

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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## TO THE READER

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All Bible quotations are from the King James version unless otherwise specified.

## VIRGIN OIL FOR THE LAMPS

(Exodus 27:20)

“And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn always” (Exodus 27:20, Rotherham version).

There should be nothing rancid or old in the house of the Lord, because He has provided everything fresh and in abundance. We know that oil is one of the most frequent types of the Holy Spirit. In the energetic version described, the double purpose of the lamps can be seen: to give light in the house, and the flame to rise continually toward on High. The second part might seem to be superfluous because the flame rises naturally, but the meaning is rich; the same thing produces two effects.

The Holy Spirit illumines the heart and turns the desires, the flame toward heaven. The lamps were being lit at night; we are in the night of this dispensation, and we have as much light and desire toward on High for as much of pure, refined oil that we bring—pure from every mixture; refined in the midst of suffering. The Holy Spirit is pure, but it is we who must receive it in a heart free from any secondary motive and mortified by suffering that refines. That which in the Old Testament was requested in the house, in the New it is to be sought in the person who presents the oil—oil, even that which is good becomes rancid when it is kept for a long time; if it is put in a vessel that is not clean, it does not remain pure. This indicates what the heart that presents the oil of the Holy Spirit must be like. They had to bring the oil to Moses in order to then use it for the lamps. All must be consecrated to Jesus Christ, and all comes from Him. Offering one's heart continually enables one to receive oil for the light and for the flame. Every day: there is much of

this “day by day” in the word of God, counting the days in order to have a wise heart, to ask for daily bread, the portion for each day. The trials are divided, enough for each day—also the oil, day by day. The Grace of the Lord that is in Him is the same, because He does not change; for us it must be fresh every morning. Every new rising of the sun is like the image of a daily resurrection, as if the Lord were saying with that star that speaks without words: “Rise, begin over again; yesterday, with its blessings and errors, is past; you cannot live in the past.” Confess that which has been in error, and leave it at the feet of Christ; and remember the blessings in order to be grateful, but ask for more because in the house of the Father there is abundance for every day. Consign the good that has been done and all the fruit to Him; you are not able to bear them, because you would become corrupted; this, in fact, is the meaning when in the Song of Solomon the Bridegroom must come to gather the fruit of the garden (Song of Solomon 4:16). We, fragile creatures, cannot bear anything in evil, because it would crush us; nor in good, because we would become puffed up. It is necessary to begin anew every day, empty and clear. His blessings are renewed every morning (Lamentations 3:23), at every new rising of the sun of Christ that shines on us (Ephesians 5:14). He helps us at dawn (Psalm 46:5), and He speaks to us when we arise (Proverbs 6:22). There has been weeping in the night, but joy comes in the morning and hope is renewed (Psalm 30:5). The past experiences are good, but we cannot live by the past. The future awaits us; the today of each day has its portion and thus they complete the entire year.

Virgin oil in the today that is part of the long night of this dispensation will give a light not reflected, nor a weak adoration, but a living light and ardent adoration. We are weak vessels, and at best, always full of imperfections; therefore, that which remains in us, and is not renewed, acquires the odor and taste of the vessel. Let us remember:

*“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and RENEWING of the Holy Spirit”(Titus 3:5).*

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## PRAYING

(Luke 11:1-12)

*“And it came to pass, that as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, His disciples said unto Him, Lord teach us to pray.”*

They had heard Jesus preaching and speaking; no one ever spoke like Him. And yet the disciples did not ask Him to teach them the art of public speaking in order to be eloquent. They had seen Him perform various powerful operations that attracted the crowds to follow Him. However, they never said to Him: teach us so that even we can perform miracles and powerful works. Speaking well—carrying out signs and wonders attract attention, they are the ministries that are most desired and sought for. But the disciples asked Jesus: *“Teach us to pray.”* We desire to pray. We esteem you to be a Teacher. Therefore, thou, teach us who follow thee, to pray...

Why should there be such a request and nothing else? We read simply that Jesus had prayed, but that which He said, His tone, the light on His countenance, and the irradiation that emanated from Him are not written, nor could they be described. He had often spoken to men and worked in favor of men. But in His prayers He was communicating with the Invisible—and was speaking with God—His Father. They

had seen in Him simplicity and confidence. The reality of the prayer was such that it seemed that the listener was present. There was, in His behavior, something that can be imagined, but not described. There is, therefore, a secret in this praying, in the communion with the Invisible.

We too want to communicate with the Father, but we don't know how. We appeal to You. And You, Lord, teach us to pray. And He did not outline any rules—but He answered: "*When ye pray, say.*" SAY. Let there be reality in what you say—not a mechanical repetition of the words. If you are truly praying, your praying must say so.

And from His mouth were pronounced the words, few and simple, that form the prayer called the "Lord's Prayer." Every true prayer must bring to mind the Our Father. Otherwise, it is not a prayer.

Father—Our—God is Father—and the Father is God. Omnipotence and love are united. OUR—He is Father also to others—not only you are privileged.

"*Which art in heaven.*" Whatever may be the meaning of Heaven, it is certain that no one can say "in heaven" while keeping their mind and thoughts below. On High. On High!

"*Hallowed be Thy Name.*" Kept sacred. Later, one will understand what is meant by "Thy Name." How much there is in the "Name!" "Thy will," not ours, be done. Therefore, it is necessary to love, to know and to obey such a will. "*Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.*" Therefore, try to discover how God is served by the superior powers.

Only now—not before—do the requests for human needs come. God first—man afterward. "*Give us day by day our daily bread.*" For each day the necessary portion, not less,

because one would be malnourished; not more, because one would become ill because of excessive food. Bread in due measure, that only God knows. It represents the needs—and it extends to the Bread of the soul that needs the food that is given by that life.

*“And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us.”* Reflect and tremble before raising such a prayer—because if we have not forgiven we will pronounce our condemnation.

The confession of human weakness follows quickly. *“And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.”* God does not tempt anyone, it is true: however, one who truly prays refers everything to God and with a burst of audacious trust, ignores the secondary agents and puts back the cause to the One who alone can do everything. As if He would say to Him: I am weak, Lord. If I am tempted, I fall. You must impede that I be tempted. Thou, deliver us from evil.

Matthew adds: *“For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the glory forever.”* Thou, deliver us from evil. There are not two Gods. Satan is a dangerous enemy, it is true, but he can do nothing beyond the permission of the Lord. All is in the hand of God—always. And then it closes, as if to seal the prayer, and, in a manner that it may be confirmed, with a great AMEN.

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## THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

(Luke 18:9-14)

The Parable is part of the "Teach us to pray" and its aim is to examine the two men who went up into the temple to pray. To pray, the word is the same as that used in Luke 11:1. The aim of the parable is to take away the illusion from those who believe themselves to be righteous and despise others, and that they may learn to pray.

Two men go up into the temple, both in order to pray. They belonged to two distinct classes. One was a "Pharisee," that is "separated, saint." The origin of the Pharisees dates back to a religious revival after the return of Ezra from exile for a new beginning in Judaea. As time passed, however, the name remained without the substance. They continued to call themselves "the saints," but only few of them were such. The majority, as in all religious movements, remained with the name and the ceremonies.

The title of being a Pharisee in those times, having passed through the mouth of Christ has become an insulting appellative. Today no one would want to be called a Pharisee.

The other who had also gone up into the temple was a Publican. The Publicans belonged to a hated class, a people without any reputation. The Publicans were the tax collectors. We imagine that the majority of them were unscrupulous people who often aggravated the poor.

Both of them went up into the temple, stopping in two separate places. The Pharisee stood and prayed. One should not be surprised that he was in a standing position, but at the significance of his words. "Stood" literally means in himself,

as though clothed in his "I"; having himself before himself. And he said:

"God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers." Noting the other who had also gone up, he continued with comparison and contempt: "or even as this Publican." As if he were saying: what is this one doing in the temple! After the comparison entirely against others, he continued to weave his own eulogy. "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

If he truly fasted as he said, if he truly gave tithes of everything is not contradicted. This teaches one who wants to pray that it is possible to fulfill all of that, and still not know how to pray.

Opposite the satisfied religious picture, the other stands in contrast: "And the publican, standing afar off"—in the "standing" of the latter there are lacking the words in the text "with himself"—"standing afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

In the text there is an "a", as though putting himself in a humble light, as though he were the only sinner. The verdict: "I tell you," said the One who has the right to say: "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Here is a lesson for learning how to pray: And it is to not see any man whatsoever worse than us, nor equal to us in evil, but to concentrate the center of the rigorous examination on ourselves, and to ask God to receive us mercifully. For a long time, even those who are closer to the Lord, notice that in the temple of their heart there are two who pray—now it is one and now the other. The Pharisee is based on personal

righteousness; with his mind, if not with his tongue, he despises others, uplifting himself. The other person—the penitent one—in moments of great trials, humbles himself and invokes to be hidden in the righteousness of God.

The Lord does not get tired; He continues to work until such time that the Pharisee disappears and there remains only the penitent one. The consciousness of sin becomes greater, not because the transgressions are multiplied, but because it grows in the measure that the light of heaven penetrates into the abysses of the soul. Then the penitent one, prostrated in the dust, cries out: “God be merciful to me, a—the only one—[I am the only one] sinner.”

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### IN THE NAME OF JESUS

(John 16:23,24; Acts 3:1-16)

Only that Name is of value in the Universe—and may everyone and everything be in that Name.

Woe to the one who, in the Old Testament, should curse that Name; woe to the one who in the New who does not lean on that Name!

Human language will not help us to understand, except in part. “Name” is that which distinguishes a person—and figuratively, expresses the character and the story of the individual. After all the possible definitions, and we are unable to define, but only give hints, inevitably some words must be left as they are, because that which is felt and known

in the spirit, in the inner man, is difficult to adequately formulate into words; often it is quite impossible.

To live, to act in the Name of another means to have renounced one's own. It is more than having a new name, because this belongs to the one who receives it. To live "in the Name" means like forgetting even that we exist separately, but that we become one with others, in such a way that we take the name. The closest illustration we can give is that of a woman who goes to her husband and she leaves her name of origin and assumes that of her consort. However, in our case it's not a question of assuming a title, but of being "in the Name," feeling to be the other, and not ourselves.

It is possible—as in all that is elevated—to abuse or to be fooled, but we mean to speak of those who disappear before themselves, and are so identified in Jesus that they walk, speak, pray in that Name. They no longer have friends, except in the Name. They no longer have enemies except in the Name. And they no longer pray, except in the Name.

If at one time they attracted the attention of others to themselves, now they do not even desire to be noticed except for the love of Christ. If they have had personal enemies in the past, now they try to not have any, because they don't give themselves enough importance to provoke anyone or to feel that they have been provoked.

Then when they approach the Throne of Grace, they feel that they do not merit anything, but reduce their prayers to that which Jesus would make by means of their mouths. It's as if they were asking: will the Lord honor, make his own this my request, or not? Not that we literally make such an examination, but this happens without us even being aware of it. The Holy Spirit, who brings them into the kingdom of

prayer, immerses them in the Name. Take note of the words: "*For THROUGH HIM [by means of Him!] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father*" (Ephesians 2:18).

An example taken from Acts, chapter 3: Peter and John fixed their eyes on the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. Prayers were not heard, but there certainly had to be an intimate communion with the Lord.

Peter said to the lame man: "*Look on us,*" inviting him to put himself in communion with them, and by means of them with the Invisible whom the lame man did not know, and could not see. Then he added: "*Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give thee: in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*"

At times we have exaggerated the poverty of some saints, or perhaps we have thought that they had faith because they were materially poor. It is true that Peter wanted to literally affirm that he had neither silver nor gold. But it is also true that the words have an extended meaning. "Silver, gold" indicate the various resources on which a man depends. Lacking one means, we often use another. The weak one, the poor one, and also the rich one often use artifice and deceit.

In addition it is possible to possess silver and gold of others in administration, or our own, and use them as if having to give account. "Poor," "Rich" are relative words. We can have nothing and feel ourselves to be important; and we can have much and feel ourselves to be nothing.

The words of Peter can be reduced to two monosyllables. A big "No" and a big "Yes." And it is the "No" that renders the "Yes" formidable. I have nothing on which to lean and to promise. But in my nothingness I have the right to use the Name that is everything. Here, present, it is not I, poor

unknown person, but it is Jesus of Nazareth. And it is He who speaks to you through my mouth. Don't expect anything from me: IN THE NAME OF JESUS THE NAZARENE, RISE UP AND WALK.

To the people who were wondering at seeing the lame man walking, jumping and praising God, Peter spoke thus: "*Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?*" The apostles were immersed in the Name before, and immersed in the Name after the event. They lived in the Name, and were occupied about it. Is it a marvel that God works? Are you looking at us? Who are we? And he explains: "*The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus...*"

*"And His Name through faith in His Name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."*

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### HARMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES

*"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips."* (Proverbs 22:17, 18) *Withal be fitted.* The words of the wise. Communion of the saints. Wisdom is revealed in the whole of the Church (Ephesians 3:18). "*The Sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous*

ordinances is everlasting” (Psalm 119:160 NASB). Your righteousness is Christ, our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5, 6; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:30). Sum, therefore, the Word.

*“Then the devil ... saith unto Him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash thy foot against a stone.”* The astute one did not cite all the words of Psalm 91:11, because in them one reads “in all thy ways,” and it is understood in the ways assigned by Providence. But Jesus, without stopping at the omission made in bad faith, answered: *“It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”*

Therefore, add them up, the two words of “to trust” and “not tempt” and you will know the truth! It is written: *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him”* (John 6:44). But, it is likewise written: *“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28). AND *“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink”* (John 7:37). AND *“Let him that is athirst, come”* (Revelation 22:17). In summary: you who hear and read, run to Jesus; and in order that you may be humble and not presumptuous, do not trust in your going to Him, but in the Mercy of the Father, who by grace wants to draw you. An ancient saint said that our part helps us to be diligent, and to live a holy life and seeing the sovereignty of God helps to really believe.

Examples could be multiplied.

St. Paul exhorted St. Timothy: (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15) *“workman ... rightly dividing the word of truth”* (Rotherham: masterfully managing). Grasp, by grace, the entire panorama of the Scripture. Look at things in a comprehensive way and

from Above. Imitate God, who summed up the disconnected parts of the Creation, in which there are so many things that are incomprehensible and painful. He concluded thus, and it is prophetic of all that which is seen as a whole. — “*And God saw every thing [not only the parts. Man is partial]”. “God saw every thing; and behold [pay attention to the behold] it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).*

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### THE SABBATH OF THE CHRISTIANS

This is a subject worthy of special attention. Many ask when the day was changed. There are various observations and answers that may be confusing. To say that Sunday should be observed in place of the Sabbath because of the Resurrection, and that the primitive Christians gathered together on that day, helps the subject but does not resolve it. Without examining the various answers, we desire to give the only one that resolves in a decisive way, and this is found in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Let us read: “*For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.*” It is not necessary to explain that Sabbath and rest mean the same thing. Therefore only the one who truly believes enters into the Sabbath—into rest. The Hebrews observed the Sabbath—the day of twenty-four hours—but they did not enter into rest. They had the Sabbath, and yet they were without Sabbath. The Epistle says: “*For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, then would not he afterward have spoken of another day.*” The Hebrews,

notwithstanding the literal observance of the Sabbath—a day of twenty-four hours—did not enter into rest. The body rests but not the soul. It is recorded that God rested on the seventh day. This confuses many. But it is clear that the days of the creation were periods of unlimited time; even if they had been of twenty-four hours it would not change the subject. In the sense of *not working*, the Deity has never been inactive, not even in the days of Sabbath. Jesus said: “*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*” (John 5:17). But what is this Rest? We do not like to make comparisons. God has no need to sit down, to stop and to sleep like a man. “*God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary. There is no searching of His understanding*” (Isaiah 40:28).

“*Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep*” (Psalm 121:4).

The rest of God is none other than the assurance that He had and has, that the end of all things, even the most contrary, will be to His glory, according to His purpose. We remember that Jesus was resting in the midst of the tempest; He is always calm and serene under the fire of questions and persecutions. True rest is in the Son of Man.

Let us return to the Epistle. It says: “*Again, He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, TODAY if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.*” The Epistle cites Psalm 95:8. It continues: “*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*”

It is clear that the literal Sabbath was of no use; that God has destined another day that is another Sabbath, and it is an imitation of His own rest; this day is not one of hours, but covers the whole life of the believer, and is called TODAY; that is, a continuous present, a continuous trusting in God

and not depending on our works. Only one who believes and trusts in God can truly rest. To the question "Who changed the Sabbath?" there is only one precise answer: God has changed it. Hebrews 4, and Psalm 95 declare it. What type of rest? Like that of God; that is, calm and confident in the face of whatever obstacle. When is this rest? Today; that is, always, from the moment that man has accepted Jesus Christ. It is not necessary to occupy ourselves of other doctrinal points, also important, when clear and precise texts will resolve the argument. One who reads Hebrews 4 without prejudice has finished with the fear of days and of times. He enters into the present of God, and is introduced to the new law. We are not without law, but we are in the new one, that is the Law of the Spirit.

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### OBSTACLES

All of us, who in one time and who in another, have caused others to stumble; and all of us have been, and a few, perhaps, are still apt to stumble.

When Jesus said: "*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him,*" many of His disciples said: "*This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*" And Jesus, knowing in Himself that his disciples were murmuring about this said to them: "*Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?*"

The outsiders stumble, and those who are inside stumble, and we have caused the outsiders and those who are inside to stumble. Jesus said to the multitude: "*Not that which goeth*

*into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:11).*

*"Then came His disciples, and said unto Him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?" (Matthew 15:12).* To the disciples it must have seemed that Jesus went too far; timidly, they thought to warn Him. But the Lord answered: *"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone [therefore, at least in the spirit, they had not yet left them]. "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind" (Matthew 15:1-14).*

They would stumble at the Cross: *"Then Jesus said to them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." (Matthew 26:31).* All of us have stumbled sometime in the sufferings, because we have not understood them, and we have been scattered until we have seen the resurrected Lord before us.

The plan of God is to form a people that neither stumbles nor causes others to stumble. The lesson that we should not cause others to stumble is more quickly learned, but a certain tendency for us to stumble lasts a long time. From this there comes exaggerated severity, easily murmuring and lamenting. Some stumble at the least thing. They would like to correct everything quickly, not realizing that if there is the holy seed in the soul, many things will fall by themselves without touching them. The Teacher Jesus was not annoying, but He announced the great truths and left it up to Grace to bring them to maturity. In those who are people of God, that which is not pleasing to Him will fall either quickly or later on. The essential thing is to know whether or not the Lord is in the souls. The True Teacher corrects seldom and soberly. That which is said about a certain government can be applied

here: "he governs best who governs least." One who corrects least corrects best. "*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*" And it is understood, seeing Him hidden where He cannot be seen. The Lord has not been severe with us, notwithstanding many mistakes, because He has waited for the Grace to work in us from line to line, therefore we should also be patient toward others. The Lord will adjust everything in all those who stay in His plan. Since He begins from inside and not from outside, we are apt to stumble, but if we want to eradicate everything quickly, we would harm even the good in the souls. It is necessary to give time to the Lord.

Many stumble where they should not, and do not know how to recognize evil where there is evil. Saul, the king of appearance, had left alive the king of the Amalekites, the elegant and delicate Agag, but the old prophet ran him through with the sword. Where evil is hidden, the mature Christian sees it and guards against it, but where the good is in the depths of the soul, he knows how to wait patiently for that which is not harmonized and in order.

*"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus... make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you"* (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:10). Those who are perfect know how to conduct themselves, and know how to wait for others to also come to maturity (Philippians 3:15). The people who have applied all diligence to grow in the Lord, never stumble (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:10). "*Blessed is he who is not offended in Me (Jesus)*" (Luke 7:23). In St. Jude, verses 24 and 25 we read: "*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*" Therefore, let us pray to Him that He makes us live without causing anyone to stumble, and

without stumbling ourselves. In His Grace there is provision also for this.

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### READING THE PARABLES

The Grain of Mustard Seed – The Use and Development of the Little

(Matthew 13:31, 32; Mark 4:30, 33)

“*AND HE SAID;*” that anchor of the Holy Spirit serves to point out to us that we are seeing partial aspects, and that it will be necessary afterward to look at the whole picture in order to have a clear concept. He said: “*Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God, or with what comparison shall we compare it?*” The question, in the mouth of Jesus, is marvelous, as if it were difficult to explain the subject. The difficulty was not, is not in Him, but in us to understand; therefore it serves to tell us that it is necessary, by the Holy Spirit, to investigate beyond the bare words to gather the meaning, and above all, to learn to hear the voice behind the words. It was like saying: keep in mind that they are only comparisons, distant representations of a reality that must be investigated with love and interest, because it is given to the disciples to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

“*It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*” Mark records

thus: "Which, when it is sown, is less than all the seeds," thus emphasizing its small size "when it is sown."

A first difficulty: Is a grain of mustard seed truly the smallest of all seeds? Some observe that it is not; however, those who have traveled in Palestine have found that a mustard seed that grows in those places is truly very small. And yet we do not need this information because the strength of the parable is not diminished even if other smaller seeds should be found. First of all it should be noted that one of the translations (Diaglott) has: "One of the smallest of all seeds," gathering the hidden meaning behind the figurative language that, many times cannot be translated strictly by the letter. In addition, one must consider: "*Which when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs.*" Someone translates "garden plant." The small and the great are in the relation between the before and after: there is no seed so small that produces such a big plant; the hidden lesson is: the Kingdom of Heaven begins from that which is barely visible, but when it is used and developed, it surpasses all that which can be sown in the garden. The smallest becomes the greatest. The measurements of Heaven are pointed out to us, and the appreciation and use of that which is barely visible.

And since the Scripture is explained by the Scripture itself, we ask ourselves if we have some mention in another place that helps us to understand the parable. We have it: there is a direct mention of the grain of mustard seed in Matthew 17:20; and Luke 17:6; and an indirect one in Mark 11:22-24.

The disciples asked Jesus why they had not been able to deliver the child and cast out the demon. Jesus answered: "*Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this*

*mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you."*

In Luke 17, we read that the Lord commanded to forgive a brother if he repents, even if he has sinned seven times in the same day. The words produced one of those distant effects in the heart of the disciples, who must have had to think that so much faith in God was needed, that rectifies and knows everything, in order to be able to be so magnanimous! That's why they said to the Lord: "Increase our faith." If, in fact, we do not read the unexpressed thought of the disciples, we cannot understand the meaning of the answer on the teaching on forgiveness. The answer of Jesus confirms the connection: that is, only one who is truly anchored in God believes with all his heart, and expects from Him the strength and all good things, only such a one can be merciful and kind. Indirectly we have a vital lesson; that is, the more we truly believe in God, the more we learn to live in His love. "*Lord, increase our faith,*" as if they had a small quantity of it, but which they considered insufficient.

*"And the Lord said, if ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea."*

The mountain, the sycamore would obey and disappear into the sea; the tree has formed roots, and would be uprooted; the massive mountain would disappear. Great things that inspire fear and bad things that develop roots are continuous disturbances; mountains of difficulty, roots of resentment and bitterness. The saint who wants to have victory must be delivered from both. He does not look at that which appears to be difficult or impossible, but fixes his eye on the Lord; he does not keep any root of evil in himself, but in faith, trusting in God, and not in the goodness of man, he commands the tree to sink into the sea of forgiveness and of

oblivion. Both times the immense miracle is wrought by means of a faith like a grain of mustard seed, the smallest possession that he seems to have in the garden of the soul. The Church, and each one of us, is an enclosed garden (Solomon's Song 4:12). Time is needed to understand that which we have truly founded, finally, in that which we believe: that which seems smallest assumes the greatest proportions. Finally the absolute confidence in God, by which we take our eye away from ourselves and from others, will become the greatest plant of our garden. Near the end of a life rich in ministries and gifts, St. Paul prided himself that he knew in Whom he had believed, that he had kept the faith, and trusted in Jesus Christ who would watch and protect him until the end.

Faith like a grain of mustard seed. "Increase our faith," and Jesus answered: "If you had..."

Therefore, did not the disciples have any faith? But if they did not have any, how had they gone to Him, and how were they able to ask for it? Without faith one neither goes nor asks; to believe and to go to Jesus is the same thing (John 6:35): "*He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*" As small as it might be, the disciples had faith; and yet, Jesus, at their request, "increase our faith," answered: "if you had." The explanation is that it's a question of a special faith, because even in this field there are various kinds; the grain of mustard seed is comparable to the kingdom, and therefore it speaks of a special faith of a people who is called to reign with Christ, a people who doesn't see mountains, but contemplates the Lord and does not permit any bitterness to take root, and, if it has done so, he commands it to leave. It is an absolute faith in the triumph of God. But this brings us to the third passage (Mark 11:22, 23), where the grain of mustard seed is not mentioned, but where the teaching is more enlarged. Let us

open to Mark 11, verse 20, and read: *“And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto Him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any.”*

A tree dried up from the roots; a mountain to be thrown into the sea, forgiving, and faith in God. We cannot examine all the glorious passage, so rich and so tender, but only within the limits of the parable. We have already noted that faith like a grain of mustard seed can command the mountain and the tree to disappear into the sea. Here it is the faith of God that commands the mountain to throw itself into the sea. The explanation is a little wider: *“Shall not doubt in his heart ... those things which he saith ... when ye pray, believe ... forgive.”* Without mentioning the grain of mustard seed, various teachings are condensed here.

The tree dried up from the roots is a figure of the people of Israel. Elsewhere, Jesus said that the fig tree would germinate again. The same word that dried it up because it had the appearance and no fruit would cause it to germinate again because of the promise to the fathers. It is the plan of God to restore ruins. Forgiving: those who are forgiving and merciful are called to the Kingdom. It does not mean that our forgiving makes them obtain pardon or the like, because salvation is by Grace. But the Kingdom belongs to the merciful; it is given to the disciples to understand its

mysteries. The key to everything is in the faith like a grain of mustard seed, or as it is said here: FAITH OF GOD. "Of," not "In"—IN is the general faith; OF is the special faith, that of the Kingdom. Lot, a just man, barely justified, had faith IN God; Abraham and David (they are the two who are mentioned in the beginning of the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew 1:1) had the faith OF God. Another reference will clarify the delicate thought better. In Galatians 2:20 we read, among the recollections of St. Paul: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God," as if to insist that one should not think that St. Paul was boasting of a personal faith.

#### Of God: Of the Son of God

When we have faith in the Son, that is, we have come to Him, we begin to take possession of His goods; that is, those who are of the Kingdom, and understand its mysteries, arrive at identifying themselves with the Son. After having faith *toward, for and in*, they are no longer satisfied: they are tired of looking at themselves, and examining themselves to see if they have faith, and how much faith they have, but they hurl themselves into the heart of the Son of God, of Whom they have had a greater revelation, and they appropriate themselves of His riches. Jesus was a man of Faith; He knew the Father. Knowing, loving, and believing are tied together. At the tomb of Lazarus, He gave thanks before the dead one was resurrected. He had faith in spite of the fact that Lazarus had been buried for four days. Faith like the grain of mustard seed is no longer our faith, but it is to grasp Jesus with tenacious love and the confidence that He has in the HOLY FATHER, GOOD GOD. At first, the seed is small, the smallest in the garden. Perhaps some will consider these words vaporous. But when the little seed is sown it will produce an effect greater than all that has been experienced.

Have the grain of mustard seed, the faith of the Son of God, put it to work, sow and you will see the result: the biggest plant of the garden. Everything will take refuge in that plant. It is a small seed but alive and produces an immense result. The birds will take refuge in its branches. It is not necessary to investigate who these birds may be, or to think of evil things. No. The emphasis, the center of the parable, the hidden meaning, is not about the birds and branches, but on the smallness and productivity of the seed. Everything takes refuge in the branches of the plant that grew from the little seed. A big plant is visible now. Faith, especially that of God, brings visible effects even in this life. While it seems like nothing to the carnal eye, yet it is, in its effects, the greatest reality in the universe and benefits all men. How many are not taking refuge in the tree of Christ? Faith OF GOD. When we are identified with Jesus, we have the full revelation of the Father. The Name of the God of Jesus is written on and in us. We enter into the plans of the Lord, and being made partakers of the divine nature, we see and wait for everything in God. That which God says is created: *"I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near."* (Isaiah 57:19). The final victory is of that which is good: mountains and trees must disappear, and there remains only the tree of life and the mountain of God. After having grasped the little, put it to use, for by using it, it grows. This is one of the secrets of faith and of all the things in God.

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## THE TWO FIG TREES

(Luke 13:6-9; Mark 11:12-23)

Two unfruitful fig trees: one was cursed and dried up from the roots. Another was not cursed, but the vine-dresser was ordered to cut it down. The reason for the different treatment was that the cursed fig tree had leaves, but no promise of fruit. It was deceptive vanity on the way, in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Jesus was hungry, and He went to the pompous fig tree to look for figs, and it was not the season. He did not find any and He cursed it; He did not curse it because of His own hunger. Even if there had been little figs, He would not have been able to satisfy Himself, as it was not the season. But He saw other hungry ones on the way to Jerusalem who would have been deceived by the pompous fig tree, and He wanted to protect them from the illusion. It was a sterile fig tree, pompous and full of boasting—Jesus condemned it. The next day the disciples noticed that it had dried up from the roots. The pompous leaves had wilted, and it showed itself to be what it truly was.

The other plant is the fig tree of the parable. Also here, the position of the parable should be noted. In chapter twelve of the same Gospel (Luke 12:35) the Lord spoke of vigilant servants. At the beginning of chapter thirteen we read about the Galileans that Pilate had had killed—and the answer of Jesus that they were not the worst sinners because they had suffered; but that they themselves, the reporters, would likewise perish if they did not repent. Afterward there follows the parable of the sterile fig tree. “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came and sought

fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Later on, the fig tree encountered on the way to Jerusalem would be dried up at one of His words, but for this other fig tree He says that it must be cut down by the servant. That the owner would be able to execute the sentence Himself, is clear from the last words of the servant: "If not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." It's the same as saying that there had been cases in which the owner himself had cut down without reasoning with anyone. He commands, but almost in such a way that it seems that he wants to enter into a discussion: "Why cumbereth it the ground?" Is he perhaps undecided, or does he want to test the servant? However, the insistence that it had to be cut down can be noted, even for the benefit of the ground that was uselessly encumbered. But the servant knew the heart of the owner; he had served him a long time and he also was of the same spirit of patience and mercy. It is clear that the dresser of the vineyard had served at least three years in which the owner had come seeking fruit. "Behold, these three years I come," as if to say: you know the patience that I have had—but now it is too much and we must also take into account the useless encumbering of the ground. Why continue to keep it? Cut it down!

"Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it." As if to say: you have had patience for three, nurture it for four years. Let me have it for one year. I shall have to give it special treatment. It was like saying, Lord, perhaps the sterility is not entirely the fault of the fig tree, I also had a good part in it. I did not give it the special treatment that a difficult case requires. He had, in fact, watered and pruned it, but he had not taken care to feed the roots. He did not say it, but in his words it seems to us that he wanted to say: Lord, I am not tranquil in my conscience

that I have done all that could have been done. I have neglected the roots of this poor tree. Perhaps the ground here is drier than elsewhere; perhaps the roots are too weak and they need to be dunged; perhaps they are entangled in some impediment. Give me time and I will dig about it and dung it.

A patient work was required to dig around it, bending himself down and carefully uncovering the roots, freeing them, isolating them, without cutting or hurting them; and then feeding them and covering them again. Before I abandon this tree, I must do the maximum work that is in my power to do.

We, alas, are often too ready to say that "by now" we have had enough of that certain people, or person. We have worked three years and yet, who knows, in the three years we may not have worked in the holy and complete doctrine of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are slow to read in the heart of God; at times we stop at the words that condemn and do not know how to discern the voice behind the word. Moses did not stop at the words of God that said He wanted to destroy the people and would have given all to him. Moses loved that people, and interceded, ready even to be canceled from the book of life. And yet we are in the dispensation of Grace, whereas Moses was in that of the law.

We are called to consider the servant of the parable. His words ring out: Confession, and they indicate a decision of a more profound consecration. Lord, it seems that they resound: forgive me. I have not known how to care for your plants. I see a work that I have not done and I have decided, from now on, to consecrate myself to this profound and patient work. Give me time; and it seemed that he was imploring for mercy more for himself than for the poor tree. And then, looking to the future, he saw the possibility that

even all the care that he was proposing to do would be of no value. Who knows if the fig tree would remain sterile just the same. Thus, he wanted to say a word in time that would tend to lengthen the patience and the mercy of the owner. And, in any case, he wanted to say that he, the servant should be excused, even in the future from cutting down the tree that he had neglected. Who knows if his intensive care may have come too late and who knows if the result may not be seen even in the fourth year, but more in the future. Therefore: "And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou [in an indefinite time that can be from now to many years], after that [thou, not I] – thou shalt cut it down."

The servant kept silent, thinking of the ruin of that poor fig tree, and confirming the new consecration of a more direct, accurate treatment. At least for then he did not add anything else.

And we, acknowledging how poorly we have served Him, and how quickly we get tired, we can't help but to cry out and sigh: Oh Spirit of Christ, when, truly, will Thou take possession of us, in a manner that we can understand the mysteries of the Kingdom, and begin truly to love You and serve You according to Your great heart?

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PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD IS THE  
DEATH OF HIS SAINTS

(Psalm 116:15)

(From the Memoirs of a Missionary)

Death, and not that which men call life, is precious to Thee? Therefore, Lord, I am more precious to you when I die; that is, in the moment I am useless and repugnant to others, I am precious to Thee! When I am precious to men, I am not so to Thee. Help me, oh Lord, to live a holy life, and die to myself, in order to be precious to Thee; rather, take of me only that which is precious, death.

You want that I already consider myself dead to everything, in order to be alive only for you. Help me to die, so that I may live. Oh death that is the door of life, oh sepulcher that is the walk of resurrection, you are among my teachers. And, so that I may not fear the final hour, help me oh my God, that I may be dead starting from now. Dying, dying. The grain of wheat fallen, buried, hidden. Thou, Lord, have many times made me see my cadaver near an open grave. Lord, make me die so much to myself that I will no longer see even my cadaver.

You tell me that the death of the saints is precious to Thee; and, certainly You refer to the last moment that will be given me in this body, although You also refer to my considering myself dead. Give me grace, so that, in the spirit, I will hurl myself into that hour that men fear, and that You call precious. Precious! That is to say You have waited a long time. You have followed me, often You have wanted to speak to me, but You could do so only in part, because my life has prevented You from doing so. My life has impeded

the true life from manifesting itself, in all its fullness. The sounds, the objects of the earth (although I am not a slave to them) have distracted me. Truly I do not know Thee. I have not yet seen Thee. You suffer and wait. But, lo, You allow a vision to pass before me.

I see myself lying on a bed for the last time. All strength of the body, although I was never strong, has abandoned me. My mind, many times agitated, never calm, is now like immobile; my heart agitated, even when I believed it calm, now barely beats. I do not see sympathy in anyone. All has fallen: the anxiety to serve Thee, the preoccupations, even that of resentment. Rather, if my memory would care to function, the insults suffered would be dearer to me than anything. It seems that no one has mistreated me, rather all have treated me well, even those believed to be enemies at one time. I see them, in a clear vision, before my dying body. Forgive me, I would like to say to them, but they disappear. There he is, insistent, the ancient accuser, who seeks to frighten me with the past, many times repentant, and many times assured of pardon, I feel the presence of grace, that invites me to look at the cross, and, for the sake of that death, encourages me not to fear anything of my death.

Therefore I see Thee, merciful Lord, as I have never seen Thee, immense in Thy mercy, vigilant in Thy care. The enemy, You have rebuked him; the multitude of memories has disappeared; the whole of the emotions, and tender moments, as so many streams, run into a single river as a whole; that which remains turns in a single direction. That which is on earth disappears; even the people that surround me. I find the strength to motion to them as if to say that the best help they can give me is not to help me at all, but to leave me alone, and in silence. The precious moment has come. I see Thee, Lord. So many times I have prayed to see

Thee, but You have not granted it to me except in a partial vision.

Now at the end I see Thee, oh Lord, glorious in the resurrection and also always the Lamb who was killed. You fill all the vision. Only I see Thee, because You don't allow the others to see Thee. You yourself have come to take me. The pilgrimage is finished, and I turn, forever, my back to the trials and temptations. The greatest joy that I experience is that of seeing Thee, and of knowing that I can no longer offend Thee. You raise your hand, and indicate a distant point to me. There I distinguish a crowd. "*I gather you to your people,*" You say to me. I recognize some that I have seen on earth; they greet me. But even this vision has disappeared. Again, we remain alone, You and I. I become light. Suddenly, I feel something that breaks off. A weight is removed, I feel lighter; and I am enveloped as in a mantle of a perfumed and penetrating tenderness. You have gathered me, You have taken possession of me. Then, I no longer see anything.

I perceive that You must take me across a space. I am at rest. Something tells me that, when You will put me down in another point of the universe (where, I don't know) my eyes will open in Your Kingdom of Light.

Lord, this has been a vision. Now I no longer see Thee. I do not know how much time will have to pass, nor the place, nor what the last infirmity will be and what persons will surround me. I know nothing I can do, oh God, that this vision may be realized. Preserve me for that death that is precious in Thy sight.

But a voice in the spirit advises me that by the vision, You are speaking of quite another death; dying to myself in order to be gathered to a people who have passed through the same

experience, to meet again with them, in the Kingdom of light, seen directly and not reflected.

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### MIXED WITH FAITH

(Hebrews 4:2)

The evangelized word has value only if it is mixed with faith. The meaning is this: each one who hears a message must say to himself, since the Lord has made me know this thing, it is clear that He wants to give it to me; I want it Lord, and I believe that You will give it to me. The Lord does nothing that is useless.

When Isaiah saw that glorious vision, he felt humiliated and recognized himself to have impure lips, but he also felt himself encouraged; next to the cry of the penitent one there is the affirmation of the believer: "FOR MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING, THE LORD OF HOSTS." As if to say: whatever my condition may be, God has appeared to me to do me good, AND HE RECEIVED GOOD. Hearing much of the Word of God, without mixing it with faith, is an accumulation of theories without reality.

Believe, each time, that which you hear; believe that the Lord wants give you what He has made you hear. Believing that that word belongs to you, you will ask for and will receive grace to obey.

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## THE COMMANDMENTS OF JESUS

(John 15:10)

The commandments of the Father were observed by Jesus; His commandments must be observed by us. What and how many are they?

In the beginning of the chapter it is written that we must abide in the vine, and that without Him we can do nothing. The command therefore is: ABIDE IN CHRIST—IN HIS LOVE. – Because even the command of loving one another, as He has loved us, results from our abiding in Him.

And what are the other commandments?

Acts 1:2 informs us: *“Until the day that He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen.”*

That is, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He gives His commandments to each one, according to the occasions, by means of the Holy Spirit.

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SEPARATING THE PRECIOUS FROM THE VILE

(Jeremiah 15:19,20)

The prophet lamented: *“Woe is me, my mother. That thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention ... And the Lord continued to teach him. Jeremiah testifies: “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.”* But once again he experienced affliction, and says: *“I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation.”* And then the Lord, once again, spoke to him: *“If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the Lord.”* As others translate: *“If thou return, I will make you return.”* One who returns is helped to stand firm, on his feet, in the presence of the Lord. Afterward, another promise: *“If thou take forth the precious from the vile.”* That is, you will know how to keep safe from things that are vile, those things that have value, *“thou shalt be as my mouth.”*

Discerning those things that are precious even in the midst of ruins. Discerning some useful lesson in everything, even in things that seem the most evil, and knowing how to draw out the good from the mud. Discerning the precious from the vile in ourselves, throwing out this, but keeping that sacred.

Knowing the remnant, in others, and in ourselves. And then the Lord will make us like His mouth.

Precious—Vile. The precious is He Himself; vile is that which is ours, simply ours. Do not call everything precious because you have seen something good. Do not say that everything is vile because you have seen some evil. Until we arrive at a complete separation, there is a mixture. Judas Iscariot was completely discarded when the last remainder of hope had disappeared. Abram is not all of one piece yet, he must become whole. Therefore, we must be able to distinguish in others, and distinguish in ourselves. St. Paul prays that the Church of Philippi may learn to examine the difference of the things, because only then would they become sincere and without offense. The Word of God is a two-edged sword and pierces to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Even in the best that we do or say for the Lord, the sword that separates that which is pure from that which is moved by mixed motives is necessary.

The Lord knows our nature; He knows that, in these bodies, we will always be between two currents. His Will is that we, by applying our mind to think and reason according to heaven, are willing to discern in ourselves the various inner motives, in order to know those that are from above, for elevated motives, and those that are earthly and full of mixture. This applies also in our relation to others. And it can be noted that the Lord did not say to Jeremiah to separate the vile from the precious, but the precious from the vile; because it is so easy to see the vile in others that we do not care to investigate if there may be something good that should be saved. In the same people about which God was lamenting, there was a remnant; also in each one of us there is a remnant. In other words, it's like saying: fish the man

alive, that is pull him out from the midst of the sea in which he is drowning; let us not finish, we, to ruin him, but separate, free the precious in him, from that which is vile. And the one who is thus used to discerning, learning in the school of the Lord, to see the good wherever it may be, even if it is surrounded by evil, that certain one becomes like the mouth of the Lord, in which there is no iniquity, nor any injustice at all.

The Lord had not entirely rejected the people, although, according to the letter, it seemed that He had rejected them. This can be seen from that which follows of the message to Jeremiah: *“Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.”* That is, you remain firm in Me, learn to distinguish the good in the midst of the ruins and then wait until those who are rejected may return, and they will return. The remnant in each one of us will return, will draw near to the prophet.

*“And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee.”*

Therefore, a strong wall in order not to be conquered? No, a wall to protect precisely those people against whom the Lord had lamented. A wall, in order that the enemy could no longer make them a prey. And since the vile that is in a person does not allow him to understand the good, the prophet would be persecuted, but the Lord would protect him in order to free him and redeem him. Just as one who does a difficult work in order to pull out precious things from the ruins must be protected so that he may not perish in the work, thus, the true servant of God, while he accomplishes the work of discerning and freeing that which is precious from the midst of the vile elements, will be guaranteed the protection of the One in whose Name he works and

accomplishes the difficult undertaking. It is said of some saints that they knew how to see the soul that was good even in contrary things. May He help us to know that He wants to save to the uttermost; that He will not allow anything to perish that is of Him; and in His time, He will know how to separate the tares from the wheat, in the multitudes and in each one of those who are His.

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### SOME MEN OF PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The saints have been—are—men of prayer. They may meditate, contemplate, or supplicate—many are the methods of praying.

Prayer is the basis of grace. Grace and Reality have come by Jesus; therefore, in anticipation, all that men have received—in every time—they received by grace and not by the law.

The sacrifice of Christ that began when the Lamb was slain in the spirit and culminated at Calvary has covered and covers all men who loved and who love to draw near to God. That being given, we come to a few examples of prayer in the Old Testament. We select a few and they will be enough to make us understand that only those can pray who trust in a powerful and merciful God and mistrust themselves, as worthy of nothing.

The two extremes touch each other. The *nothing* of man encounters and leans on the *all* of God. Abraham (Genesis 18:17-33): A single example of this great life. The destruction of Sodom has been decreed, and the time to carry

it out has come. The Lord communicates to him what He is about to do; He cannot hide it from Abraham, whom He has known, and with whom He is in communion. Abraham drew near and asked a question: "*Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*" The hypothesis was that if there had been in Sodom fifty righteous men, it was not right that they should perish with the others. Growing in holy boldness, in the measure that he spoke, he dared to propose: "*Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?*" And we will not transcribe the rest of the request, as if Abraham were exhorting God: "Be it far from Thee to do such a thing, to make the righteous die with the wicked ... shall not the Judge of all the earth carry out righteous judgment?"

Bold words these, and dangerous if they should be said to a great one of the earth. But God, condescending, replied: "*If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.*"

Abraham, encouraged by the kind aspect, began to doubt that the number that seemed small to him at the beginning might be, who knows, a little exaggerated and he reduced it to forty-five. The Lord condescended to the lesser number. They continued, Abraham reducing the number of "righteous men" and the Lord condescending to forgive for the sake of the reduced number, until Abraham, seeming to him that he was abusing too much of so much mercy, said that he would speak for the last time and limited himself to ten. After the answer that even ten would be enough to save the city, Abraham stopped asking.

It was man, and not God who limited the mercy. The applications of such intercessions are many—among which this—that a good thing, even if small, can cause even a great

evil to be pardoned—whereas man—if he is not truly penetrated by the mercy of Heaven, is apt to forget much good, because of some evil he may have received.

The prayer of Abraham's servant at the well, to know which damsel would be the bride of Isaac, is worthy of admiration. We see the type of the servant, faithful to the Master, worshipper of the Lord.

The anguished Jacob, in the night that preceded his encounter with Esau, said to the Lord that he was not worthy even of the smallest of the blessings of God. But he was tenacious in asking to be blessed, even confessing his old name.

And the prayers of David, how can we count them, that present him truly penitent, the man after the heart of the Lord? And his trust in asking for the greatest things, after the greatest falls. And the prayer of thanksgiving in offering the treasures amassed for the construction of the temple, recognizing that it was an honor and a blessing that God should accept from the hand of man part of that which He Himself had provided.

And not to mention many others, the prayers of Daniel, especially that by which he invoked that the people should return from captivity, because the seventy years were up.

We cannot close this chapter without mentioning Nehemiah, the man who had a good position in the court of Persia and being informed of the misery and ruin of Jerusalem, after having fasted and wept, asked grace from the Lord in order to find in turn grace with the king of Persia.

What an army of worshippers, of men of prayer pass before us, to tell us that God is looking for men who intercede, and

who do not get tired. And we have not mentioned the prayer of Hannah, so intense, without moving her lips, that made her appear to be inebriated. And the prayers of Samuel, and his protesting, although offended by the people who had rejected him, that he was asking God to not allow him to sin, if he should stop praying for them.

And we, the more we meditate on the subject, the more we feel to unite to the request of the disciples our own request, and to supplicate:

*“Lord, teach us to pray”.*

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A BRIEF, BUT POWERFUL MINISTRY:  
SAINT STEPHEN

(Acts 6:8-15; 7)

They had assigned Stephen to wait on the tables, because the apostles could not do so, having to occupy themselves with prayer and the Word. But this deacon, even he found time to preach the Word. A man full of faith and of power, Stephen was doing great wonders and miracles among the people. Certain ones arose disputing with him, but they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. And then they suborned false witnesses to accuse him of blaspheming against Moses and against God. They came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. The accusation was: “This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall

destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses gave to us.

The accusation was new, which proves that there was, in the preaching of Saint Stephen, something beyond that of the preaching of the apostles. The deacon attracted the attention of the enemy more than the twelve. *“And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”*

The High Priest said to him: *“Are these things so?”* And Stephen pronounced that discourse that is condensed in chapter 7 of Acts, and we recommend that it be read attentively. He began with Abram, called out of his country and then he spoke of the people in Egypt. Then he spoke about two persons, rejected at first, then used to liberate. The patriarchs, because of envy, sold Joseph. However, the Lord permitted it for a good purpose and his own family was kept alive because of him. Joseph’s brothers, envious and murderous, had to acknowledge him as their benefactor. The second person was Moses, born in a time of distress. At forty years of age, animated by a desire to help his people, he wanted to be a peacemaker between two who were fighting, but he was repelled. He fled into a distant country; but then, after forty years, God sent him into Egypt to deliver the people. *“This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? The same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.”*

Stephen was uniting courage to a great wisdom. The two persons mentioned by him were revered by the nation, but at one time they had been rejected. They were recognized only after the people had denied them. It was clear that he was preparing the hearers to accept the One of Whom Joseph and Moses had been figures, and who also had been rejected. But

Stephen did not go quickly to the center of the subject. He mentioned the life of the people in the desert. They had not obeyed Moses, not even afterward. *"To whom our fathers [take note of that our] would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt."* Then a quick hint to the idolatry and, following the history, he spoke of David, who had found favor before God, but who was not able, as was his desire, to build a house to the Lord, and that Solomon was the one who built it.

And here is a clever hint to the burning subject, because that people was proud of the temple: *"Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples,"* as we read in our translation but he said: *"things made with hands."* Saying this was both bold and prudent because it was immediately followed by *"as saith the prophet."* Up to now they could find nothing on which to contradict him, because it had all been the known history of the Jews. He continued, citing the prophet: *"Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?"*

They were listening reluctantly, although they could find nothing of which to accuse him. Then Stephen changed his tone and confronted them. It doesn't pay to try to persuade one who does not want to be persuaded: *"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."* In the preceding narrative he said "our fathers," also uniting himself with the ancient disobedience, but now that he sees them to be obstinate He says *"your fathers."* They were and *they remain* your fathers, there where they had been fathers also of Stephen, they no longer were.

And he attempted by this means, to return to the subject: *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"*

[again: your]. *And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now betrayers and murderers.*" The behavior toward the third person was tied to their own history. They should have just listened attentively and repented. But, instead, hearing these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

It did not pay to continue. It was necessary for that young life to be immediately spent for the glory of the Lord. Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, took his eyes off those faces full of wrath and fixed them on heaven, and saw "*the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,*" like an act of encouragement to the martyr, and of receiving him.

Then he said: "*Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*"

It was the limit. Those listeners cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord. They cast him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

The martyr, imitating the Lord in death, was saying: Lord Jesus receive my spirit. "*And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*"

We hear no more of him, except in some mention of the apostle Paul, but it is those hints that constrain us to reflect, so much so that we have asked ourselves what effect that death may have had on the Apostle to the Gentiles; and while considering this, we have found that the relation between Stephen and Paul is very strong, to the point of feeling that

we can affirm that the ministry of Paul is a continuation and enlargement of that of Stephen.

It has slipped by us to say a word about the funeral. *“And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”* Another hint of no little importance says: *“They were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.”*

Stephen was before his time; it was an anticipation of Paul. We must not even marvel at the behavior of the apostles at his death. It was the plan of God that they should still remain in Jerusalem, but that the others should be scattered. The ministry of Paul was a son of that dispersion, because Antioch, not Jerusalem, opened the door to the Gentiles for the Apostle. The preaching of Stephen must have seemed bold to the conservative group of the Church, as being too offensive to the Jews. That discourse can be considered the outline that guided all the ministry of St. Paul. Paul had seen Stephen die, and had consented. In observing that death, Paul received from that saint like a commission that said to him that the ministry that had been cut short should continue by means of the persecutor, in order to show the separation of Christianity from Judaism; a separation that began to be foreseen in the discourse of Stephen. Stephen had a short ministry, that ended in a violent way. It was like the lightning that forebodes rain. There followed the long elaborate ministry of Paul, by which the angelic face of Stephen was the greatest incentive in keeping Paul faithful to the end.

\* \* \*

SO LET HIM CURSE

(2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 16:10)

Absalom, the cruel, elegant idol of the crowd, rebelled against his father. A multitude followed him. But the men hardened by the vicissitudes of war and of misfortunes, few, but resolute, remained around David. The great king, the man whose heart was toward the Lord, wanted to prevent the siege of Jerusalem, and did not permit the priests to transport the Ark of the covenant behind him.

*“And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and shew me both it and His habitation: But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do unto me as seemeth good unto Him.”* “And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.” The picture of penitence and accumulation of sorrows, in so much misfortune, surpasses every human description.

They reached a height at Bahurim, and “behold”—note this “behold”—as if to tell us that that which happened merits special attention—*“behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came.”*

It seems that the unexpected enemy had concealed himself in that place, waiting for the travailed one, in order to hurl insults at him in such an anguished hour and to break his heart, already oppressed to the extreme, and curse him. Without caring that there were men of valor near the king, Shimei was throwing stones and cursing, saying: *“Come out,*

*come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: The Lord hath returned all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man."*

To render the insults more atrocious, there was the apparent religiosity of mentioning the name of the Lord—as if he, Shimei, were a representative of the righteousness of God. And the Lord. And the Lord! Remain in your evil. You, if you don't yet know it, hear it well: Thou art a bloody man.

One of the servants of David, *"Abishai—said to the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head."*

The king who had remained silent at the downpour of insults, was shaken at the language of his friend who was seeking immediate vengeance. Souls of heaven experience this type of horror. David answered, *"What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah?"* As if to say: Can you understand that which is going through my soul? You see the outward appearance and not the reality of the things. Mine is a walk different from yours. And the man whose heart was toward the Lord trembled that the great ideal of his life, of always pleasing God, should be endangered under the insinuation of his servant, because he himself was at the extreme of patient resignation, and he was certainly tempted to take vengeance. But it is the extreme criticisms that strengthen great resolutions. As if he were speaking to himself, in a sad soliloquy, David added: *"So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who then shall say, Wherefore hast thou done so?"* Afterward, sweetening his language, as to explain to his servant the reason of that sharp answer, David added: *"Behold, my son, which came forth of*

*my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it?"* Silence on the weight of his profound remorse. God had forgiven him, but his own sin was continually before him. Each sorrow seemed like a balm, because the man of heaven accepts with resignation the blows that strike him. They are like a retributive justice. It is true that he did not merit the accusations of Shimei, because he had not persecuted, rather, he had spared Saul. But for other things, he was inflicting reproof upon himself and was accepting all that punishment. "*Let him curse,*" and he no longer said "if", but he acknowledged that the Lord wanted that which was now happening to him. "*For the Lord hath bidden him.*" And we add: It is certain that without permission from Above, Shimei could not have been able to say even one word. Blessed is the man who sees the Hand of the Lord in everything.

We read line after line, and many times we do not pay attention that often there are great pauses between words and moments of illumination. After a while, David lifted up his head, always sorrowful, but irradiated by peace. Evil, hatred and punishment are not eternal. And next to the anguish there arose the comfort: "*It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.*"

And they went by the way, while Shimei was continuing to curse and to throw stones. Then the enemy became tired; and David and his people arrived at a place where they stopped to refresh themselves.

Let him curse! – Let him curse.

The evil was evident. The good was hidden: God, Supreme good, prepares help and comfort for us in the midst of suffering. Because, said the Psalmist, He speaks to us in the

time of trouble, He lives in the thunder and lightning and His footsteps are in the great waters (Psalm 78). And the place that is a desert and full of anguish can be, without us knowing it, as it was for Jacob, the House of God.

\* \* \*

### NOT PROSELYTISM

The words of Jesus: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*" Scribes—those who knew the letter, and Pharisees—separated or saints, as they called themselves. In the language of the time, hypocrites were the actors who were representing various parts using masks, which they changed according to the circumstances.

Those who practice proselytism have a fanatic zeal, trying to attract to their circle and discrediting others.

The commandment of Jesus is entirely different. He exhorts those who have seen and heard Him to witness to others of Him and not of groups. The One who ADDS TO THE CHURCH (Acts 7:47) is the same Lord who has promised: I will build My (MY) Church.

Again: Not proselytism—for this, No.

And witnessing of Him to those whom the Holy Spirit points out—for this, Yes.

\* \* \*

NEW COMMANDMENT

(John 13:34)

The commandment is not new in substance: “A *new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you.*” The key is in the word “As”—THUS—AS.

Each one us must try do discover HOW JESUS HAS LOVED US, notwithstanding the many “notwithstandings” that, if we are honest, must make us tremble. Examining ourselves in the light of that Face, we will come to hate ourselves and would like to flee.

But He stretches out His hand to us and says to each one of us: “Don’t be disheartened. The things that you discover in yourself I have seen before you even suspected them; and yet I have loved you with an eternal love—“As the Father loves me—thus I love you.” THUS—AS. Between the two adverbs there is the Infinite of human misery and the Infinite of the love of God.

THUS we must love others—AS Jesus has loved us.

And then? Oh, then there will be the true manifestation of the Children of God.

\* \* \*

## THE TWO MESSAGES

(John 1:29, 35,36)

### PART I

*“John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* This was the first message; the other, in fewer words, was: *“Behold the Lamb of God.”*

The messages were given in two consecutive days. In the first case the audience was composed of a multitude, in the second of two individuals. The one who pronounced them was the same John the Baptist; the person to whom he was referring both times was the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first message: *“John seeth Jesus coming unto him.”* The information is not without a purpose and is a figure of the first encounter with Jesus as a Savior; that is, in the work that He accomplishes for us. John had already seen Jesus at the Baptism; but now he saw Him as entering into His official Priesthood.

It is impossible to imagine the number of lambs and other animals sacrificed up to that day. We seem to see a river of blood. But the sin of the world had not been taken away. The first mention that we have of the Lamb is found in chapter 22 of Genesis, in the words that Abraham said to his son; that is, that the Lord Himself would provide a Lamb. As for the sacrifices, they go back to when the Lord dressed Adam and Eve in tunics of skin. Now, the prophesied Lamb, provided since eternity, had come in the fullness of time. Not many sacrifices, but only one. As in the Passover, where the Lamb

was selected by the father of the family and kept in reserve for three days before the sacrifice, thus the only Lamb prepared by God was presented to the people by a single individual and then had to be exposed to the public for three years before being sacrificed. The words "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away ...*" draws attention to only one, that is, that it is He, the Lamb who takes away the sin; and only He can take it away. The quality and the character are understood in the words of the message; but the emphasis is given to the work: "*Takes away the sin of the world.*"

This was the Evangelistic message to the sinners. We do not split hairs on the words, but we speak according to the habits of the churches. Many people were near the Baptist when the message of salvation was announced. The next day the scene was quite different.

"*Again the next day after John stood.*" The word "stood" indicates determination to understand first himself and then to impart to others a new lesson. Every step forward is preceded by a stop. With the Baptist, there were only two disciples.

"*And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God.*"

We note with sorrow that much stunted religious growth is a consequence of not having distinguished the two messages, giving to each one the proper value. Except for rare exceptions, the church has given the first but not the second message, because it has considered the second as a simple abbreviation of the first.

We note: On the second day the crowd was no longer there: Should we say that the great Evangelistic movement had failed? To the superficial eye the absence of the crowd

would seem to be a failure of the preaching of the Baptist. But it was not so. The first message was for many, the second for a few. Two or three is the number indicated by Jesus as a beginning of union in Him, we would say, the Church. The two were *disciples*, therefore prepared for intimate communion. Even the method of *seeing* differed from the first day. John noticed Jesus drawing near. Now Jesus was not coming to them, but was passing by and it was necessary to observe Him promptly. That's why it is said that John was looking upon His face as He walked. Rather than getting excited, the people of God should gather the powers of the soul in absolute silence and follow the movements of the Baptist before hearing and understanding his words. He said only: "*Behold the lamb of God.*"

And we, fearing to prolong this study too much, with the danger that the second message will become hurried and confused with the first, we place a period, and postpone what follows to the next number.

## PART II

The first looking had not been sufficient; it is necessary to look again. In the language of the scripture the word "look" has an intense meaning. It supposes concentrating the mind in order to discover the qualities of the soul that do not appear at first. John had seen, with an intense seeing, the Savior, and had pointed out His work. Now he looked again, fixing his eyes on His face as if to draw out from the features His inner life, and not only did he look and look again in His face, but he contemplated how He was walking.

The Christian life is called also "Way" or "walk." The character of a man can be studied not only by contemplating his face, but also in the manner that he moves and walks, since exterior acts are indicative of the movements of the

soul. One who considers well the few words of the Scripture will discover that John did not hurry to the second message as soon as he had seen Jesus again but he took time to absorb within himself the impression of that face and of that walk. After, as though forcing himself to interrupt with words, the admiration that had subdued him, he exclaimed: "*Behold the Lamb of God.*" The lesson "*Takes away the sin of the world*" he had given the day before, and he was sure that the two had indeed heard it. Now another was needed. Those who have tasted the work of the Savior are invited, following the look and the voice of that first messenger, to study the Lamb.

The greatest expression of love is not only in obeying and contemplating, but in imitating up to the point of resembling the loved object. The two, figure of the Church, that is of a people that the Lord has made His Church, are exhorted to look and to look again at the face and the walk trying to know who the Lamb of God may be. They knew of the other lambs and various sacrifices, but now, from many, they had to come down to one alone: that of the Lamb of God. The message of sin and of salvation is most important, but in certain lessons it is necessary to forget, for the moment, even the work, but to study the One who works. It is true that from the picture one knows the artist, but it is also true that by looking only at the picture we will never know the man, unless, after having contemplated the work we turn to contemplate the artist himself. This is what the disciple must do: treasuring with gratitude the good received from the Blood of Christ, he must enter into the school where one learns to know the Lord Himself. This is the plan of God. So much so that Jesus has defined that Life Eternal is in knowing God and the One that He has sent (John 17:3).

The Lord has many titles. Each one of them is an answer to our needs. The final title is: Lamb. Certainly in the school of

the Holy Spirit we learn to know Him under various aspects, but the final lesson of the many lessons is *Lamb of God*. Such a Benefactor proceeded from that fountain of love, of the Father. The life of a man is not enough for such an examination. The admiration of Him continues after this life. The last book of the scripture is occupied mostly with the Lamb. The City described last is that of the Lamb. The last City described is that of the Lamb. The Lamb is also the temple and the light of it; the last writing from which one can draw hope is the book of the Lamb.

John the Baptist did not describe the Person, but he pointed to Him. No book can describe Him. One who starts to follow Him will begin in silence to delineate Him to himself and to know Him, and then he will be able to point Him out to others. John did not add words to his brief message, nor were they necessary. The luminous gaze fixed on the Person who was passing, the voice resounding with conviction, the precise words; the arm and forefinger stretched in that direction had the strength of separating the two disciples from the first teacher in order to lead them toward the One in whose school they had to enter.

The Message had effect. The scripture concludes: "*And the two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus.*"

\* \* \*

WHAT SEEK YE?

(What thing?)

(John 1:38)

The two disciples, one of them was the Evangelist John, started out in silence to follow the One who the old teacher had pointed out as the "Lamb of God." It was all they could do as they did not feel themselves to be capable of initiating a conversation. They needed encouragement and they received it. All who seek the Lord with love will receive it. Jesus turning about, saw that they were following Him, and said to them: "*What seek ye?*" While it is true that He follows the walk without deviating, it is also true that He stops and interrupts it in order to attend to the works of mercy that the Father puts before Him. The question was brief, but the sound of that voice and the aspect induced them to trust. In His school we learn that one of the methods of teaching is to ask suggestive questions. "*What—what thing—seek ye?*" He knew that the two did not want anything except to be admitted into His presence. The question has remained as a line of instruction to future disciples: to discover if people are looking for things or for Jesus Himself. The consideration brings us to consider two classes of people: those who go to Jesus for material benefits, and those who, without asking for anything, love to see, to contemplate and to follow Him. Alas! Many of those who go to Jesus for material things do not remain, but those who are attracted by His words remain faithful until the end, because they bind themselves to His great heart.

What seek ye?

The two disciples said to Him: "*Rabbi (Master) where dwellest Thou?*" It was like saying to Him: we are not

seeking anything, but You Yourself, and not in passing, but in such a way that we can enjoy Your presence. We ask for the address of Your dwelling. Dwelling? Fixed room? Jesus did not have any; not even an ecclesiastical office in which he could receive in given hours. He gave no address because it could be lost or waylaid by some seducer who might act as a guide. Therefore He answered: "*Come and see.*" He did not schedule an encounter, and He indicated neither street nor house, although He certainly had to live somewhere. Since they were seeking Him, not things, it was necessary that they should follow Him without being preoccupied about places. He was necessary and not places. The way that leads to Jesus is Jesus Himself. The two went and saw where He dwelled. The Evangelist does not give any hint, as many religious people would have done, about the place where He was living. Instead he hastens to tell us that they "*abode with Him that day.*" What did they say? Nothing is mentioned; but if they did not say anything, they must have heard much. That which they heard was for them, and not to tell others. Each one who sets out to follow Jesus for Himself and has the privilege of an audience with Him, in ordinary language we would say, a visit with Him, gathers in secret that which He communicates. The words "that day" are prophetic and indicate that from that moment on there began another day, that of Grace and of Rest. The Evangelist records the time of the encounter: "*for it was about the tenth hour.*" It was in the morning. Ten is the maximum of man, hands have ten fingers. Man finishes, the Lord begins.

However there is no mention of the hour in which the visit ended. He, after we have fixed our eyes on His face and admired Him in His walk, sought Him as a Lamb, and have told Him that we do not want things but Him Himself, it is clear that the encounter had a beginning but will never have an end.

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## SOME OBSTACLES TO FAITH

(John 5:44; 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:19)

Let us select only two references in order to limit the great subject. There must be an evil and incredulous heart, a continuous exclaiming "Lord, Lord," without obeying. It is clear that faith is confirmed by works. But we want to limit the subject.

We begin by citing the epistle of Paul to Timothy, in which he exhorts him to have faith and a good conscience. We are face to face with a new word that is little used in Biblical language: Conscience. It is that capacity of inner discernment or hidden tribunal, that guides every man to know good and evil, in proportion to the light that he has received. Conscience does not act equally in everyone, but according to the light of each one. The important thing is that no one is left without an inner light; this is the basis of that which is called natural religion. However there are those who suffocate their conscience, which becomes always more hardened, up to the point of losing the capacity to feel the prick of every remorse and sorrow. It becomes cauterized. At this point even faith withdraws, because ceasing to hear the inner voice, any desire to hear that of the Lord disappears. Faith brings us to draw near to the Lord; a hardened conscience pushes us to flee from Him.

The other obstacle to faith is revealed in the words of the Lord, reported in John 5:44: "*How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?*" Someone translates: "*from the Only God.*" The words contain a reprimand mixed with pity:

the Lord does not reprimand them for the fact that they did not want to draw near to Him; in a certain way He was putting Himself aside, not lamenting that He was not accepted personally. Deep down, one who does not accept some good, or a part of what is good, is contrary not only to that part, but to all that which is good. The spirit of what is true and good is one; and one likewise is the spirit of evil. One who accepts something good with his heart is inclined to accept all that is of God; one who is attracted in the depths of his soul to a form of evil, is attracted to the spirit of evil. The conclusion is: either the Lord or Satan.

One of the characteristics of the man who wants to resist the voice of heaven is that of adoring himself. This is in all men, but some, after the invitation of Jesus begin to hate themselves up to the point of disappearing before their own eyes.

The word "Religion" has two meanings. It signifies a double bond between man and God, and it is a great word. In the more common sense, the word religion, as it is used by many, expresses some kind of meeting toward a superior power. The Jews whom Jesus was addressing were religious according to the common use of the word, not in the true sense. All men want, or pretend to want some kind of religion, even those who qualify themselves as "Positive Thinkers" or who outright believe in nothing. Those Jews were religious, but full of vainglory. All of us, alas, have been such for a long time. They expected approval and honor from each other. Jesus Christ knew them, and told them that they could not believe, precisely because they were invaded by the desire to be glorified by men.

But let us stop occupying ourselves of those poor ones, whose end, after all, is unknown to us, and let us pay closer attention to the business of our own house, and, to be more

sincere, precisely to our religious movement. Do none of our preachers or others seek their own glory, to be honored by men? In the testimonies about the benefits received from the Lord, who knows if sometimes there may not be a little of vainglory, as if we were receiving the comforts and the visits of the Lord because we are better than others, or great people of faith or sacrifice?

Alas, how many questions could be asked, to which even the most saintly would be embarrassed to answer. And why therefore do we persist so much to explain and to defend ourselves, under the pretext that we do so for the sake of righteousness?

Did Jesus defend Himself? Was He justified in the flesh (in the visible)? Or did He commit Himself to the One who judges righteously and knows when and how to justify?

It is necessary that we seek a place of retirement and meditation, and learn to truly hide ourselves so that Jesus alone may be seen. We like to refer to a man whom Jesus pointed to as a type of the resurrection, we mean to say Jonah. One who reads that book is left with two portraits before him: a weak man who narrated only that which was to his discredit, and a great and merciful Lord.

*"How can ye believe?"* we seem to hear the groaning of the great soul of Christ, as if He were saying: even if you would want to believe, you cannot, because seeking reciprocal glory impedes you from believing.

The *"how can ye"* leads to suppose that of all the obstacles, this is the one that most damages faith. But in every severe message there is an encouraging side. It is true that the desire to be glorified among ourselves impedes faith. But the opposite is also true, and, that is, those who grow in

renouncing themselves, hating even their very own name, it is true that they, entering always more into faith, draw always to Jesus up to the point of saying they no longer live, but Christ lives in them.

Rather, such ones do not even boast that they have faith, because having abandoned themselves to the Lord and to His Grace, they no longer confess their own faith, but that which they have received by grace.

\* \* \*

### SUFFERING FOR A TIME

(1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:10)

The first epistle of Saint Peter shines with gentleness and consideration. Having been in the school of the Lord for a long time, the apostle had become not only modest and sober, but also measured and charitable in his exhortations. Even when he must warn that there will be suffering, the manner in which he expresses himself diminishes the very weight of the suffering. He insinuates that at present we are saddened by various temptations; this is for a short time and because it is necessary. He warns that we must not consider suffering a strange thing, that we must arm ourselves with the same mind of Christ. At the end of the letter, he beautifies the crucifixion through which everyone must pass, with these words: "*But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*" There is the announcement but it is attenuated by the words "a while," and it is preceded by the announcement

that the plan is prepared by the "God of all grace who has called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus."

Not content with having said "a while," and preceded by "all grace," the apostle concludes that the brief process is for the purpose of making us perfect: "*after ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*"

It is one of the laws of the soul that we suffer not so much for things, but because of our way of thinking of them. The sense of righteousness and the certainty that there is a kind purpose sweeten even the greatest sorrows. God is just. He is wise. He is love. Therefore there is no error in HIM. Suffering of all kinds forms the glory and the joy of tomorrow. Suffering is for a short time. The glory and the joy are immense and eternal.

Then consider that the exhortations were coming from a man who had suffered much, and who had before him at the end of his career, the death of the cross as his and our Lord had prophesied.

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### GRACE AND REVELATION

(1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:13)

Every new height requires a fresh work of the Grace of God. In fact, in John 1:16 it is written: "*And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.*" The richness of the original language leads one to understand that it is Grace preparatory of another Grace; so that the walk of the

Christian can be described as a chain of Graces. Receiving benefits from the Lord, without His help, would crush us. There is a danger in forcing people beyond the Grace that they have received. There is a proverb that one should not take a step that is longer than one's leg.

St. Peter, in exhorting to holiness, begins with these words: *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* Revelation means also manifestation.

We must grow toward the perfect knowledge of Him, and we are brought to it from revelation to revelation like one who ascends from height to height. But the air of the altitudes is not suited to weak organisms.

The Christian does not adapt himself to increasing revelations unless, with every advancement, he receives a corresponding Grace. It is dangerous to understand much without the Grace to be able to suffer. Every discovery that we make in Christ without His help would bring us to pride or to desperation. Pride in seeing the light that would make us judge others, desperation that would make us look at our impossibility to imitate it.

We need a greater light, but also stronger eyes in order to be able to sustain it, a vision that is always being enlarged, but also the Grace that sustains, so that our head does not spin.

I have heard a saintly man pray thus: *"Lord give me the gifts of the Spirit, but accompany them with the fruit of the Spirit and with your Grace; if not, do not give them to me."* What would it be if someone were to have all the gifts without the fruit of the Spirit and the Grace to be able to carry them.

Ruins have come about when there have been gifts without the corresponding fruit and Grace.

It is possible, for a time, to possess the strength of Samson and to have been abandoned by God. Therefore we say: Lord, with each advancement and revelation give us the corresponding Grace. The apostle indicates three preparations: girding up the loins of the mind, sobriety, and a persevering hope.

Our minds run the danger of being thrown into strange imaginations, because it is at the head that the enemy directs many of his blows. We need the Lord to control our minds. The record that the hand of the Lord was many times upon the prophet Ezekiel is not without reason. And also in chapter 61 of Isaiah in the prophecy regarding Jesus, the first words are: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.*" Sobriety, that is, a just measure that makes us remain in our limits.

In the things of God there is: Weight, Number and Measure. Thus girded up in our minds, controlled in our hearts and in our emotions, we are exhorted to persevere in the hope that the necessary Grace will be given to us.

Don't expect to receive today the Grace that will serve in the humiliation of tomorrow. Some of us have marveled that we have been able to accept suffering with calm and almost with happiness that at one time we would have believed impossible to tolerate. The Lord has supplied the help according to the need.

There is a special Grace for those who are moribund and for some forms of martyrdom. But, from the words of the apostle, one perceives a correspondence between Grace and revelation. Grace is like personified in the Lord Jesus Himself. The rich scriptural language teaches that every new

revelation of Jesus is and must be accompanied by a new Grace, and also says that the Christian who is controlled, sober and firm, grows in Grace precisely in the measure that the person of Christ is more and more revealed. They are the extremes that the logic of man cannot reason, and we sum them up in a few words that only touch the subject, but cannot exhaust it.

It is by Grace that we can know the Lord; likewise it is true that by continuing to know Him and to have Him revealed, we keep ourselves and grow in Grace.

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### FOOTSTOOLS UNDER THE FEET

(Psalm 110:1)

*"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool."* The Lord—Father God—has said to the Son, who is Lord to David, to sit at His right hand, that is, of His power.

If the aim of this meditation were the word "Lord," and its relation to us, we should have to insist that "Lord" in the relation between the deity and us, gives the idea of absolute ownership, and that the measure of how Jesus must reign over us is given in the absolute submission of Him to the Father. But the aim of the present writing is another.

The things of Jesus extend to the Church. Therefore, that which was said to Jesus is repeated to each none of us: *"Sit thou at my right hand."* It is not the material position, but the

state of the soul that is important: it means to enter into Rest, and to depend entirely on the Lord, knowing that He is the powerful deliverer, and will know how to preserve us in His hand. Sitting, resting—until when?

Until He—not we, *not we*, has put our enemies for footstools under our feet.

There are various classes of enemies: those that we have procured ourselves, and those who hate us because we are Christians. As for the first ones, there is a promise that if our ways please the Lord, He will reconcile them to us (Proverbs 16:7). We cannot free their hearts from resentments; however, the Lord will pacify them. It goes without saying that we must not continue to act toward them in the manner that made them our enemies, but live and walk in a way that they will see that we have changed. For a time, they will not believe us, but, if we trust in the Lord, He will sweeten them toward us.

There are enemies of Christ. They are also ours, and such ones will never be pacified unless they also surrender to the Lord. There are circumstances and events that we can qualify as enemies. Not the last enemy to us, is our very own "I." However there is a promise that all these enemies, without distinction of class and origin, will become footstools for the feet of one who has entered into the rest of Christ.

Footstools, not in order to trample them, but in order that we can, by rising, lift ourselves on High. We must pray for the good of our enemies and never that they should be trodden upon. Woe to him who should desire such a thing. He would have no right to the mercy of the Lord. It is not the individuals who will come under us to make us rise, but the afflictions, the travails, the sicknesses and all that which for a time has caused us anguish. All will be used by God to

make us rise always more toward heaven. Therefore, every enemy becomes a benefactor to one who rests in Christ. Enemies are the guardians of our soul, they constrain us to seek the face of the Lord, and to examine ourselves attentively. Sometimes they are right, at least in part.

The Christian must grow from grace to grace, from faith to faith, and also from enemy to enemy. Imagine that we must rise to a height without any ladder. Behold an enemy appears; we bless him and gather ourselves in the Lord; when the test has passed we become aware that precisely that enemy has given us a boost on high. He has become a step upon which we have begun our ascent toward the New Jerusalem. However we must continue to rise; and therefore there appear, one after the other, new enemies, who also become new steps. Let us bless them because, I repeat, they are our benefactors.

There are events that destroy some and help others. The ark of Noah was of ridiculous construction to the human eye. It rested on, but was not founded on the earth. When the flood came all the solid constructions were covered with water. But the destruction for others was life for Noah, for his, and for the ark, since the more water that came down, the more the floating house rose toward heaven. We feel like exclaiming: Oh enemies from infancy till today; men and inimical things, travails in us and outside of us, so-called misfortunes or sicknesses, agitations of temperament, all that which has caused us pain, looking back we see that everything has been used by God as so many steps toward heaven. Blessed is the man who trusts and rests in the Lord; he will no longer see evil, since the evil itself becomes changed into good for him.

#### *The Last Enemy*

What terror is death. One after the other those dearest to us are taken away and we remain as if in a desert. It is said that

the last enemy, death, will be destroyed, but in the meantime, it is an enemy. We are walking on a vast cemetery. What a lot of dead men! What a lot of dead women! But is it truly an enemy or does it enter into the number of those that are called footstools under our feet? It is clear that death is called an enemy but it is also clear that the Lord has made no exception of any enemy to be transformed into a footstool. Therefore even death is for one who rests at the right hand of God a step of ascent toward on High.

The pilgrim, from enemy to enemy, always remaining in the grace of God, rises continuously on High. Let us understand each other: the true Christian does not think that he is rising, nor does he boast that he has grown; rather he keeps on losing in his own eyes, to the point that he considers himself ashes, and it seems to him that he does not even exist. It seems to him that he has always gone down. But, to the eye of God he has risen. The way on High is through the walk that leads down. While one loses in the visible, one gains in the invisible. The Christian does not enter into the rest of Christ, sit at His right hand and forgive his enemies because he expects recompense. The supernatural has become natural. He does not see the consequences of his sitting at the right hand of God and of the waiting, but the consequences come.

Always firm in the Grace and in the Faith, accepting as from the hand of the Lord, the Christian becomes nothing in himself, but has always risen from enemy to enemy, from step to step. The earthly things seem always farther away, while the vision of the beyond becomes enlarged. But he senses that he finds himself before the greatest difficulty. From enemy to enemy he has lost the earthly things and no longer has anything. However, he is not in heaven. He sighs, but he sees himself as if by an abyss ready to enter into it. Behold the last enemy comes forward. Death is the

frightening black servant who presents himself to the imagination as if to destroy. However, the soft voice that has encouraged him up to then makes itself heard and says to him: "*Fear not, the long ladder is finished, only one rung was lacking and here it is; place the feet of faith on it and enter.*" The last enemy has become your last benefactor. The dark underground passage leads to a vast plain of light and of love. The black servant introduces one into the Kingdom of the King of Kings.

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### BLESSING AND CURSING

(James 3:8-12)

Among religious people such events occur frequently. We mean to say among those who have not yet learned to tremble before opening their mouth. St. James, speaking of the tongue, notes that by it we bless God the Father, and by it we curse men who are made in the similitude of God. From the same mouth proceeds cursing and blessing. Let us imagine a comedian who knows how to transform his aspect. In one moment we see him with an unctuous aspect sending sweet words on high, and then—suddenly—with a harsh countenance, turning downward and insulting men.

"*Glory to Jesus, brother! Peace of the Lord.*" Afterward a sarcastic smile, and some question or information, or report against these or those. And many go on in this manner for a long time—blessing God and cursing men. St. James takes away the illusion, and warns that one who acts in such a manner does not bless, but is always cursing. Imagine that

someone should come into your house and show respect to you, but at the same time mistreats your children, or despises the objects in your home. Would you consider such a one your friend? One who despises your family and your things despises you.

God is the Creator of everyone and of everything; any lack of esteem that we show to that which He has created is an offense to Him Himself. If we understand this well, and it is dutiful and right that we should understand it, we must tremble when we are about to open our mouth or to move our lips in a fraudulent manner. One sins with the tongue and with the lips.

A Christian is known by his mouth. The best way of showing our love and gratitude to God is to see everything and all men, such as they are, as works of His hands. And if our tongue or lips or impulses of the heart surprise us, warning us that we are cursing, let us cease from the illusion that "glory and hallelujah and peace, brother," are worth anything. We should acknowledge that such blessing is in substance cursing. Let us seek the Lord for help so that He will give us grace to have a single fountain, from which there flows a single language: Blessing.

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#### FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE

*"WOE UNTO YOU SCRIBES AND PHARISEES..."* Often we are asked: But didn't Jesus use rigor, throwing the merchants out of the Temple, and reproving the Scribes and the Pharisees with the famous: *"woe unto you?"* It is true. But it is also true that it is easier for us to imitate the severity

than the love and the patience. He never erred, because the great innocent and serene heart was free from any prejudice. He loved everyone, and was not occupied with Himself, but of the glory of God and of the good of the souls. His severity was an explosion of intense sorrow contained for a long time; he was moved by compassion and His aim was for compassion.

Be careful, dear ones, of rigor. Pay attention that it truly be the Lord who moves to reprimand. One of the good rules for one who feels guided to reprove others is to investigate himself to see if he, who knows, is moved by some resentment, from some rancor or prejudice. Let him examine himself well if he loves those whom he reprimands, up to laying down his life for them.

God uses a merciful man. And then, before correcting others, like the ancient Levites (Exodus 32), he will pass and pass again through the camp, using the sword against those closest to him, that is, starting from himself. Such a one will know the time and the measure of God. He will imitate the Apostles who were admonishing with many tears, and Jesus who wept over Jerusalem (Over Jerusalem! What a figure!).

“GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD.” Some insist: the Lord has commanded: *go* ... what are you waiting for?

Calm down! To whom did He say it? First to the eleven, a figure and prophecy of the entire “Body of Christ.” It is the united body that fulfills all the commandments of the Lord. To the various members the commands are given in particular, to each one, in time and with measure. It is commanded to visit the prisons, the sick ones, to dress those who are naked, to warn the wicked. But does each one alone fulfill all this? There are various promises and commandments, but they are realized according to how the

Holy Spirit imparts them each time. In Colossians 3:3, 4 it is written: "*For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.*" A dead person can do nothing. He does not speak and he does not put his hands on anyone; his life is hidden in *another*.

"*Shall appear*" does not refer only to the "*return of the Lord*" but also to every manifestation of Him. The prayers and movements of the Lord have always had sure results. Jesus is the same. The Lord dresses Himself of the dead one (of us dead ones) and moves him. The result is sure. And then it becomes manifested in the work that glorifies God.

Should we speak always, to everyone? Anna, the prophetess, spoke of that little child to all those who were *waiting* for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). The Holy Spirit prepares the listeners, and guides the messengers to them. Our zeal and haste makes it difficult for us to understand this.

Moreover, John 17 clearly expresses that Jesus came to us sent by the Father, with the message of the Father, to those to whom the Father sent Him.

WITH REGARD TO THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, The Lord baptizes with the Holy Spirit. It is our duty to insist that those who have heard the Gospel and have believed in Jesus, seek the Holy Spirit. But pay strict attention that the Lord does not need any one of us to kneel very close to the one who is praying to incite him to repeat: *Glory, Glory*. God has no need of our help, and He knows when and how to work.

Exhorting and cooperating are from God. But the mania of quickly reporting that by means of that certain ministry so

many were baptized, etc., is ... *Vanity*. Be careful of human artifices, under the color of religious enthusiasm.

**PROSELYTISM OR WITNESSING.** It is wise and prudent to meditate the words of Jesus: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of Hell than yourselves*" (Matthew 23:15).

We are so darkened in considering the "Scribes and Pharisees" as monsters, that we do not recognize ourselves under these names. Saints! Literalists, strict with others, excusers of ourselves; severe against some forms of sin, indifferent and ignorant of the sins of the inner life; cleaning the outside of the cup, keeping that which is inside, that is invisible, full of extortion and the like.

Where are we? An examination of conscience is necessary here. Psalms 19: end; 139: end.

Proselytism means to make followers and that is: followers of a sect, of some individual. After having gained disciples, the Scribes and Pharisees "MAKE" them (note the words "MAKE THEM") children of hell, twofold more than them. The teachers teach hatred; and the disciples, in the evil, surpass the teachers.

But Jesus commanded His people, that after they had received the Holy Spirit, that they should be His witnesses. That is, the Holy Spirit witnesses of Jesus to the disciples, and they transmit to others that which they have heard and seen, by the work of the same Spirit.

The Church is founded by the Lord because it is He—today as in the past—Who adds to it those who are saved, and who

are about to be saved. The original text admits both expressions. WITNESSING OF JESUS.

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### WHY IS IT THAT YOU ASK MY NAME?

(Genesis 32:29)

Jacob, having become Israel, asked to know the name of the supernatural man with whom he had fought all night. The answer he received was: "WHY IS IT THAT YOU ASK?" One did not declare his name; the other did not answer the question. But the words have remained for us. Evidently Jacob, Israel, was asking for praiseworthy reasons, because he was blessed. The "WHY" is passed on to us.

Why do we study the Scriptures, and attempt to accumulate theological knowledge? Is it to know the Lord, or to appear to be learned and spiritual? Before God only that which is done for His glory is worthwhile. The Jews were full of Scriptures and of theories, but they rejected the Author of the Scriptures. We live by the Word of God, of which we can receive only that which we sincerely desire, or rather, for as much as we have hunger and thirst of Jesus Christ.

Discussing and discussing, making of the sacred Book and of the mysteries of Heaven, arguments of intellectual curiosity! Oh! NO. Lord, give us TODAY, the BREAD of TODAY.

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HE ANSWERED NOTHING

(Luke 23:9)

*“Then he questioned Him in many words; but He answered him nothing.”* Herod Antipas, the killer of John the Baptist had been moved when he heard of Jesus and of the powerful works accomplished by Him. He said that He was John resurrected from the dead; but he had not gone to Jesus. Now Jesus was led before him, and Herod, instead of showing interest for his own soul, began to ask idle questions and discourses of the accused. He had absolute silence for an answer. Heaven had been closed on the dark soul of that fox. Jesus answered nothing.

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BUTTER AND HONEY

(Isaiah 7:15)

The Lord Himself gave the sign: *“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”* (God with us). Immediately, connected to the announcement of the sign, the Lord further declared: *“Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.”*

The sign offered and promised is from Above and from below. The two extremes touch each other: the Omnipotent condescends to the misery of fallen man. The Immanuel is true God and true man. As a man He must advance in wisdom, in stature, in grace before God and before men.

Man has need of food in more than one sense. The Prophet informs that Jesus will eat butter and honey so that and until He can discern between the evil and the good.

If we, Church of *Christ*, meditate some words, for example, these words, we would be less precipitous in acting and speaking. In His school, listening much, reflecting a lot, and speaking only when He opens our mouth, we will serve Him better.

Butter and honey: not only one, but both, because one food compensates and balances the other. Honey alone is too sweet, and it was forbidden to mix it in the sacrifices. Besides, there are impure qualities in commerce. The Psalmist compares the words of the Lord to pure honey that does not go through vessels made by man, but flows directly from the honeycomb, from the source.

Butter is a solidified food. The prophet refers to a pure butter, certainly not to a butter mixed with other substances as can be found in the market. It is obtained by beating milk until a solid, white mass is formed, that separates from the watery part, also good for other uses.

The glorious and humble personage, who unites in Himself the Above and below, the two extremes, and who has one Hand at the Throne and extends the other to the most miserable and degraded, is described as being inactive and silent, but feeding Himself with butter and honey so that and until He can discern good and evil. As He, so His (His!) Church, those born from above, who have the Triune God dwelling in them. Those who are born from Above must abide with Jesus a long time before being able to discern. After receiving the milk, they learn to see it stirred and agitated. The Word must be considered under various aspects until it becomes in us a sure, balanced doctrine. We

remember the three “ANDS” of Isaiah 11:2 Wisdom and understanding; Counsel and might; Knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Six operations carried out in us by the Holy Spirit. The result of the six operations is: REST. Therefore, discipline of food and silence is needed before we can understand, by the light of the Holy Spirit, good and evil. Natural man errs, because he judges superficially and not the reality (John 7:24).

Oh! great life of Jesus Christ, the true God and the true Man, the perfect Mediator! Help us, oh Lord, to put ourselves in your school, and to feed ourselves with butter and honey, so that and until you will want to guide and use us in the so difficult task of discerning and choosing, and of acting and speaking according to your Will!

Divine, long silences! – Measured words, few, but merciful and wise!

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### THE SEVEN THOUSAND

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19:18)

We become easily discouraged because we pause too much to look at the exterior and sad aspect of things. Elijah, the prophetic giant, exposed with desperation his own condition and that of the people as he saw it: *“I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.”* The Lord did not answer

to this series of lamentations, but gave the prophet commands for a new and more difficult work: "*Go, return*" thundered the divine voice: "*Go, return.*" And after the order, the Lord answered to the comment: "*Even I only am left.*"

If one had heard Elijah, not knowing the power of God, he would have imagined that hell and earth had conquered Heaven. I remember when, as a child, I attended the fireworks, it seemed to me that those rays, those explosions and that smoke would destroy the starry sky. But is it necessary to say it? Everything disappeared and the heaven remained immobile ever my head.

"*I have remained alone*" the prophet lamented. Why alone? Because Elijah considered only those whom he knew as people and servants of God. The prophets known to him had been killed; the people had failed, or were at least indifferent. Therefore, all was lost. He had suffered in vain; the grandiose scene of Mt. Carmel had happened in vain! Heaven had been defeated, evil had triumphed! Indeed? Time is needed to understand that God is above everything, that He knows how to use wrath for His own glory, and we add the unfaithfulness of man. Rather He is more victorious when His plans seem to be destroyed. He wins, when in the visible it seems that He loses. The prophet did not yet know that the Lord has a hidden people, hidden servants who will show themselves in the time set by Him.

Alone? No, encouraged the divine Voice, as if He were saying to the prophet and to us that we do not know quickly who the true people of God may be, that the groups to which we have become attached in a first enthusiasm do not remain such as they appeared to be in our inexperience; the friends and the companions that we selected are not such nor the best, that we must learn from the lessons of haste and

disappointments that we receive, that is, we make ours only that which comes to us from Above (John 3:27).

The Lord said: *"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."* Baal was the God of the Visible, of the noisy and corrupt feasts. Seven thousand is a symbolic number that indicates all the true worshippers. They do not have mixed meetings, nor do they caress, flatter the visible nor are they deceived by it.

In fact the Lord had prepared for Elijah a companion and a friend, who was more than a son to him, and to whom was entrusted a long and powerful ministry, and when he was brought on High, he had around him, and in many places, groups of devout persons, whom the Scripture calls "sons of prophets." We like to compare this picture with that of the Shulamite, of the Song of Songs. Alone and cast out in the beginning of the book, but, at the end, elevated to the direction of a people affectionate to her and led by her.

Life is a series of surprises for us, but not for God, to whom everything is known, and Who has told us that many last shall be first, and many first shall be last.

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### THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There are some who inform those who have believed: if you are not baptized with the Holy Spirit you are not saved.

Others say we are already saved because we have received grace, and the grace cannot be annulled. Others almost put

the Trinity in conflict and say: The Holy Spirit was not crucified. And others repeat: The baptism is simply a gift. Groups curse other groups and we want to cry out: How much violence, oh Lord is committed in your Name! More than a brief writing would be required, but it is necessary above all that one who reads be without prejudice and partiality, and does not hurl the easy insult: "you are..." (we do not write the first part of the title that they can give). They are names given by sects.

Candid reader, listen! We are not called to explain the destiny of all men. The Creator is just and knows how to treat them. Our assignment is to announce that which has been given to us. The responsibility of each one is relative to the light that he has received. Whoever recognizes in his heart that Jesus is the Savior, and in his heart accepts Him as such, receives the capacity to extend himself to all the promises of the Lord and to receive them. "Believing" is a powerful word, that is, *true* believing. Such a one is firm in himself in the faithfulness of God and knows that he will receive all that God has for him. Putting an "if" in place is offensive. If he is not baptized, what will come of him? And we add, if he does not keep himself bound to Christ, even after the baptism with the Holy Spirit, what will come of him? If! If! If! The fact is that the man who truly believes—"truly believes"—is by Faith made a son of God. But it is also true that the faith of today, base of reality, makes him enter into the practical reality, sooner or later. Therefore, already a son by faith, he shall be demonstrated as such by power, and will receive the Gift—Seal.

Who are we to divide the three persons of the Trinity? Do we use the word "Salvation" in the true scriptural sense? And do we use the word "Baptism" in the sense due to it? The work of the Lord is complete in Him, but is completed by Him in us according as He pleases. "Salvation" is a rich word that is

often used for one who has begun to believe, but there is a distinction between justification, reconciliation, and full salvation. In the Lord salvation is complete as a single act. But still in Romans 5:9,10 we read that those who are justified and reconciled *shall be saved*. Take note!

Certain expressions are repeated without distinguishing the mention that there is only one baptism: Ephesians 4:5. What is it? It is enough to hear the words of John the Baptist that he was baptizing to penitence but that another would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with Fire. Keep in mind that the baptism of water, important and commanded as it is, is only a figure. It is necessary that Mark 16:15,16 be read attentively.

The faithful Lord will not abandon anyone who truly trusts in Him. What we must say is not: if you are not baptized you are not this or that, or you are this or that, even without being baptized, but insist: believe in the Lord with all your heart, love Him, trust in Him and He will do what is needed.

There was a people who pretended to believe in God, but rejected the Son of God. Read again the discourses of Jesus in the Gospel of St. John. One who truly believes in God has no difficulty in accepting the Mediator, the bridge, the great ladder that ties the earth to heaven. Jesus said to the disciples, "ye believe in God, believe also in me." One who has truly believed in the Father and in the Son has no difficulty in accepting the Holy Spirit that filled the one hundred twenty on the day of Pentecost, and others afterward. It is true that the Son went on the cross but it is absurd to exclude from the great martyrdom the Father and the Holy Spirit. There were three who created, and there are three who work out complete salvation. Reader, don't be horrified! We know no less than you that Jesus is called the only Savior, but we remember also that He honored those

who sent Him to save. Honor them also yourself. Read again Isaiah 48:16: "And now the Lord God, and His spirit hath sent me." Three are One. And One is Three (1<sup>st</sup> John 5;7,8). The one who writes remembers well what he felt when someone observed to him that many preach the Blood of Christ. He felt as if someone were saying to him that only the Holy Spirit can truly exalt the sacrifice of Christ. Although Jesus is called Truth, and such He is, the Holy Spirit is also called Truth (1<sup>st</sup> John 5:6). It's the same as saying that without the Holy Spirit we would not even know clearly if Jesus existed, or if He existed, and if the facts about Him are as the Scripture narrates them. It is he, the Holy Spirit, who gives the live image of things. The Jews of that time pretended to honor God and they crucified the Son. May God deliver us from repeating that sin in another form, saying: we have Jesus and in Him we have everything. May it even be so: one who truly has Jesus knows that he needs also the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the three must abide in him.

Our speaking must imitate the apostolic preaching. The apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, were presenting Jesus with such power that the hearers would see reproduced before them, the Life, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the presence of Christ at the throne. They did not go around insinuating: "if, if" insulting those who are waiting in the marketplace of insults, or putting to sleep those who have received pardon. The things of the Lord follow one upon the other by an irresistible force. Dominated by the law of the love of God, the soul that has tasted pardon yearns for all the rest, without fear that if he does not receive, he will not be the Bride, or will not be other.

How much levity in the so-called people of God to imagine about places in heaven, forgetting that the Lord will gather the elect who have made a covenant by sacrifice (Psalm 50:5). How much levity without considering the words of

St. Paul who wanted to suffer the loss of all things in order to gain Christ Jesus his Lord (absolute owner), and who was reaching forth—we seem to see one who is dragging himself—toward the mark of the prize of the highest calling (Bride of Christ), (Philippians 3:9-14). But it seems to us to be enough!

Rather than discussing about the “if” and insulting one another, breaking the great heart of Jesus, let us ask Him to truly fill us with the Holy Spirit, in a manner to see Jesus alone, and present Him with such reality that those who listen to us will be constrained to say that we also have been with Him. Our ambition should be one alone: that one day we will see face to face that Countenance that supported shame and blows. What will be our place in heaven, we leave it to Him to appoint it; rather, we will say that He is our heaven.

Oh reader, let us put aside the discussions that irritate, the “ifs,” and all the exaggerations, and let us return truly humbled and repentant.

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### THE GOD OF PATIENCE

PATIENCE is a lame word, and bitter for one who does not believe; but for one who believes it is a great and holy word. It grants God the time that He wants in order to allow His plan to triumph in us, and by means of us. Someone heard repeatedly, I don't remember if in the spirit or how, these words: “*Patience: station that precedes the arrival.*” Being

patient is an index of perfection, because such virtue is, if not the last, among the last to appear in the life of the saints. Nor should one understand for patience that natural calmness that many possess by a happy temperament. No. The patience of God shines, like all of His things, by reason of contrast. It is the daughter of a discipline, many times long, and is in contrast, many times, to a lively and resentful character.

Patience is not an outward calmness while the insides are rumbling. That which can be human prudence is never divine. No. The man of God learns to be patient of Spirit. Only such a one is strong, because he waits for the One who is Strong.

The Lord, who wants us to be patient, uses painful processes. It is written: "*We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope*" (Romans 5:3,4). In fact, those who have suffered are more rooted in confidence and hope.

Elsewhere it is written: "*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience*" (James 1:2,3). And he exhorts us to allow ourselves to be worked by patience, so that it may do a complete work, and we become perfect and whole, lacking nothing. Therefore, one who remains under discipline, displeasing to the flesh, is brought from patience to perfection.

The Lord Jesus in describing the last days, speaking of wars, of earthquakes and persecutions, says among other things: "*And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.*" He adds that "*There shall not an hair of your head perish.*" That is, nothing that is contrary to His plan

will happen. And yet many will be killed. He knows and governs everything - this is what it means. And He adds still: "*In your patience possess ye your souls.*" Another version expresses: "*By means of your patient perseverance, preserve your souls*" (Luke 21:9-19). He, Kind Lord, calls "*our patience*" that which He will give us, and of which He has given us such an admirable example in a life, which, more than any other, had need of patience. Patience for the long time of waiting, before beginning; patience for the intensity of the provocations and pressures around Him.

In that school, we must learn His patience and keep the word of His patience (Revelation 3:10). Keep, be a sentinel, because there is nothing in which one is tried more than in patience, be it for the time of waiting, as well as for the intensity of the trials. Word of His patience! God is patient toward a world in which many deny Him and challenge Him continually. It seems that He does not even listen, that He does not even exist. It is difficult for the vengeful and impatient man to understand His patience. Grace is needed to understand, and grace in order to keep it (preserve it).

But why are we speaking of the world? Let each one consider how much patience God has with us and is still putting up with us; at times we no longer have patience toward ourselves, and He has it, and exhorts us to be patient even toward ourselves, because we are His property. He loves us, and will accomplish, in each one, what He has predestined, if we allow Him to work and if we keep the word of His patience.

We, according as we are able, acquire little by little the humiliating knowledge of our deformities; but He "knew everything." Thus says the Psalmist: "*My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth*" (Psalm 139:15-16).

Who knows how many of us are, precisely at this time, worked secretly in some lower part of the earth. He must hide the process from our eyes, else we would flee. *“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect.”*

What patience is that of God! How much He has pitied and pitied us! The Lord does not delay in fulfilling His promise as some think, rather He is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9).

*“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.”* Besides the final COMING, there is a coming for everything that must be adjusted by Him. *“Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also PATIENT, stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”* (James 5:7,8). For everything it is necessary to wait for the early and the latter rain that He will want to send. We need patience in waiting for Him; patience in the sufferings, patience with ourselves, patience among us.

*“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”* (a thing that wants to escape) (Romans 15:4). The men of God were patient, although at times it seems that they were not. They had to learn patience. We are invited to consider the patience of Job that failed in many things, but Job never rebelled against God, however much his appearance, at times could make it seem to be the opposite. In the root of his soul, he was patient. The sacred writer tells us this, in the light of the New Covenant (James 5:11). Having one sentiment in the church is one of the most difficult things. The Lord must bring us to unity. He will do

that which is impossible to us. He has as many titles for as many needs that we have.

*“Now the God of patience”* – He, Himself – *“give you patience”* someone translates, of that patience (that is His patience) *may grant you to have one mind among you”* [AMONG YOU].

Oh! the difficulties in the same, among the same people of God! – All things are given to us in the Son – *“May give you according to CHRIST JESUS.”*

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### BUT JESUS WENT AROUND

(Matthew 9:35)

The word “AND” in the text is also translated “BUT.” Two “BUTS” are opposite each other. Let us examine them. When the devil was cast out, the multitudes marveled saying: “It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.”

The work was evident and the envious ones wanted to discredit it, therefore the “But.” On two occasions they hurled such an accusation (See Matthew 12:22-32). The second time Jesus administered a severe warning to them; He gave no answer to the first “BUT,” except for continuing in the triplicate ministry of teaching, preaching and healing.

The man of earth, as long as he does not become a new creature always places a “BUT” before the good done to

others. He, the old Adam, approves and is happy only in that which serves his carnal interests and caresses his vanity. We have heard—and alas, justice requires that we confess—have pronounced many of these “BUTS.”

The most daring “BUT” is against the Creator Himself. Jesus the Lord and Teacher, teaches the Church (His Church) to oppose the “BUT” of man with the “BUT” of Heaven, which is: Thou, Church of Christ, do not defend yourself, do not accuse, do not waste time; by His example, continue to go about, doing good. Expect justice and recognition from Him alone, and wait for a “New Heaven and a New Earth, wherein Justice dwells.”

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*For fervent souls more grace is required to be inactive than to work. Inaction is a greater sacrifice than action. Let us offer to God our silence, our weakness, and apparent inertia.*

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### DOING AND TEACHING

“Of all the things that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). It does not say to teach and then to do. Many times silent work has preceded speaking.

At the close of the Gospel according to St. John we read these words: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” A ministry of a few years, and a life ended at a young age, but His deeds surpass

the limits of time, and are so many, that no one has been able to or can recount them. Every deed has a reality and an infinite extension that inspires the other deeds that are accomplished in His Name.

The same Word that has proceeded from His mouth is such a reality that John saw a sharp two-edged sword go out of his mouth.

In a time such as this, when teachers who are not teachers are easily multiplied, it is comforting to return with our heart and mind to the One who alone is a Teacher, because He taught and teaches not with the quantity of words, but with the Reality of Life.

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### THE PRESENT TRUTH

(2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:12)

From time to time the Lord stirs up some movement by means of which attention is awakened to some part of the word that has been neglected. In our days the Pentecostal movement has arisen in order to give emphasis to the Baptism with the Holy Spirit; that is, the Lord baptizes as in the Apostolic times.

The title "Pentecostal" is not scriptural, but it has remained, as other titles for other movements have remained.

It should not surprise us that Pentecostals have exaggerated in many points and have not kept themselves united. This

happens in every religious movement. The essential thing is to know if the origin of this movement is from God and if it has a message for the church.

Honest souls, and there are some in every group, must recognize that the movement is from God; those who have reverence for the scriptures know that the Lord is the same, therefore they cannot deny that the movement has a message. The Pentecostals, on the other hand, must recognize that the preaching of the Gospel is not limited only to the Baptism with the Holy Spirit and the manifestation in tongues, but must be extended to include all the counsel of God. It is dutiful to give emphasis to one neglected truth, but neglecting the rest of the word is a serious error.

The Apostle Peter said: "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" These simple words declare that the gift of the Holy Spirit is distinct from repenting and of sins being forgiven. They also reveal that this gift is promised to those who have repented.

That this was not only for those times is clear from the other words of the Apostle: "*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*"

Believing in Jesus as a Savior, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit are distinct; this is clear from chapter eight of Acts. It is written that many believed in Jesus by the preaching of Philip, but they received the Holy Spirit when, from Jerusalem, Peter and John went to them. Receiving the Holy Spirit is accompanied by some clear manifestation; this is understood by the words of the Scripture that say: "*For as yet he (the gift of the Holy Ghost) was fallen upon none of them.*" In addition, it is also recorded that Simon the

magician saw that by the laying on of hands the Holy Spirit was received. Therefore he saw something.

The method of recognizing that the Holy Spirit was being received was the manifestation in tongues; this is clear from chapter ten of Acts, in the words of Peter: "*Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*" The "how" brings us back to Acts 2:4.

On the day of Pentecost the Gospel was preached by the mouth of Peter in only one language, understood by the one who spoke and the hearers. Cornelius and his companions spoke in languages, but not for evangelizing.

Chapter 14 of the first epistle to the Corinthians concerns the order of the meeting. The gift of tongues, one of the gifts of the Spirit, should not be confused with the manifestation in tongues when the Holy Spirit is received. Those who had accepted Jesus were immediately exhorted to receive the Holy Spirit. This is clear from Acts 19, in the question of St. Paul: "*Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?*"

That they spoke in languages and not in order to teach is clearly written in three passages (Acts 2; 10; 19). There are more examples of speaking in languages than there are of baptisms of water by immersion.

The expression in the Epistle (Ephesians 1:13) that they had been sealed when they believed, does not annul the distinct operations. It is certain that the apostle was writing to a people among whom the fact that they had to be sealed by the Holy Spirit was not in doubt. In this sense one should read Ephesians 1:13. On the other hand the one who *truly* believes, desires and receives all the promises, because God is faithful. Chapter 14 of St. John clearly states that one who

believes in God necessarily accepts the Son of God. One who has accepted the Son of God necessarily receives the Holy Spirit that has been nearby and then will come into the believer (John 14:17).

Therefore why quarrel? If we have truly believed, why should we object to such a simple and evident truth? But, can one who has *truly* believed resist, in his spirit, to the presentation of the counsel of God, even if the one who announces it does not know precisely how to present it? Reader, believe me, the one who writes remembers very well that he felt an imperious "No" to various doctrines that were presented to him, even though in a gentle and persuasive way; but in his spirit he could not reject the testimony that he heard from some that even in these times the Lord baptizes with the Holy Spirit and that it manifests itself with languages. The testimony was given to him by methods that were not entirely correct, but they had the truth as a base.

Let's not deceive ourselves: in conclusion, everything is reduced to whether or not we have truly believed in God and in His Son.

Oh my Pentecostal brothers, it is good that we should be humbler and wiser in proclaiming this part of the present truth. Oh my brothers of whatever name others may call you, do not stumble at our faults, as they are not few. The promise is also for you. I have the hope that the Lord has hidden among you many who are destined to be compared to and a teaching to the Church.

Read me in the spirit in which I have written to you.

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COME - ABIDE - GO

(Matthew 11:28-30)

I - Come

In the relations of Jesus with the disciples of that time, and of every time, one notes, expressed in one way or another, three invitations that are exhortations and commands: COME, ABIDE, GO.

They must be read in the order given in order to understand them and to live them according to the One who has given them. *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

It is necessary to consider the reprimands given by Jesus to the impenitent cities, and to read by the Holy Spirit the expressions *"woe unto thee Chorazin, woe unto thee Bethsaida... and thou Capernaum..."* even ignoring the relation of time between the reprimands to those cities and the tender words *"Come, etc."* Even if pronounced in different times, there is a harmonious scope in the order in which they are given in the gospel according to Matthew.

The multitudes had lost a glorious opportunity and they were responsible; but the One who has come to seek and to save those who were lost, never rejects without making an appeal to that which can be saved from a ruin. Not only a number from one that is greater, but also in each one of us he saves the remnant from that which must be rejected.

The Holy Spirit can and knows how to unite events of different times and to present them in intimate connection, and vice versa, events or warnings that follow each other

according to the letter, are verified at different times, at times distant in the lives of the saints. Therefore, after "*Woe unto you, woe unto you*" there is the invitation, and before the invitation, thanksgiving and praise to the Father.

At that time (take note "at that time") Jesus answered and said: "*I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*"

They are the ones who are wise according to themselves, but the babes are those who are disposed to learn and to allow themselves to be molded by the Lord. Only these last ones are in a condition to receive the teachings. "*All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.*"

He prepares the soul to accept the invitation "*to come.*" And it is the Father, although we did not know Him as Father, who has revealed the Son to us in a mysterious way, disposing us to accept Him. And it is the Son who has revealed and continues to reveal in us who the Father is: "*God so loved the world...*" – "*The Father Himself loveth you.*" These affirmations of Jesus are to make us know the One who is the fount of all love and good.

Therefore the invitation: "*Come.*" It is addressed to a special people, to those who have been prepared by circumstances, often painful and desperate, to receive the invitation. He has waited in order to make such an invitation. Wait with the multitudes, and wait with the individual. We must come to the end of ourselves in order that He may begin to work in us. And there are various ends of life in the saints. Let no one think that when heard the invitation for the first time, he

might be at the last end of himself. For that time and for the light that he had, it was the end; but further on, other discoveries are made in the abysses of the soul, and there are other disappointments, and, once again there is the voice and the invitation of the merciful and patient Lord: "*Come...*". There is a "*coming*" that continues until the end. And each one of these "*Come*" invitations resounds always more compassionately.

All – a place for *All* – on the condition that they are "*Weary and heavy-laden*" (NASB); that is, they have arrived to recognize themselves in that condition. He has waited for that point in order to benefit them. Tired of burdens and of efforts to get out of miserable situations, without hope. Their very efforts have continued to exhaust them. They are one step from desperation. And then behold the voice: "*Come.*"

Permit us to refer to the words of a merciful woman who turned to a man close to desperation. The man was a miserable person, hungry and trembling with cold. He had knocked in vain on all the doors, receiving only frightening threats, and now thought only of having to spend the night out in the open and perhaps to die of hunger and cold. The words of the woman who it seemed had met him by chance were: "Have you knocked on *that* door?" It was precisely the door opened for him, the only door in that place of mistrust behind which was a soul of heaven committed to receive unfortunate ones in the Name of Jesus.

*Come.* A determined step is necessary that requires a decision. He often made people move from one place to another in order to teach them, but the place is a symbol of the condition. *Come...* The invitation that encourages gives the power, besides the will, to make that state of travail and aggravation cease. All things have been given to Him, therefore our souls have been given to Him, and He knows

how to medicate them and heal them. *"I will give you rest,"* or as one version says: *"I will cause you to receive rest."* That is, He will put us in the condition to be able to enter into His Rest.

And elsewhere, with other words, moved by the same heart, to a deluded unsatisfied people, there is the same invitation: *"Come."*

It was at the end of a long feast that left minds stupefied and hearts empty, when He stood and cried, saying: *"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."*

It is the same Lord who in another way had invited a poor soul of Samaria to come to Him, to drink of that water of life, by which one who drinks of it shall be satisfied and shall have in him a well of water springing up into eternal life.

The work of Grace begins with that *"Come,"* and is renewed with a continual *"Come,"* in order to go out of something and to enter always more, and always better, into that which He has prepared for us, and it is *rest to our souls.*

As there are several *"Comes"* thus there is a crescendo in the Rest; from a first grade that is only a lightening of the weight and peace with God, up to a complete rest from all of our works and to the peace of God in our hearts, up to the point of having the God of peace with us and in us, in order to show Himself by means of us.

Among the majority of stolid and indifferent faces, Jesus would discern a few on which from the furrows of anguish and suffering, there transpired the desire to find, be it even in an indefinite way, some help, in some way, from someone, if there should be anyone. *Someone* was there and help was ready, prepared before the foundation of the world. He has

loved with an eternal love. And it was a sure and prompt offer: "*I will give you rest.*"

## II – Abide

"*Continue ye in my love*" (John 15:9). *Coming* has led to the beginning of another life. He knows how to introduce us into the rest that has already begun with an alleviation, and has as a terminal point the complete abandon in him. Therefore He adds: "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye will find rest unto your souls.*" At the word "yoke" the tired soul is tempted to be afraid; therefore the ready and benevolent assurance so that one remains assured: "*For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" Sweet and light... He makes everything pleasing because He transports us to a new condition.

The invitation is repeated elsewhere, in another form, and is defined as "*drinking*" (let him come unto me and start drinking): *contemplating, considering, abiding*. In the words cited by St. Matthew "*learning*" is defined. But all the forms of the same command suppose that one has already *come* to Him, in order to begin with Him, or rather in Him, the true walk that awaits us from now on. He does not require anything from us like activity. The yoke itself and the burden will be progressively revealed to us in a way that we will have the strength to take them and the joy of the soul makes them sweet and desirable.

*Abide*. This second command includes all the work of grace in the soul. It is a long work that has to bring us to a complete transformation, by which, as we have carried, and in part still carry, the image of the earthly, thus will be formed, and in part it is already begun, the image of the heavenly. He has created us and now He continues forming

us. He is the Creator of poor Jacob and the One who formed Israel, the prince of the Lord.

Every form of the command to ABIDE reaches a special line. It is impossible to examine all of them. The Holy Spirit will go on making them clear to the soul, according to the aspect that he wants to impress upon the unique, yet varied truth.

One time it will be to contemplate with a long and profound gaze of love and of admiration, forgetting ourselves; another time, consideration that takes the powers of the intellect, and absorbs them in the humiliation of the Son of Man; another time it will be to give emphasis to "*abiding by faith in Him*" while He also abides in us, and His living words, of Him who speaks, and He Himself is WORD, dwell in us; another time it is to drink at length of that water that satisfies, and of which, after drinking, we are prepared to drink more, in order to come to the fullness, which becomes always more vast. However it may be, it is always a taking from Him without work, but leaving to Him to always give, while we never stop taking.

"LEARN OF ME." We have had other teachers; but now He puts us in His school, because He wants us to learn directly from Him, by some means and using whatever person He wants.

But what is there to learn? To know Him, and of Him, two qualities: When we have known that, we will find "*Rest unto our souls,*" a more profound rest, because, by coming to Him, we have already experienced an alleviation.

MEEK in His behavior. Because He is humble of heart. The life that manifests itself and the inner life are in harmony. What is meekness? St. Paul gives us a description, although the Word in that point is translated as gentleness, which is a

form of meekness itself: *“When we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children”* (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:6,7). It is the tender and charming way dictated by love toward the weak ones! All the unhappy people were attracted to Jesus. The sinners, fearful of everybody, drew near to Him; the woman who was a sinner anointed His feet with oil; the mothers were presenting their children to Him so that He would bless them. The strength of that meekness was in its genuineness, because there is also a false meekness, that of the wolf, dressed in sheepskin. The meekness of Jesus was a fruit of His inner life: *“Humble of heart.”* In the measure that we remain in the school of Jesus, we learn to know Him, and we will become like Him.

What is humility of heart? It is necessary to consider the plan of the life of Jesus, in harmony with its practical application. He made Himself of no reputation; His only aim was to live for the Father. He said that He could do nothing, because the Father was the One who was doing the works. He never sought glory for Himself, but for the One who sent Him. The words were not His, but those that the Father gave Him to say, and how He gave them to Him to say. He taught and lived according to this program and His humility of heart consisted of this. When we have listened and understood well *“ABIDING,”* and we have put ourselves with all our heart in the school of His contemplation, while we enjoy the rest, we will hear a third command with which and by means of which He will allow to pass from us, and by means of us the holy influence of a life consecrated to Him, and to the benefit of others: *“GO.”*

### III – Go

The Lord takes a long time to prepare those whom He wants to use. It is not possible to hear from Him the command to

“Go” if we have not first obeyed the other two: “Come” and “Abide.”

Bearing fruit is tied to abiding: *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”* *“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”* *“I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain”* John 15:5, 8, 16).

In Ephesians 2:10 we read: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* Another version says: *“For which God has prepared us.”* It is true that a volume of works await us, to each according to what God has destined, which the Lord shows us step by step, in order that we may accomplish them; and it is also true that we are prepared for such works. It is a twofold preparation.

In John 7:38, after the invitation to come to Him in order to drink, Jesus adds: *“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”* Having had our thirst satisfied by Him, we will be used to refresh others. From the mouth of the saint there flows honey, pure honey that comes from the honeycomb.

To each one of the three commands: *Come, Abide, Go*, our will must answer with a great *Amen*. While in a general way we have said that we want to be with Jesus, it is also true that, step by step, a specific determination is necessary.

*Come*: Here we are. *Abide*: Here we are. *Go*: Here we are.

Go, bear fruit, enter into the works that I have prepared for you. And without looking for personal satisfaction, we must answer: Here we are. It is possible for us to stop and to not

continue, or to jump from *Coming* to *Going*, without *Abiding*; or to want to *Abide* only, without ever *Going*; or worse yet, *Going* without *Coming* and *Abiding*. All three commands are needed and in the order given by Jesus.

*Come, Abide, Go.*

*Going* does not always require a physical movement. Jesus wants us to perform the works that He has prepared for us. He wants that in Him, by the Holy Spirit, we bear the fruit of the Spirit and He wants us to proclaim the Gospel. Fruit, Works and Proclaiming the Gospel: three great lines that start from *Going*. The fruit is permanent; the works are those that are good (and only that which comes from Him is good) and that perfect the faith; the proclamation of the Gospel makes the face of Jesus shine. By means of these three lines, the Lord reaches others.

God, let us keep it well in mind, loves the world. He promised to Abram, and his promises are also commands, that in Him, in Abram, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. God wanted to bless the people by means of the nation of Israel, firstborn son; but Israel, as a nation, failed. He wants to bless the people by means of the Church; but the Church, in its great mass, fails; only a remnant is faithful; and it is by means of this remnant that God accomplishes His plan.

CHURCH? BUT NO ONE IS PART OF THE CHURCH IF HE HAS NOT FIRST LIVED THESE THREE GLORIOUS COMMANDS OF "COME, ABIDE, GO."

*"Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side... Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you"* John 20:20, 21). *As Jesus was sent, thus we must go. His hands and side had the profound stigma of the*

cross; those were the only credentials that he showed them, and that is what we must show to the world! Hand and heart sealed by Him, for Him.

Therefore the program of *how* to go is in those lacerated hands and side.

The created world groans and travails, and waits for something. "*For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God*" (Romans 8:19). That is, they wait for the Revelation of the sons of God, as these are waiting for the Revelation of Jesus. It is always that Revelation, first to the saints, and then, from them, to others. The creation speaks and neither is its language veiled; therefore many of us do not understand the plan of God. The signs are everywhere outside of the churches, and many voices cry out, but many of us do not hear them as voices directed to us. The world (the creation) longs to see not the sectarians, of whom they are tired, but the "sons of God." Only they are able to demonstrate the heart of God. *God is love.*

In chapter 47 of Ezekiel, the vast program of the three commands is symbolically figured from the relation of the prophet to that river proceeding from the sanctuary; that is, from measurement to measurement he was commanded to swim, having only his feet wet at first, then his knees, then his loins; then he had to begin swimming, without touching the earth, and without his strength, but lifted up by the water, which separated him from the earth, and kept him under heaven. It is the image of the life of the Spirit, which begins to be sanctified from the feet and then is entirely absorbed. Such a river brings life everywhere. Fishermen were staying near it: "*I will make you fishers of live men.*" Fishing without killing, and not even crippling. That river brings life; and where there is life there is also fruit. "*And by the river*

*upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not face, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.” (Ezekiel 47:12).*

But let's pay attention, there is a note of condemnation in the midst of the description of so much prosperity. The life that does not produce for others is sterile and becomes abandoned, among the glorious promises of a rich and fruitful life; it is the sad parenthesis of verse 11: *“But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.”*

May God deliver us from resisting the third command: *“Go,”* after having obeyed the first two. *“Coming and Abiding”* concern individual privileges and therefore it is easier to obey them; but going is a life of sacrifice for others. Many fail at this point, because they want to enjoy selfishly, alone, the benefits of God. They will be abandoned to salt: a sad spectacle of a life centered in the human ego, and not placed truly on the Altar for the Glory of Jesus Christ.

After that which has been said, we seem to understand better the *“Going”* of chapter 16 of the gospel according to St. Mark: *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”* Every, not some; *every creature*, not to some only.

The word *“creature”* is the same as that which is used in Romans 8:19. In the text it is *“Creation.”* The same is found in Colossians 1:23. St. Paul says: *“Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.”* Therefore going is not always a physical going from one place to another. Neither the first apostles, nor others

afterward went everywhere, nor did they preach to every creature in the sense that we have thought. There is a ministry that deals with that little known ministry of the Spirit in the spirit.

Preaching the Gospel in every place, to all of Creation. What a program! Being enabled by Him for such! Thus formed in that school, identified in Him, so much so that every one of our actions is a proclamation to all beings and things created that Jesus is the Savior.

*Coming*, if it has truly been a coming, converges in *Abiding*, and *Abiding* is perfected in *Going*. It is a *Going* similar to that of the son of Man, of today, of tomorrow and of the day after tomorrow, perfected the third day in the life full of resurrection, living from here, beginning now, the heavenly life, the days of Heaven. And in order to truly keep going, going, even always coming to and abiding in Jesus, it is necessary for the prophet to die in Jerusalem. This hubbub of the earthly Jerusalem serves for something, and it is to kill the Prophet, the prophets. What an agony of a long preparation, until the sacrifice should be consumed! These certain ones who are killed go. Only they can proclaim to "all the creation." They do not belong to any section of the country, and to no group of people. They have entered into the tender heart of the One whose Hands were kept open by the nails in order to embrace all of the creation. Love of God! Glory to Jesus.

Forgetting ourselves, and also the house of our father, the earthly house, and every people that we call our people, we will be beautified by Him in order to show to others a life that, like His, must be ready to go until death and to the death of the cross. *Amen*.

\* \* \*

### WHO KILLED JESUS?

The Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the world, had to finish at Calvary. Putting aside this fundamental truth that can be applied for many reasons to the destiny of every man, the question remains: Who killed Jesus?

Who were the first ones who wanted His death? When the multitudes recognized that Jesus spoke with authority and not as the Scribes, the first authors of the tragedy appeared, that is, the Scribes. When the Lord reproved the religious people who loved to be seen by men, we discover in the Pharisees the united group that determined His death. When we read that He drove the merchants out of the temple, lamenting that the house of the Father had become a market place, we come to know that there were others who wanted His death; and we conclude that the killers of Jesus were the scribes, the literalists; the Pharisees, the fanatics of artificial holiness; and the Sadducees, the official authority of the temple. It goes without saying that they availed themselves of others, but they were the authors of the tragedy.

It is not difficult to recognize as enemies of Jesus the Pharisees and the Sadducees, because the attack on their hypocrisy and avarice is too evident to be ignored. But affirming that the first to want His death were the Scribes is a proposition that is not clear at first sight. Many were Scribes and Pharisees at the same time.

The conflict manifested itself between the letter of the word and understanding by the spirit. The Scribes were repeating the words of the scripture without penetrating the meaning. They were alarmed at the preaching of Jesus because they saw in Him an innovator who was breaking their proud knowledge in pieces. They were the ones who, more than others, were spying the movements of Jesus in order to

accuse Him. But have they, the Scribes, finished persecuting Him?

Reader, think about it. Have you never seen anyone, with the Book under his arm, quick in citing Biblical verses, showing an impetuous zeal, under the guise of holiness to the Lord? One who knows even a little of the history of the church does not ignore how much cruelty has been committed under the pretext of serving the Lord. Acts of violence, people pushed out of meeting places, thinking to obey the command to separate. The words of Jesus come to mind that if that which has been written had been understood that God wants mercy and not sacrifice, many innocent ones would not have been condemned.

It's only too true that the *letter* kills and the spirit gives life. We know that this refers mainly to the distinction between the Old and New Covenant, but it is not an error to apply such words to superficial repeaters of Biblical verses who do not see Jesus as the Key and interpreter of the scriptures. The Scribe is still the killer of Jesus, not of Him personally but of those who are bound to that great heart and live for Him. The tenacious literalists, in order to maintain their position, are quick to ally themselves with the fanatics, and with those who are proud and avaricious. If Jesus should visit many religious groups in disguise, alas, He would not be recognized or would be cast out. The spirit that moved those enemies is not dead. Even today that spirit persecutes, although with different weapons, those who truly love Jesus Christ.

"*Seest thou this woman?*" (Luke 7:44). It is certain that Simeon had seen her. But Jesus wanted to say, and indirectly He said to him: See her now, with my eyes. We learn TO SEE in the school of Jesus Christ.

### THINKING TO DO WELL

The one who writes knows of a certain one who, conscious of his own deficiencies and full of the spirit of sorrow, was in the habit of not saying evil of anyone, and excusing everyone as much as possible. It happened that others defended him with bitterness, even using judgmental language against the persecutors. These last ones concluded and said: "We were right in considering him a hypocrite; he does not defend himself, he feigns charity, but he incites others to act for him... And in this way the poor man came to be smitten from two sides.

Let us turn to the Holy Scriptures: The prophet ordered his servant to set the great pot on the fire, and to cook a pottage for the sons of the prophets. It seemed to one of the young men that the pottage would not be enough for the many that had to be fed. So he went out to gather herbs, and he gathered many wild gourds, and shred them into the pot.

Then as they began eating they realized that the food was poisoned. They cried out to the prophet who took some meal and threw it into the pot, and there was no longer harm in the pot. The disciple, thinking to do well, had spoiled even the good pottage. Something that is the image of the holy humanity of Jesus was needed to remedy the pottage. (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 4:38, 41). The Lord Jesus recommended to some who had received powerful healings to not speak of it; but they, thinking to honor Him, published the event. From that time, the alarmed synagogues began to close their doors to Him.

In Gethsemane, Jesus, the example of meekness, gave Himself into the hands of those who were looking for Him. Peter, thinking to help Him and defend Him, pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, and in this way he imperiled the cause of Jesus, because one of His following

was resisting the authorities by being armed and wounding. But Jesus repaired the mistake putting the ear back in place, and he reproved the disciple, then He allowed Himself to be arrested.

Alas, how many times we, imagining to advance the cause of Christ have, with the tongue, with the pen, with violent acts, done evil and not good. Lord forgive us!

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### ESTABLISHED THOUGHTS

(Proverbs 16:3)

Oh how our mind troubles us! If we could concentrate on Heaven! Oh deliver us! Distressingly we ask ourselves: How?

Malachi speaks of a people who think of the Lord. Philippians 4:8, 9 points out the secret by which the God of Peace will come to dwell with us, and it is in thinking of things that are true, honest and just. In Colossians 3:2 there is the command: "*Set your mind on the things above.*" (NASB).

The Scripture informs us that our thoughts are not like the thoughts of God (Isaiah 55:9). But does there exist a way by which our mind can enter into a state of rest, ceasing from the agitated conflict? Yes, because the Lord has not demonstrated an evil without pointing to the remedy. There is a remedy, and it is sure in its effect; however, it is necessary to recognize that there are necessary preparations. In Philippians 4 it is commanded to think according to

Heaven, after we have obeyed the exhortation to notify everything to the Lord, each time, as things present themselves. In Isaiah 55 there is the invitation to those who are thirsty to "come to the waters," and to cease from our efforts. But we find the specific remedy in Proverbs 16:3, after we have heard to select and accept only that which is from God, and that we must not approve our own ways, but submit them to Him. And it is: "*Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.*" There is no command here about the thoughts. We read that depending on one condition, those thoughts that have so tormented us will finally be *established*. In the original language, Proverbs 16:3 has a vigor that is difficult to translate, and suggests the idea of an energetic and rapid command to make haste to deposit all our works completely on the shoulders of the Lord, and also to depend on Him to select and to direct the very works.

The Sacred writer adds: "*and your thoughts shall be kept under control, in their place.*"

Blessed Lord! You promise us, after all the good that you have done for us, that you will give us the Mind of the One who rested in the storm, and who was always calm in the midst of the complicated agitations that surrounded Him.

He always sought the glory of the Father; in His works and words He investigated how He would please the Father.

And we also will partake of that same Mind, if at every step, we ask ourselves if God is with us, and will ask Him for the grace to fulfill His will as He wants. In such a way the troubled mind, little by little, will enter into the quietness and Rest of Christ.

## AN INVITATION TO LITIGATE

(Isaiah 1:18)

The Lord prohibits litigation whether it is with outsiders or with those who are inside. We should not litigate with anyone, except for a single exception, and it is with Him Himself. To Him we can and are commanded to tell everything. He does not get offended, nor does He take advantage of our mistaken words in order to reprove us and confound us. He loves us.

Rather than harboring desperate thoughts in ourselves, or litigating with others, it is to Him that we must go and tell everything. Don't be disheartened because of the greatness of the sin in which you have perhaps fallen, or because your iniquity discourages you from hoping for anything good from yourself. The sadder the case, the sooner you must come to Him: "COME NOW, AND LET US REASON TOGETHER, SAITH THE LORD" (unburden oneself privately, without being spied upon by anyone). "THOUGH YOUR SINS BE AS SCARLET, THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW." A white mantle of snow (His garments are whiter than snow) covers you, and nothing can be seen of you. Not only will you be covered, you will be worked on the inside, so that there will be beauty and purity also inside of you. "THOUGH THEY BE RED LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BE AS WOOL." A work that reaches into the intimate fabric of life and sanctifies it to the glory of God. The holy life succeeds more than words in awakening around us a sense of the eternal realities.

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TWO ENEMIES: ONE WHO FLATTERS YOU AND ONE  
WHO MISTREATS YOU

We need prudence in order to flee from one who flatters us; he is our worst enemy. Flattery has caused many giants to fall. Men, if they are not in Christ, are caught in the net by praise.

Patience and gentleness are needed against ones who persecute. They must be fought with the weapons of love and prayer. It is necessary to persevere in patience.

The important thing is that no wind may move you, whether it is the seducer of flattery or the other furious one of persecution. You must be firmly planted in Christ in order to remain immovable under the attacks of both, because He was never deceived by the applause of the crowds, and never frightened by the anger of men, but He persevered until the end.

\* \* \*

THE MESSENGER – THE MESSAGE – THE LISTENERS

(John 17:6-8)

*“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me,”* The Messenger, the message and those

to whom the message was directed were all from Heaven! When these three conditions are met, only then will there be a result.

*The men which Thou gavest me, thine they were.*" In one sense, everyone is of God; that is, they depend on God, but here is understood the being of God that applies to the elect: *"They have kept thy word."* Those who are of Heaven know the voice of Heaven by that instinctive intuition that is in them.

It is in vain to give messages to those to whom God does not send us.

What the relation of each man with his Creator may be, it is not something that we should occupy ourselves with in the present subject. It may be that many who are unfit to be reached in one time, will be so in another; however that may be, we leave that in the hands of the Lord. The Church is relatively a small number, and the gospel, in the literal sense of the word, was never announced to all men. The words in Colossians 1:23 *"the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven,"* cannot be taken in the sense that the apostle had gone personally, and literally to evangelize to every creature; they bring us to consider other important lines, and we will do so at another time, if the Lord gives us grace.

God has an elect people. It is absurd to doubt this, in the light of the scriptures and of experience. This does not change His plan of love for all men.

Only the elect can receive the message destined for the elect. *The message:* "the words that you gave me." Only those are powerful. All the times that the Lord Jesus commanded the disciples to do something, and gave them all the words that they should say, they always had favorable results. When

Jesus sent them to untie an ass that was tied and a colt with her, He added: *"And if any man say ought unto you, Ye shall say, The Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send them."*

For the Passover they had to say to the owner of the house: *"The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished."* So it happened.

Jesus was always, in everything, faithful to the message of the Father. He gave the words to the disciples. In John 12:49 we read: *"For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak."*

To the men of heaven it is necessary to bring the message of heaven.

*The messenger.* *"They have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me."* They, not the others. Many doubted and did not believe that Jesus had been sent by the Father. No credential was valid for them. But the disciples believed, without any document but by the living words; the word of God in the mouth of Jesus was enough for them; but no less than that was needed. The one who is of God knows His voice, and listens to it.

The messenger, the message and the listeners are all from Heaven. May God help us to understand this. Are we messengers of Heaven? From whom are we taking our orders? Do we have a clear and precise calling to the ministry? My brother, don't deceive yourself. It is necessary for you to know that God has sent and commanded you. And that is not enough; it is also necessary that He point out to

you to whom you should bring the message. How much time we have wasted where He has not commanded and prepared. Our words have seemed like useless songs to many. Here and there the Lord has some elect soul that he has prepared, and continues to prepare and consigns to someone of us to bring them His message, that He shall have inspired precisely in that time, for that person, for that circumstance. This is a work that escapes human wisdom and activity, but is entirely at the command of the Lord.

The message that arrives is the one brought by the Holy Spirit, each time. We have seen people who remained indifferent to elaborate discourses and were penetrated by a single word, said without pretense. It is His Word that penetrates and has effect—His Word, in His time, in His way, to whom He wants.

Someone, some time ago, showed me a booklet where there were many biblical passages selected and ordained for different occasions. Most of us have seen such works. Oh! my brothers, do not make use of them; they will hurt you. We do not know what we should say each time, whatever the outward circumstances may be. It is necessary to be awake at His door, in order to take from Him one word, be it even only one word, and let that one fall, and it will not return to you empty, but will work according to that for which it was sent. And the word that has come out of His mouth, that He gives us, only that produces spirit and life.

*“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”*(John 6:63)

We will work less, but we will bear much fruit, and permanent fruit.

\* \* \*

PREDESTINATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

(John 6:36, 37, 40, 44)

One who fears and loves the Lord, although he does not succeed in explaining it, does not have difficulty in harmonizing, in his own spirit, the two extremes: the predestination of God and the responsibility of man. Someone has said that by accepting the first, we are encouraged to believe firmly, and by obeying the second we learn to live a holy life.

Not to exhaust the difficult theme, but as orientation, we note that Jesus said to the Jews: *"But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me."* And He added, among other things: *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."*

If we had only these words we would conclude that those Jews and many others did not have, do not have, any responsibility in not accepting Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord! They had seen, and yet they had not believed; but only those whom the Father gives, only they go to Jesus. And no one goes to Jesus if the Father does not draw him.

However there is another revelation in His following words: *"And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."* A more expressive and richer language of mercy does not exist.

The Lord Jesus attributes to the Father the high destiny of those that He, Jesus, will raise up. The Father has given them to Him, and wants that He will raise them up. But the Father wants also some other thing; that is, those who see the Son

must believe in Him. Permit us to describe thus the attitude of the Father: turning to the Son, He says to Him: "I entrust a people to you, and you must raise them up." Turning then to the creatures, the Father says: "I will give you grace to see my Son. Believe in Him, and He will raise you up in the last day."

Therefore it is the Father Himself who leads us to the Son, so that the Son may lead us back to the Father. "*To See*" has a rich meaning, always enlarging itself in the measure that one continues to look.

The Jews had seen enough in order to be able to at least desire to see more. The multiplication of bread and fishes and the considered and merciful action of the day before were sufficient to awaken in them a live desire to fix their attention, their gaze on Him, and to know Him better. They saw but they did not want to continue to see. Therefore they did not believe, and did not accept Jesus.

But those who by some act of Providence are brought *To See* Jesus, be it even a little, if they are well disposed, want to see more. They have the desire to contemplate and to know the marvelous Person of whom they have only begun to catch a glimpse of a greatness that is above human things. The Father accepts such a wise desire as a prayer, and, to those who desire and appreciate the little, He gives more, drawing them to the point that He binds them definitively to the Son.

The first seeing was by grace; for those who do not stop but desire to continue to see always better, it is also by grace. One who accepts the little will receive much. Our subject regards those who had seen Jesus, however that first revelation may have come to them. Some of them, ungrateful and indifferent, do not care to see and to know more, and they harden their hearts. Others desire to see and to know

more of the glorious Person, and they are attracted to Him by the Father, who grants their desire. Many have seen Jesus only as a man, and have finished by saying to Him: My Lord and My God! The honest centurion saw the dying man and proclaimed Him "*Righteous,*" but he immediately added: "*Son of God.*"

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*"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"* (Luke 12:32).

Do not fear. Do not look at your inability, but trust in the Lord.

Do not fear men, because they cannot impede the plans of God.

Do not fear because you see that the majority does not want that KING and that Kingdom.

It has pleased the Father to give the Kingdom to a remnant that is undergoing mortification and ruins, and has their eye fixed only on Him.

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### NATURAL HEARING

(Proverbs 17:4; Jude 10)

The Epistle of St. Jude gives a very sad picture of the wicked who manifest themselves always more boldly where the Lord reveals His glory more. Among other evil qualities, are always being ready to say and to hear evil. Proverbs 17:4

says: "A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue." St. Jude describes them thus: "*But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.*"

Saying and hearing are correlative. Each one wants to feed the ear and the tongue according to the hidden intentions of the heart.

We have noticed that there are some who, in hearing some holy conversation, have demonstrated annoyance with yawning, interruptions, and observations that are out of place, or they have outright distanced themselves. But if into the conversation there has been introduced some subject of speaking against someone or of ridicule, they have quickly lifted their head and given a sign of sinister enjoyment. Their inner being has awakened to the call of that which is unjust or malicious. Oh! those who know how to turn a conversation from a bad or even vulgar incident to a heavenly discourse are indeed rare; and instead those who drag into the mud even the holiest and elevated discourses abound. St. Jude describes them: "*But these speak evil of things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.*" They do not succeed in seeing anything but evil and in speaking of evil and they do not desire to listen to anything but evil. Stopping at the external view of things, gifted as they are with a suspicious mind, they find a way to censure even those who are innocent, and to suspect even the purest motives.

St. John describes two classes of people: those that love the world and the spirit of the world, and others who love the Lord and eternal things. He says of the first: "*They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world*

*heareth them.*" (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:5). One should be careful to not fall into the sectarian error of speaking against those who do not come into our meeting places, as if they are the world and we the saints. The spirit of the world is where vanity and concupiscence dominate and it is not places or people. There is much "world" in religious meeting places, and there are many who aspire to heaven among those who do not come among us. There is a so-called religious world where evil is heard and spoken of under a veneer of false pity. St. John continues: "*We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error*" (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:6). St. John is not speaking of meeting places but he goes to the root of the soul describing two tendencies that manifest themselves in two types of listening. Do we want to read in the abysses of our soul to discover where our tendencies lie? Pay attention to our ear and to our tongue. What do we like to hear? Of what are we ready to speak? As there is an evil hearing and speaking, there is likewise a saintly hearing and speaking. The mouth speaks of that which is in the heart; and the heart is nourished by that which it hears. Hearing God in secret induces the tongue to speak of Him.

May the Lord make us of the number of that "We" of which St. John speaks. There is a hearing and a speaking that have roots in that which is not seen or heard naturally. Hearing and speaking in perfect harmony, inclined only to heavenly things, is one of the most beautiful qualities of the followers of Christ, who, hearing from Him alone, fed by Him, speak only of Him. Closing their ear to that which is evil and to that which is vain, they gather the notes of heaven and they open their mouth by grace, speaking only of that which returns to the glory of God.

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## I KNOW MYSELF ... IMAGINE THE OTHERS

(Psalm 4:4, 6; Luke 11:35)

The "I know" and the "imagine" must, it is understood, be considered in a relative way.

Many times, since I have given my heart to Christ, I have put this question to myself: "Who is the worst man that I know?" And the answer has always been a single word: "myself." If the candid reader would like to repeat the same question himself, he also will have the same answer: "I am the worst man that I know." Please pay attention that I have said the worst that I know; I have not said the worst that exists. First of all, knowing oneself is not easy; the revelation of us to ourselves is given to us only by Jesus, because He came not only to reveal God, but to reveal man to himself. "Know thyself," said a wise man of Greece, but no wise man ever knew himself, as he was not able to know God, and he remained ignorant of himself, because he was ignorant of God. The Jews said that they would not have killed the prophets, yet they cried: "Crucify Him" to the most innocent and best of men.

We thank God that Jesus Christ has not only revealed His love to us, but us to ourselves. However, even when we have received the revelation of ourselves, we are tempted to err because of the easy illusions of which we are victim. We often seek to suffocate the voice of our conscience or the sense of dissatisfaction by saying: "We are sinners anyhow." And often we comfort ourselves by observing that others are worse than we, and that even so they have been forgiven by the mercy of God.

Now, if it is true in general that we are all sinners, and that evil men have been forgiven, it is true that I *do not know* the

sin of another. I can see the evil that others do, see it outwardly, but I ignore the motive, therefore I can never say that I know the sins of others. The most disgraceful action can be the consequence of an error or of a misfortune. In any case, there is always a doubt in me about the affairs of others. Therefore I am not permitted to speak of the sins of others because I lack the essential point for deciding, that is, the knowledge of the depths of the soul of the one whom I undertake to judge. The sin is in fact completed in the depths of the soul that I can never see and that is known only to God.

In myself, however, I can carry out the examination of sin. I can see my wickedness before me.

*“Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still,”* says the Psalmist. Our heart, illuminated by the light of the Gospel is the only point of comparison; only in that light can I see myself precisely reflected. In the silence of the night and in the quietness I can excavate the egoism of my soul, the baseness or the not always genuine absolute sincerity and singleness of motives, and evaluate every action, even those that are judged excellent in the eyes of others. And in the face of the examination, if done honestly, there remains to me only to cry out: I am a miserable person, and I owe everything to the mercy of God. And if I meet someone who is greatly to blame before God and Society, I am led to think, who knows what could have thrust him to do evil, and who knows what I would have done in his conditions; perhaps in his place I would have been worse than he.

It is healthy to believe that no one is worse than we; it is also healthy not to formulate any judgments or to make other comparisons except those that return to our disadvantage. Someone said: “Turn your eyes into your own heart and you

will see that you will not judge the actions of others." In judging others man strives in vain, and generally falls into error and easily sins. Scrutinizing oneself is profitable.

If what we have said is conviction in us, if we see ourselves always poorer before ourselves, a benevolent doubt moves us in favor of others, and we cannot avoid growing in tenderness and compassion toward humanity. This is the greatest gift that can be given to a converted sinner who presses closer day by day, in increasing gratitude and adoration to the heart of Jesus Christ.

Reader: "I know me; imagine the others"—rather it is better that I say, "I know me and I don't want to think anything except the best of others."

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### CRUCIFIED TO THE WORLD AND THE WORLD CRUCIFIED TO ME

A double separation. Paul had separated himself from the world (world in the sense of a bad spirit) and the world had separated itself from Paul.

The cross of Jesus Christ had planted itself between one and the other. And in the measure that Paul kept separating himself, the other kept fleeing, because nothing, good or bad, attaches itself or remains attached to us for any length of time, if we do not attach ourselves to it.

The evil, however seducing and insidious it may be, and which chases us, if we repel it, even though inwardly, at first only inwardly, at the end it will separate itself and leave us.

And every good, however elevated and of difficult attainment, if we attach ourselves to it, be it even only in our inner desires, at the end it will attach itself to us. According to the attraction or repulsion that we have, so will be our life, and by reason of that we will be surrounded by bad things or good things.

Therefore let us constantly repel that which is bad, and let us hold firmly to that which is good. Let us always run closer and draw near to God; let us abide in Christ, and at the end we will become one with Him.

\* \* \*

### THE LORD AND THE TEMPLES

(Hosea 8:14)

Hear the words of the prophet: *“For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof.”*

It is well known that the followers of almost all religions have spent energy and money in building temples. Those who desire to do so can read the history and the descriptions of many temples and of the feasts that have been and are celebrated in them. Our subject is that there is a relation between forgetting God and the multiplication of temples and of fenced cities.

When Jeroboam wanted to impede people from going to Jerusalem, the first thing he did was to build a sanctuary in Bethel, and to constitute priests for it. The astute king knew

that the people wanted some religious form: an imposing edifice, some rites, men set apart are necessary for the purpose. Later Amos prophesied against the sanctuary of Bethel and the house of Jeroboam. The priest Amaziah advised him that that was the sanctuary of the king and that he, a man of Judah, should not prophesy in that place.

The temple of Jerusalem was built by the command of God Himself, but the Jews made an idol of it, binding themselves more to it than to the Lord Himself. Let us remember the principal martyrs of the temple: Stephen, Paul, and above all, Jesus Christ.

In a few years we have seen various buildings come into being and we have had to deplore that many of them have become theaters of scandal. I remember something that happened about thirty years ago. A numerous people had believed in the Lord; His presence was being manifested in a marvelous way in the Word and in the operations of the Holy Spirit. The meetings were being held in a modest building and someone began to say that a church like that should not remain in a poor place. The protests of a few who smelled the beginning of ruin in that proud speaking were in vain. For buildings, novelties and feasts, people allow their money to be taken from them. We remember the story of the golden calf and the gift of precious objects (Exodus 32). With the acquisition of the property it became necessary to establish a certain ecclesiastical government. Much time did not pass when the vast, imposing building became a theatre of violent scenes for which the intervention of the authorities of public safety became necessary. This is not an isolated fact. The religious wars that occurred in order to designate who had to remain in possession of a building are modern and ancient stories. Those who have made economic sacrifices for the acquisition or beautifying of meeting places are not disposed to leave them and they hang on to them tenaciously, because

the material things have taken the place of God Himself. Without going back to the history of past centuries, we are witnesses of ruins caused by the ambition to have buildings.

The prophet observed that having forgotten God, temples and fenced cities were being built. That is, for the purpose of not losing the temples, rules and creeds are formulated, and the people are placed in a religious slavery. One who desires to walk in the footsteps of Jesus must choose between adapting himself to the temple and the fenced city or to go out of it, losing all that which in a moment of enthusiasm he has sacrificed. Alas, how few are disposed to lose and to go away without fighting. The majority, by human ability, like the astuteness of Jeroboam, is tied to sanctuaries and fenced cities.

The Lord, from time to time, in order to shake and deliver the Remnant, sends some fire that destroys the temples and cities.

Ezekiel, the prophet of exile, speaks thus of the people of God dispersed among the countries: *“Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come”* (Ezekiel 11:16). They were an exiled and wandering people, without temple and fenced cities, however not without God, because He Himself would become for them a sanctuary and a fortress.

\* \* \*

## THE ANIMALS ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

(Isaiah 11:1-10)

That which is said of Jesus must be realized also in the church. *“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”* It was a humble origin according to the flesh and the surroundings.

*“And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.”* The Spirit of rest is the terminal point, fruit of six operations of the Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and might; the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

Therefore the seven Spirits of God, or rather the seven principal operations of the one Spirit are: Spirit of wisdom; Spirit of understanding; Spirit of counsel; Spirit of might; Spirit of knowledge; Spirit of the fear of the Lord; these operations terminate, upon completion, in: Spirit of Rest.

Many times it is one of the preferred methods of the Scripture to put the conclusion first, before specifying the way to such a conclusion. With this introduction and consideration it will be easier to understand the Scripture better, especially the Psalms, where this method is more frequently used.

The one operation is contrasted and balanced by the other. Understanding makes wisdom shine; might renders counsel valid. The fear of the Lord renders knowledge humble. From here—the perfect rest.

The consequence of such a life controlled by the Holy Spirit is: *“And he will delight in the fear of the Lord, and he will not judge by what his eyes see, nor make a decision by what his ears hear”* (Isaiah 11:3, NASB). It is a judgment that

does not look at the appearance. Sight and hearing will not be by the flesh, but according to the inner vision of the Spirit. It is a prophecy of that which we read in the Gospels where the Lord warns to not judge according to the appearance, but to judge righteously.

*"But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." Because of this he will have authority in the word that comes out of his mouth, "and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."*

Up to now it speaks of the Lord Jesus. A strange contrast of animals follows: *"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den."*

The reason of this drawing near is: *"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."*

It is possible to read all this, and to receive no benefit from it at the present time, which means no benefit. Whatever the future may be it is certain that the word must be fulfilled in us, now.

From the description of Jesus, the prophet passes to speaking of animals, children, and babies on the Holy Mountain, because it is the contemplation of that perfect life that teaches to climb and to remain on the high and elevated Mountain. As the Church enters into the reality of Jesus

Christ and contemplates Him, and by contemplating grows, in that measure it is established on the Mountain of Holiness, where the animals will not be able to do any harm at all.

These animals are figures, some of the flesh, others of the holy life. The wolf, the leopard, the young lion, the fatling (which can refer to any animal), the bear, the lion, the asp, and the cockatrice are images of the various manifestations of the flesh. Take note that not even in the fine climate of the Holy Mountain do those animals die. We climb, and they climb with us, a warning that as long as we are in these bodies, for as close to the Lord as we are, we are never delivered from the flesh that will war against us until the end. However, on the Holy Mountain they have no strength to do any harm.

The lamb, the new life in Christ, will have the wolf near it, but without danger. The leopard and the kid are close together, the calf and the young lion also. Behind them there is a little child who will lead them so that all of them will stay in their place. The little child shall have sufficient authority to keep the animals in place.

First of all on the mountain the animals are distinct. There is no danger of calling the wolf by another name. Each animal has its own name. That is, we know clearly the movements of our flesh, and we do not excuse them. Knowing the enemy well is the first step toward victory. Many delude themselves continually, ignoring the presence of the various animals, calling them with harmless names. On the Mountain we learn to be sincere and truthful with ourselves. As they move, the child directs the rod and puts them in place; rather he leads them, which makes us suppose that the very temptations can be turned to good. These mixtures of animals will have children, and they too will stay together without conflict. It does not say that they will eat absolutely

nothing. The flesh will get some little disturbance. Jesus has warned us that we must have our feet washed (daily conduct). The lion takes a little food, but he will not be able to kill. He is content to eat a little bit of hay like the ox. Once in a while, something that should all have gone to the ox of work and of sacrifice, is robbed by the famished lion. The babies, ignorant of the danger, will not be harmed by certain acts that elsewhere would be fatal. The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. Take note that it is two children that do that; let not an adult hazard to provoke the asp and the cockatrice. Their presence is a double lesson of the protection of God and of advice to walk diligently. We must not tempt the Lord. But if a young child who does not how to control himself puts his hand in dangerous places, Providence will see to it that no harm comes to him. Many times the Lord has protected innocent creatures, precisely in the same vicinity of the evil people.

Live animals, spying our movements, tempt us continually, but they are harmless. They would like, if possible, to pull us down from the Holy Mountain. If we descend, they regain their strength to harm. The promise is that in the Mountain of Holiness of the Lord, they can neither hurt nor destroy. The reason, although implicit, is clearly indicated: *"For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."*

We know that the earth and the heavens shall be renewed. It is good therefore, to pray that there be in us, NOW, new heavens and a new earth. Covered by Him, we are immune from every enemy attack for as long as he continues molesting us by his presence.

*"And in that day"* (how many times "in that day" is repeated) prophesied for everyone, and, in that day of victory

for each one, *“there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek.”*

While the contemplation of Him brings us on the Mountain of Holiness, it is the life of the Saints that witnesses to the world, and enamors them to seek the Christ. He, and not a sect, shall be lifted up for a banner of love for everyone. *“And His rest shall be glorious.”* Amen.

\* \* \*

### THE FIRST LOVE

*Let us pray one for another, because these are truly difficult times for the life of the Spirit. We need a great Revival in Love. Let us read Revelation 2:1-7 attentively.*

\* \* \*

The Gospel had already been preached for some time when the Lord set apart the Apostle John for a special purpose, permitting him to be exiled in the Isle of Patmos. It was in that prison (and true saints are prisoners of Christ) that the Lord appeared to him in a truly marvelous way, and told him to write to the seven Churches. The first message is to the church of Ephesus.

In the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians we note that that church is commended for their faith toward Jesus Christ. But in the letter that concerns us now, there is a great lament of the Lord toward that same people. Evils come about gradually. Those who descend are not aware of it many

times, especially when it concerns a spiritual declining. A warning is needed in order to discover us to ourselves.

And the Lord of glory Himself, presented Himself in the midst of the seven candlesticks. He watches over His work. Gentle as He is, He begins by recognizing the good: "*I know thy works and thy labor.*" There were many good things in that church, including the knowledge of the word. Those who called themselves apostles were tried; therefore there was discernment, something that is lacking in many. That church had carried the burden and had worked for the Lord; and, a praiseworthy fact, they had not become tired.

Therefore what was lacking? According to man, who stops at the outward appearance, nothing was lacking. But it was not possible to deceive the penetrating eye of the Son of God.

The message continues, and it is also for us in this time. By the Holy Spirit who gives the live representation of things, we seem to hear a groaning. It is necessary to live the life of the Spirit (may God help us to do so) in order to read and to hear by means of the words of the Scripture. A lament follows; it is brief, and we feel that He who gives it is sad to be obligated to give it, because He loves us, He suffers much in having to reprove, and even more, to have to threaten. The Lord added that He had "*somewhat against thee.*" The church of Ephesus had lost their first love.

And He added a threat, that is, if they did not return to their first works (works of charity), He would remove the candlestick.

Therefore something was lacking; that is, that anointing of true tenderness, of reciprocal compassion and enthusiasm, and a whole lot of things that cannot be defined except by one word that is among the greatest words, that is "LOVE." GOD IS LOVE. He HAS attributes, but His essence is

LOVE. It is in vain to speak of Him if we do not live in His love. The accusation was on a single but fundamental point: a definite and precise lament, as the language of the Lord is definite and precise: "*I have this against thee.*" This, (nothing else), against thee (don't look at the lacking of others).

The lament is that they had lost the first love. It does not say that they had no love. God does not exaggerate. There still was a little love otherwise they would not have been in a condition to be able to receive the message. But it was a love that was growing weaker every day, and was slowly being extinguished.

The Lord knows, and He wants that we too should know that all the other evils result from losing the first love. Therefore the first message is to the church of Ephesus because it is the fundamental message.

In reading the seven letters attentively, seven dangers can be noted: the first is to lose the first love. But one in whom love is decreasing also loses the first courage. There is a relationship between love and holy courage. The third danger is to lose the separation from the spirit of the world. To this follows the fourth danger, losing the first purity and simplicity of doctrine which causes one to fall into the depth of Satan, and then the discretion of man takes the place of the discretion of God. In the measure that impure elements of life and of doctrine enter in, the life of the spirit becomes cold, and one is no longer fervent; one has a name that one is living but is going toward death. The Lord says: you are dead, that is, if you remain in this condition, consider yourself certainly dead. But in the measure that man loses the heavenly life, he increases in pretenses; the last phase of the ruin follows: blind pride. You say, but you do not know... Please read Revelation 3:14-22. Oh! How important

it is to understand the foundation of these seven letters. How essential it is to know that *God is love*. *God is* (let us note the IS) LOVE.

Just as beginning to neglect the good works and of decreasing in love lead to death, maintaining and increasing in love lead to perfection.

Oh! Church of Christ, cease from the pride that is blinding you, and cry to the Lord for a powerful revival of *love*. Other things will be adjusted afterward... Afterward!

The word of God must make us tremble and reflect.

In the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Matthew it is recorded that the Lord Jesus said that in the last days iniquity shall abound and the love of many shall wax cold, but one who endures until the end (perseverance in love), that certain one shall be saved (will remain saved).

The High Priest of Israel had to carry on his breast twelve precious stones on each of which there was written the name of one of the twelve tribes, and two precious stones on his shoulders and on each of those stones there were written six names of the six tribes. He therefore was carrying on his breast (that is, in his heart) and on his shoulders the names of the tribes of his people. There is a certain accord between work and love. If we do not carry in our heart, we will become tired (one day the church of Ephesus would become tired) of carrying on their shoulders, but if we do not carry on our shoulders, even love is a vain word, because true love brings us to suffer for others.

In the last days, full of spiritual coldness, only an intense love (burning, heated) can give us the victory. The Lord warns us to abide in His Love. This is possible only by praying by the Holy Spirit, "Because love is a fruit not of the

flesh, but of the Holy Spirit.” Such is the victorious love which is spoken of in Solomon’s Song, especially in the last chapter where it says that it is as strong as death, and that neither many waters nor floods can drown it. It is the only love that has no price, because it is the fruit of the Blood of Jesus Christ that no human effort can conquer and corrupt.

“*Repent,*” cries the message to the church of Ephesus. The case is serious! All restorations and blessings begin by penitence.

The church of Ephesus fell. God does not send punishment without first sending a warning. He still warns in these times. We hear the voice that tells us to cry out this message: “*He that hath ears let him hear what the Holy Spirit is saying (is saying even today) to the churches.*”

“*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.*” We will be fed by Him, blessed Lord, because it is He in us that bears fruit in all times.

\* \* \*

### THE TWO ROOTS

(Isaiah 53:2; Job 19:28; Hebrews 12:15; Matthew 3:10)

It is important to know what sort of root we have in us. There are only two main roots: that of the Lord, and that of the enemy. Our final, definitive development depends on the kind of root that is in us. Job, who was speaking in his suffering and was lamenting, understood that his three friends were spying on his words and asked them to have

consideration for him. *"But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?"* Job was sure that deep down, his spirit was right and was seeking God.

In the portrait that Isaiah gives us of the suffering Christ, the "Root" is mentioned: *"For He shall grow up before him as a tender plant (a small plant insignificant in appearance), and as a root out of a dry ground.* The tender plant has become the Tree of Life.

Unfortunately there is the Root of Evil. It is in each one of us until it is uprooted. The Lord ordered Jeremiah to root out, to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant. It is not enough to uproot: it is necessary to plant in the place of that which has been uprooted, in order that some seed of iniquity does not take its place.

John the Baptist said, among other things: *"And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees."* Those who come face to face with Jesus are immediately discovered in the most important root. The Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus saw themselves in the light of the face of Jesus.

But we are still in these bodies; we are subject therefore to receive bad seeds and sooner or later they will form roots. Suspicions, bad thoughts, jealousies, envies, and various lusts, if left to themselves will form roots which will continue to grow and will form bad trees. The wise farmer will not give the twigs time to grow; he uproots them as soon as he discovers them.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts: *"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled"* (Hebrews 12:15). There are few who love to read themselves in their own inner life. Many of us, for a long

time, resemble those to whom the Lord said that they cleansed the outside of the cup, not paying attention to the fact that the inside was full of evil. We cannot always or for a long time keep hidden the root that is in us, because that which is hidden will be manifested.

You readers have certainly observed persons who for a long time seemed to be friends and in a good communion, and then, for some unpleasant incident, both, or one of them has come out with some poisonous word, extraneous to the argument, such as—you are so-and-so, for example proud, or other derogatory attributes. Where did that bitter phrase, extraneous to the subject under discussion, come from? There was a hidden root of bitterness; the storm has discovered it, and the poison has come out.

The inner life must be diligently watched.

Sinister thoughts, words of malicious gossip that we hear, suspicions that we do not bring to the light of Christ in order that they be quickly removed, leave like a photographic negative in the dark camera of the soul. One day the sketched image will come out complete and sad. The root will germinate upward. Oh my brother, do not leave anything hidden in your heart but bring it to the light, so that the Blood of Jesus may continually wash you (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:7). And, on the other hand, run continually to the Lord so that He will strengthen, establish, plant in you the good Root.

And then, whatever may happen, you will remain firm because the Root of Holiness is in you, and is your support (Isaiah 6:13 ; 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:10).

\* \* \*

BUT I HAVE PRAYED FOR YOU

(Luke 22:31, 32)

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was about to be abandoned by the disciples and arrested. Moreover, He was to be denied by Simon. A few hours before the great event, He pronounced these words: "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee.*" The repeated name makes one note a tender appeal for special attention—"Behold." Pay strict attention. It's a question of an important trial. Satan—and the disciples were not hearing it for the first time—would have sifted them like one sifts wheat, by which he would have taken away every good thing and allow to remain only that which is insignificant, this being the precise meaning of sifting wheat.

The disciples were in serious danger, but Simon more than all, and the discourse was directed in a particular way to him. The Lord knew that they could not rely on their strength; He knew them to be weak, and knew that they would fail, especially because they could not estimate the danger they were about to face, with closed eyes, without watching and praying.

Up to here there is the sad appeal and the sad announcement of the Lord. But the words of Jesus did not stop there; the tone rose again and followed a note of triumph.

"*But I have prayed for thee.*" Note the contrast: "*Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.*" "*But I have prayed for thee.* BUT I. The One who knew and had already gauged the danger, had already prayed. The word *prayed* means supplicated with insistence. But for what? Let us hear it: "*That thy faith fail not.*" Afterward we see how Peter was sifted and failed to the point of denying the

Master; and we ask ourselves: of what benefit was the promise of Jesus "I have prayed for thee?" But Jesus said *so that thy faith fail not*. He did not promise that Peter would not err, but that his faith would not fail. In fact, Peter denied the Master, but he wept bitterly and he repented, because he had not lost faith in the pardon and the love of Jesus.

The greatest danger of the believer who has been tempted or has fallen, is not in the fact itself that he has committed sin, but that he may lose faith in the Lord. After the sin, hardening of the heart or desperation may occur. "It's too much, says the sinner, now there's no more hope, I will no longer have the strength to lift myself up, I'm lost, and since it is so, I will follow my tragic destiny." However, when faith does not fail, even in the midst of the falls, the sinner sees the thread of salvation that will still lead him back to the feet of Jesus.

However, returning to the Apostle, we note that he was finding that faith again because another had prayed for him, and this other one was no less than the Lord Jesus Christ, and this fact leads us to another consideration.

Many times we feel a spiritual dryness and a cruel abandonment. It seems that everything has gone wrong, and we are tempted to believe that everything has been useless. We would like to open our mouths again in prayer, but we do not know; at times we cannot even pray. The times of testing come, and we find ourselves defenseless, and it seems that no one protects us; and many times we remain discouraged. But precisely when we do not know where the help must come from, there rises again from the depth of the soul an unknown strength that makes us fall again on our knees, and in the midst of the danger and the discouragement, even in the midst of the fall itself we see a ray of faith that brings us back to the Savior. How has this happened? Have we done

it? No, because we were already discouraged. It has not been our prayer, because we were not praying, nor did we have the will to do so! Someone else kept a watch over us for that dark hour. When all seems lost to us, the prayer of the great Intercessor has saved us.

Oh Lord, you do not forget our prayers, and above all, you pray for us in the moment in which we have no prayer. Blessed Savior, blessed Intercessor!

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### FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE

To a dear brother in Italy:

Your letter is the echo of that which I have repeated to myself many times, especially in the first years in this Work, and of that which I hear very often. Dear ones (I include your wife), I have suffered and suffer for that gift of God that makes me observe every problem from every aspect.

Personally, I am of a character that is reserved, sad and of very few words. In my first contact with the Pentecostals, I realized that the Movement was from Above; however I approved neither the languages nor the excitement. That which I now think of the languages, you can read in the little volume "Lo Spirito Santo" (The Holy Spirit). With regard to the excitement, the tremors, the raised voices, even admitting the exaggeration in that which is human, I tremble to judge them. In Ezra 3:13 it is written of a "loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off." Certainly, the final plan is "Rest" (Hebrews 4) and to hear the soft and subdued voice. But the prophet had to experience three strong shakings. Dear ones,

dear ones: I, in myself, am not humble. Others judge me to be “dignified,” but I have discovered that I am proud. I cry and am grieved. The Lord opens my eyes and shows me the good and makes me rejoice in it (Psalm 106:4, 5), even in acts that seem to be (and often they are) childlike and extravagant. Wanting to correct too much, we cripple. Dear ones in Jesus, may we dispose ourselves even to allow ourselves to be rolled in the dust, and to be exposed to ridicule to our very own eyes. How many strange things in the prophets, things that we would judge to be such (Isaiah 20; Ezekiel, many passages, and Jeremiah, and Hosea, etc., etc.

Lord, make me humble, because I am not yet. One day, in the beginning, the Lord said to me: “I have no need of you (referring to us “dignified” ones) in this Work. Thank me that I have wanted to call you to it.” Go slow, dear ones. I thought that I had the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and I did not have it. Suspend judgments and activities. Seek and wait. May you be blessed.

\* \* \*

### VAIN WORDS

(Ephesians 5:6)

In the end of the fourth chapter and in the beginning of the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, we read various admonishments on the practical life, and among the last recommendations, this: *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but*

*rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."*

Foolish talking and jesting are considered among the unclean things.

However, things may seem to be exaggerated, and there are many that by subtlety deceive themselves and deceive others, finding an excuse for many irregular things. Therefore the Apostle continues: "*Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*" Vain words, that is words that only make a noise, but in substance do not say anything substantial. As the word sounds in the text: empty words, at the end of which only illusion remains.

Among the persons described in Pilgrim's Progress there was one who knew how to find a good reason for everything, and he had an elastic religion adapted to the subtleties of his mind. That certain one was called Talkative.

The man who truly fears God is not ready to excuse himself, but trembles; he remembers the words of Psalm 2:11: "*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.*" He knows that he does not know himself, and does not justify himself, but wants the Lord alone to justify him. "*Blessed are they who trust in Him.*"

\* \* \*

### THE TRUE PENITENT ONE

He has a horror of sin in whatever form, and not only of the gross sin of the flesh, but also that of the spirit.

He trembles and watches over his thoughts, and this not only because he fears punishment or condemnation, or because he is expecting eternal enjoyment.

Punishment, condemnation and eternal enjoyment do exist! But the true penitent one trembles that he may, even in his imagination, offend and grieve the great Heart of the One who was loaded with insults, and then at the end died on the Cross for him.

The true antidote against sin is the "Pure love of God."

But true love is not a plant of the earth. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Therefore one should seek the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, and those who are baptized should try to live and to walk by the Spirit.

\* \* \*

### IF ANY MAN...

(Matthew 16:24; Mark 5:30, 34; John 7:37, 39; Rev. 3:20)

The "IF" refers to the condition; the "ANY MAN" refers to the number.

Man, invaded by pride and extravagant dreams, looks at the crowds. The Lord begins with the individual. He is looking for "ONE man." Moreover, the earthly man is quickly deceived by appearance, but the Lord goes to the root of the

heart. That's why many invitations of the Scripture begin with this appeal: "If any man." Many were following Him, but He said to His disciples: "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*"

The invitation supposes separations after separations. Multitudes, then disciples, and finally, only someone. The invitation is not limited, but it is clear that the appeal is directed to the individual; that's why, in the crowd, the true disciple must not turn around to know how many may be ready to follow Jesus. Without paying attention to what others are doing or will do, not even those who are closest, "*any man,*" coming to a decision by himself, will dispose himself to follow Jesus alone. If a company will be formed, and who will form it, it *does not concern* him to know it.

\*

"*Somebody has touched me*" (Luke 8:46). Many were following Jesus and in the crowd several were touching Him. But He, knowing that virtue had gone out of Him, was asking who had truly touched Him.

\*

There was a great number of pilgrims in Jerusalem. The temple was filled with people; the occasion was solemn, also because that was the last day of the feast. And Jesus stood and cried, "*If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*" Words that must have seemed strange to who knows how many, while they were singing the words: "*With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation*" (Isaiah 12:3). If there truly was "someone" who was thirsting for the Infinite, that certain one was invited to separate himself from the crowd of the enthusiastic revelers and come to Jesus. And one of the last appeals: It is the Lord who from glory has come to the isle of Patmos and extends the invitation.

First come words that reveal love and infinite patience: "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*"

At the door of a church rich in pretenses, and, who knows how numerous the people and how much feasting, the One whom those of Laodicea imagined they were serving stood like a pilgrim. Will anyone hear the Voice, that "*Voice?*" And upon hearing, will he leave the crowd, and will he go to Jesus?

"*If any man...*" But it seems to us that it is enough.

Often some tiresome expositor of the condition of the work presents himself, repeating that the times are evil, that there is apostasy, etc., etc. And behind that sequel of murmuring, one discovers that he is precisely one of those who has not decided to follow Jesus by himself, "*Jesus alone.*" We often feel like answering him: But are you disposed to follow Jesus? Very well, don't excuse yourself with others. Learn to be alone. Hear His invitation: "*If any man!*" May you be that someone.

However, you will not be alone. Others, not those that you imagine or those with whom you are connected in an ecclesiastical party, others are also disposed to follow Him by themselves.

Listen to the voice. Follow it and you will find yourself in the company of the elect, His true Church.

\* \* \*

## EXTREMISTS

One who tries to be free from any party or individual and, in every topic, attempts to observe things serenely from every point of view, such a one disposes himself to martyrdom. This is because almost everyone likes to make the rules, and require that others should support them unconditionally. But for a little friendship, if it can be called friendship, some exact a great price for it.

The one who writes remembers a clear and important vision. It was night and he was ascending a very high mountain, meeting snakes at every step who were attacking him in order to bite him, but they were not succeeding in touching him, because they were biting a cushion that he had in his hand. In the quietness, then, the Lord explained to him that he had to endure attacks from others, demonstrating the true meekness of Jesus Christ.

The vision continued.

He reached the summit of the mountain, at a point where the narrow walkway ran between two abysses, without protection neither of wall, nor of tree, and not even of a bush. The straight walkway was between two precipices and ended at a tree. The one who writes had received a command in the depths of his being to reach the tree and to embrace it. But the danger was great; the path was narrow, unprotected, between two chasms, and he was subject to dizziness even at small heights. *"Throw yourself to the ground, and continue to go forward dragging yourself, without looking either to the right or to the left,"* the Voice said to him. He did so, and finally after hard work, with hands and clothing torn, he reached the tree and embraced it.

And the Lord warned him: *"Beware of forming an alliance with anyone. The Christian must move ahead between two*

*abysses; in order not to precipitate, he must keep himself humble, and drag himself in the dust."*

Alas! The various abysses! Far be it from us to pretend to have always demonstrated the meekness of Christ.

Far be it from us to think that we are the only ones who are going ahead in the narrow path, keeping ourselves humble and in the dust. We are writing of that which God wants and not of ourselves. He knows our shortcomings, and those that we know make us tremble. But it is of Him that we wish to write and of that which He wants from us.

It is difficult, impossible to man, in his own strength, to not defend himself, to not enter into arguments, to not be aggressive. It is difficult not to yield to some current, because in times of affliction, one is tempted to accept the protection of some other group, and to be allied with both sides, now trusting in one, now in the other.

Those who ascend the mountain, not arguing with anyone, are few. They arrive at the height, and then each one, as if he were alone, drags himself in the dust in order to reach the tree.

Be united? Certainly, such ones, attracted by a single force, will find themselves in the great Heart of Christ. They are alone, and yet they are not. Their companions are those who move ahead, attracted in the same way to the Person of Jesus Christ, the Lord.

\* \* \*

“DENY THYSELF”

It is necessary to displace the center of attention or rather the base from which all attention starts. Earthly man is egoistic, and remains such for a long time, even after it seems to them that they have definitively accepted Jesus Christ. Egoism has a single root, but many ramifications. Before, it was earthly things that attracted him; after, the egoist is occupied of himself in the “voluntary religion.” Every day he reads so many chapters of the Scripture, visits so many sick ones, does much good, etc. With a certain unctuousness he attracts to himself, while it seems that he wants to uplift Jesus Christ.

There are many such disciples. But the Lord wants to do a sifting; therefore, to the same crowd of disciples, He directs the invitation that, if anyone truly wants to follow Him, that certain one must deny himself, especially the most dangerous “Himself,” that is, the one rich in religious boasting, at times disguised under a mantle of false humility, in words like these: “I am a miserable person, I am the worst of all, etc., etc.” “Deny thyself,” says the Lord, finish with yourself, either of good or in evil. Take your eye off yourself, and fix it on Jesus Christ. Good, evil, that which has been has been, consign it to the Lord. Concentrate your mind and your heart in Him.

While in the past, in everything, your aim was in something of your own, now no longer pay attention to yourself. Be occupied only of taking up your cross (not that of others), and of following Him. You will serve Him, and will fulfill His will without even being aware of it, because you are no longer occupied with yourself, but of Him only. Under that Hand, in the light of that Face, the fruit will be spontaneous—no longer you, but Him in you.

## HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT

(Romans 5:5 NASB)

Hope is a certain reasonable expectation of something based on some circumstances that lead to that expectation. Many hope foolishly, having no basis. The word of God speaks of "the boast of our hope" (Heb. 3:6 NASB).

The boast is that we have fixed our hope on the Lord. But isn't this an illusion? How will we know that our waiting is not in vain? The answer is: *"And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."* If we have received one thing, we can, without doubt, wait for the other. We already have a pledge. It is: not our abilities, or the boast that the Lord uses us or has used us. Not a certain zeal of our own, by which we can will ourselves to do something. Not certain outward results of miracles and blessings, because many have received such things without remaining faithful to God. Nothing. The basis of this hope is only one: **THE LOVE OF GOD Poured OUT WITHIN OUR HEARTS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** It is worthwhile to meditate these few words that are the measuring thermometer of the foundation of our expectation toward eternal things. The love of God is not our fragile, vacillating love, ready to be born and ready to cool itself off, and that is based on egoism, according to how we ourselves enjoy loving others. The love of God is disinterested, and occupied in the good of others; it loves to give, always give. He has given the best; He has given it while we were enemies, and He wants, in Jesus, to give us all the things that pertain to life and righteousness. This love is shed abroad in our hearts; it

occupies the fountain of life by means of the Holy Spirit. The Love is from Above, and God Himself has poured it out, diffused like a liquid fire within our hearts. A red hot love that spreads continually and possesses us, by which we grow in love toward all creatures, and like the fire, it never says enough.

There is therefore, a positive given. We are no longer ourselves. There is something in us that was not there before.

Who has done this? How can we explain that resentment against anyone can no longer last, and we are happy about the good of those that at one time we did not love, even if they do not love us? Who has accomplished such a miracle in us, of changing egoism into love? God has done this. He Himself is Love.

Here is the basis by which we can hope for all the rest. He is within us; He has diffused by His Holy Spirit, His fire of love. It is impossible that He would leave us. The hope is solid, and gives the courage to answer victoriously to every doubt.

And if this love is not shed abroad? The answer can be only this: "The hope is in vain and disappoints."

Therefore, be in search for this love; and if it already exists, ask the Lord to give us grace to abide in His Love. He has told us:

"ABIDE IN MY LOVE."

\* \* \*

## JUDGMENT AND FIRE

(Isaiah 4:4; Hebrews 12:29)

*“When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.”* After having described the corruption of Judah and Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah informs that seven women will take hold of one man, ready to receive from him neither bread nor clothing as long as they should be called by his name and their reproach taken away.

It is painful that some have not succeeded in discovering in those seven women the type of the true Church. And yet it is enough to note that which is written of other women in the preceding chapters in order to understand that the prophet, after the distressing picture, describes the plan of the elect. Anyone who reads the fourth chapter attentively will see that it is so. *“In that day,”* that is, precisely in the time of desolation the Lord displays His Remnant. Seven—number of perfection—seek neither bread nor clothing. In the description of the corrupt women one does not encounter such unselfishness. Rather the contrary, because they live in great luxury. That which the seven women seek is to have their name changed, taking that of the man to whom they have turned, having discovered *“Reproach”* in their name.

They hate themselves and want to take refuge in the Name of that One Man. Tender and glorious is this picture. And it is in that day that *“the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the*

*adornment of the survivors of Israel. It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 4:2, 3 NASB).*

After such promises the prophet describes the method used by the Lord so that the seven women might decide to definitively draw near to the One Man, asking nothing, except to have His Name.

Food and clothing refer to more than material goods. Many, even with the expressions: “*Glory, glory, Lord, Lord*” have for a long time caressed ecclesiastical ambitions.

The method is: Judgment and fire. The same prophet, in chapter 33, asks who shall dwell with the consuming fire and the everlasting burnings, and he answers that it will be the people who will submit to a severe discipline.

In the fourth chapter, in the words of the meditation, it says that the Lord will wash and purge by means of two processes: judgment and spirit of burning—fire.

There are two ways of curing the illnesses of the organism, and two in curing the soul. The good doctor first diagnoses the illness and then orders the remedy. The Lord does the same.

St. Peter tells us that the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God. It does not mean that everything and everyone are immediately judged, but each one according to the light that he has received. The Holy Spirit, using the word, and by means of revelation, illumines the secret recesses of the soul. The inner light reveals abysses that were never suspected. Blessed are they who love the judgments of God; they are the ones who will make progress. The Psalmist was crying: “*Judge me, o God.*” The Lord does

not limit Himself to discovering, but intervenes with a penetrating inner fire, which at times seems that it wants to destroy. Many do not like to be judged, and as soon as they see themselves discovered, they begin to flee. They are the ungodly of whom it is written in the first Psalm. They are not ungodly because they have some faults, but because there is a resistance in their heart to the judgments and to the fire of God.

Those who love the Lord do not flee, but accept His judgments and allow themselves to be burned by the divine burnings. It seems that the fire must reduce them to nothing; however they are in the hands of the One who is Powerful and also Wise. It is a fire that destroys the evil, but not the individual. After the poisons have been burned, the soul feels refreshed and light. The Lord has washed and cleansed it. And then one enters into a greater communion with the Lord. *“And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night.”* The fire is not inside the soul but outside this time, and serves as a guide in the dark and dangerous hours.

By day, that is, under ordinary conditions, the guide is less sensitive; but there is always a guide. Besides “over all the glory there will be a canopy.” It is necessary: there are experiences that are so profound that we can enjoy only if we are covered by the hand of the Lord. And still: *“There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain”* (Isaiah 4:6 NASB). Great Lord! What a tender supply of mercy for the seven women who have reduced themselves to desiring only the Name, that Name; and have remained firm in the discipline of the Judgment and of the fire.

PEACE BE UNTO YOU – THE GOD OF PEACE

(John 20:19; Philippians 4:9)

*“Then the spirit came upon Amasia, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 12:18).

Peace was the message that God sent to the men that He Himself rendered of good will (Luke 2:14).

Man is slow to believe that God loves him and he flees from God. But the Lord has sent him the message of reconciliation, and by it we make peace with God. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 5:1). It is by means of and through Him that we have had peace: *“The chastisement of our peace was upon Him”* (Isaiah 53:5).

*“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.”* The phrase “came and stood” is very expressive in order to give the idea of a presence ready for everything. “Peace be unto you.” Take note of the “Unto”... There is a people prepared to receive Him, Prince of Peace.

In peace, as in other things, there are degrees; after having tasted that first peace, that is by which we feel that we are no longer enemies of God, there is a progress in which He wants to bring us. There is the “peace of God” as we read in Philippians 4:6-9: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”* Made known to God.

He knows them, but He wants us to open our hearts to Him, whatever the trials we are undergoing may be. Nothing is too miserable for Him; He listens to whatever request or confession of one of His children. Let us run to Him for anything. Prayer, and not only that, but also supplication that is like a moaning before Him. "With thanksgiving." There is always a motive (And how much!) for thanking, also for the privilege of being able to notify all our requests to Him.

The promise: "*And the peace of God*" (An emphatic version says: "That peace of God"). "*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"

Hearts and minds can be easily disturbed. For a little thing we find ourselves in a storm without strength to control ourselves. But, if we confide everything to Him with prayers and supplications, never forgetting to thank Him, He comes with His Peace that is not afraid of anything and that knows how to sleep in the storm and cause it to be the guardian of the heart and of the mind. The peace of God is different from that of the world, that is warfare inside and temporary agreement outside. The peace of God is within and endures in the midst of discord. Jesus was sleeping in the storm. He was serene in the midst of enemies; He had put everything in the hands of the Father.

Blessed rest and assurance!

And yet there is still another promise: "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever [and it is a vast whatsoever, that includes all our activities and relations] things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*" THINK. – We must pay attention to how we think and of what we think. Man,

ultimately, becomes what he thinks. The man of heaven is called to think of the things Above. Many things want to take possession of our thoughts and deviate them. But the man who has notified everything to the Lord, is on the way to having his thoughts governed by Him. The mind forms the habit of thinking in harmony with the divine will. Even if it is sometimes obligated to be occupied with things that are displeasing and even uncomfortable, by the strength of holy discipline, it returns to the center, that is the Lord, because that which is good, beautiful, true is only in Him.

It's not a question of bad or idle conversations that by now have been left behind. If a moment of thought is necessary on that which disgusts, then occupy the mind and the imaginative faculties should be occupied in that which is honest, just, pure, amiable, of good report, where there is some virtue and praise. These things should strictly occupy our attention. "*Practice these things*" (NASB). Doing or practicing is the consequence of thinking. One who notifies everything to God, and thinks of Him according to His heart, ends by working as He wants. And then the God of peace shall be with him.

We have all met people against whom no accusation can be brought, but whose presence it was not easy for us to tolerate. Something agitated or agitating emanates from them. Although they have peace with God, yet they do not enjoy the peace of God. They spread around themselves a sort of malaise and mistrust, by which we become cautious before them, and we prefer, as soon as possible, to distance ourselves. That is because their thoughts are not exercised in heavenly things.

But, praise God, sometimes (rarely, alas) we have found ourselves before some mature saint, in whose pure glance we saw reflected a soul saturated with heaven. Something of

him was spreading around and over us, giving us a sense of divine well being, and tranquility and trust. If there was some tumult in us, that presence was calming us, without our being aware of it and without causing us embarrassment. One of the virtues of true good is that it attracts the well intentioned, and never puts anyone to shame.

The secret was that the God of Peace, desirous of walking and spreading peace in the midst of men and to offer it to everyone, *has found someone in whom He has gone to dwell, and in whom, and by means of whom, He walks, spreading peace everywhere.* The God of Peace is in that certain one.

Therefore: Peace with God; Peace of God, and finally, the God of Peace shall be with you. Amen, Lord.

\* \* \*

### FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE

With regard to "Scandals and excesses."

It would be stupidity or bad faith to deny that even among us, excesses and even scandals happen. It has been observed that these occur more in the Pentecostal Movement than in other denominations. Supposing that this is so, one cannot infer that the Movement is not of God.

Without stopping at the historical fact that all the Movements have had excesses and scandals, we note: only in cemeteries does there exist calm and absolute quiet, because cadavers don't make noise, nor do they move. It is the presence of the Lord that awakens the hidden demons in the hearts. There

never was so much manifestation of demonized ones as during the ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is on warm days that snakes come out. Please read again the incident in Acts 28: *"And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and had laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand... And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm."*

The viper was frozen and hidden in the sticks. The fire discovered and destroyed it.

Returning to religious movements, the more the Lord works, the more the tares, hidden for a time, manifest themselves. This takes place also in individuals who are consecrated to the Lord. They would never have imagined that they harbored in secret so much iniquity, as much as they discover little by little by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Men who are correct and without blame according to the world, coming under the fire of God, are turned upside down. Such surprises should not cause us to wonder, nor to be discouraged.

It is only as the divine nature in us develops that we discover how much that is sly and wicked is hidden in the old Adam, arriving thus even to the hatred of ourselves.

\* \* \*

WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES OF THEE

(Micah 6:8)

*“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”*

Therefore pay attention to yourself and accept the righteousness of Christ by faith. The Lord Himself is our Righteousness, but He makes us righteous, that is, He gives us grace to walk in all righteousness.

Except that there is a danger: that precisely because you are walking uprightly, you may become bitter and rigorous with others; therefore pay attention to that which the Lord wants from you: that you “love mercy.” Your God is Righteous and delights in Mercy.

There is yet another danger, the worst. It is that precisely because you walk uprightly and use mercy, you allow yourself to be tempted by subtle pride: that in the spirit; of fixing your eye on your own righteousness and gentleness. Therefore, may you know that He wants you to walk in all humility.

After you have done your best, lived in all holiness and mercy, remember that you have always failed in something, and therefore, hide yourself in the dust, even before yourself.

Therefore, be UPRIGHT—MERCIFUL—HUMBLE.

\* \* \*

ENTERING INTO THE KINGDOM

(Acts 14:22)

One who loves the Lord tries not to offend the creatures, rather, seeks to understand them.

Speaking of scriptural subjects, it is impossible for each of them to touch on the various points of controversy. Reading the book of Revelation, in chapters 2 and 3 it appears evident that the Church began to fail in Love, and doctrinal confusions followed afterward. Obstinacy, the daughter of pride, leads each one to exaggerate his point of view. But let us come to our subject.

Here, as in other things, one must keep in mind that there is an "Accomplished Work" of the Son, and this work will gradually be accomplished in us by means of us.

Some say, and it is true up to a certain point, that the Kingdom of God came the day of Pentecost, with the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Insisting on the need for the Baptism with the Holy Spirit is our duty and it is never too much. The question of St. Paul to the Ephesians if they had received the Holy Spirit after they had believed is a shining directive, but to say that those who are baptized with the Holy Spirit, and we mean those who are truly baptized, have entered into the Kingdom of God in an absolute way, goes against other passages of the Counsel of God, because it gives a spectacle of persons, even if devout, that have not entirely surrendered to the Lord. We do not deny that one has entered into the germ (embryonic stage) of the plan of the Kingdom, as also one has received in the germ form the knowledge of all things in Christ. But, as the knowledge of the Spirit is subject to development, thus also subject to development is the Sanctification, the Wisdom and the Kingdom of God. We will limit ourselves to remember only

one verse in Acts 14:22: "*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*"

Please note: they were disciples; therefore they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The word "confirming" leads one to suppose that they had been previously evangelized. They had to *continue* (persevere) in the faith: it means that they were already in the faith. But then the language changes, and it does not say "to continue and to remain in the kingdom," but that by means of tribulation one *enters* into the kingdom of God. The word in the text that is translated "to enter" is very rich in meaning—it indicates an extending of oneself *toward* something that requires a constant exertion of will.

If we make listeners and readers believe that they already possess that toward which they must make every effort to extend themselves, we deceive them. And likewise, we give the outsiders a sad spectacle, because they can say to us: "What a beautiful Kingdom of God your Churches are." Alas! *Entering into the Kingdom of God* is quite serious, having Jesus as King (absolute Sovereign). Prophetically the King is established in Zion (fortress of David) but practically one here and one there, and known to God alone are the rare Christians who suffer and are silent and do not litigate about biblical verses, making of the Scriptures a museum of curiosity and argument.

Ah! *No*. Entering into the Kingdom of God is too serious to speak lightly of it, and to say to those who are baptized with the Holy Spirit: "you are in the Kingdom."

That it begins by receiving the Holy Spirit is undeniable, but it is likewise undeniable that by the strength and work of the

same Blessed Spirit, those who continue to yield, must arrive at a definitive entrance into the Kingdom; that is, they must disappear, and have Jesus as their King.

I who write feel the thrust, but I have not arrived to the height. *I hear* the exhortation of the Apostle: "Suffer and thus prepare yourself for the entrance into the Kingdom of God." Amen. Amen.

\* \* \*

CHRIST MAY DWELL  
LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU

(Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 3:16)

Please read again the cited verses: "*That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,*" and "*Let the word of God dwell in you richly.*"

Christ and His word were not yet dwelling in their hearts, since the apostle exhorts by saying: "*may dwell.*" It is necessary to read again John 14:23, and weigh its meaning. It is the promise to those who were to receive the Comforter: "*If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*"

This begins when one receives the Holy Spirit, but is extended by loving the Lord, and, by the strength of such love, observing His word. "*We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*" Christ and His Word have already come with the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, but they

will come and abide, increasingly taking possession of the dwelling in us.

In the text, the words "may dwell," are not the same in the two epistles. Ephesians 3:16 suggests the idea of the House that Christ, the Son of God, comes to inhabit as in His own house. In Colossians, instead, it expresses that, Christ already dwelling in us as in His own house, He speaks to us, and teaches us richly with His words.

It is painful to observe how many of those who are in the habit of crying: "Bible, Bible," are confused in many passages that are impossible to harmonize in the letter. Only the Holy Spirit can read and harmonize the Scriptures.

When Christ, the Anointed, comes to abide in us, He Himself speaks to us; and when He wants, He presents now one, now another scriptural passage. Only then do the biblical verses become luminous. We are not free to make of the Scriptures a spectacle of arguments. The key is in the hand of the Lord.

The one who writes remembers being in the company of several mature Christians who were more or less knowledgeable of the Scriptures, and they were speaking of the Scriptures. In the beginning there was edification, but at a certain point he heard a warning: "Enough!" The verses were no longer being cited to uplift the Son of God, but it was like an intellectual competition as to who remembered more and could make broader applications.

"Enough!" the voice of the Holy Spirit thundered in our spirit, and we had to separate from each other, each one on his own going to collect himself humbly before the Lord. Oh, the many religious conversations, and so much citing of verses upon verses! May God give us greater reverence, so that we may enter into the Sanctuary with fear and trembling,

and we see Jesus, the Anointed, first, and we dispose ourselves to listen to Him, who many times, together with the increasing revelation, presents some passage to us that we had never thought about, or that we had never understood.

He dwells in us, and He speaks; He, the great equalizer, will give the Scripture the great place it deserves, when it is He Who reads it to us, and gives it to us as a daily food, as much as we need.

In Him there is wisdom with understanding. In Him there is every sobriety and measure.

\* \* \*

### THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

(1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 12:7; Acts 19:9; John 14:6)

*“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* (NASB). That is, not for a personal gain, or for ostentation but for the common good of the church. *“But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way”* (NASB). This verse is misunderstood by many; therefore we will give the textual translation: “But you ardently desire (are zealous) the gifts, the best. And yet I will indicate a very excellent way to you.”

Be it far from us to discourage desiring the gifts, because in the fourteenth chapter of the same epistle it is recommended to desire the spiritual gifts, but we want to exhort to follow Charity intensely. Our scope is to understand clearly the thought of the Apostle. In the verse cited above, the Apostle

reproves and does not approve the zeal of the Corinthians. As if to say: You ardently desire the gifts and select those that can be seen and are the most eminent according to your opinion, because you are motivated by a spirit of vanity. Preaching and being used in miracles attract the eye; therefore you are zealous of the best gifts, or those that you judge to be such. But, remember well that the gifts are not given to gratify yourselves, but to serve others; and since it's a question of serving, I will show you a more excellent way in order to live for the good of others. The various gifts that are spoken of in chapter 12 are necessary; but I want to show you a most excellent way, or, if we can call it such, the most excellent gift, without which all the rest is worth nothing, rather, ends in disaster. Of what value is it to speak with eloquence, to be powerfully used, and not to be filled with the love of God? It would be a ruin. If one is not filled with love, being in the public eye induces pride. The rebellious angel was full of gifts, and he fell; but no one full of love can fall.

Have the gifts, but first be careful that there is love to follow ardently, as if pursuing it, because it seems to run away. There is nothing in the people of God that is so much in danger of being lost or of decreasing, as much as love that easily cools off or fails completely, because the enemies that conspire against it are many. The ingratitude of others, being misunderstood and increasing iniquity are things apt to make us lose any good determination to be charitable. *Charity is rare*. Pursue it, therefore, grab hold of it well, at any cost. Let whatever may be lost be lost, however it goes, as long as you have charity. And then (*then*), be zealous for obtaining the gifts, because, having charity, there is no danger of pride or of any boasting; Charity lives for others, and therefore, the gifts will be used for the glory of God, in the service of others, and the one who is used loves to hide himself, to disappear. And yet the principal aim of our text is not to have

charity so that we may receive the gifts. One who has charity appreciates the gifts and is more suited to receive them, because it pleases God to use a merciful man. But our text isolates charity in that point, as if to say: the various gifts that have been mentioned are for the benefit of the church. If you truly want to live for others, have charity because of all the ways to benefit, it is the *most excellent way*. Among the many who possess the various gifts, the true benefactor is one who is filled with charity, even if he had nothing else and only charity.

### WAY.

A way serves to allow passing. One who uses it travels on it by stepping on it. The way is under the feet of all those who pass over it; if it is uncomfortable, it is repaid by murmuring: "what a bad road!" If it is good, the most that it can expect is a sense of being pleased that it is a good way, but nothing else. The Christian lives to be a *way* for others; silent, dusty, trampled, but charitable, he has laid his body down for those who pass by. A way is so much more appreciated for as much as it is trodden upon, and useful to many. The Christian is happy when, by means of him, on him there pass multitudes on their way to a better life.

Acts 19:9 speaks of the "Way." The witnessing and all the meetings were a *way* for the outsiders. The Christian is a Way to others, because Another has been a *way* for him.

The fourteenth chapter of St. John reports the words of comfort and of tender good-bye of Jesus to the disciples: "*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*" But the disciples were confused. In what point of the Universe would He stop? And, even knowing it, it would be of no use; how could they

go where Jesus would go? "*Thomas said unto Him, Lord—and he spoke for everyone—we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*"

They say that among the episodes of the Russo-Japanese war, in order to attack a fortress it was urgently necessary to fill a chasm in order to allow the army to pass. Time was short, and, after having thrown into it as much as they could, a great empty space still remained. The Japanese are happy to give their lives for their emperor: entire regiments threw themselves into that chasm and filled it, and on that mass of shapeless cadavers, that became *way*, there passed the chariots of victory. So much for a man and for earthly glory!

No one could fill the chasm between Heaven and earth; Jesus laid down His body and has built the Bridge between heaven and earth and in His broken body has opened the *new and living way* for going up to the Father. "Living" means that not only is He stepped on for the benefit of those who are walking, but He keeps in the way those who are on it; rather, He brings them in the way and keeps them in it until they pass. Therefore it is the only Way, and He keeps them in it because He is living. No one goes to the Father but by Him, and by Him, one goes surely to the Father, by means of the *Living Way*.

Because He is *Way*, He is also (and only He is) *Truth and Life*. The Way leads to the Truth, and Way and Truth give Life. He gave His Life in order to become the *Way*, and to give life to others. He lives in eternity, always for others, to intercede, that is to say, in order to be *Way, Truth and Life; Blessed Lord!* Love brought Him to so much! The Christian, if he is a Christian, lives for others. The spirit of the world is to not allow themselves to be mistreated, when it is not to

completely take advantage of others. The spirit of the Christian, if it is governed by divine love, is to be disposed and ready to allow himself to be mistreated, so that others may pass on to something better than they had before.

There are many preachers and wind bags, but men must see the *Way*. Certainly, the *Way is Jesus*; but those who don't know Him do not understand how He can be the *Way*, if you yourself, ready to be pulverized under their feet, do not make yourself a way to Him.

Someone may have read about a very inspirational episode of a missionary who witnessed to an unbeliever during a long ship voyage. The ship was wrecked, and there was barely time to select a small number of lifeboats; the missionary happened to be included in the small number. The other was looking as if destroyed by the disaster, but the Christian grabbed him by the arm, put him in his place, and said to him: I know the Lord, and I know where I'm going; you accept *Christ*, and you will join me one day. If this love does not touch even the most hardened heart, what other thing can?

Gifts? They must be truly desired and used only for others. But, does one truly want to serve others? The apostle says, "*I show you a still more excellent way: Charity.*"

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## BLESSINGS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

(John 13:26)

We have thought many times about the responsibility that people who have been greatly blessed by the Lord have. We read in the Scripture that if Sodom and Gomorrah had seen the mighty works that had been done in Capernaum, they would have lasted until the time that Jesus came to Palestine. *“But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for thee (that is, Capernaum).”* Capernaum that had been exalted unto heaven, will be brought down to hell.

There is a serious danger in abusing the blessings of the Lord. Samson had received a supernatural strength and he abused it. Read chapter 16 of Judges and it can be seen how he really trifled many times with the gift of God. We marvel at the long patience of the Lord! For a long time, Samson enjoyed and made unadvised display of the gift that he had. However, the time came when the great secret was wrung out of him by the seduction of a foreign woman; he was put to sleep and his hair was cut. His strength departed from him.

*“And she said: The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I [take note of this proud I] will go out as at other times before, and shake myself.”*

But we should read the brief message of God with reverence and godly fear: *“And he [Samson] wist not that the Lord was departed from him.”* And no one understands when the Lord says: Enough!

We have heard persons boasting that wherever they go, the Lord always works, and it is true. We do not know why the Lord works more by means of one than of others, because

we know little of the plans of God. There are hidden ministries from which little is seen on the earth. And let us not forget that the Lord has a plan to reveal, by means of the Church: *"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God"* (Ephesians 3:10). There is a vast message in this sense in verse 10 of the third chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians. But let us return to the present subject.

The Lord blesses you? Then humble yourself, brother. Your responsibility is very great, because much has been given to you and much shall be required. Keep in mind the humility of the blessed Mary, who answered the enthusiastic salutation of Elizabeth by uplifting the Lord, and adding, *"He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden."* It's like saying that for such a great plan, it was necessary, by reason of contrast (since God, in order to exalt His plans, uses the extremes), a low person was needed, and therefore she had been selected. Our dear sister Mary is one of the most beautiful types of the Church.

But of all the examples, that of Judas is apt to make us meditate, trembling. Perhaps someone may have thought that Judas had a terrible visage; perhaps it was quite the opposite. For three years none of his companions suspected him. And even in that memorable supper, the disciples asked, each one, in turn, if he himself could be the betrayer. *"Is it I, Lord?"* so much so that when one is under the eyes of Jesus, and dining with Him, one has neither time nor desire to ask if the betrayer could be another, but each one trembles for himself, because we do not know our own heart if the Lord does not reveal us to ourselves.

Only Judas was not able to say "Lord," but he called Him "Master." One can say "Master," and betray but now, in the

light of the Holy Spirit we know that no one can say "Lord" if not by the Holy Spirit. Lord means absolute owner. The Lordship of Jesus must extend itself to the least of our thoughts and words.

The occasion of that revelation and question was the Last Supper, followed by the communion. May the Lord give us grace to investigate in silence, under the eyes of Jesus, each one himself. *Who then is the betrayer?* The time has come to discover him. Only the Lord can reveal him, because none of us would dare to do so. Jesus said: "*He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it.*"

At the table, Judas was one of the closest ones to the Lord, and he was dipping in the same plate. The treasurer of the little company of pilgrims was eating in the same plate as the KING. One should not think that all were dipping in the same plate, otherwise the distinction would not be clear. What an honor for Judas. Even his name was illustrious. Judah means "praise." And the lawgiver, the Christ, had to come from the tribe of Judah.

If we had seen that group without hearing anything, according to man we would have first seen the place of Judas at the table and his dipping in the same plate as Jesus, and later, receiving a sop from that Hand, we would have judged that he was the most respectable and faithful person of the company. But now we know that we must not judge according to appearances. One day many hidden things shall be brought to light. The Lord, at times, caresses more the souls that are in danger of deviating. He loves everyone, but he extends more care where the need is greatest.

And if one of us had been present in the house of Simon the Pharisee without hearing the conversation between Jesus and Simon, we would have seen the silent scene as it was

happening at those blessed feet: the woman who had tears and no words, and was drying the feet of the Lord with the hairs of her head, and was perfuming them with a fragrant ointment which was the best she was able to provide, and we would have noted that the conversation was between two, face to face, Jesus and Simon, while not a word and not even a glance was turned by the Lord toward that woman, what would we have said, what would we have thought?

May the Lord illumine us, and make us understand that in the measure that we draw close to Him, and are consecrated to Him, tangible blessings diminish and we are as closed in a walk of pure faith, because of which it will often happen that we say, as is written in Isaiah 45:15: "*Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O god of Israel.*" Oh! That He should make us understand, and not measure our communion with Him by that which is visible.

Returning to Judas, we see that on that occasion, he was the target of special attention. Be careful of the caresses of the Lord. They have a meaning. When the Lord blesses more it is not because we are better than others, but perhaps because we are needier than others.

Chapter 28 of Ezekiel is one of the pictures where Satan is described. He was a Cherubim and a Cherubim protector. This was a high position among the Cherubims. From that which can be understood from the hints about heavenly beings, Cherubims must be among the most elevated creatures. The angel placed at the gate of the garden of Eden was a Cherubim. There were Cherubims on the ark and in the tabernacle. Satan was full of gifts, but gifts must be kept safe in great humility; otherwise, in spite of the gifts, there will be a ruin. He was charmed by the very gifts, and in his pride, he placed himself above others and he fell. Oh! May

God spread over His people who are baptized with the Holy Spirit a cloud of true humility, because there is need of it.

The Lord has not called us because we are better than others, but because thus it pleased Him, because it His plan to bless others by means of us. The Jewish people forgot that the Lord wanted to make them a channel for spreading blessings to other people by means of them. This is the plan of God for the Church: to bless others by means of us. If we do not understand this, even we will fall because of pride, as others before us have fallen. There are two things to be noted among the many: One is to understand what is meant by the expression that one who is spiritual judges all things, and the other is to not say, as a habit, when we speak of people that are not with us: "the infidels, the sinners." Let us explain ourselves:

It is true that one who is spiritual judges all things, but this should be understood without offending the other part of the word that prohibits man from judging, because God alone is the judge. It is not man who must judge, but God who judges, and He serves Himself of us, when the Holy Spirit (and only then) keeps us under control.

It is true that all men are sinners until they have received grace, but only the Holy Spirit can call them such. And we, in order to call them such, must be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who uses our mouth. Let's remember that the Pharisees (separated, saints) had the habit of calling others sinners, and they fell.

When the disciples returned full of joy, as we read in the tenth chapter of St. Luke, reporting to the Lord that "even the devils were subject to them in the Name of Jesus," the Lord calmed them, calling them back to sobriety so that they would not become proud by the gifts. And on that occasion

we find one of the few hints about the ancient Cherubim protector. "*I—exclaimed Jesus—beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.*" And further down: "*Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven,*" One should rejoice, not for the gifts, but in the Lord, and keep in mind that we are saved by Grace, and nothing is of more value in keeping us down as knowing the grace of God that shines on our miseries.

"The one who is dipping with me in the dish." The betrayer was the closest one. It was a double honor to dip in the same plate and to receive a special sop. At this point one of those problems of the word of God presents itself that require a special grace to be understood. Some say that Judas was destined for that; he had already been called a devil. Reverence for the Word requires that we respect the apparent extremes of predestination, on the one hand, and of individual responsibility on the other. This is not the time to discuss this. For us it is clear that Judas was responsible, and when the Lord said that one was a devil, He spoke prophetically; that is, following the line in which the spirit of Judas had put itself, and that only the Lord could know, he, Judas, would become a devil. The word of God is interpreted by God Himself, and in a way that is not understood according to the letter. To the church of Sardis He says that it is dead, but still it must strengthen the things that remain that are about to die. Remaining in that condition, death would come. And Judas, remaining in those conditions that the Lord knew, would end by justifying the title of devil.

In reality it is said that the devil entered into Judas only after the sop. Then there was no longer room for any message. Everything was finished. "*That thou doest, do quickly.*" Finish the betrayal. Judas went out. It was night. The sop was given in love. Yes, brother, leave the unreasonable interpretations and know that God is Love. Yes, the sop was

given in Love. It was the last attempt of ardent love toward the unfortunate one; it was a step that should have broken the ice of ingratitude and of hatred and cause Judas to fall penitent at the feet of Jesus. An extreme act brings extreme results. There is either a true drawing closer to the Lord, or a more fatal estrangement. By Him, that is, by Jesus, one rises on High, and by Him one descends into the abyss. The two ways start from the same center that is the love of God. Accepted love brings one on High; repulsed or neglected love leads to the abyss. In the rays of that love the heart is either liquefied or it becomes hardened.

May the Lord help us to understand His glorious plan, and not to abuse the blessings, and not to take them as a guarantee that we are always in order. At times, the gifts may remain for a long time, after the Lord has already been offended. On the downward slope of proud assurance, many times the voice of Mercy wants to reach us, and in many ways call us to sobriety and humility. And it is time to pay attention to the warning of love, so that we do not continue the course that leads to the abyss, and before we reach that limit unknown to us, beyond which there is no more hope of mending one's ways.

We want to eat at the table of the Lord and receive the sop from that hand, but likewise let us ask grace that together with the sop of heavenly food, our soul becomes penetrated with an ardent love and fear toward Him, and of mercy toward all His creatures. Let us ask forgiveness for every past error. And let us ask Him to help us to surrender always more to Him, and to feel the weight of so many blessings that we have received without our merit.

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NO MIRACLES, BUT

(John 10:41)

The person of whom many were speaking was John the Baptist. The people were saying: "*John did no miracle (literally "sign") but all things that John spake of this man (of Jesus) were true.*"

The Lord described him: "*For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist*" (Luke 7:28). These are the two definitions of the person of the Precursor: the first, of the earth, and the second, of Heaven. The people affirmed that John did not work miracles, but said the truth about Jesus and Jesus said that no one was greater than John the Baptist.

It is true that the Lord did not mention Priests and Kings, but the Prophet was the most important person in the Old Testament. Besides those of whom we have the writings, it is clear that Abram, Moses and others were prophets. Therefore, we deduce from the words of Jesus that Abram, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elisha, and even David, were not greater than John, although greatly used by God.

Moses saw the waters of the sea part and water springing forth from the rock and the people fed miraculously in the desert; Elijah, on Carmel, prayed that fire should come down from Heaven and burn the sacrifice, and it happened; Elisha was used in various miracles, and like Elijah, saw a dead child return to life. David, the man whose heart was toward God, was the recipient of the highest favors of Heaven, among which was hearing that the Lord would build a House for him, and would leave at the head of it One who would have a Kingdom in eternity. In comparison with them and many others there is John the Baptist, the man of the desert,

who did no miracle. Speaking of him, the Lord assures that no one of the Old dispensation was greater than he.

Therefore what did he do to raise him so high? The people give us the answer: He did nothing spectacular, no sign, but he spoke of Jesus. However even the others, be it even as a figure, occupied themselves about the One who was to come. And again we have to seek on what basis the Lord pronounced that verdict, so absolute, that among those born of women, no one was greater than John.

The answer that he, John, had a special destiny, says the truth, but does not explain everything. The destiny there was, because John was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. That which puts him before us in a holy light is the fact that all the time he spent in this life, he lived for and spoke of only One.

When they asked him if he were the Christ, he said "No," and did not even reveal his own name. Constrained to say something, he informed that he was only the voice of the One who was crying in the desert. Of his words only a few have been handed down to us. It is reasonable to conclude that he did not speak much. The little that has been kept for us reveals an intense character, possessed by a single ideal, and occupied only about that One. It was a concentrated force that moved, without being distracted by anything else, in only one direction. He had no family, no house, no preoccupation of clothing or food, because he dressed and fed himself in such a simple way as to have no need to be preoccupied. Even when in prison, not freed and not even comforted by a visit, not even by a word, when a distressing doubt travailed him, he turned for light to One alone. We could add much more. There was no miracle (sign), but he was faithful and spoke the truth about Jesus. And we must

affirm that to live constantly occupying oneself of ONE alone, that is, of Jesus, is the greatest miracle under Heaven.

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Times of contrast and disturbance seem to be the worst; but one day we will know that they have been the times in which the soul has advanced more toward heaven.

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### LOVE TO BE HIDDEN

Someone recommended thus: love to be hidden. St. Paul, in the third chapter to the Thessalonians, records that the life of the saints is hidden with Christ in God. Therefore it is necessary to guard ourselves against every seduction of vanity, and among the most dangerous forms, there is the religious one of wanting to make known our work that we do for the Lord.

Love to be hidden!

Pay attention, attentive to the delicate warnings of the Holy Spirit that can be heard in silence, far from the noise of adulation of groups. If we pay good attention, we will form the habit of hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. But it is necessary to resolutely close our ears to outside voices and all the voices that encourage pride and passions. Blessed solitude that brings us close to God.

\* \* \*

THY WILL BE DONE

For the things that are dear to our humanity, and it seems that God has revealed to us that He wants to give them to us for a glorious aim, it is well to investigate at length the will of God, avoiding the TWO EXTREMES; that is, either of refusing (or doubting, as did Zacharias), or to accept quickly. It seems that the best way may be to speak to the Lord more or less like this: "Oh Lord, this thing that seems to have been revealed to me or promised, I desire it; therefore, I fear to accept from Thee that which it seems to me that I have received as Thy revelation. Deliver me oh Lord, either from tempting Thee by doubting, or, who knows, from caressing thoughts that may be my thoughts. Therefore I confess to Thee and declare that I accept and desire the fulfillment of that which you have made me feel. And, in your time and in your providence, fulfill, oh Lord, that which you have made me hope.

But if, oh Lord, there is (in all or in part) something that may not be of Thee, I pray, oh Lord, to deliver me of it, even in my mind. Give me the grace to renounce that which could be mine, and give me, oh Lord, only that which is of Thee. If then it is Thou thyself who has created in me those desires and propensities for some purpose, then give me the grace to know how to use them for the fulfillment of Thy plan. Oh Lord, I report everything to Thee, to take from Thy hand only that which is pleasing to Thee Thyself in order to maintain and regulate me. And, however it may be, adapt me to your plan in the spirit, in the soul, and in the body, in my regard, making me dead to that which is not of Thee. And also, allow only those thoughts that are according to Thy plan remain. And I ask this for the love of the Blood of Thy Son JESUS CHRIST.

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PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD

(Amos 4:12; Malachi 3:6; Psalm 90)

At a certain hour of the day, the servant of the king of Macedonia would go near to him and say: "Philip, remember that you must die."

We do not like to speak of dying, if we have the life of Jesus Christ, because death for us is not death. Those who are in Christ have eternal life, now, and therefore we prefer to keep two warnings in mind: one in Malachi: "*For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*" And the other in Amos: "*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*"

The last days of the year are a time for reflection. In the midst of so much that changes, only God does not change. And as the Lord remains, one who does the will of the Lord remains. At the time the prophets were writing there were kings and great kingdoms, but they have passed on; and there were also men who were not considered much, like the servants of the Lord, and they have remained, because they received the seed of eternal life in their heart, and they decided to do God's will and were content to be unknown to the world.

We have not been consumed, but around us many things and many persons have been consumed. In this past year, we have often grieved the heart of our Heavenly Father; and today, if we are where we are, we owe it to Him Who does not change toward us, like we, many times, have changed toward Him. He has not consumed us and we are here, and with the song of Moses we can look back at the tombs in the desert. This should fill our hearts with gratitude, and because

of this, be more steadfast in the future. It is time, in view of so much mercy and love, to collect our thoughts once and for all and make a serious determination to live according to the exhortation: *Prepare to meet thy God.*

Prepare yourself! It supposes liberation from impediments in order to be quicker. Every hour is a preparation. The day of today prepares for that of tomorrow. But do we know Him Whom we have to meet? The text supposes that we already know Him, because it says: *Thy God.* A preparation is necessary. It's not a question of judgment, because thanks to the blessed Name of Jesus, being in Him, we will not go to judgment, but it's a question of an encounter. That of the criminal is not preparation; preparation suggests communion. We are meeting our friend; we are led before the judge. Children encounter their parents; subjects ask for an audience with the king; one sees the dependent worker; one meets a friend. Prepare yourself for the encounter; otherwise, if you are not prepared, the court of judgment is prepared for you.

Nothing important is done without preparation. Our mind, mouth, and heart are prepared by confession and constant discipline; it all serves to prepare us. Do you have an aim in your life? If not, write now: *Prepare to meet Thy God.*

Go now, to Christ, surrender entirely to Him, and He will make the preparation for you. You have only to be His. Have you met *Christ* at the foot of the cross, in the garden of the resurrection? Have you followed Him on the Mount of Olives, and after, have you put yourself at the disposition of the Holy Spirit? This is what is meant by accepting *Christ* and not vaguely affirming: "I believe in Christ," when many times the "believing" goes no deeper than our lips. Hurry therefore, now, to put yourself in communion with Him, or to strengthen the communion that already exists. If there is a

fault, it's on your side; He is always ready to do more. With Him in your heart and in your life, you will prepare yourself for the great encounter.

The venerated D. L. Moody was prepared. In one of his last messages he said: "Some day you will read in the newspapers that D. L. Moody is dead. Don't believe it. Then I will be more alive than now; I shall have gone higher, that's all."

And Spurgeon sent this message to his congregation shortly before he died: "One last year! There will be one last year for each one of us. Are we ready? How many old people? To someone the command is: this year. Mortal, think about it. Perhaps only now the cross will appear to you as a beam of light. Jesus will come, and then He will be Judge more than Savior for you. The time is limited. Believe in Him today. These are the exhortations of one who, now weak, falls again on his bed."

The old man Simeon was ready because he had seen Jesus, and had prepared himself to meet Him for many years. "*Ready*," not to mention others, was the word of acknowledgement of St. Paul.

And "*Ready*" may our word of acknowledgment be in this new year. May the Lord help us to count our days, and to be wise. Let us not live in illusions! It does not pay to think of a distant eternity, if we do not have eternal life now; it doesn't pay to sing the songs of the longed for return of the Lord, if we are not ready to meet Him now.

Prepare yourself to meet the Lord your God. And, in order that you may better prepare yourself, I will transcribe for you a few words printed on an elegant poster given to me these

days by a brother in Christ. They are words that are good for me and for you. Here they are:

*“Rules for today: Do not do anything that you would not want to be doing when Jesus comes! Do not go to any place where you would not want to be found when Jesus comes; do not say anything that you would not want to be saying when Jesus comes!”* And we can add: *Do not think anything you would not want to be thinking when Jesus comes.* And also: *“Work for Him how you would want to be found working when Jesus comes.”*

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### WE WOULD SEE JESUS

(John 12:20-23)

We have seen much in life, but seeing Jesus is the highest of the visions.

Those who have seen Jesus have been transformed. Abram saw God and emigrated toward an unknown country; Jacob saw God and was changed into Israel; Moses saw the burning bush and guided the people out of Egypt.

Those who have seen Jesus have not been able to remain indifferent. He has always been the center of interest. Having passed from this life, He is still visible, not physically, until His return, but in the spirit, and those who see Him feel a joy beyond any expression. But how can we know Jesus?

By His face? Certainly, even by His face. By His pierced hands? Certainly. But the precise indication is given in the

last book of the scripture (Revelation 19:13): "*And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.*" We will find Him on the way of sacrifice and of the renouncement of ourselves.

The vision of Jesus becomes always brighter. John had seen Jesus in the flesh, and in the last supper he placed his head on His bosom; the same John, an old man, on the Isle of Patmos, saw Jesus again in glory and fell at His feet as dead, overcome by His splendor and majesty. But Jesus put His right hand on his head and said to him: "*Fear not; I am the first and the last.*"

The vision of Jesus reveals us to ourselves, and uplifts us to look above. In order to look well in one direction we must take our gaze off something else and concentrate on the vision. We must see with interest, see in order to know, and see after having sought.

Seeking in order to see, in order to know. We have an example of this in St. John 12:20 ff.: "*And there were certain Greeks among them, that came up to worship at the feast.*"

There were quite a lot of Greeks, but the Gospel speaks here of a special group. They were men unknown to us, but have been consigned by the Gospel to the memory of centuries. Precisely where they came from, we do not know, but in all probability, Gentiles by birth, they had become proselytes of the Judaic faith, because they had gone up to Jerusalem in order to worship. Evidently they had not been satisfied by the Passover. A Person had attracted their interest, and everything else took second place.

In order to see Jesus, the group drew near to Philip. The Scripture does not say they went, but they approached him

and it makes us think of the reverence of their action. They had spoken among themselves and decided to go forward in order to obtain a special audience from the Lord, and they prayed Philip. In the word translated "prayed," there is a note of supplication with insistence. They prayed Philip saying to him: "*We would see Jesus.*" The New American Standard Bible says instead, "*we wish to see Jesus.*" The words translated "wish to" makes us imagine like a plan, a decision. They had decided and wanted to see Jesus. To see, to discern to admire up close, to know; not an ordinary seeing, since, for that, they would not have needed to inconvenience, because Jesus had not hidden Himself.

The request came from resolute souls, and was made with seriousness and respect. This can be seen by the reaction of the disciple whom they addressed: "*Philip came and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus.*" (NASB). Between the two disciples there had to be an affinity of sympathy. Philip was somewhat of an investigator; gentle of soul, he had gained the trust of the petitioners, but he did not feel that he should bring the message to the Lord by himself. In two, they established like a small committee, and they presented themselves to Jesus.

From the demeanor of the Greeks, timid, and at the same time resolute and interested; from that of Philip, who, although a disciple for a long time, did not feel to present himself alone to bring the request; from the whole of the scene one can vaguely imagine what impression Jesus made, and what light irradiated from His countenance to those who honestly drew near to Him. Behind His aspect there was the light of immortality; behind His words there was the voice that had, since eternity, thundered the decrees of the Universe. It was a veiled splendor, and yet how fascinating! And we also are in the splendor of His reflected light. But in

what beam of light and of Majesty we will see Him in the Kingdom of God, it is not possible to adequately imagine.

The request was brought to Jesus. But more than the interest of a few men, He saw that which would happen one day, when all the nations would call upon His Name and the people would walk in His Light.

That question came to Him at the time of a bitter battle. The enemies were plotting His death with a soul full of hatred. The spontaneous, respectful, interested coming of those Greeks, in that critical moment, was like a glass of cool water to the tired pilgrim. From that coming He took the occasion for a new discourse and spoke with the solemnity of one who is conscious that He is saying important things that go beyond the present time: *"The hour is come that the son of Man should be glorified."* Those words so dear to Him: *"Son of Man,"* resounded, then more than ever, of the meaning of universal sympathy.

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."* He spoke of death as the beginning of life and of glory: He was, in that moment, the solitary corn of wheat that had to die and bear fruit.

*"He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor."* And the shadow of what awaited Him projected on Him; and He continued: *"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy Name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."* And it was on that occasion

that, together with other words of great meaning, that He pronounced these that are so memorable: "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" And the Gospel adds in explanation: "*This he said, signifying what death He should die*" (vv. 32, 33).

The Greeks wanted to see Jesus and Jesus spoke of death. The vision of Jesus begins with death. The glory should not make us forget his wounds. In glory He Himself does not want to forget them. "*A vesture dipped in blood*" is the indication we have of Him in the last pages of the Scripture.

We begin to see Jesus from Calvary if we want to see Him also in glory. And not only this, but such a vision makes a Calvary even for us. No one can see God and live. And let it be so, exclaimed a saint: Let me see Him and die. If we see Jesus, we die to ourselves in order to live for Him.

Have you seen Jesus? Have you sought Him with interest? One day everyone will have to see Him; but today it is given to us to have the vision of the Savior, because we must see Him before meeting the King surrounded by glory.

We can see Him in this life. The physical vision as the disciples had is not permitted, but the spiritual vision is conceded.

Seeing and knowing are intermixed in the spiritual communion with Him. He has not left us to ourselves, and is around us in the person of the Comforter and of the Spirit of truth. Making Jesus always more visible and real is in fact the work of the Holy Spirit.

*The true Church is known by the Holy Spirit in the same way as Christ is known. The eagles of the Lord can see far away, have a keen sense of smell and fly to the spiritual food, and gather where the crucified Christ is uplifted.*

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It is necessary to fix our eyes on the Son of God, if we want, in the days in which we are living, to not be deceived by many fallacious religious appearances.

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### READING THE SCRIPTURES

*Two questions:*

WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE LAW?  
HOW READEST THOU? (Luke 10:26)

That is, what is literally written? And: How do you understand and harmonize that which is written? An example will help us to understand.

In Revelation 3:1 & 2, it is said to the Angel of the Church of Sardis that he has a name that he is living, and yet he is dead and then he is exhorted to be vigilant, and strengthen the things that remain that are about to die. This is what is written. How should it be understood? In fact, if he is dead; does it pay to send him a letter? How do you read it? It is understood thus: by continuing in the condition in which he found himself he would die; but there was still a little bit of life, and he could repent; therefore the message. Any teacher

whatsoever of the earth can teach us and indicate to us "what is written." But only the Holy Spirit is able to teach *how to read* that which is written.

The words: "*How readest thou?*" are, in the text: *pos anaginoskeis*, which mean: How, or in what manner, know anew, or know well.

Therefore the second question is: How does one know anew, or know well that which he has read?

The humble answer of the Ethiopian treasurer is needed: "*How can I, except some man should guide me?*" (Acts 8:31). And Philip, guided by the Holy Spirit, taught him how to read and to understand the passage that he had under his eyes. It can be noted, in fact, that the words of Acts 8:33 are not found literally in chapter 53 of Isaiah, or elsewhere, but there certainly is the sense of the whole of the scripture.

The enemies of Jesus were punctilious for the first part: how it is written; but they did not care about the second part: how to read and to understand that which is written.

A people that is baptized with the Holy Spirit must pay attention to both questions. It is necessary to know the written word and it should be cited correctly. But one must invoke the continual assistance of the Spirit of Truth in order to be guided to know as a whole, and in the particulars, the Truth itself.

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EVEN THE POOR

(1<sup>st</sup> Kings 17:3, 6, 16; 18:3, 4; Mark 6:38, 39)

Yes, even the poor must do their part, because it is an error to expect everything from the rich.

Some Christian friends had decided to give a gift to someone who was highly esteemed and rich. When one of them presented himself to do his part (and he was poor), the one who was collecting the offering said, smiling, that he had already collected more than was necessary. But the other, showing him a fifty-cent coin, answered: "Therefore I cannot have the honor of contributing, as a sign of love, these few cents?" They were accepted.

One time a poor, sick brother offered to another a gift that was being refused; but that one, between tears, said: "Therefore I do not have the privilege of giving a glass of water?" It goes without saying that the gift was accepted with deep-felt gratitude. Another poor brother who had a large family and was without work at the time offered a gift, and the person to whom it was offered, knowing the conditions, wanted to refuse it; but the other, with firmness, said: "Exhort me not to do evil, but don't impede me from doing good."

Sometimes it costs to do good. To the widow who offered the two mites it cost everything that she had available in the house; yet the Lord did not stop her, rather He approved it, and pointed her out as an example. May God be blessed for such contributions, and may He also be blessed for the abundant contributions of the rich, because there are rich ones who offer much, and also with all their heart. Many are like the administrators of God. He made the rich and the poor. Both are necessary, until the present order of things

ends. If it were not so, there would be no examples of self-denial. But there is a danger for many that are poor, and it is to expect that expenses should be met by those who are in better economic circumstances. And if this should happen, the poor would have no part at all in the works of charity. And if many must wait to become rich before doing good, it may be that they will never do anything. Therefore let us imitate those dear souls that we have mentioned, and above all the widow who gave the two mites.

What you have bought to bring to me costs much, said a certain one to a person who had brought him a gift; it costs and you are not able to spend so much. So much the better, answered the other; when it's for others it's good that it costs. And there comes to our mind the woman who bought the fragrant oil of great price.

That which costs is worth something. God gave everything in order to save us.

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The word of the Lord was addressed to Elijah, saying to him: *"Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan, and it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."*

Ravens? Precisely the birds that are such impure, voracious thieves? But Elijah did not laugh and he did not doubt. He left, arrived, and hid himself by the brook. *"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook."* What a picture: ravens carrying in their talons fresh meat without touching it! That which is impossible to man, God does it;

His resources are infinite; He uses for His purpose means that to us seem to be unsuited.

Then the brook dried up, and it is not necessary to say who made it dry up. And then the word of the Lord was addressed to Elijah, saying: *“Arise, get thee up to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”* Elijah went. The incident is well known; the request for water in that time of drought, the readiness of the widow, and then the request for a cake and the answer of the widow that she had only a handful of flour and a little oil, and that she would prepare for the last time something for her and her son, and would eat and then (humanly speaking they could not expect help from anyone), they would be waiting for death. But the prophet said to her: *“Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruise of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.”* The woman did not doubt, and served the prophet first (*God first*). And she, and he, and her house ate for one whole year.

God also has the rich to make Himself be served. We read in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 18, that Obadiah, the governor of the house of the king Ahab, feared the Lord greatly. And when Jezebel was destroying the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took one hundred prophets and hid them, fifty in one cave, and fifty in another, and fed them with bread and water.

In this case there was no miraculous multiplication of food, but a considerable expense was involved and it was a great risk for the servant of Ahab. The Lord uses the rich and the poor, because the One who works in both of them is He Himself. In the case of Elijah, at the brook, there was no

hand of man; in the other two cases, He served Himself of human creatures, a poor widow, and a rich man.

The Lord not only does not refuse, but encourages the cooperation of the poor. This is clearly shown in the case of the multiplication of the bread and of the fishes. Let us read in Mark 6:38: "*He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? Go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes... Then He took the five loaves and the two fishes.*" In John 6:9 we read that that small supply had been given to a child. Jesus did not disdain that small amount; rather, He wanted it, He blessed it, and multiplied it. Thousands of persons were satisfied. The author of such a miracle did not despise the leftover pieces and commanded that they should be gathered. The disciples, in view of such abundance, were not thinking of that economy. At times the rich are more ready to economize than the poor.

The disciples each had a basket of providence. Abundance for everyone. Many times we have regretted having trusted in men, and have all lost of the goods of this world, who for one reason, who for another, but no one has ever regretted being generous with the Lord. We have ultimately given Him of His own. Whatever good we do to men is as if done to the Lord.

Is there perhaps among the readers someone who is truly poor? Let him ask himself if there is nothing he can do for the cause of the Lord; let him not be looking at the rich, but let him imitate the widow who was ready to give her two mites and gave more than everyone.

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### BEATEN ON EVERY SIDE

The true peacemaker, the man who wants to examine things from various points of view, is often misunderstood; and at times he is beaten by those to whom he wants to bring harmony!

One insists on FAITH (oh how necessary it is). Others insist on GRACE (and it is essential). WORKS, another will shout, and they are needed, but he ignores that they must be preceded by GRACE and FAITH, and that they must be the works that the Lord Himself puts before us (read Ephesians 2:8-10).

Forgive me, brothers; the Cause of the Lord is greater than our resentments. Listen, and then you may even beat me. But listen, not to me, but to Him, if it is He who makes me write. And if for you it is not He, reprimand me freely.

Look, some well-intentioned brother says to me: Look, two or three or more Spirits are preaching. Instead, the Holy Spirit is One. Yes, yes, it is ONE. But are there truly more Spirits preaching? Are you sure that the words that are said are not like one way of explaining, and that they must be interpreted better? And, let us admit it, must they not be explained better?

And another continues: that one, those certain ones deny the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But is that true? Perhaps insisting on receiving the Holy Spirit (and we should insist) destroys the great truth that man is forgiven as soon as he cries to the Lord; and that if forgiven he is not condemned; and if he truly has begun to taste the Grace of God, he will not stop seeking, because one good leads to waiting for another? And the Holy Spirit? Certainly, without the Holy Spirit that certain one would not have felt the prick of penitence. But

we know that one must distinguish between the Work of the Holy Spirit and the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Oh my brother, those (for the most part) that mention more Spirits mean to say more works of the Holy Spirit, pointing us to JESUS CHRIST.

Oh my brother, this other one of your brothers who insists on the Baptism with the Holy Spirit does not want to deny the sacrifice of the Cross. No, No.

You are holy, better than I. If each one of you, being unsatisfied with me, because I do not want to copy one hundred per cent neither one nor the other, but I esteem both of you, and if you would like, each one on his own account, to beat me, you may do so.

But know that God has some men, less robust, less holy, less faithful than you, but in the School of the One who was beaten by everyone, are learning that sense of mercy and of righteousness that invites to interpret and to discover, in everyone and in everything, the best possible.

Blessed, holy harmony in the great Heart of CHRIST!

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### FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE

#### With Regard to Languages (1 Corinthians 14)

It is necessary to distinguish between adoration and preaching in languages. The judgment of the Apostle Paul refers to preaching and teaching in languages without

interpretation, but not to the spontaneous explosion, in languages, in prayer and outside of the time of preaching. Chapter 14 of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians should be read with careful consideration and not with the levity of those who do not believe in the Pentecost and use it as a weapon. Scripture that is wrongly interpreted becomes a stone of stumbling. If we are not careful, on the one hand and on the other, there is a danger either of quenching the Holy Spirit, or of falling into fanaticism. Must the mind always understand? The same Apostle Paul tells us something with regard to this in Romans 8:26: "*Likewise the spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*" It is necessary that there be measure and sobriety on all points, therefore, let us ask the Lord for the right balance.

Dear brother in Christ,

Grace and peace be multiplied to all who are in Christ. I thank you for writing to me. If you receive the periodical *Il Regno di Dio (The Kingdom of God)* you may have noted that in the September issue there is a "Comunicato" (Bulletin).

My dear ones, our situation is very delicate. In order to write serenely and to uplift Jesus Christ, it is necessary that we do not become part of any group, and that we do not judge anyone. There are in America, in Italy and elsewhere various groups that are trying, each one of them, to do the best possible, according to the light that they have. It is certain that in every group there are sincere people. The Brother... is a good man; there are good men also among those who do not work with him. God, in His great Mercy and Patience, is indulgent with everyone, and knows how to bring glory to His Name by means of everyone. Repeating words: "Organizations"—"No organizations," does not help us.

Little by little, the Lord enlightens those who are disposed to know. Therefore, let each one of us work according to the light that we have, and let us bless everyone.

Oh great *love of Christ!* (Ephesians 3:14, 21)

Dear ones, we who compile the periodical must not take part in the conflicts of individuals, of assemblies, of groups. We want to serve everyone, in the Love of God.

Best regards. Your servant and brother in Him.

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### HOPE THOU IN GOD

(Psalm 42:11)

The Psalmist exclaims: "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me?*" After the question caused by the difficult conditions in which he finds himself, he has decided to do nothing; to cease all activity: and he exhorts himself thus: "*Hope thou in God.*"

Waiting is one of the secrets of the victory. One who believes does not make haste. Hope, not in a man, because help comes only from Above. Therefore: "*Hope thou in God.*"

From the memory of past benefits, the Psalmist takes heart to hope for the future: "*For I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*" God has put before us a country of great promises that are ours in the measure that we extend our hand to take them. Christian, DARE to

wait and to take great things from God, because you have a great God.

*“Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.”*

\* \* \*

### GOD WILL PROVIDE

(Genesis 22:7, 8, 14)

While father and son were climbing the mountain of sacrifice, Isaac with the wood on his back, said: *“Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”* And Abraham, who had the knife and the fire in his hand, answered: *“My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.”*

It was the third day of agony for the heart of that father. Two statements, both of them precise, had been made; one: *“In Isaac shall thy seed be called;”* the other, heard recently: *“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”* Every possible objection had been anticipated and removed in the command: ONLY, WHOM THOU LOVEST, ISAAC. As if to say: I know everything, and I have not forgotten the promises of the past. The commands of the Lord should be obeyed and not discussed. Abraham obeyed and undertook that journey of three days, in which he had to bury himself and his beloved son many times in the spirit. But it was in the long journey that he had to repeat to himself, in an intimate soliloquy: *“The Lord will provide.”* He did not know how God would harmonize the two

speeches; he believed the first and the second. "*The Lord will provide*, and among the possibilities that were coming to his mind, this was the most insistent, and he stopped on it. Isaac had to be sacrificed, but the Lord would resurrect him from the dead. This is how he succeeded in seeing the Providence of God, and he kept repeating to himself "*God will provide*" when the tender question of his son arrived to his heart wounded by sorrow and by holy obedience. The older martyr answered the young martyr that God would provide Himself a lamb. This is the first time that the Lamb was mentioned in the Scripture

And the Lord provided at the extreme moment, when Abraham had already extended his hand and taken the knife to cut his son's throat. Not a moment sooner; the agony had to be complete, but not even a moment after. The Lord arrived in time. A ram caught in a thicket by its horns had been provided as a substitute for the victim, and Abraham saw it behind him.

Isaac had been offered and accepted, but spared. "*Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided"* (Genesis 22:14 NASB, also Jehovah-jireh). The tough circumstance had revealed another one of the many names of the Lord—from trial to trial, but likewise from revelation to revelation.

Oh! that even we, when we are in difficult circumstances from which we cannot see the way out, and for which it is impossible to foresee what will happen, may be able to say with confidence: "The Lord will provide." Things happen unexpectedly, and the waters of our existence are quickly agitated by the winds, but He is tranquil in the boat. Nothing can catch Him unexpectedly or surprise Him. Everything is foreseen and provided for, as long as we know how to trust

in Him. Abraham did not change anything of the program, and continued in that which was before him; thus we cannot find our way out of certain complex conditions on our own, but we can and we must say and repeat continually: *The Lord will provide*. And, meanwhile, with holy vigilance we must keep our eyes open and attentive, in order to see quickly something that He shall have caught in the thickets nearby, and by means of which He has provided help.

Divine Providence, may you continually be blessed. Let us fall in love with His Providence, and we will cease from our designs of freeing ourselves on our own, because while we try to adjust one thing, we spoil another without fixing anything. The agony will be long, but help will come. It will not be in the way that we would anticipate, but much better than we could have anticipated, as it was for the patriarch who was prepared to see his son expire, waiting for the resurrection, and he was completely spared. The more complex the problems, and the more impossible the solution is for us, the greater will be the manifestation of His Providence.

In the Mount of the Lord the Church is invited to learn the lesson. On that Mount one loves only one will: His. The souls surrendered to His will do not delay to say and to repeat that it will be provided; they will go from trial to trial, but likewise from one to another expression of His Providence.

\* \* \*

CHRIST LIVETH IN ME

*"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).*

Someone said: "I see Him in such a way as to permit saying, at times: I no longer believe, but I see, I feel that which faith teaches. Thus I want to live and to die with Him." But Paul went further. Let us ask him: "Paul, do you believe in Jesus Christ?"

"Believe! answers Paul—He lives in me. Can I say that I believe in the blood that is running in my veins? Believing, for me, is not enough now; the time of believing is past; *now I live*. Do you believe that you are living? You certainly would not ask yourselves a similar question. I no longer believe; it is not on the outside, but I live; but it is not I who live, it is *Christ* who lives in me."

And we are contemplating Paul, trying to read on his face, to guess from his words that which he wants to say. And he adds, almost speaking to himself: "I am not Christ, but in Christ who is mine, I am; I sleep, and my Christ is with me; I walk, I think, I speak, and He is so much in me, that I cannot separate myself from Him."

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It has seemed to me that the Apostle, in writing, at a certain point allowed himself to be dominated by the overwhelming force of Christ in him, and not being able to say it better, wrote that which he wrote, but if the words were said in a moment of intense emotion, they do not fail to reveal a long discipline of contemplation and thought. In fact, it is only the constant thought that is converted into sure words: Paul had

thought about Christ for a long time, and he had, let's say it this way, absorbed Him day after day.

Thought is the guardian light of the soul. It burns with varying strength; it illumines intensely, it lowers itself to the point of giving a weak light, but it does not go out, because one word is enough to restore it to feverish action. Christ dominated Paul's thinking.

And Christ dominated also his affections. A great ideal dominated the life of Paul: *Jesus Christ*. Paul had also contemplated the character and the passion of Christ, and little by little, his heart had continued emptying itself of himself and filling up of Him. It happened just like a phenomenon observed by someone: "I saw two little trees growing near each other, and one day, by the action of the wind, they became entangled. Little by little, they began to grow together, and the sap ran in one and the other, until they became united and became one. Finally the stronger one began to absorb the weaker one; it grew and the other became weak; finally, it dried up. There were two trunks at the base and only one on top."

Thus it was of Paul with Christ.

The long, insistent ideals culminate by being imprinted from the soul onto the countenance. The face of the Apostle was the same, yet it was not entirely the same; the old features remained but were irradiated by a new light and seemed to contain two persons in one, so closely united that they could not be divided. And it was evident that this power did not result from willpower, but was living and never left him.

In fact, let us follow Paul in his battles and in his stormy life, let us read the words of the text, and we see how much the Christ in Him sustained him. The two poles of the Pauline

theological doctrine are: Christ FOR us; Christ IN us. Christ dead, made sin FOR us is the first part; Christ King, and then identified IN us is the second part.

In the first case, in Christ FOR us, it is necessary to have certain habits and rules; we need exhortations. There is a time in which it is opportune and necessary to say to the Christian: remember your Savior, don't neglect the communion with Him, pray and keep Calvary present; but there is a sanctified life in which there is no longer a need to remember. When Christ flows in one's blood the time of believing, of having fixed times for meditation is past. One's existence immediately undergoes an extraordinary change; then it is our life, plus His life in us.

It is one thing to have the blood of Christ over us, and another to have the heart of Christ in us. Paul was in the second stage: Christ in him.

And not only this, but even his faith was no longer his: "*I live by the faith of the Son of god.*" Living in the faith, or rather in the faith of another, is one of the most extraordinary affirmations, because it is not the faith of Paul, but it is the faith of Christ that Paul attributes to himself. The person of Christ in him has surpassed his faith, and whereas, before, his faith had led him to the Person, now, a seeming exaggeration, but yet it is a truth of the profoundness of the spiritual life. Christ in us becomes greater than the faith that we have in Him. Our faith has moments in which it seems to diminish or change, like all that is ours; but the Person of Christ, no. He in us, with His, makes up for our faith. We absorb from Him, together with other things, even faith, and we live in His love, in His faith toward God and toward men. And besides, all this becomes tenderly personal and intimate. Take note of the lively alternating of pronouns in the few words, "I, Himself, me, in me, for me." It is not the too

general "for us" or "in us," and therefore too vague, but is something direct and personal; in this lies the secret of the career of the Apostle. And still it is not all; the tender exchange Paul in Christ, and Christ in Paul brings another thing with it: "He loved me, and gave himself for me." *Me, for me*, also here. He loved and gave Himself also for others, but here the personal relationship has value. Christ in me, today, because He loved me and gave Himself for me.

Another consideration: "IN me" is much stronger than "I in Him." The "IN me" of the Apostle supposes and includes the "*In Him*." In a certain sense He was in me before I knew Him. But *in me* now He has become action and life. And if it is true that because I am in Him, He has become intimate in me, it is likewise true that His "*in me*," preserves my "*in Him*."

A very beautiful hymn of consecration reads like this: "*And now that I have Him in my heart, I will never leave Him*. It is sweet to sing thus, but the present study brings us beyond that. The hymn supposes our will and effort to hold on to Him, and it is good that we exercise our will to possess Christ. But if I say: "Christ lives in me," it is no longer I who leaves Him, but it is Christ who does not leave us. The difference is not slight. In fact, for how much gratitude I feel and love that I have for Him, and do not want to leave Him, I could, who knows, fear that events could distance me from Him. After all, my strength is that of a man. But when I have said: "Christ in me," I have entrusted myself to Him so entirely that neither events nor dangers can tear me away. It is not my hand that holds His, but it is His life that holds mine. He has thrown a chain around me and within me; He has bound me to Him so that, forasmuch as I may be agitated and tossed about and at times it may seem that I am about to perish, I am bound to Him, and I am sure that I cannot slip

away from Him—because the force with which He holds me is the same with which He rules and governs the worlds.

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### THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU

(Luke 17:21)

*“And when He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not by observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”*

From these words “within you” some draw the conclusion that all who have believed in the Savior (and if it is even true that we have indeed believed) are already in the Kingdom of God. From such a thoughtless affirmation based on a few words, without observing the context, a sort of spiritual paralysis takes place, because most people do not care to pray “Thy Kingdom come,” and do not pay attention to another affirmation that “by means of much suffering one must enter into the Kingdom of God,” and that there is a spiritual height in which, as a consequence of various stations, one truly becomes a candidate to receive the Kingdom (Hebrews 12:28-29).

The Lord Jesus often referred to the Kingdom of God. Among the listeners there was once one that, almost in a mocking tone, said: “*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.*” The Lord answered him with the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:15-24), with which He wanted

to teach that rather than dreaming—or excusing oneself—by the future, the invited ones should appreciate the present opportunities.

Later on it was the Pharisees who interrogated Him regarding the Kingdom of God. As a group, the Pharisees, except for rare exceptions, were hostile to Jesus. If we keep this in mind, and also all that is written in Luke 17:20-37, one will understand that the question came from those who liked to quibble, or if we want to tone down the language, from persons who heard the message of the Lord in a frivolous manner. If we are permitted to read between the lines, here is the question of the Pharisees: “Tell us therefore, you, who speak always of such a Kingdom, when it will come!”

The answer of the Lord, and His following words reveal who those who were asking the question were, and of whom they were truly interested. He said: “*The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.*” An able translator translates the meaning better: “*Not that it can be insistently observed, spied upon.*”

Ah dear ones, without the guidance of the Interpreter (of the Holy Spirit) it is not easy to read the Scripture. And Jesus adds: “*NEITHER SHALL THEY SAY, Lo here! Or, lo there!*” At this point it is necessary to take a long pause, whatever may be the punctuation marks of the translators. The Lord Jesus, after He had given the answer to the frivolous question, continued with an affirmation: “*For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*” The better version is: “among you.” They were in the presence of the King and they did not want to know it. The Kingdom was not in the heart of the Pharisees, otherwise they would not have been obstinate enemies of Jesus, and Jesus would not have continued to talk as He did. And yet, for one who truly wants

to read, even the few words were enough to indicate that the Kingdom of God had to come. "It will not come," Jesus said. That which they were thinking would not come for the spies, but it had already come for those who would open the eyes of their heart and would accept it in the Messenger. We remember the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: "*The hour cometh—and now is* (it had come for her). And "*I that speak unto thee am He.*"

By the words "Within—among you" Jesus was referring to Himself. This is clear from the following: "*The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them.*" After this there is a rapid picture of suffering and corruption followed by severe warnings that provoked the anguished question of the disciples: "*Where?*"—a question that the elect have asked themselves in every age, and were answered by these words: "*Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*"

These words have been interpreted in two opposite ways. That is, that the eagles (some translate "the vultures") would fly to where there is a mass of rotten flesh. That is, evil attracts those who like evil. But there is the other interpretation: it is that where Christ is uplifted, the eagles, the elect, will be gathered. Both interpretations aim toward a single conclusion: that is, ultimately, men are attracted where the depth of their soul leads them.

Therefore, my brothers, without losing sight of the "It is finished" pronounced on the cross, let us keep in mind that the Christian must pray: "Thy Kingdom come," and, disposed to suffer, must be prepared to receive the Kingdom of God. This means that he must elect Jesus, and make Him sit in his own heart as King, absolute owner of ourselves and

of everything that belongs to us. We are no longer anything:  
He is the King.

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### THE OLD MAN

*“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22).*

When the Gospel is presented to them, many answer: “we do not want to change religion.” It is not a question of changing a form of religion, but it is essential to change the old heart. However, we cannot, in our own strength, improve the inclinations of the heart, which are stronger than our will, but we must be regenerated in Christ, because only then will two operations be accomplished in us: put off the old man and be dressed of the new one.

The old man, tamed but not dead, is there in the depths of the soul, and ready, at the first occasion, to allow the roaring to be heard and to show his teeth; there is no Christian who has not had this experience.

The difference that exists between one who is regenerated and one who is not regenerated in Christ is this: in one who is not regenerated, we do not speak of the old or new man, because all is old and natural; the old nature is more or less polished by the education of the world, but it is always and only the old man. In one who is regenerated, instead, the old man is still there, and it is the whole of the natural inclinations, held down, tamed, but not suffocated, and make

themselves felt by the continual presence of the new creature that fights and rises in us to condemn the old man.

Now we're coming closer to the subject of the meditation.

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St. Paul, writing to the Church of Ephesus, was addressing persons who knew the Lord Jesus. The content of the letter is a profound teaching that makes one think of advanced spiritual life. Also, it is in the same writing—intended to stimulate a greater holiness—that warnings are intermixed, that, as a rule, are given to the Christian in the first moment of his conversion. As if a teacher, in teaching higher discipline to advanced students, often feels the need to remember the elementary principles of the material that he is teaching.

The Apostle writes among other things, as follows: *"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind... But ye have not so learned in Christ. If so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."*

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**THE OLD MAN.** It is well to understand, and quickly, that which the Apostle intends by "the old man," in order to take away the illusion from those who measure their Christianity by the standard of gross sins. By the old man one must not understand homicide, theft, impurity, etc. in the material and common meaning. The Christians of Ephesus, at least as a majority, knew that they must stay away from these things. Nor should it be understood as the corruption of the lust of

seduction. The Apostle says, it is true: "*the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*" etc., but it should not be confounded with that to which the old man can arrive, from that which he is in himself. The old man can corrupt himself in lusts, push himself to homicide, theft, and so on, but it is necessary to watch himself, before he descends to acts that even persons of mediocre morality condemn. And what is it? Can we find the explanation in the Scripture? Yes, we can—and not in Judas Iscariot, not in Jezebel, not in the builders of the tower of Babel, not in the antediluvian giants, not in Cain. The old man is to be sought in the time before the first homicide, and precisely in that first human couple, and precisely in that lapse of time that runs between the sin and the expulsion from Eden.

Let us take a look at it: the manifestations of the old man, even at his best, correspond, on the whole, with the manifestations of Adam after the fall:

1) "*And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.*" Sin and shame. They become aware that they are naked; they feel, without saying it, shame, and they flee from God who is purity and light. It is the same today, and always, when the old man has the predominance he runs away from the face of the Lord. And this is the principal reason by which, as a rule, men prefer whatsoever company or meeting to a religious one, and by which many invitations to come to the Lord remain unanswered. They flee from the presence of Jesus, and do not want to look at His shining face because they know, deep in their heart, that they are naked.

And it is also true that, in most cases, if a brother from the church has failed in some duty, and has had some affliction, he leaves, rather than coming to explain himself and to push for peace. The old man urges him to hide himself, to flee.

With sin in us we cannot live in the sight of the Lord, and not even, for any length of time, with Christian people unless the sin is confessed and forgiven.

2) God said to Adam: *“Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded that thou shouldest not eat?”* At this question of the Lord, we would expect Adam to confess and a supplication to be forgiven. Nothing of the kind, and instead Adam answers thus: *“The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.”*

Adam immediately attempts to unload the responsibility on others, and, with maximum impudence accuses the Creator and denounces his mate! It seems that he wanted to say: “I was fine by myself, and I would not have eaten the prohibited fruit, but you placed the woman near me, and she gave it to me. You and that woman are to blame.” He showed himself ungrateful toward God who put him in the Garden of Eden, enriched with everything, and seeing him alone, had given him a mate; and he manifested himself cowardly in his relationship with the woman whom he hastened to accuse and expose to punishment. And it was the same woman that made him happy when he saw her, and had exclaimed: *“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh!”*

The old man constantly seeks to justify himself and blame others as long as he saves himself. He accuses even God of injustice, and he also slanders his fellow-man if it is necessary.

Unfortunately, this spirit manifests itself, and not rarely, even among persons who have accepted Christianity. When something deplorable happens, it is rare that one is disposed to recognize his own shortcomings, but instead, there quickly

arises from the heart to the tongue justification in his own favor, and accusations against others.

The regenerated man who intends, truly and humbly, to remain at the feet of Christ will be ready sooner to seek his responsibility than to complain to God and to accuse persons that, perhaps at another time, he had appreciated and praised.

3) In addition, when Adam and Eve became aware that they were naked "*they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*" The first clothes were invented by shame. Before that Adam and Eve were clothed with innocence.

Such clothing was insufficient. It is true that it was very easy for them to make them, but they could not move without uncovering themselves. In fact, Adam and Eve, thus clothed, did not have the courage to appear before God. When he was called, Adam answered: "*I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.*" With all the fig leaves sewn together, before God, he is naked.

Quite another covering was needed and it had to be obtained by the Lord with the sacrifice of innocent lives: "*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*"

The old man seeks an artificial covering, and an artificial religion, or as someone with insight has said, he seeks a vegetarian religion. He expects to gain heaven by his works, by his own character, and dresses himself with fig leaves. Perhaps he appears to be a good person, but basically he is proud, because he trusts in himself, and does not remain humble and penitent at the feet of Jesus. Ultimately, however, in the presence of the Lord God, notwithstanding the fig leaves, he will have to acknowledge that he is naked.

These are the three directions or principal lines of conduct of the old man. We have not spoken of homicides, thefts, or other things. But it is from these three lines or from these three principles that there emerge, as they did emerge, all the evils and misfortunes of the human family.

Now the old man in us must be made naked. This is the first important step; and when he is discovered, he must be subdued. Let us see how: The Apostle counsels two continual operations: "*Put off concerning the former conversation of the old man—Put on the new man.*" He did not say to kill the old man, because it accompanies us all our life; but only to undress it, and do this every day, in order to make it become insignificant and denuded, and to enrich the new creature that is in us. This implies a putting aside, a taking away of one thing, and replacing it with another.

Both of the operations are not easy. It is surprising, in fact, how the old clothes and rags attach themselves to the flesh, and in tearing them off we seem to be tearing off our skin. It is difficult to accept something else: obstinacy and pride are the main obstacles. Left to our own devices we would not resolve either to take away or to put on. If, however, we are taught in Christ Jesus, if we are humble at His feet, if renewed by His Spirit, if we have recognized the existence of the old man, then it will not be difficult to undress him and to dress the new man instead.

The new man is the human nature that has become partaker of the divine nature; it is not the old man that has been polished and covered. It is Christ in the believer.

Undressing alone and thereby leaving a vacuum would be dangerous. If that which is taken away is not replaced by something better, it is worse than before. In fact, many times, men undertake programs without Christ to get rid of one

habit or another, and perhaps they succeed, but, either they fall again into the old habit and with greater violence, or they succumb to another side of their weak nature.

There are, it is true, persons that, even without Christ, appear to be immaculate, humanly speaking; but the exertion of will and of character, as strong as they may be, cannot hide for long the natural hidden disposition.

Listen to what someone says: "That which cannot be seen today will be seen tomorrow, or the day after; and even the most reserved man will have an hour in which we can see him naked. There is no one who knows how to resist under a long patient observation, and the concealing work of one year is lost in the distraction of one minute."

Let's not deceive ourselves about the old man that is in everyone's heart. It can be kept down and kept silent only by Jesus Christ in us, each time that we apply ourselves to the work of undressing and dressing, and remain at His feet. Let us ask for the assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit day by day.

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## SAVORING THE BOOKS

(Job 12:11)

Permit us the remembrance of a personal experience that goes back about forty years.

A pastor of a church of a certain denomination gave me a copy of the book: "L'Aurore del Milennio" (The Dawn of the Millennium) as a gift, translated into very fine Italian, and I began to read it immediately. At that time I was in the acute stage of avid readers who devour, permit the expression, many books. On my desk were piled up perhaps ten volumes that I was reading simultaneously, a few pages from each one. The subjects were the most contradictory that one can imagine. Next to a volume by a profound mystic stood one of a nationalist. The varied reading tended to give me a balanced learning.

I had decided to read attentively "The Dawn of the Millennium," and I repeat that I have been a patient and persistent reader; however when I would begin to read that book, I felt an innermost repugnance to read it. And yet I had absolutely no prejudice or bias, as at that time I had no knowledge of the arguments for and against the subject. With a heavy and confused mind, I would pick up the book again until I resolved to put it among the books that I would read in the future.

In time I became informed about the various religious movements such as: Theosophy, Christian Science, Bible Students (they are the heirs of Russelism, the author of "the Dawn of the Millennium" being one of his exponents), the Seventh Day Adventists, the Pentecostal Movement. I noticed that for some writings I felt an inner repugnance. Others appealed to my investigating mind but they made the

figure of Christ grow dim up to making Him disappear; others attracted me in the depth of the Spirit, although a few were not entirely logical.

I understood that I was constrained to a religious dilemma: Either Jesus Christ, or the theories of those many books—I say, the Christ of the Gospels, dead-resurrected, ascended on high, and who lives to intercede. He who has said, “All power in Heaven and on earth is given to Him,” and has exhorted that we should abide in Him, and without Him we can do nothing. In conclusion: Either the Lord who brings us into the Love and Peace of the Father and into absolute Grace, accompanied by the faith which takes, and the works that follow, and into which the Grace introduces us. (Ephesians 2:8, 10)

Either Him, or the various theories. But I have never been able to separate myself from that Benign Face which was covered with shame and spit for me, therefore, at the end of every dilemma I had to say:

### I REMAIN WITH CHRIST

I know, oh reader, even I know the words of John 5:39, that make us think of a people crammed full of scriptural verses, but empty of the faith and love of God; those who, rich in pretenses, crucified the King of Glory. And, alas, they crucify Him now in His elect.

Everything, therefore, is reduced to this dilemma: Either this thing, or CHRIST. Meditate.

What really remains of Jesus Christ, the Lord, in the theosophical, and almost theosophical writings? What remains? The Person of Christ, His sacrifice and Redemption

disappears. Little by little there remain only ideas by which one expects a cloudy and fantastic future.

The purpose of this writing is to affirm that those who are bound to Jesus Christ, such ones are the elect; they cannot savor, much less assimilate any theory that tends, under brilliant colors, to distract them from that glorious Lord, who by the will of God is the Center of the Universe, because all power in heaven and on earth has been given to Him.

### CHRIST ALONE.

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### BEFORE SERVING OTHERS

The preoccupation of many is what they can do for the Lord, whereas they should be trying to understand what the Lord wants from them, because only in such a manner can they better serve him in their fellow man.

We have heard from some that in reading the Scriptures and meditating on the mysteries of God they would like to retain the impressions of the spirit in order to pass it on to others. Many read with a view of what they will be able to preach, thus they never grow in the true knowledge. The man who truly wants to serve God must forget the serving, but must deepen his communion with Him. The food that we eat is first digested, then assimilated, and then it becomes part of the organism, without our being able to indicate from what portion our strength may come. It is the same in the world of the spirit: when we are nourished by Him, and how He likes, in time, we have the strength for everything that He

commands. The water that falls from heaven returns in springs, but first it disappears in the bowels of the earth without our being able to distinguish what may be the portion of water that we drink.

Apply yourself to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures to yourself; only afterward will you be able to explain the Scriptures to others, if it will please God to use you. In this way, you will accomplish in one day what you would not succeed doing in ten years. Opening hearts and saving belongs to the Lord. If the Lord so wishes, He is able to say a single word by means of you that may be a fruitful seed in others.

There are many ways in which it seems that one can serve God: one is to run after crowds; that is proselytism, and not serving God. The good way, the only way to serve God is to live only for His glory, forgetting everything for love of Him, serving Him in His Temple that is our own heart, and then, outside of us, where and when He likes. Much of what we call serving God is nothing but anxiety and building on the sand which will be demolished by the storms that follow.

In the measure that we spend more time with God, we will need less with men, giving ourselves to a concentrated life. We will avoid dissipating ourselves in multiple operations, because it is a life that is imprisoned, closed in God, and that is powerful in the Lord.

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## THE LOVE OF GOD

*“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?”*

The question sets the terms of comparison at the maximum of love: that of a mother. But even such love can fall short, and sometimes it has failed.

*“Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.”*

The difficulty is not in understanding these extraordinary affirmations, but in believing them. TRULY BELIEVING THEM, because the measure that we have of the love of God is weak. His love aims at the final goal: to do us good, at the end.

Oh to believe that! Lord, help us to believe that You love ME (let each one put his name in that ME) more than any mother can love her sucking child. To fully believe this means to know God. To know Him, means to live. Glory, glory to the Lord. I HAVE GRAVEN THEE UPON THE PALMS OF MY HANDS.

Behold them, those nailed hands! They are the writings engraved in the flesh of the Son of Man. Look at those hands and those feet that still bear the stigma of the Cross, and believe in the love of God. There is every good thing in His presence. *“Thy walls are continually before me,”* He says to us. Help us Lord, to believe the immensity and the eternity of Your Love as You want us to believe. Amen.

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AND I... PRAYER

(Psalm 109:1-4)

The Psalmist, surrounded by enemies, cries thus:

*"The mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They have compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer."* The words "give myself unto" are not in the text. Therefore literally it reads: "But I... prayer." We sense an interruption. He must do something, but he decides not to reason, not to explain, not to go around trying to neutralize the attacks of the enemies. The decision is this: "I, prayer." It is for them to say and do evil, and for me to pray.

They encourage themselves and persevere in evil, and I will persevere in prayer. Rather my very life will become a continual prayer.

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THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GODThy Will Be Done

In the model prayer taught by Jesus, the request concerning His will comes third and this is because it cannot be presented as it should be if not in its proper order. "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" the Lord is Lord everywhere, and invites us to live in the heavens, as in our city.

*"Hallowed by Thy Name;"* that is, may that Name three times Holy be set apart. Let us guard against pronouncing it lightly or irreverently.

*"Thy Kingdom come."* There are other kings and other kingdoms; *"Come;"* therefore it is not yet established. At this point, and only at this point, comes the third request: *"THY Will be done, as in heaven, so in earth."*

There are, therefore, other wills. "THY will be done," therefore the others must be abandoned. "DONE," that is, not only known and approved, but PRACTICED. *"As in heaven, so in earth"* affirms that there are places where such a WILL is carried out. "AS"—the example is put before us, and we cannot imitate it, if we do not know how such a "will" is carried out in heaven. But one who can invoke the Father who is in heaven and ask that His Name be hallowed and that His Kingdom should come, already knows, at least in the depths of his spirit, something of heaven, and of reverence to the Name and the Kingdom.

Before obeying it, it is necessary to know it, and before knowing it, it is necessary to love such a will—loving, knowing and obeying the will of God.

One cannot expect anything from those who do not love the Lord. Those who love Him make a diligent effort to know His Will.

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"* (Romans 12:1, 2). By saying "good, acceptable, perfect will," it is understood

that there is a will that is not perfect and for clarity of distinction we will call it: "*Permissive Will.*"

Here are a few examples of permissive will: The people of Israel requested that spies be sent into Canaan and the Lord said to Moses to send the spies. Balaam, after having received the command not to go with the men sent by Balak, prayed again and received permission to go with them. David had the command to number the people, but it was a permissive command, since Satan had already incited him to pride. The people in the desert had enough meat to be filled. Let us read: "*But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent them leanness into their soul (Psalm 106:14, 15).*"

These examples demonstrate what is not the good, acceptable, perfect will of God. This perfect will is inquired into by one who is entirely resigned to what God wants, whatever his personal inclinations may be.

Read again, now, the exhortation of the apostle. The appeal is urgent and tender: "*by the mercies of God.*" The body must be presented in offering, a living sacrifice; God does not accept living sacrifices. He is the God of the living. The living sacrifice hurts. The idea is of a body still alive, bleeding, placed on the altar to be sacrificed.

After this, he advises to not be conformed to this world, to the spirit of the world. Many forces around us try to attract us. "*But be ye transformed*" or more literally, transform yourselves. Renewing of the mind supposes, at times, a long time of calm waiting, so that, little by little, all the mixed thoughts that disturb even the best desires disappear. It is one of the tricks of the enemy, when he does not succeed in making us rebel entirely, he manages to trouble the mind adding or taking something away. Only then are we in a

condition to PROVE, to accept, in a way that we can say with assurance, that what we do is from God. As long as there is uncertainty, it is necessary to wait. And prove the "good," because all that is from Him is for the good, because He is *Good*. "Acceptable," since He Himself makes that which He commands agreeable to us. The flesh resists, but, in our spirit, there is the good, acceptable, perfect *Will of God*.

And now there is only one step: obedience. *There is grace for obedience (Romans 1:5).*

Let us turn our eyes on the One who, in a complete way, fulfilled the Perfect Will of God; he did it always, and with readiness: In Psalm 40:1-8 we read: "*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*"

He always did the things that pleased the Father. He knew the Will of the Father perfectly: "*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day*" (John 6:38-40).

Here there occurs immediately, also from the mouth of Jesus, a hint as to what the will of God may be with regard to us; that is, the general will of God, which will then be manifested, step by step, in the particulars.

"*And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*" Seeing,

*Believing on the Son.* Ultimately this is what God truly wants as the basis of all of His will that He will go on manifesting to us.

### Contemplating Jesus! Trusting in Him!

In Gethsemane, Jesus had an immense conflict. It seemed that He was going to die under the olive trees. It seemed that the whole plan of God was going to pieces in a moment. Not the glorious death, hanging on the Cross, as had been prophesied, but there, hidden, by night, to die under those trees! It was too much: *"Remove this cup from me,"* He implored. His prayers were always according to the Blessed Will of the Father, therefore, to the powerful prayer, there is the limit: *"If thou be willing..."* and the triumphant exclamation: *"Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."* More precious than all the plan that, up to then was being admirably fulfilled, and that shortly would be consummated in the victory of the death on the Cross; the will of His Father, however it worked out, was always more precious than anything to the glorious Lord, even if it seemed that everything had failed. May every man, if necessary, be found a liar. God is always true and faithful.

But the prayer of Jesus was answered, because the prayers of the Perfect One, resigned and happy in the Sovereign Will have always been answered. But the same One who said: *"Not my will, but thine, be done,"* in another occasion, concerning His Bride, asked for something and said: *"Father, I WILL that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am."*

The One who has given His life for the glory of God receives the right to see others saved and brought on high. It is worthwhile to live for the Sovereign will of such a Lord. Teach us therefore, oh Lord, to love, to know, to obey Thy

Will. And ultimately, it is He Himself who creates in us the will and the work. Amen.

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### THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS

(Micah 5:13; 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:21)

*“Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands. And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee: so will I destroy thy cities.”* Thy, thou, thine, thee, thy—the day will come when you will no longer see you around yourself, or rather, you will no longer be pleased with yourself.

St. John, in the close of his long letter, after very elevated teachings, exclaims: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”* It is not necessary to explain that here it is not a question of statues and pictures to which a certain cult lends itself, as that is too coarse a form of idolatry. Rising in the invisible, we are likewise faced with the dangers of the invisible, and of worse sins. The worst idolatry is in the invisible. As long as man has not fully entered into the plan of Redemption, he will be an obstinate lover of himself and of all that regards him. It is not always the bad works, but often the good ones, those in which we have been guided by the Lord Himself, to which our heart becomes attached, and is interposed, even by a little, between us and God, because an idol is that which hides the face of God.

It is said of someone who was greatly used by the Lord that while he was serving Him, and as soon as he had finished

-serving Him in something, the enemy tried to instill in him the poison of pride by making him look at his own holiness or ability. And he would say: I began this work only for the glory of God and I want to finish and keep it only for His glory.

*“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake,”* exclaimed the Psalmist, and then he describes the material idols of the people and does not describe the idols that tempt him, but the energetic appeal with which he begins the psalm tells what the danger may be: *“Not to us, not to us,”* because “US” wants to rob the glory of God, and make us become proud of our privileges. This was the great sin of the Hebrew people, so enriched with privileges and blessings. And this is the rock against which all the religious movements become shipwrecked, because of which the Lord must continually work by means of a remnant.

*“Unto Thy Name* (that is, to Jesus, because “NAME,” in the Old Testament, is a prophecy of Jesus) *give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.”* He gives the glory to His Name, but the invocation of the Psalmist in danger is that He would be pleased to use mercy toward us, helping us, in order that we may turn every praise and honor to Him. It’s the same as saying: O Lord have mercy on us so that we do not give the glory to us, not to US, but unto Thy Name the glory. The virgin Mary, praised by Elizabeth, did not keep the glory for herself, but immediately, with the perfume of adoration, turned it to heaven: *“My soul doth magnify the Lord.”* *“Little children,”* and we seem to hear in the voice the tenderness of the old Apostle: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”*

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## THE WAY OF ESCAPE FROM TEMPTATION

(1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 6:13; James 1:2-12)

*“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

A temptation never comes that is greater than the grace we have to bear it. God does not tempt; yet, without His will, we cannot even be tempted. As the warriors are prepared for greater tests, in the measure that they demonstrate valor, so for the Christian warrior, as he goes from height to height there are reserved always greater temptations in the face of attacks of the enemy that are always more malicious and persistent. But God is faithful. Faithful, because He Himself has guided us to pray to not be led into temptation, or, according to the sense of the word, to not be abandoned in the temptation, because we have confessed to Him that we are weak, and therefore easily overcome. Faithful, because together with the temptation, He has provided a way of escape. For as evil and subtle the attack of the enemy may be, God has arranged that we see a ray of deliverance in the same moment that we are tempted; perhaps a subtle warning of the Holy Spirit, by which we are invited to ask help of the Lord; perhaps it will be the disapproval of some dear person, who advises against a hasty step; it may be some discord that can be heard in the same deceitful music of the enemy; it may be a sickness or a warning of suffering, it may be a confusion that assails us in the same moment that the matter seems plausible; it may be one of the many ways that Providence has at its disposition in order to warn us. It is always He who has the way ready, hidden, like a warning, in the same moment that we are tempted. He has provided that

we must not yield, and likewise, that we must not pretend, since hypocrisy is sin, like falling into the temptation, and worse.

And more than all, Jesus Christ Himself, who becomes more real in the measure that the danger increases, is Himself the Way of escape; He puts Himself between us and the evil, as if to say that we must pass over Him in order to fall. Therefore, the apostle was able to speak victoriously of the twofold crucifixion: that of himself to the world, and of the world to him.

The temptation has an aim: it makes us know our fragility and the astuteness of the enemy against whom we would be powerless, if we had to fight with our strength, and it makes us know above all that God is more vigilant than the enemy, and, in His strength and mercy, He has provided how to protect us, and more than that, He makes the same temptation result to our advancement, and to the glory of God. Therefore St. James says: "*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.*"

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WAIT AND PRAY, in order to give time to the Lord to manifest that which is His, and do not precipitate yourself after every novelty and spectacle. There is nothing that combats the astuteness of the enemy (whose behavior is more or less hurried and full of strangeness) as much as giving time to the Lord to make us see if the thing proceeds from Him or from the powers of darkness.

The Apostle John warns us to try the spirits (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:1, 3), to see, that is, if they confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh.

This means more than a literal confession: to see, that is, if there is a conduct that is sober, humble and meek like that of Christ.

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THE THINGS WHICH REMAIN THAT ARE ABOUT TO  
DIE

“Thou art dead” – “Strengthen the things which remain that are about to die.” (Revelation 3:2).

The language is contradictory, but the Holy Spirit interprets and harmonizes it. The Lord “THAT HATH THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD, AND THE SEVEN STARS” inspects the Church of Sardis, and says to it: “I KNOW THY WORKS, THAT THOU HAST A NAME THAT THOU LIVEST, AND ARE DEAD.” The energetic language of the text is: “*You have a name that you are living.*” Whether that church was boasting of this, or that others were praising her, she appeared to be living, that is, in order with the Lord. The “Name” that she had, however, did not correspond with the Reality. The great Inspector discovered under the apparent vitality: “Thou art dead.” If “dead,” what is there to be medicated? One who is dead no longer hears. And yet the Lord continues: “*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.*”

Remaining in that condition, death was inevitable at the point that he said: “Thou art dead.” But since there was still a thin thread of life, that church could, if it wanted, by a supreme effort, open its eyes and watch. They were being exhorted to make an examination free from pride, and to seek among the ruins the little that had not been destroyed.

There was still a little; and, by vigilance and energetic resolution on the part of the church, if they throw themselves into the arms of the Lord, imploring Him to give them grace in time of need, life would return, and from the little spark, the fire and heat would extend to all the body.

Mercy and pardon and the giving of help belong to the Lord; but man, a group of men, must abandon illusions, recognize their own state, and put themselves in His hands again!

Alas! many Movements are going in this direction!

Caution, reader! Do not be scandalized. Oh, that it were indeed true that the one who writes might be in error! But, observe: Where is your first love? The works of one time? Your communion with God? The fear of speaking evil, and even of thinking evil? Where is that fire that burned in your heart with love toward God, and toward the Creatures? You will tell me that you have gained much; and you will point out to me the buildings that have multiplied, the Rules and the Statutes, and the increase in activities, and the like. And for this you qualify yourself as "Living," and you give yourself such a name.

But, collect your thoughts and seek the face of the Lord, and He will tell you: Continuing thus you can call yourself dead. However, I want you to live. There is a small remnant in you; but, in the ruins, it already vacillates. Hasten to reaffirm it. You, hasten to do the best that you can; and the Lord who loves you, He will reaffirm it to you.

Make an end of the name that you give to yourself, and with which others deceive you. Go to the Fountain where alone there is Reality: CHRIST ALONE.

DEEPER THAN THE SKIN

(Leviticus 13:3)

Of all the symbols of sin, leprosy is the most impressive. It is an insidious sickness that develops slowly and becomes like a worm in the bone. The leper loses even some member of his body, without dying, and drags on, at times for many years, with a disgusting existence. The Mosaic law ordained: *“And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.”*

The aim of the present writing is to remember how leprosy was recognized. Only the Priest had the authority to officially declare if someone were leprous; and when, in some rare case, someone was healed, only the Priest could declare him clean. This was a prophecy that only the Lord can discover the sin in us, and only He can justify us, and declare us clean.

*“And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and when the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look upon him and pronounce him unclean.”*

Deeper than the skin. It is necessary to distinguish between evil and evil, between that which is barely visible but has roots inside, and that which is diffused on the surface. In the first case it is leprosy; and in the second it is an evil that has come to light, and therefore close to being healed. One who meditates the life of Jesus cannot help but notice with how

much consideration He regarded the unfortunate ones who had fallen into the most flagrant sins, and of which humanity has the most horror. The well-known sinners and publicans drew near to Him voluntarily, and found Him always ready and compassionate. The evil was diffused on the surface; it was easily noticed by themselves and others that they were sinners; they recognized that they were lacking and therefore in need of the Savior. But in others who were refined and in appearance were scrupulous observers of the law, who fasted, paid tithes, made long prayers and the like, and who to the blinded eyes of the multitude and in their own eyes were believed to be saints, the true leprosy was found. Only the Priest was able to discern. Everything was correct; but from time to time, mumbled words of anger came out of that mouth that revealed evil designs that were deeper than the skin.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, and it was the Sabbath day. And a woman was there who for eighteen years had been the victim of a spirit of infirmity that kept her bowed down, such that she could not straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said to her: *“Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight and glorified God.”*

But in that place there was someone who was sicker than she, although externally he appeared vigorous and strong. No one would have suspected him. The Priest discovered him. Here he is: *“And the ruler of the synagogue (oh the indignation of those who seem to be zealous for the righteousness of God!) answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”* Jesus read the apparent zeal of the formalist; He saw in

him a sore deeper than the skin; that is, the hatred and envy in a fanatical heart, and the Lord answered him: "*Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?*" The adversaries were ashamed, but they did not want to recognize that they were true lepers *in the soul*. The multitude rejoiced.

In the beginning of Solomon's reign, an event occurred that seemed to be of excessive rigor. Adonijah, brother of the king, sent by means of Solomon's mother to ask that Abishag the Shunamite be given to him for a wife. The request seemed to be innocent but the wise one saw that the sore was deeper than the skin. Adonijah aspired to be king, and was secretly preparing a new rebellion. Therefore, he was asking for Abishag the Shunamite for a wife. Apparently there was nothing wrong; but, as we have said, the wise one read and saw that the sore was deeper than the skin, and answered like this to the innocent mediator: "*And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunamite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom...*" And he sent to have him killed.

The superficial eye is mistaken, but the Lord and those to whom He has given discernment, are not mistaken; they recognize the leprosy, the sore deeper than the skin. In the Old Testament when the leper was discovered he was reduced to a condition of extreme abjection; he was condemned to veil his upper lip, and to cry out his own misery to those who were passing by. However, in the condemnation itself, there was the prophecy of the restoration of the soul.

One day a leper, type of all the lepers who recognize themselves as such, met Jesus who was coming down from a

mountain. Attracted by the power of the Lord, he was not sure that He would have compassion on a leper like him. He came and worshipped Him saying: "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*" There was no need to touch him; but He did it in order to demonstrate the greatest love and tenderness toward the greatest unfortunate ones. That touch to the poor body was like a hand of love to the dormant powers of the soul, as if to say that God loves even the leper.

May the Lord help us to discover in ourselves that which is deeper than our skin. Certain actions of our soul in unexpected moments; words that escape from our mouth and of which we ourselves remain marveled; thoughts that assail us unexpectedly are not always temptations but little sores revealing something deep that has need of the Doctor. The Psalmist was crying: "*Who can understand his errors?*" And so that he would not be deceived about himself, he appealed to the Revealer and Healer of all the evils: "*Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*" That sore near live flesh, full of the resentment of our humanity, and that is deeper than the skin, is leprosy.

Let us present ourselves often to the High Priest for inspection, so that He will look at us, and if there is something, He will declare it to us. Once we are discovered to ourselves, let us not be ashamed to humble ourselves. He loves and heals even the leper who recognizes himself as such and appeals to Him.

\* \* \*

THE REMNANT OF THE OIL  
OR THE ANOINTING OF THE HEAD

(Leviticus 14:18)

*“And the remnant of the oil that is in the priest’s hand he shall pour upon the head of him that is to be cleansed: and the priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord.”*

If someone desires to know the subject in depth, read both chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus. The healed leper had to present his offering. Each part of the service was prophetic and instructive, and makes one think of the work of the Lord Jesus in the soul of the reformed sinner. We want to meditate on the last part: the oil on the head. Keep well in mind the order of the Scripture. All the other parts of the purification had to precede as described, and then, at the end, the oil was applied. In the New Covenant we have no need of any sacrifice, as Jesus has accomplished everything; however, the various parts of the ancient sacrifice are worked in us by the Holy Spirit, and made practical. In the measure that we surrender to the Lord, we experience the power of forgiveness and we consecrate ourselves to Him like dead resurrected, in order to live the life of heaven from now on.

In the purification of the leper, the ancient Priest took the blood of the sacrifice and put it on the tip of the leper’s right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the great toe of his right foot. The ear, the hand and the foot were purified by the blood; these three organs that, as a whole, symbolize all the human activity, and by means of which so much evil has been done, were washed by the blood. Then the Priest would take the oil and pour it in the palm of his left hand, and with his finger sprinkle seven times toward the Altar on which the blood had been sprinkled. The priest would put the remaining oil on the tip of the right ear of the leper who was

being purified, on the thumb of his right hand and on the great toe of his right foot; that is, on the blood that had been previously placed there—not on the flesh, but on the blood. The oil, as we know, is one of the most beautiful types of the Holy Spirit, and it refers mainly to the anointing for service. While it is the Holy Spirit who alone knows how to present and to make one desire the power that is in the blood of Jesus Christ, it is likewise true that He, the Spirit, does not come upon us as unction, if we have not first been washed by the blood of Jesus—therefore the blood first and the oil afterward; the oil on the blood and not on the flesh. It is in vain, rather harmful, to expect and to encourage service and consecration, where there has not first been the powerful washing of the Blood of the Lord. It is in vain that we should strive to announce the Baptism with the Holy Spirit where there has not been the work of grace by the blood of Jesus. Let us follow the order of God and we will have the blessings promised by Him—blood first, oil afterward. The ear, the hand and the foot are washed from every contamination, and now with anointing of the oil, we are enabled to a full consecration and service.

Take care how you hear. Faith comes by hearing. Oh how much difference there is between a holy hearing and one that is not entirely consecrated, and worse, by one completely contaminated! But now the purified ear, anointed with oil, is called to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, and to discern between sounds and sounds. And the hand that has done so much evil is now purified and consecrated in order to extend itself peacefully and charitably, like the hand of Jesus Christ. And the feet, at one time hasty for hatred and intrigue, will be, from now on, occupied to move themselves only to do good, or to stay still in holy expectation. And yet there is still something else. It is certain that the accomplished sacrifice benefits all of us; but then practical and progressive holiness requires that it be applied to every part of our activity. The

mind plays an essential part in having a holy life. No one can say that they have experienced true rest in Jesus if their mind is not controlled. The scriptures are rich in teachings about the mind with its thoughts and imaginations. Ultimately, we become similar to what we think. Therefore, we are invited to meditate on the things of above, thinking of things that are honest and of good report. It is our head that must be covered by the helmet of salvation; the Lord covers it in the day of battle, because the blows of the enemy are directed, preferably, against our head. If the adversary can make us turn our head and lose our serenity, he has, in part, conquered us. St. Peter thus exhorts (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:13): *“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be given you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

There are strongholds of imagination that the power of the Lord must keep down. Our mind must be controlled so that our thoughts do not wander. Only then can one be sober, having the right measure and only then can one hope perfectly. Perfect hope is that which is based on charity, because we know that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). The Revelation of the mind on all of the holy life is great: sobriety, perfect hope and final revelation of Jesus Christ. The mind needs a special consecration. And here is the leper, after all the sacrifice of purification which can be said to have been finished, here he is still before the Priest: he has already undergone the elaborate preparations described in chapter 14 of Leviticus; he still has the fresh application of blood and oil on his ear, hand and foot, but he cannot leave. Nothing must be lost. A little oil remained in the hand of the Priest. The Priest will put the remnant of the oil on the head of the leper who is being purified. The oil that finishes anointing him and the hand that is placed on his head are the last part of all of the service. SO (take note of the SO) THE PRIEST SHALL

MAKE ATONEMENT BEFORE THE LORD (Leviticus 14:31 NASB).

In Christ everything has been provided, but He wants the Blood and the Oil to be applied and to work in us, step by step. Only thus is there truly a holy life.

\* \* \*

### LET YOUR WOMEN KEEP SILENCE

(1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:5; 14:3, 34, 35; 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:11, 12; Acts 2:17, 18)

It is a mistake to cite isolated verses of the Holy Scripture. Not that they have no value because they are isolated, but by themselves and in the appearance of the letter they often do not express the true meaning, because their true sense is discovered by reading other passages.

For example, it is not rare to hear from someone that the Scripture itself affirms that there is no life beyond the tomb, and they cite Ecclesiastes 3:19: "*For that befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other.*" And they do not read beyond that, and they do not know what may be the key to the book of Ecclesiastes, a key that is found in the words: "*Under the sun.*" The book is the testimony of a thinker who describes his mental conflicts before coming to the conclusion: "*Fear God*" (last chapter). It is necessary to read and listen to what the thinker testifies of himself, remembering doubts that assailed him but did not stop him. We often hear, from some in good faith, from others, in order to cover their own ineptitudes, that they cite this passage: "*Let your women*

*keep silence.*” And they add that which is true, and that is, that St. Paul repeats the injunction to Timothy.

If there were nothing else, even not admitting that the words in the letter mean that which the literalists understand, we should take care to not contradict them. But the verses cited do not say what some people understand, because the word “women” in the above passages refers to married women, and to the churches in which the affairs of the church were being discussed. However there are other passages to consider, and we will put them one next to the other, exhorting the well-intentioned to examine them.

*“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:34, 35)

*“But which becometh women professing godliness with good works. Let the women learn in silence with all subjection”* (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:10, 11).

*“But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:5).

*“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort”* (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:3).

There is no contradiction, but harmony; the texts explain themselves reciprocally. *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall*

*dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17, 18).*

St. Peter, by the Holy Spirit says: “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”

Take note of the clear mention of “daughters,” whereas in the common language the word children refers to everyone, male and female, in the family.

There is a reason for the specific indication, as if to emphasize that the Holy Spirit wanted to eliminate any doubt concerning women. The “children” shall prophesy, and let’s explain it in more detail, also the “daughters.”

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:5, by the mouth of the same apostle Paul, the supposed opponent to the preaching by women, we read: *“Every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head.”*

It means that “with the head covered she can pray and prophesy.” But the prohibition is: “Let your women keep silence.” If it is “keep silence” in the sense understood by some, they could not say any word, not even in prayer. However, our brothers, passing over the “Keep silence,” make the benevolent exception, and answer: “Women cannot preach but they can pray.” This concession would be culpable if the “keep silence” refers to their behavior in the meetings.

Questioned then, about “prophesying,” they give vague explanations, admitting a speaking in ecstasy; but they are invincible in repeating: “They must not preach.” Now, we ask the same St. Paul what is meant by prophecy. He answers in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:3, cited above: *“But he that*

*prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*” Let us stop at the word “edification.” We read in Ephesians 4:11-16, and we note the ministries given for “*the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” The final terminal is to see the “Body of Christ,” that is, the Church, edified and built.

Prophecy edifies. A woman can prophesy, therefore, a woman can edify the Body of Christ. Please read also Revelation 19:10.

“Keep silence” refers only to those meetings for discussion of church affairs in which it is unbecoming for women to join in the conversation, especially if their husbands are present.

But let a man keep silence, if it is he that speaks, whoever he may be, because God does not have regard to the quality of persons. And may only the Holy Spirit speak, who uses whosoever He wants, man or woman, or be it even a child!

\* \* \*

*“Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down...”* (Revelation 12:10). One who loves that KING and that Kingdom rejects the accusations against his brothers, rather, he neither wants to hear nor to speak evil of any person.

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## THE EXAMINATION OF THE BELIEVER

One who fears God does not wait to be judged but is wise and judges himself. *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."* But those who do not like to judge themselves are judged by the Lord, and are corrected (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:31, 32).

The saints love judgment; that is, they love to examine themselves in the light of the Holy Spirit. They are not deceived about themselves, nor do they desire that others deceive them. What is the approval of flatterers and our own approval worth to us if we are not in order with God? He wants to light the lamp and illuminate our insides.

Examine yourself, *"the case is before Him, and you must wait for Him,"* Elihu said to Job (Job 35:14 NASB). Wait for Him, because He is Merciful and delights in the man who is crushed by repentance and who mourns. But "judge and examine yourself" in His Light, and only thus will you be able to walk in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ washes from every sin.

\* \* \*

## HE PASTURES HIS FLOCK AMONG THE LILIES

(Song of Solomon 6:3)

In Arabia there is a small shellfish that feeds on spikenard and other little fragrant plants and it is so full of fragrance that it would be pulverized in order to make perfume of it to be used in the temple (Exodus 30:34). We become like the

food we eat; it becomes flesh and blood in us and we are either filled with sweetness or with corruption, with truth or with error, with peace or with agitation; that little creature teaches us to feed ourselves with spikenard and other sweet-smelling things. Although we would have to be pulverized in order to give perfume to others, we should remember that we will become a sweet savor to Christ.

*“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ... set your mind (feed the mind) on the things above” (Colossians 3:1, 2 NASB). “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things do (after the insistent thinking there comes as an effect the doing), those things do, and the God of peace shall be with you.”*

CONSIDERING, CONTEMPLATING *CHRIST*, AND  
ABIDING IN HIM MAKES US BECOME LIKE HIM.

\* \* \*

### LOT—THE TRAVAILED ONE

(Genesis 13:7-13; 14:12-19; 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:7-9)

Two men are before us: Lot and Abraham, one pigmy and one giant. The epilogue of their life can be defined for each one with an adjective: Lot is the *travailed* one, and Abraham is the *jubilant* one. The two titles are scriptural, and we read them, for Lot, in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:7-9, and for Abraham, by the

mouth of the Lord, in John 8:56, in the words: "*Your father Abraham REJOICED to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*"

If our subject were Abraham, it would be edifying to meditate on the word "rejoiced." "Rejoice" is the explosion of an inner happiness, it is also a daughter of a long and constant communion with Heaven. But it is of Lot that we are occupied.

We know only one Abraham. From time to time there appears some saint of rare intuition, in whom we see, not only the faith of the patriarch (and the children of Abraham, according to the faith, are many), but also the whole of the qualities that form a character more unique than rare.

There are many like Lot: men who want to save their soul. We have met many of such that, with an unctuous voice, lowering their head and puckering their lips, say, or lead one to suppose that they say: "As for me I want to save my soul." Nothing can be expected from such beyond the strict measure of that which is absolutely required. They escape as from a fire.

The first time that we see something of Lot, and that reveals to us his character oscillating between the earth and heaven, is in the passage in Genesis 13:9-15. In the company of Uncle Abraham, Lot had become rich. The scripture, with brief moderation, informs us of a strife between the herdmen of the cattle of Abraham and of Lot. The cause of the strife is not revealed, but it is not entirely impossible to imagine that the servants had noticed something in the attitudes of the owners. The noble language of Abraham reveals who of the two might be to blame. "*Let there be no strife—he said to Lot—I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the*

*whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."*

For a long time the pilgrim of faith had read deeply into the heart of his nephew, and the latter, without a word of protest or excuse, seized the occasion, who knows how long he had yearned for it, and he separated himself. The Scripture continues: "*And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.*"

If our task were to examine words and the various signs, we could say much: Lot lifted up his eyes, beheld, chose—he departed. According to earth, the young man had (allow the expression) made a fool of the old man, obtaining the liberty he yearned for and getting the best of the territory. Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

There is no mention that Lot built altars, but only tents; but even these tents disappeared, because, as if attracted by an evil force, he continued to draw always closer to a place famous in the history of sin, a place that offered him the opportunity to become rich. So, one fine day, Lot abandoned the life of the pilgrim forever and fixed his residence in Sodom.

What a sad parenthesis; one reads a warning that is for us, but that certainly can be applied to Lot himself. It is written: "*But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.*" The story of Lot reopens in chapter 14,

when we read that the King of Sodom and his confederates were defeated and the conquerors took also Lot, son of Abraham's brother, and his goods; then they left. The mention is brief but eloquent, telling us that Lot had already become important, at least in resources. He would have disappeared then, if the generosity of his uncle, forgetting the ingratitude, had not hastened to deliver him.

But Lot remained in Sodom.

It seems that he had prospered in the things of earth, but not in those of Heaven. He would have died in Sodom, if the city had not been destroyed and the Angels had not put him out, almost by force.

## SECOND PART

(Genesis 19; 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:7)

*“And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.”* Lot went out of Sodom but he did not want to reach the height to which the divine command had sent him.

This is the narrative: *“And the men said unto Lot, hast thou here any besides? Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place.”* But the sons-in-law, hearing the warning of Lot, mocked him. From this it can be determined that they did not esteem the man who, although he had a religion, had never built an altar or demonstrated a firm character. Great crises reveal what is in us and what even the most intimate ones think of us. *“And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two*

daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city." But he lingered. All was lost; only the people could escape. Lot, as if dazed (he was so tied to Sodom), could not succeed in moving himself. But the angels took them by the hand and brought them out of the city. The holy writer comments: "*the Lord being merciful unto him.*"

"*When they had brought them forth abroad, he (the Lord) said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*"

Not only the city, but all of the plain was dangerous. And it was to the plain, or as someone translates "the Circle," the vast circuit in which the cities and their territories were included, that Lot had been attracted, and now he was commanded to flee, and "the mountain" was being pointed out to him. But he answered: *Oh, not so, my Lord: behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die.. Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one...*" And the Lord condescended with an act of permissive will, since Lot was refusing the directive will. He said to him: "*Haste thou, escape thither.*"

What evil was frightening Lot from going to the mountain, we do not know, except to imagine that he might fear that on the elevation he might not find means for living. However, if he had trusted in the Lord, he would have obeyed, because the One who was saving his life would not have denied him the necessities for living. But certain men are too attached to earthly things to separate themselves entirely. The little city, Zoar—was not important like Sodom, but it was always a

city where the clever Lot would find how to attend to some project again. However, because of some event unknown to us, he could not remain even in Zoar, and he had to go away, living for a time in a cave with his two daughters. As for his wife, she had become a pillar of salt, because she had turned back.

We would like to know why Lot did not dwell even in Zoar. The fact that he was reduced to living in a cave makes one suppose that Zoar was not a tranquil place for him, and that he had to flee. Poor man! Troubles upon troubles.

And we close here, regretting not reading the rest of the chapter. But the New Testament deigns to make mention of this man. It is St. Peter who writes (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:7): *“And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.”* Lot – just! We could not imagine Lot as “just” if it were not the Lord Himself saying so. Just in what? The scripture continues: *“for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.”* He was in Sodom, and he did not enjoy Sodom. The poor man was between two worlds. He had imprisoned himself too much in order to resolve himself to flee from it; and on the other hand, tender memories, especially of his holy uncle, were too fixed in his heart to allow him to adapt himself. He was a man out of place. He saw, he heard, perhaps he protested, but his words were not listened to. He had earned himself the title of “judge.” *“This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge,”* those of Sodom said of him on a sadly memorable occasion. He was a judge without authority. Nothing remained to him except to hear, to see, and to show a sad face and to trouble himself, without peace either inside or outside of his house, because he did not succeed in earning the esteem of those who were to marry his daughters. He was a vacillating, weak, yielding character even to the

point of allowing himself to become inebriated. But no more on that...

And as if the great mercy was not enough, the writer adds: "*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations.*" Lot, therefore, before the Lord, was godly; that is, inclined to the good. He lived without the comfort of anyone who, like him, feared God. He lived alone, without an altar, surrounded by evil from which he could not profit, because his soul was rebelling. But the long travail had the value of penitence before the Lord. For the love of Abraham, he was not reduced to ashes in Sodom; for the love of that Lord who knows how to appreciate even a tiny bit of mercy and of penitence, even his soul was spared, remaining as an example of how ruinous it may be to choose that which enriches and seems to be easy, and likewise of how hard it is for someone who has tasted something of the Lord to live between two worlds.

Lot received grace, but he remains in history: "Lot the travailed."

THE END

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