

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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TO THE READER

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This is Volume Three of 1948, 1949, 1950.

SOBRIETY

(Romans 12:3)

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Others translate more literally: "Thus think to think soberly." That is, keeping thoughts in just measure, controlled by the Holy Spirit, thinking soberly will become a habit.

"Sobriety," just measure.

Some, in a rash and impetuous zeal, desire to do more than that for which they received grace; they follow the impulses of their heart. They do greater things than they should. They build for themselves special dwellings in heaven, they are exalted in their own imagination; they make a particular God for themselves; they take from the Word of God only the part that pleases their pride, giving the heavy part to others, and the defense to themselves. They are imitators of the rebellious Angel, of whom it is written that he said in his heart: *"I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds..."* (Isaiah 14:13-14).

All of us have had a little exaltation. But the difference between pious souls and those who are not is that the pious ones gratefully accept all the occasions tending to reduce them to their just limits, whereas the others grow in vanity and pride, and end in ruin. The warning is repeated elsewhere, and exhorts us to gird up the loins of our minds,

and to be sober, so that we will not become a prey of the adversary.

Each one, therefore, feels sobriety according to the measure of faith that God has distributed.

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THE TWO EXTREMES IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

“Vanity of vanities” are the first words of the book. The last are: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”*

Between the first and the last word there is a sequel of reasoning and reflections “under the Sun.” The book is full of “I,” “mine,” “me,” and “to me” that are an index of human egoism.

When the preacher rose above the Sun, then he had the conclusion: “Under the Sun there is confusion.”

We take the first and the last word. The first makes us see the nothingness of man; the last makes us see the all of God. Leaving ourselves in order to be occupied about Him, we will find ourselves and learn that which He wants to impart to us for our good. *“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter”* (Proverbs 25:2). A reverent investigation is not only permitted, but pleases the Lord, because it demonstrates that we are interested in knowing the mystery of His will. One who has

no depth of spirit or is only curious, will never investigate anything. But one who loves God, and seeks Him, will do his best to know Him. And this is the glory of the kings, that is, the people that God has made a Kingdom of priests.

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WHY WE DO NOT PREACH THE "TENTH"

We know that avarice is the root of all evils, and we are not ignorant of the fact that those who give liberally grow in the Lord. We know that those who are truly converted do not feel themselves to be owners of anything and consider themselves slaves of Christ. We remember the teachings of the Epistles on giving, especially Galatians 6:6 and Philippians 4:10-19. The warnings of Jesus to those who are avaricious come before us, as also the examples of abnegation: One, very rich, and a very poor woman, gave, the first, much, and the other, everything. And yet, we cannot preach the Tenth! And yet we have a fear of gathering money even for the expenses, be it even for the most necessary, doing like the world does, grasping the opportunity and profiting from moments of emotion and the like. We must announce and teach. But from this to the methods used by the majority of churches, there runs an abyss. *We continue to explain.*

There is a fundamental difference between the laws of the old Covenant and that (of the Spirit) of the New Covenant. In the old there were commandments to be followed, whether one wanted to or not. In the New Covenant it is the Holy Spirit Who commands and the Holy Spirit teaches and guides, revealing Jesus to us; and Jesus works in us by means of Grace and Truth. Not Truth (Reality) by guidance,

but guidance that prepares us to understand and to receive the Truth. It is Grace that makes the yoke sweet and the burden light.

In the New Covenant, the true system is to decide to not have any other system except that of wanting to depend and to depend on the Holy Spirit, perfect and absolute guide and teacher.

In addition it has been said by the Lord that "*the wind bloweth where it listeth.*" We hear the sound, the manifestation, but we cannot, of ourselves, foresee whence it comes or where it goes. The same individual, if guided from Above, has a different guidance in different times, always remaining in the holy love and fear of God.

Be it far from us to judge the motives of all those who teach giving a systematic quantity, and use able or lively methods in order to collect, and distribute numbered envelopes to know who gives, and what he gives. Many among them are men of conscience and of mercy, and find reasons to justify their methods. But the fact that some of them are men who are admirable in their character and life, does not alter the truth of God. They see better than us many things that we do not see. Therefore we must teach and exhort one another, having the fear of God, and a good disposition, all of us, to learn.

The one who writes remembers a conversation he had with a pastor many years ago. "Brother—the other said to him—if you do not preach and impose the "tenth" (and he meant using also the envelopes) you will not be able to live yourself, nor meet the expenses." The one who was exhorting was a good man. He was given the answer: "Brother, I cannot. If I do not receive enough to be able to live and to pay the expenses, it means that God does not

want to use me, and it is better that I stop. If the people are not moved by Jesus Christ to give, I do not want them to give me anything in the name of Moses.”

“But, but—said the other—the tenth was before Moses—Abram, Jacob, etc.” It is true: they were guided, but the action of no man or of any institute is law for us who, from the many messengers, have arrived to a single Messenger, and to a single Message: that is to Christ, and to the law of the Holy Spirit. That He uses some, meeting them in the territory where they find themselves, I admit it. The Lord uses the line of least resistance.

For a time some understand only the “tenth” and commands. But this does not say that we must teach or follow the methods of the Old Testament. God loves a cheerful giver. Let each one give according to how he prospered. There is material prosperity and spiritual prosperity. One who has not prospered spiritually has cramps in his hands, and, except if dominated by fear (by shouting in his ears some verses of the old books), selects the smallest amount of money or gives when deceived by vanity, and in moments of exceptional tenderness. Ah—no! The Holy Spirit does not descend to human artifices. One who is decided for the Lord, loves to do good secretly, hidden. He does not want, rather he suffers to see his name in the list of donors. THE LISTS!...Ah! Brothers; we caress human vanity. And then we say: Lord, send us a revival! Did the Apostles preach the “tenth” or a “fixed amount” to give?

No, no. The mention to the tenth, in Hebrews, is for quite another purpose. It refers to the “Remnant,” and makes one think of Amos, and of Isaiah and what they mentioned to the remnant of the people. One who has truly had his heart touched by Grace is ashamed to give little. He has first given his own heart. Giving one’s heart is everything, since life

proceeds from the heart. Such a one does not ask how he must GIVE to the Lord (he, give to the Lord!), but how much he, a slave, can take for that which he needs of that which is in his hands, that is of the Owner, but not his. Oh Lord, illumine Thou our darkness! Someone will say: "But these are exaggerations. These heights are impossible, except to very few. We have those who are weak, etc., etc."

We answer that often it is not the newcomers, but the old members who harden their heart, and are avaricious. Impossible? Therefore has Jesus Christ commanded that which is impossible when He said that we must renounce everything, take up the cross and follow Him? Must we make the Gospel small because we are small?

Ah, no. Let me be found a liar, but we affirm that God is always faithful. We have written too much, although the subject, like all that which regards heaven, is of great extension.

A word to the well-intentioned: Rather than being preoccupied about how to collect money, let us convert ourselves truly to the Lord, so that He will fill us and possess us. And in the meantime we proclaim His Name under the guidance and the fire of the Holy Spirit. "*The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.*" The Lord has not changed. He is the same Yesterday, Today, and Forever. Amen.

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HE TAUGHT AS ONE HAVING AUTHORITY AND
NOT AS THE SCRIBES

(Matthew 7:29)

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Such was the spontaneous judgment of those who had listened to Him. The contrast was between the manner of the One and of the many. Here it does not mean what was being taught, but how; in the language of the One there was authority; not so in that of the scribes who had been their teachers.

It was not the authority of one who wants to be respected because of a high office; it was nothing external, but the force that the Word of Jesus possessed, in order to enter into the souls. It was Truth said by the One who is Truth itself, in the implicit conviction that does not seek demonstrations or arguments. The convinced accent was convincing. Every word that came out of that mouth had the strength of deep persuasion. But allow a personal testimony. The first evangelic message that I heard was from an old Scottish pastor, in the Italian language. The subject was the resurrection of Lazarus. The impression that I had, when he was repeating the words: *“Jesus is the Resurrection and the life,”* was that the one who was repeating them, believed them sincerely. Whatever my judgment on the message itself may have been at that time, I did not deceive myself of the sincerity of that which he was offering. It is only a soul who is convinced who can be used to convince others. Pronouncing great things with a false voice is the greatest

enemy of the truth. To the foolish a magnificent speaking is not inscribed.

The comparison is weak compared to Jesus. What must have been the sound of that Voice, and the accent of conviction, it is not possible to say. Only the Holy Spirit can make us understand it. While He was speaking, His countenance, all of His Person, and His voice were inhaling its fragrance; and the souls were hearing the voice of the Creator Himself.

In John 12:49-50, Jesus informs us: *“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... Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”*

The WHAT and the HOW were always from the Father, both in simple conversations and in His messages. The saying and speaking was all from Above, and the emphasis itself was taken from Above. It was an absolute dependence, within and without; a perfect slavery to the will of God. He was the perfect servant who is moved from within and acts outwardly, according to the One to whom He is submitted. Understanding the Humiliation of Christ is the vital point of the Christian life. Such a person was not concerned about His own reputation. Applauses or censures did not alter the serenity of His spirit. His sole aim was to please the Father and to faithfully transfer the accent of Heaven, the message of Heaven. He also had the aim of doing good to the multitude, but submitted to the other, that is to please the Father. He had to demonstrate the Father.

The multitudes must know that it is God Himself who loves them, and that He (Jesus) came to serve and to please the Father. The good that will happen comes from the source of Love that has sent Him, and to Whom He sends us back.

That which weakens our discourses is egoism, more or less manifest, of defending something of our own. One who can (and it is possible only by grace) forget himself, and speak only of Him, in His spirit, will have strength in his speaking.

Therefore there is authority only in that which is said by God Himself; it alone can command, because only ONE can command. No powerful one of earth can command the soul; he may be able to enslave the outward life, but to dominate the soul, never. The multitudes may have who knows how many times applauded the long and caviling idle talk of the Scribes, but they were free to disapprove of them in their secret thoughts. One day, to their ear, there sounded a voice that entered within them; they heard the authority, and spontaneously gave the judgment: *"He taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes."*

One who is not concerned about himself, gains. In the measure that we are submitted to the authority of that Voice and Word, we also will speak and say with authority. The Holy Spirit makes authoritative only that which uplifts Jesus Christ. The Scribes were repeating opinions and theories of others; and often they believed nothing of what they were saying. A great truth can be repeated, and no effect can be seen. That which is worthwhile, is that of which God Himself has assured us, and which we must relate only when He wants, and how He wants. Oh! the misery of certain messages, and certain caricatures of false power, with the aim of impressing, and to make one believe that one is guided by God! The crowd may fake an applause, as to the Scribes, but the soul remains empty, because it does not hear the voice of its Creator.

God does not reveal everything to one, directly. It is necessary to learn, in the school of Jesus, a holy independence and a holy dependence. We must be

independent of everyone except God; and yet dependent on everyone, but IN GOD. The saint is always learning and everything is a lesson to him. However he does not learn everything at one time; he hears many things, but he waits for the confirmation from Above. The Lord reveals some things directly; if not, we would not know the paternal voice and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He reveals some things by means of others and of other things, so that we learn to be humble, and to have reverence not only for the Church, but for the entire creation. But to speak of that which we have heard, we need the confirmation of our spirit, that it is the truth of God. If commanded, we can speak only in the time and measure of God. In the proportion that we are penetrated by this, we will understand the difference of the languages: that of divine authority, and the other of the scribe.

Let no one who reads these words deceive himself that the speaking of one who has not studied is always the speaking with authority. The spirit of the Scribe infiltrates everywhere. Much sagacity is not required, at times, to repeat opinions that have been heard. That which is repeated without a divine confirmation in the soul, and without God having made it food for ourselves, and without making us digest it, is speaking like the Scribes, wherever and however it may have been learned, and however it is repeated.

Whereas that which is revealed clearly or directly or confirmed and illumined in us, even if revealed to others, when commanded to say it, is with authority, because it is said by God, by means of us, and in the time and method of God.

May the Lord help us to be so penetrated by this truth, that immersed in Him, occupied about Him, we will speak moved by Him, to the glory only of His Name. And as for the effect on one who listens, let us leave that up to the same Lord for

whose glory our mouth opens. The souls belong to Him and only He can illumine and reach them.

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CONTEMPLATING THE PIERCED ONE

(John 19:31-34; Zechariah 12:10)

"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for the Sabbath was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." After Jesus expired, no violence was done to that body except this that is mentioned. Instead, hands of friends touched Him and only friends saw Him after the Resurrection. John adds: "And he that saw it bare record, that his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done that the scripture might be fulfilled, a Bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on Him whom they have pierced."

Let us bow our head with reverence at this testimony. Two Scriptures are before us: one has been fulfilled; the other begins to be fulfilled, and will always be in fulfillment. The fulfilled scripture is written in Psalm 34:20: *"He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken."* By not breaking the legs of Jesus, the soldier was fulfilling the prophecy without

knowing it. The easiest thing for the soldier would have been to continue to do as he was in the habit of doing to other crucified ones, but neither he, nor all the soldiers of the Empire could have touched the bones of the Just One. Let happen to that Body that which men want, but may their hands be powerless to break His bones. God has a plan: on the bones of that Crucified One He must build a Body, the Church, bone of His bones, and flesh of His flesh. His bones cannot be broken. This is symbolized in the Passover: "*Neither shall ye break a bone thereof*" (Exodus 12:46).

Martyrdom yes, but let the bones be intact. The eyes of the Father are on the Church; the prophecy is fulfilled in the example and is being fulfilled in the Church, so that those who are of Jesus, although they may be tempted, are protected until the end.

The other Scripture was not fulfilled. The language is accurate. And another Scripture says: "*They shall see Him whom they have pierced.*" One who reads attentively the writings reported by St. John, will notice the importance given to the verb "TO SEE." The Greeks wanted to "*see Jesus;*" and "*he who sees the Son and believes in Him hath life eternal.*" That which John has seen and contemplated, he announces. Seeing for St. John is a powerful word, and it is not the casual seeing, but a contemplating at length with interest, fixing the gaze until the reality of the lesson can be discovered from the thing. He had been at the foot of the Cross, and had noted everything, keeping his eyes fixed on that Cross of pain. And when the soldier passed before him and pierced that body with the spear, the two scriptures passed before the mind of the disciple.

He noted that from the pierced breast blood and water immediately came out. The suddenness of the double supply of blood and water made an impression on him. A deposit of

love, ready to be poured forth. The two streams that had striped that Body had been as though absorbed by the dry eyes of the contemplating disciple. He had to remain for a long time staring at that Body whose bones were not broken, and at the pierced side! He saw the prophecy regarding the piercing applied but not finished.

How many saw? How many noted that scene? We do not know if, beside John and the mother of Jesus others may have seen, but to the mind of the disciple the horizon becomes enlarged, and makes him see a multitude, always bigger and interested, and sees, and is not tired of contemplating. The One who has remained in the eyes of all times "*He who has been pierced,*" until the wound of that side seems to pass into the one who contemplates, and in the spirit, makes him taste the tragedy of that death.

In Zechariah 12:10 we read: "*and I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him.*" It is necessary to be filled with the Spirit of grace and of supplications, to call upon him, and to take our eyes off ourselves and others, fixing them on the One whom we have pierced. All of humanity is represented in that soldier that pierced Him, so that it will be restored. "*And they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*" Without losing sight of the future, it is also considered in the present application for each one who puts himself like John at the foot of the Cross to follow the various movements that were accomplished there, up to seeing the soldier that pierced Jesus, and to see blood and water flowing immediately from the ample wound, as if to say that it has nothing else to offer and that all has been accomplished. Remaining with our head lifted up, in the measure that, guided by the Holy Spirit we

contemplate, we enjoy the communion of His suffering and we will mourn for ourselves and for others.

The Lord loves and prepares people who mourn because we will be able to be indulgent and to love as much as we have savored of the death of the Lord Jesus, and that, too, will be in proportion to how much and how long, and how intensely we shall have begun, without ever ceasing, to contemplate the One who has been pierced. The lesson which begins on the earth will have no end in heaven, because the contemplation of Him will be the marvel and eternal admiration of the Universe.

* * *

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST

(Philippians 3:18, 19)

They are not to be sought far away, because no one can truly be an enemy of HIM, if in some way he has not known Him. Saul was persecuting the Church, but he was not exactly an enemy, although his actions were contrary to the doctrine of the cross. Enemies are to be sought within because nothing hurts as much as the discredit that comes from many among those who call themselves people of God.

"I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping" adds the Apostle; and he feels to tell them the plain word: it is time to make an end of illusions; you do not want to hear it, and it seems to you that there is severity and exaggeration; therefore my insistence and my tears; not only for the condition, but for your lack of discernment. I have said, and I

repeat it weeping: *“that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.”*

In reading again the beginning of the letter, it is clear that the Philippians needed to discern the contrary things. It wasn't easy for them to discover these enemies in sheep's clothing. The Apostle describes them thus: *“Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”*

Men who are outright gluttonous and voracious are quickly discovered; therefore, making an idol of the stomach is an indication that they love to have all the comforts and know how to procure the best. Skilful as they are in twisting the counsel of God, they always have some verse ready to excuse, rather, to approve their egoism. But there is another sign: *“Whose glory is in their shame;”* that is, they rob the glory of God, and they boast about the visible. Even this they do skillfully, as if they want to honor the Lord. Such people can be recognized by this: after they have spoken, attention is attracted not to Jesus Christ, but to themselves. They are the charlatans of religion who know how to play on the easy admiration of the crowds. After Peter had finished speaking, many were pricked in their heart; they were not occupied about how the Apostle had preached, but they were **PRICKED IN THEIR HEART**, and asked what they should do. Permit us an example outside of the Scripture: Luigi Decimoquarto often heard two famous preachers. Of one it is said that when he heard him, he came away with an admiration of his eloquence and erudition; but when he listened to the other, he would leave thoughtful and mortified in himself.

One day, the glory that is stolen returns to confusion. Whether that time comes sooner or later does not matter, but

it will come, and it will be a day of shame for those who have not sincerely sought the glory of God.

Another sign of the enemies of the cross is: "*Who mind earthly things,*" that is, they are occupied about the visible. We all have to live and have need of many things, but there is a difference in using and abusing, or rather, to have our soul, our intention on earthly things. Such people demonstrate anything but having citizenship in the heavens, and that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth.

Now, such people discredit the testimony of the Gospel. All the harm that adversaries are not able to do, they do it. The Christian is observed more than he realizes, if he truly lives according to the Gospel. A bad testimony has two effects: either it is considered completely false, or it may be considered to be only a theory that is impossible to carry out in practice. "It is so true," they say, pointing to us, "that they themselves do not live it." Reader, do not put this writing down without asking yourself in the light of the Holy Spirit if, at least in part, you also have not been an enemy of that Cross! Decide once and forever to live TRULY as a citizen of heaven should.

The plan of the Lord is to give us a body like His. He possesses the virtue of submitting all things to Himself, and therefore, to give abundance of grace in order to make us know how to live in this world as though not belonging to it. The attractions of the visible, against which many make shipwreck, cannot harm those whose soul is not for the earth, but for Heaven, from whence they are waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, they expect all joy and comfort only from Him, and by means of Him whom they have made the center of all their thoughts and affections.

THE TRUE REASON FOR PUNISHMENT

(Amos 2:4, 6)

Judah and Israel heard from the prophet the threats against other nations, but now they are called to hear their own condemnation: *“For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments.”* Thus saith the Lord: *“For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because they sold the righteous for silver.”* These two nations had received the light of the Lord, and their responsibility was therefore greater. There is in the heart of man the temptation to decide for what sins one may be punished, and for what merits one may gain the favor of God; but there is a point that decides the good of everything and the evil of everything, and that is the reverence that we use for the Law of the Lord, and what justice we do to the truth. In the dispensation of Grace, Law and Virtue are personified in Christ Jesus and we are judged neither for one sin nor for two, but according to the reception we give to the Lord. In Him is our righteousness and salvation. Outside of Him is our condemnation.

“What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” asked the Jews: the eternal doing of the human pride! And Jesus answered, *“This is the work of God, that ye might believe on Him whom He hath sent.”* Therefore the question is not about what we do, but how we receive Him.

Believing in Christ means receiving Him and letting Christ work in us, or rather, to surrender to the work of His Spirit. Behold our doing, and alas, behold that which the world,

always desirous of creating their own justification, and thus they rebel and don't want to admit.

If we accept Jesus Christ and we love Him, it is easy for us to do the rest; if not, it is impossible, and we will only deceive ourselves. This is the secret: accept Christ and His words. Many shall be judged because they shall have been ashamed of Christ, and of His words. It is the continuous sale of the Just One. Many sell Him for a very small price; and that is, for the demands of the world, the interests, human respect, and then they say: "I love the Lord." They pretend to love Him, and they neglect Him every day, in the transactions of life, and for a small price. Here is the condemnation: Friend reader, let there be fewer programs, and less pretensions in your efforts to save yourself: only be constant in being in communion with Him; do not think of the rest, because, as the condemnation is based on His rejection, your salvation is likewise based on His love and His righteousness for you.

* * *

BUT JEHU...

(2nd Kings 10:29)

All began well in the behavior of this king of Israel. Jehu obeyed in exterminating the house of Ahab, and for the extermination of the prophets of Baal. But...

But what? *"Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan."* He obeyed in all that which concerned his

adversaries, but as for the particularism and religious ecclesiasticism he did nothing, rather he continued in the ways of Jeroboam. A look to the past: *“And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah (1st Kings 12: 26-32).*

Such reasoning was against the faith because it was God Himself who took away the kingdom of Israel and gave ten parts to Jeroboam. But although he was used by God, Jeroboam's heart was not toward God, but toward glorifying himself. To Judah, although impoverished, there remained Jerusalem, the priesthood and the temple where the sacrifices were offered. Jeroboam was not content with what the Lord had given him and did not lean on His promises; he trembled for the future and envied Judah for what had remained to Judah. *“Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto the people, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast”* (exactly like it was celebrated in Jerusalem).

In conclusion, he built a religious fortress in order to impede meeting in the place in the manner that the Lord had ordained.

The successors of Jeroboam remained firm in wanting to keep the people far from Jerusalem. Jehu continued the religious policy of Jeroboam; that is, he kept the sanctuaries that were to take the place of the Temple; and as for the

priests and assistants, he provided them himself, although they were not of the tribe of Levi. But, we ask ourselves, what has all this to do with us who call ourselves "bride of Christ," and say, in an unctuous manner: "The return of the Lord is near?"

What? Much. We have neither the earthly Jerusalem, nor the ancient Temple, and not even the Judaic priesthood. We have another Jerusalem, which comes from heaven; another Temple, and another priesthood in the center of the New Testament. God is Spirit and Truth, and is not limited to places and groups. The eagles, the elect, are called to be fed where the sacrifice of Christ is honored, and where He is King.

Christians must not be under any dictatorship, but must depend on the Only Lord, King and Master. It is true that He uses men, but those to whom the servants are sent must have a confirmation in their spirit that God is Sovereign, and that ministers are "servants," not owners of the souls. Thank God there are such servants who desire, like John the Baptist, to diminish themselves so that Jesus might grow before the souls. There are.

But—But there are also the Jeroboams, men to whom God has given an assignment, but who go beyond the assignment, and want to act as lords over the souls.

There are also the Jehus, zealous against Ahab and Baal, but tenacious in their religious policy, so that the people, whom they do not want to lose, do not ascend to the Heavenly Jerusalem, to the true Priesthood, to the true Temple.

Special sanctuaries, buildings, groups, ordination of ministers made for political reasons, feasts and so on, and so on are not lacking. Oh people of God, open your eyes.

Remember that the sheep hear only one voice: that of the Good Shepherd. The one who is of HIM, listens to the voice of God.

* * *

ARE THERE FEW

(Luke 13:23-30)

The title of the present meditation could also be: "Idle and dangerous questions."

"Then said one unto Him, Lord are there few that be saved?" Few? Many? How many? Who? Such questions tire even the most devoted, until, renouncing speculations about matters which the Lord has reserved only for Himself, they arrive to rest also in their mind, by which they are content to ignore that which the Lord does not allow them to know because they cannot bear such knowledge.

Few? If few, even those who are the best disposed are always in danger. And the enemy takes advantage of that, insinuating: "you will not be able to persevere. The One whom you serve is too demanding and rigorous. Therefore it is better that you follow your instincts... Who knows if there is another life."

Since from curious investigating to doubt there is only one step, and from doubt to denying there is only another step, therefore it is easy to arrive to Agnosticism or to Atheism! Speculating about the Scriptures, without the guidance, Light

and MEASURE (And Measure) of the One who inspires the Scriptures, has caused much damage. Let us continue. Many? Therefore, the walk is not as narrow as we are led to believe. Many? And why not all? From one discussion to another one arrives to libertinism. Since there are “many,” and the many become “everybody,” for what is the Gospel? Admitted that we have not read well and ALL of the Gospel.

But the Wise One did not satisfy the curiosity of the one who had asked because He, the Master, teaches line after line, according as the disciple is able to hear.

He answered: “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*” That is: pay attention to yourselves. You who have seen and heard ME, YOU are obligated to obey ME.

The command is a continuous present imperative: be always striving to enter in at the strait gate, and do not always speculate if there be “few” or “many,” of other “things” and of “others.” When Simon Peter was walking with Jesus and saw John who also was coming, resented it, and asked: “*What shall this man do?*” the reprimand and the answer of Jesus were rapid, absolute: “*If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*”

Thou—Follow ME.

Oh man, leave to the Infinite of God the problems of the Infinite. Thou!

“But thou” is written in more than one place of the Scripture. God, a saint has said, cares for everyone as if they were One alone, and also of one alone as if he were “everyone.”

And it is to each one that He says: “*But thou—Thou—Follow Me!*”

NO FORM OR COMELINESS

(Isaiah 53:2)

THOU ART FAIRER THAN THE CHILDREN OF MEN
(Psalm 45:2).

These are two contradictory judgments on the same Person. It is two peoples who are speaking, under two different aspects. Carnal beauty is ostentatious and showy; it fades when examined closely, and, in time, disappears entirely. Divine beauty is not seen quickly, but it becomes enlarged to the sight in the measure that the one who possesses it is examined. Carnal people do not see the beauty of Jesus, nor that of those who love Jesus. The Church, fixing their gaze on that Countenance, will say that He is fairer than any of the children of men. The judgment depends not only on how the person is that is seen, but on the spirit of those who see.

SALVATION BELONGETH UNTO THE LORD

(Psalm 3:8)

All forms of salvation belong to the Lord, not only opening hearts so that they may receive the Gospel. If we understand this, we will enter into true rest. Salvation is a rich word—saved from eternal death; saved from ourselves, in a full sense; saved from errors; saved from impressions and saved from our ignorance. We cannot correct anyone; I say WE.

God can use us to correct, but it must be HE Who corrects. All that which touches the fountains of life, only He can do.

Someone thinks evil of us, and we try to explain, but things get worse, the darkness becomes thicker. One fine day, when we no longer think of it, by one of those mysterious ways of Providence, something happens that enlightens the troubled mind. At times, we, not in the ways of the Lord, try to win over an enemy, but we do not succeed. The day comes that the Lord delivers us from that enemy, or delivers him from the hatred that he fosters against us.

If we apply the word SALVATION to all things of which we have need, we will surrender completely to the Lord, and we will depend entirely on Him. When He intervenes, as pleases Him, we shall be saved from whatever thing of which we have need to be delivered. Therefore He is also called Savior to the utmost. He saves from little and great dangers. He saves us for eternity, and He saves us now, from present things. The key of all the problems and of all the hearts is in His hands.

As soon as we stop depending on ourselves and we lean entirely upon Him, we will give Him the opportunity to be able to work. And He is looking for such an opportunity: He waits for it. Job would have been delivered much sooner from his afflictions if he had not at length and tenaciously, sought to enlighten his friends. When the Lord brought him to the condition of making him say that he repented in dust and ashes, only then did God deliver him. Man stops, so that God may work. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Only to the Lord.

* * *

PRAY AND BE SILENT

(1st John 5:16)

One of the most insistent messages in the writings of John is: the love of God. One who loves, prays. Only one who loves can pray; and only one who continues to pray perseveres in loving.

“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life.”

“If he sees!” It does not say that he may have gone to spy. A Christian does not try to discover evil except in himself. If, even not wanting, he comes to the knowledge of his brother’s sin, he prays. It does not say that he speaks, but he prays. One who loves is silent and does not report. He prays.

And the Lord will give life to the errant brother; a sure promise. Therefore, instead of lamenting about evils, let us pray and be silent.

* * *

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH IN THE LAST TIMES

Let us bear in mind that we are in the last times of the Church on the earth. Many things happen that never happened because there are express prophecies for the end-times. The ministries are not yet developed to the stature to which the Lord wants to bring them. Now, as He continues to develop, He Himself, by the Holy Spirit, will continue to

assign offices and work posts. The Church is on the way of restoration and subject to rapid changes as it has never been. Every step taken by us, even wanting to imitate what is good, would be out of place and out of the ways of the Lord and the result could be damaging.

These are exceptional times for which the Lord has exceptional remedies that we know only in small part, although all is already written. But the interpretation of the word of God becomes clearer in the measure that the time of the prophesied Word arrives.

Our wanting in some way to hasten or to want to make that which has been prophesied come true has always been dangerous. Isaacs, persecutors of Isaac, have multiplied because of our anxieties. We know that the Lord will draw a people out of a people, and will leave a remnant; but it would be an error for us to judge who that remnant may be, and for us to separate them. It is the Lord who builds the city, the walls and the towers (Psalm 147:1 and Psalm 127). The Lord governs the Church from on high in a way that escapes human prevision. This truth should be revered at all times, but never so much as at the present time.

It is said that many who are wise will fall and that the return of the Lord will be preceded by a great apostasy. However, it is impossible for us to know in advance who these wise ones who will fall may be and what the limits of such an apostasy will be. There will be unexpected betrayals by many who have pretended; but, exactly because betrayals *are* unexpected. It is said that the people will be reduced from the number that we had been used to count on. Truly difficult times are ahead for the Church and it would be a foolish work for someone to undertake anything at all without being fully assured. At the coming of the Lord strange and poor methods were used and thus it will be at His glorious return.

Officially there was the government of God on the Jewish people by means of the priesthood and of all the sum of that which is written in the old covenant. And yet the Lord gathered and prepared, in a way unforeseeable to man, those who had to see Jesus.

Simeon and Anna are figures of the church of the last days. Although part of the Judaic organization, they were united by the Lord, without their planning, for that which the Lord had prepared them. They were hidden people who were, each one, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was God that took care to make them meet at the right time.

Psalm 50 is a prophecy of the return of Jesus. There will be a gathering of those who have made a covenant with sacrifice. But this cry and this gathering will not be made by man, according to rules known to him in advance, but God Himself will do it, in His mysterious ways that always go beyond any human calculation. For the sake of our souls let us not make any innovation on our own. As soon as the Lord changes the line of teaching from the period of popularity, figured in the first ministry of Jesus, to that which began in the synagogue of Capernaum, with the discourse recorded in St. John, chapter six, many who now appear to be faithful will desert their places.

For a time other multitudes will come, and there will be saints among them, but even they will be sifted, in the lines traced by the various times of the ministry of Jesus. In the Spirit, the aspects of the earthly ministry of Jesus will be repeated in the Church. Let us pray that God will give us understanding of the times. The children of Isacchar had an understanding of the times. And then we will understand that these are the days in which men go around, and knowledge is increased. They are rapid times in which cities and nations will be transformed. There is absolute uncertainty in social

things. The Church lives in contact with an environment electrified by fear and uncertainty. Enemy forces are around the saints. Likewise varied is the grace of God. The tensions that are around us declare that we are at the vigil of unforeseen events. It is said that the hearts of men will fail them for fear. In such a state of things, the advice to the Church is to lift up their heads because their redemption is nigh. The prudent man shall keep silence, because it will be an evil time (Amos 5:13).

The days are reduced to the measure of the palm of a hand. Those who live thus are guided by the Holy Spirit to not move one step unless they see the Lord before them in everything. While everything changes rapidly, it can be said only of HIM: JESUS is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

* * *

BUILDING THE WALLS

(Nehemiah 2:16, 17; Psalm 51:18; Lamentations 2:18, 19;
Zechariah 2:5)

For three days Nehemiah had remained in silence, meditating on what to do in order to restore the ruins. Then he got up by night and slowly walked around the walls of the city, considering the walls and how they were broken, and how the gates had been consumed by fire. He, the elegant and prosperous courtier, cupbearer of the king of Persia, wept when he heard of the miseries of Jerusalem.

There are not many Nehemiahs! After he had considered the ruins, he appealed to those who, encouraged and helped by

him, had to apply themselves to the work of restoration. He said: "*Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.*"

Ruins and reproach go together. There are various qualities of walls. There are those that separate and keep us outside of the counsel of God. In this case they are walls of protection. No enemy can enter into a walled Jerusalem without having first scaled or broken the walls. The king, prophet David, hundreds of years before Nehemiah, had, in conclusion of a penitent psalm, asked of God: "*Build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*" This is the reason: "*Then [not before] shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*"

We acknowledge immediately that the walls for which David prayed are not the same ones of which Nehemiah is occupied. For a rich king, victorious and powerful as David was, there were not lacking means and men for constructing material buildings. He was praying for something else; that is, that Jerusalem, the people of God, should be protected by a spiritual wall formed and being formed of mature saints, so united together as to create a wall of obstacles to enemies and protection to those within the city.

To such a wall, the prophet Jeremiah appealed: "*O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.*"

Material things are a figure and a lesson of spiritual things; therefore, the ruins of the walls of Jerusalem that interested

Nehemiah make us think of other more serious ruins that also need restoration. Nehemiah was helped by a special grace in loving the city of his fathers and in obtaining permission to return there. No less of a grace is necessary in order to love the Church, to feel its need and to ask the Lord for grace that its walls be built or rebuilt. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." But when the Lord wants, He builds and uses men to work with Him. There is a ministry of building.

Many are preoccupied about cities and masses of people, and there is good in that—but where are the walls? Only in the last verses of Psalm 51, a psalm rich with thoughts and of faith is the request: "*Build the walls.*" They are the mature souls who see the need of "walls." To them the prophet appeals (the prophetic spirit): "*Arise, cry out in the night, lift up thy hands toward Him!*" We remember many words of Joel (2:17): "*Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar.*" So many masses of people, many buildings, frequent gatherings in order to decide, but where are the walls? And where, or how many are there that cry to God that He should build the walls, serving Himself of who He wants and how He wants. Arise, merciful souls who love the good of others; arise, to cry before the Lord: "*Build the Walls.*" Because only then will there be a meeting in spirit and truth, and all will be placed on the altar, that is, on Christ.

The Lord has promised to restore: "*For I will be [thus He says to Jerusalem] I will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.*" Fire, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, warms those who are cold and distances the enemies. When the city is surrounded as by fire; that is, entirely wrapped up by the Holy Spirit, only then will there be glory, true glory, in the midst of her.

WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?

(Exodus 32:1-26)

FOR THE LORD? Not for Moses, or another man, or for some group.

The question was asked in a difficult moment and required a precise answer and a decisive action: *"Let him come unto me."*

THE OCCASION: In the brief time of Moses' absence, the people had gathered around Aaron and said to him: *"Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."*

Aaron, being weak, consented to the request. He asked for and obtained the golden earrings that the women were wearing and out of them made a golden calf. He thought to make reparation by ordering a solemn feast to the Lord. It was a mixed feast.

The Lord commanded Moses to go down from the mountain because the people had corrupted themselves. He said that He would consume them, but Moses interceded and the Lord spared them.

"And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand. And it came to pass as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them before the mount." *"Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me."*
The moment was difficult and decisive. The man of God did

not tremble, nor did he gather a group around him with whom to discuss how to remedy the ruin. It was not a question of him, nor of others, but of the Lord. The important thing was to know immediately who were the ones on the Lord's side.

"And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him."

THE PROOF: The Levites demonstrated courage in going forward as one man, and gathering themselves around Moses, disposed to everything. But the readiness of one's soul is proved by action. And he said unto them: *"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor."*

Put every man his sword by his side! If there had been no other command, it could not have been proved what nature the zeal of the Levites might be; that is, whether they really loved the glory of God. The zealous man is ready to gird on his sword and to use it, even in an exaggerated way. But there was in the command something very sorrowful to the flesh: they had to go back and forth through the camp, and kill each man his brother, his companion, his neighbor. The rigor had to begin toward the people that were connected to them by bonds of affection, according to man. Before they could punish those not connected to them by blood ties or special friendship, they had to truly show that they were impartial men and that their sense of justice was above any relation. Only then were they to continue in the work of justice, striking those less intimate. It was a justice that began in each one's circle. *"And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses."* *"For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, even every man*

upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day." It is understood that the blessing would pass on to others, because the Levites, a tribe selected for the Priesthood, were the ring of connection of God with the people, which is what the word Levi means.

Remembering in a special way the sons and the brothers serves to give emphasis to the impartiality that one who announces God's justice to others must have. That raised sword, with which they had to go from one side of the camp to the other, had to first pierce their own heart, in their sweetest affections. When it had to be lowered on strangers, it would already be tired.

Since these things are a figure of the New Covenant, we learn that each one must pass through the camp of his own existence, and not spare the things, the affections that are dearest to him. It is easy to use rigor toward others, and to be indulgent toward ourselves and our relatives.

The examination must be severe and precise: from one gate to the other of the camp. The first one that comes forward and that must be pierced by the Word of God is our very own person. The disciple of Jesus Christ must deny himself. Understanding what this HIMSELF may be is not an easy undertaking. An accurate and minute examination of one's life is required, from one gate to the other, putting everything on the Altar. Thus shall we be consecrated. The word "Consecration" means "Filling the hands." The idea is that while we empty them of our own things, we refill them of His; that is, of the things of the Lord. The Church is a Kingdom of Priests. No one who caresses himself can be a disciple of Jesus. He commands us to hate ourselves; only then will He be able to entrust to us the delicate work of the souls, because He loves the souls, and wants that any rigor that we use toward others has been experienced first on

ourselves, examining ourselves in the light of the Holy Spirit. The sword that must wound must first penetrate well within ourselves. Only in this way can we attract blessings and be bonds of connection among the men of God.

* * *

THE TWO COUNTRIES

(Deuteronomy 11:10-21)

Egypt—Canaan; between them there is the desert. Egypt, the desert and Canaan are figures of spiritual conditions. These three districts have been, and still are significant in the life of the saints. Completely out of Egypt, and also out of the desert, is perfection toward which we must aim. The knowledge of these places is an essential part of the discipline.

The contrast: *“For the land, whither ye go in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out.”* They were out of Egypt, and not yet in Canaan. In this interval, the Lord invites them to a retrospective and a prospective look.

The comparison is on the negative side: NOT and AS. It is well to keep in mind that in some ways Egypt is similar to Canaan: the sun rises on one and the other country; the water is provided by the Lord for one and for the other. The blessing of God is on both places, although expressed in a different way. It is useful for a balanced view to know clearly that the Lord loves also Egypt, because He loves all the world. The two countries are a figure of two peoples in

two conditions. Egypt: *"Where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs."*

The memory of the past in Egypt remains in some for a long time, and so long and insistent that they return to it. In others it remains for a time, alternated by the vision of the new country; and a few succeed in forgetting Egypt, forgetting it to the point of not desiring it: they have forgotten it and they proceed forward. But there is a time that the Lord Himself presents the comparison and contrast. He knows what we have left.

In Egypt the water was at our disposition, and we controlled its use. No matter what the sky looked like, the water was already ready, as long as we used our activity: watering it with our foot.

"But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven."

"To possess it." In Egypt you were a stranger; but in the new country, you enter in order to possess it. And you possess as much of it as you occupy by faith.

It is a *"land of hills and valleys,"* now up, now down. A land without water cannot live; but here the watering does not depend on you; and your feet cannot help you; it is necessary that you turn your eyes on high, waiting for everything from heaven, because the land *"drinketh water of the rain of heaven."* It had to be a trial for men who were used to seeing water run when they wanted. They had to remain in apparent inertia and wait for heaven to be covered with clouds, and finally, give the rain. If not, all was dried up. In the field everything could be ready and in order, but all was useless if it did not rain. A dry period would render the ground barren, and cause men and beasts to perish. The person's head and

gaze had to be raised often, in silent prayer to heaven, so much so that even one's manner of walking had to be influenced by it. It rains when it pleases God to make it rain. You, the land and the instruments of work are there, witnesses of impotence if the heavens do not open.

We are apt to lose courage as soon as we become aware that we cannot help ourselves on our own. Therefore, the Holy Spirit continues to speak in order to encourage: "*A land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.*" **THE LORD THY GOD TAKES CARE.** The secret is in that "Lord—Thy—God." Let Him be your Lord, absolute owner. He is God; therefore He can do everything; He is yours, therefore He loves you. You can depend on Him. Pay attention to keep always effective these three great words: "Lord—Thy—God" and do not fear anything.

Does He not care for Egypt? Yes, He does. Everything is in His hands; nothing escapes His love. However, He has a special plan for Canaan; therefore, He speaks of a particular care. His eyes watch over it continually, from the beginning of the year to the end. Your feet will never again control the water as it seems good to you. That time is past forever. The country is another, and the watering is entirely different. From the feet, to heaven! From your care and your eyes, to the care and eyes of the Lord! In the beginning it is difficult to believe it, because man is slow to enter into absolute and full dependence on the Lord; but the promise is powerful and continuous. However the season may go, whether it rains or the field be rich with green things or the field is dry, it is He the Lord—Thy—God; do not fear, because He is responsible for everything. In Egypt where He waited for you with so much patience, the care was divided; you depended a little on Him, and a little on yourself. Everyone depends on God

in some measure, for something. But in Canaan it's a question of not depending in part but ENTIRELY ON HIM; ENTIRELY. The government is entirely on His shoulders. May your feet rest. Up to now they were hasty and sometimes wandering. Look to heaven; leave everything in His care. The Lord God neither slumbers nor sleeps. His care extends not only to the territory but lasts the whole year, from the beginning when He has introduced us into the country until He brings us to the end which He Himself has destined for us; and even there His care will be eternal.

Thus it is of our life. In the camp of Grace, since we have accepted Jesus as a sufficient Savior, everything has changed; our feet, as a means for watering, can no longer lend us help. The configuration of the country does not allow it: mountains and valleys of unexpected experiences require quite something else than the method of the feet of man. We must finish forever and entirely with ourselves. We must acknowledge Him as the Lord, Our God.

Only then, by the Holy Spirit, will we be able to hear His commands that are children of a single great Command: that of abiding in HIM. Without Him we can do nothing; not even understand His commands. We will have grace to hear and to obey; the Lord—Thy—God. How much there is in three great words!

“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thy oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.” Each one will know the field assigned to him. Grace is necessary in order to know our limits and to respect those of

others. We will gather our corn and our wine and our oil. We will not attempt to disturb others. And we will have enough of these three harvests, a wonderful figure of communion with the Lord that will not let us lack of the bread of life, the wine that makes us happy, and the oil that anoints our head. We must simply gather in. He keeps us under the heaven from whence comes our rain, when and how He wants, and gives other counsels that regard us and our children; that is, those that are born by means of the work that He gives us to accomplish for Him. Not only this, but He enlarges our vision for the future: *“That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children... as the days of heaven...”*

Everything becomes new. The country is another; the configuration is different; the watering is different and the care is continuous; time itself acquires another extension; the days of the Lord are not of twenty-four hours, because it is true that He makes a thousand years of trouble, or of human efforts, like a day of twenty-four hours, or even less, like a watch, and it is also true that a day of twenty-four hours, or a watch in a night of trouble, spent for Him, are like a thousand years, He counts them as a thousand years. We will enter into the age of the millenniums. New Heavens, new earth, new days.

* * *

GIVE TO HIM THAT ASKETH

(Matthew 5:42)

To whom did the Lord impart and does the Lord impart such a command? Who is the one that “asks,” and by what and by whom is he moved to ask? It is an important subject; truly important, because the Christian must obey the Lord, and

cannot obey if he does not know the voice. He must love and know the Sovereign Will of the Lord, and at the same time, he must not be made a fool of by the craftiness and malice of men.

He has said: "*Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that borrow of thee turn not thou away.*" To the one who is "asking," to the one who is "desirous," who asks because he truly has need, and wants a loan, having honest intentions to repay—to such a one, give.

One who gives must be disposed to lose; but one who asks must do so honestly, and if he wants a loan, he must sincerely want to make restitution.

It is not right to elude or to reduce the objective of the divine commandment; it is necessary to understand it and obey it. The command was given to the disciples when they left the multitude behind and followed Jesus up the mountain. They remained seated around Him and they heard and gathered the whole of the messages that form the Sermon on the Mount.

The command to give follows various teachings, at the head of which are those eternal words: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*" The other beatitudes follow, and other exhortations and promises. Following the order of the holy language, we find that BEING and BECOMING precede DOING and OBEYING.

Having become that which the beatitudes want us to be (and one who honestly begins to walk in them has already in faith received), having become what the Lord wants us to be, we see Him and follow Him in the various lines of teaching which have become like steps, that one after the other, bring us on high. It is necessary to obey. One who has climbed on high and hears Jesus, in the serene atmosphere of the

Mountain (Isaiah 11:2-9), loves, knows and obeys the Sovereign Will of God.

Obedience is a must, but to the Lord. We must be very sure that it is He who commands. Abraham and Philip both obeyed commands that seemed to be truly unreasonable; one, of the sacrifice of the only son promised and received by grace; and the other, to leave a great and prosperous work in order to go into a desert way. They obeyed, not doubting that the Lord had spoken, and not some seducer or a deception of the heart.

When we have consecrated ourselves to the Lord we hear His Voice, distinguishing it from other voices. Until we are assured, let us wait. The Lord does not leave those who trust in Him confused and perplexed.

Must we give to whomever asks and wants, to whatever individual that asks and wants, always, without limit, even if one who asks and wants is moved by a spirit of malice and of egoism? It is necessary to understand that every word of the Lord is based on and appeals to Reality. Asking and desiring must be born of a true need. They mean: to the one who truly asks and who honestly and ardently desires.

Every Reality is in God, from God, and tends to serve Him.

John 3:27 reveals one of the great eternal lessons: that is, no one can RECEIVE anything if it is not given to him from heaven. Men take many things but receive only that which God gives. The rest is strange, and sooner or later, it is poison.

Applying this law to "Asking and desiring" we see that true asking and desiring, in order to be legitimate, must be moved from Above. All creatures are, whether they want it or not,

under the control of the Omnipotent. It is Heaven itself that moves the honest asking, and to whom, and how much. The One who asks and desires (permit us the bold expression) is God Himself hidden in the creature.

But, someone will smile, this is mysticism. Such it is, we answer. The mysticism and the Mystery are in the things of Heaven. Grace and light are needed in order to understand them.

The word "ask" of our subject is the same as that Martha used with Jesus in John 11:22: "*Whatsoever that Thou [Jesus] wilt ask of God.*" It is the asking of the Son, of that Son, to the Father, to that Father. It is a sure asking, like that of one who, on the basis of absolute consecration and trust, has received authority to ask.

On many other occasions the word "to ask," in the text is another. Permit us an example that is very practical in this life. Two individuals present themselves in a Bank, one to ask for some help or a loan, and another, with documents in hand, to ask for a sum that is due him. Both ask, but with different courage. The asking of the second one is absolute, although the language used may be as if he were asking a favor.

Those who live on High become "pure in heart," they see God, each time, when they need Light and guidance, and know how to distinguish between the true and the false askers. But there is more.

Those who live on High have consecrated themselves and their things to the Lord, and are free from two possible influences that might confound them in the obedience to the command of "Giving." After they have understood that the one who asks and desires is moved by God, they are not

tempted by avarice to reduce the amount, or by partiality to prefer one person over another.

On the Mountain, near Jesus, the spirits of avarice, prejudice and partiality cannot dominate us (read again Isaiah 11:2-9 and 1st Timothy 5:21).

We are asked: can we, when we discover bad faith, answer with a NO? Yes, we can, and we must. As faithful administrators of the goods of Heaven, we must know if that which is asked has the stamp of Heaven. To the cunning fellow, to the impostor, to one who is deluded who asks, we will say: I cannot give you anything, because my Father to whom I and the things that I have belong, has advised me that you neither ask nor desire truly. NO!

In the school of Jesus Christ, living in the secret place of the Most High (Psalm 91) we learn to say "Yes" that is truly "Yes," and "No" that is truly "No." Behold the secret: We must make a funeral to ourselves, living on High, close to Jesus, seeking only His glory; and that He may ask that which He wants, directly or by means of whom He wants. Obeying Him is a privilege and happiness.

* * *

THE TRUE HUMBLE ONE

One who is truly humble speaks not even in his own dishonor, because self-love is very subtle, and is nurtured even when we speak evil of ourselves. One who is truly humble, with a deep persuasion, neither boasts nor despises himself; he is not occupied about himself.

* * *

WHERE THE TESTIMONY REMAINS FIRM

(Isaiah 8:16)

The prophet has given the message to sanctify the Lord of hosts, and to fear Him. The warning is given, that "*many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.*"

Afterward the Lord says: "*Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.*" We know, in the light of the New Covenant, that it's a question of the Law of the Spirit, a testimony of Jesus in us, and by means of us, because He is the true testimony. Did the Lord send Isaiah to preach in order to make him conclude that only a number will have the privilege of listening, because such is the will of God that few will receive benefits? It could seem so, but it is not.

"*Bind, seal among my disciples.*" Only those in whose heart the testimony and the law remain bound and sealed, only such ones are the disciples of Jesus. Or, to say the same thing in another way, only the disciples bind and seal. If anyone wants to be His disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily (a variety of crosses according to the persons and the times), and follow Him. The soul that is so decided, treasures the testimony and the Law of the Lord. And one who esteems the testimony and the Law of the Lord, and binds and seals it, if he is not a disciple, is on the way to becoming one. The Church must be a garden enclosed and a fountain sealed (Solomon's Song 4:12). We too, must be watchful and hold dear that which He gives and make a treasure of it deposited within us. We bind and appreciate that which He finishes binding and sealing within us, for Him.

CURSED IS THE MAN – BLESSED IS THE MAN

(Jeremiah 17:5, 7)

“Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and that maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.”

Therefore, should we mistrust all men? From mistrust to hatred, there is only a step. How should we understand this “trusting in man and in the Lord?”

Cursed be the flesh in us and in everyone that trusts in the flesh of another. That is, confidence that is placed in men, for that which we see that is carnal in them or that we expect, by our pretenses, thinking that we deserve something. But blessed be the life of God in us, that trusts only in the life of God that is in others.

The flesh of another man deceives us, but that life of heaven that is in him, and that spark of God that is in him, cannot deceive. We must distrust up to the maximum that which is of man in man, but trust up to the maximum that which is of Grace in man. The two extremes touch each other. The maximum mistrust, because we do not merit anything, and another man cannot guarantee anything to us; but, likewise, the maximum confidence if, forgetful of ourselves, we entrust ourselves, for holy purposes, to the work of God in our hearts and in the heart of others.

We do not see the Lord; however, He moves and works by means of men. Therefore, blessed is the man who, while he distrusts everyone, as men, wants, for heavenly ends, to hope

for good from everyone, and, by means of everyone, up to the extreme possible, trusting not in the visible, but in the Grace of God. Holy prudence brings us to mistrust everyone, as men; the love of God brings us to hope for the good and to trust in everyone, in God, for that, and for as much as God wants.

* * *

THE PROCEDURE OF THE KING

(1st Samuel 8:11-17)

“This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you.” Samuel warned that the king has a procedure over his people; whatever the king may be, and whatever the people may be.

This is the procedure of the king over that people: *“He will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants.”* This is one of the passages of the Scripture that seem to not have any importance outside of the

immediate occasion for which they were written, and even this occasion seems to be secondary; the writing remains like a desert, frequented only by some rare traveler. But the day comes when the desert will flourish like a rose.

Saul and that people passed on, but the application of that "Procedure of the king" has not passed. The king has been elected voluntarily, not imposed by anyone. In addition it is not a question of a tribute to Caesar, but of a sovereignty that extends to all that we hold dear. Saul, for the autocrat that he may have been, did not take everything, and from everyone. First came Saul, then David, who is a type of Jesus. Thus, first comes the kingdom of the stranger, and then of the One to whom it belongs. Our King also has his chariots and horsemen, and his chariot; armies and weapons, and equipment for his chariots; he needs perfumers, cooks and bakers and wants to give gifts to his officials and servants.

In the passage transcribed there is the picture of hard slavery to the tyrant, and of the sweet voluntary slavery to the Blessed Lord, who makes us His own for our good.

Verse 17: "*You will become his servants.*" That is at the end of the list of that which belongs to the king. We would have put it at the beginning, and perhaps we would have concluded all the procedure of the King in these words: "We will be His servants."

Many of us have said that we are servants of the King Jesus, and yet, if we examine the particulars, we see that in **MANY THINGS** He is not yet our King. He is waiting for His procedure. The owner had the right to everything that belonged to the slave. The list is for the purpose of telling us in what way we can sincerely say that we are His servants. He will take all that is dearest: the sons, the daughters, in order to make them serve in His Kingdom, as He wants, and

not according to what we would have desired for them. All of us have sons and daughters, even those who do not have them in a human sense. There is something in many areas that we like to consider ours, our fruit: sons in the sense of that which is strong; daughters in the sense of that which we consider delicate and gentle. Every man, poor though he may be, has a little world of his own, in which he considers himself king. In the day that Israel voluntarily selected a king for itself, Samuel the prophet warns them that the dominion of that kingdom passes to the Sovereign that it has elected. And Samuel, practical man that he is, does not content himself telling them of a servitude expressed in general terms and that can mean much and nothing (according to that which one wants to understand), but more specifically, he explains to them the right of the elected king.

THE KING WILL TAKE! He does not even have to ask and advise when he will do it. Your sons and your daughters are no longer yours, except in the sense of keeping them close to you at the disposition of the Sovereign, for the time that he will be taking them for His service. It can be that you will have to separate yourself from them in a single time, remaining, in a moment, without anything, and be thus alone, to serve Him. For as painful as such a separation might be, even happening in a single time, it would spare you the long torture of taking place at intervals. It can be that He will not come quickly to take your children and they are kept in reserve for the King. In such a case not only is He always the owner, but you are responsible for how you care for Him, for that which is His. They are His, and yet you cannot exempt yourself from taking care of this responsibility. More than one has observed and observed well, that living EVERY DAY for the Lord is more difficult and requires more consecration than dying of one blow for HIM. The day will come when you least expect it, that by the order of the Sovereign, the call will come to make them leave or to you

yourself to accompany your children to the place indicated; they will be put on the chariots of the King, and among his horsemen; it does not say in what capacity. It is not necessary to tell you, because the King will not give you a reason for His action. Some will have to run before His chariot. Our Lord is a Great Warrior. How these children will be divided, you will not know except afterward. Perhaps they will have the rare privilege of being commanders of thousands and of fifties, or be used in the less risky, but humbler trade of plowing the fields. All of your cooks, perfumers and bakers (the most indispensable) that you had in your little dominion will pass on to him. Perfumes, kitchens and bread, will pass under the administration of the Sovereign. Even these things? We want to consign to Him (that He might govern them) the strong, difficult sides, but never the delicate ones, because we think it is not necessary to bring them to the Sovereign. And yet these delicate daughters are the ones that represent the morbid and dangerous side of our humanity: they are precisely our good qualities on which we were resting that we must yield to Him, so that He will make of them perfumers, cooks and bakers. The bread comes from Him; He prepares it and He causes it to be baked. He knows what food is necessary according to the people that must be fed, and every perfume is given only to the Lord.

Our vineyards and olive groves will pass on to Him because we are not able to produce anything that is good. Or if they are true vineyards and true olive groves, in such a case it is He that has made them by means of us; or if they are apparent vineyards and olive groves, even then they must pass on to Him because it frees that territory from vain appearances. And our male servants and female servants and even our donkeys, that is, everything that is material around us and at our command must pass on to Him.

And at the end of everything, even ourselves, like those whom we have been consigning to Him one son after another, and one daughter after another, and afterward the male servants and the female servants, and the donkeys (oh! how much there is in the fact that He takes our DONKEYS!), at the end we present ourselves also, to Him, servants in perpetuity.

“He will take a tenth of your flocks.” After He has taken everything it seems that he is content with only a tenth. That is because of all that that seems to be His, done by means of us, at the end, only a tenth part remains. While He takes everything under His Command, that which is approved is only a tenth of it. The tithes, up there, are taken by the One who is the High Priest for evermore according to the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 7:8).

So that the people would consider well that which they were about to do, electing themselves a king (and the Holy Spirit warns us to consider well, before saying that we have elected Jesus as our King), Samuel added: *“Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.”*

When you see that which is dearest to you, everything, one thing after another go under the dominion of the King, then the flesh will resent it, and you will cry out.

And it is thus even of the most saintly that, many times, they have felt like a desire to flee because they saw themselves as deprived of everything, not only of that which one is immediately ready to yield, but also of that which we were in the habit of considering as delicate and good in us. The Lord will not answer these morbid cries of the soul. “Take now my soul,” cried Elijah, but the Lord did not answer him. And He did not answer Jonah who wanted to die. And many

times He does not even answer when you are grieved and resent the dominion of the King over something that you still considered yours. Bless Him, because the King of Peace and of Righteousness governs over you and takes away everything that is yours; He undresses you in order to dress you. He afflicts you for your good because He wants to do you good at the end.

* * *

FIVE AGAINST TWO

(Luke 12:51, 53)

“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth?” He gives the answer Himself: “I tell you, Nay; but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.”

They had received the command that into whatsoever house they entered, they had to greet it with the words: *“Peace be to this house.”* It was time that they should understand where this peace should stop, and where it would not. Something had already been said on the same occasion that the seventy had been sent on their mission: *“And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again”* (Luke 10:5, 6).

Later, in the last discourse that preceded His arrest, He spoke of HIS PEACE, quite different from that of the world. The

peace of the world is war within the soul, and false external agreement and is quickly disturbed. His peace is rest, harmony within, in the midst of outward discord. Jesus rested in the midst of the tempest. He was serene when surrounded by enemies; His Peace makes us live undisturbed even when, according to the visible, there is every reason to be disturbed. Take note of the words "My peace." Elsewhere it is "His doctrine," "His Wisdom," "His Kingdom." HIS supposes that there are those of others, therefore the conflict.

Peace on earth? The word used in the text is: "*land not inhabited;*" that is, the land of which the true Owner has not yet taken possession in order to govern it. His delight is in the inhabited part where He has begun to govern; the rest, spiritually, is desert. Peace, where the souls do not surrender to Him? No, rather, there is discord.

True peace, in order to establish itself, must reveal and put false peace out. Therefore, there is the battle. From now on five will be in one house divided three against two, and two against three.

For a long time it seemed to us that the number five was given like any example, but then we reflected that it is significant, also because in verse 53 the five persons are no longer found. The words that follow are: "*The father shall be divided against the son and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law.*"

In the cited application and practice it is not three against two, but one against one. And it should be noted, that whereas in order to have agreement of two it is necessary that both consent, it is also true that for true discord, two must consent. If one is against and the other is not, there

cannot be harmony, but not even discord. Two are needed in order to contend. But if one is disposed to peace, the contentious one must go elsewhere.

The five thus divided: three against two, and two against three, has a symbolic significance, and especially in view of the announcement: "*From now on,*" that is, from when the Gospel began to be announced. In the same house; he did not say of one house yes and of one house no; therefore, the word house also has a symbolic significance. A more effective translation says: in One house, or ONLY house the discord of the five; three against two, and two against three. The day that one of the parties ceases fighting, the discord will be finished. The house can be nothing else but our own heart. Who are the three, and who are the two? It is one of the symbolic numbers; figure of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And two, in this circumstance, signifies the carnal will allied to the circumstances of temptation. The flesh is the territory on which, and by means of which, the enemy works. The Three have always been working for our good, and the two resist. The struggle becomes acute from the moment that the Gospel is announced, "*From now on.*" The Three do not stop working for the good of the soul, but the flesh and the enemy resist. Therefore the discord which lasts until one of the parties stops struggling. And how can this happen?

Either the Three abandon the two to their hardness (because the Spirit of the Lord shall not always strive), and then it is a sad condition: that of no longer being fought by the reprimands of the Lord, or that the battle finishes by the surrender of the other side; that is, when our will is allied to the will of God and knows how to say NO to evil and to resist the temptations. Even so, a certain conflict lasts until the end because we resist in that in which we have still been

victorious, because we have not really known ourselves, and hated ourselves.

The work of Grace and the discipline of the Lord, to which even the most holy must submit, last as long as we are in this pilgrim tent. We should not deceive ourselves, either in our relations with the outsiders or with ourselves. The Peace of God is based on the Justice of God. As long as Justice and Peace are not in harmony there will be conflict and suffering. Therefore, we are encouraged to remain in His Peace, and at the same time, not to lose our way if we see that His peace is not accepted by others, and if even in ourselves there is a continuous conflict, now more and now less acute, but conflict until the end. Discord is found in the territory not occupied by Him because where He arrives, and plants His banner that is Love, there is Peace, absolute Peace.

The occupation of the territory is not always carried out in the same way; the Lord must often use harsh methods. Sometimes He allows the waters of the river to rise, strong and great. He will permit that we are put under the Midianites, in order to learn the difference between the domination of men and that of God: *"The king of Assyria [symbol of audacity and of arrogance of heart] and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck."* It is a sad spectacle of the territory that belongs to the Lord, and yet is so invaded. But everything is for a purpose. *"And the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel"* (Isaiah 8:7, 8).

However, he will not destroy because in the opportune time, when he has finished the disciplinary mission, the proud Assyria that thought that he would beat and did not know that he was like the rod used by the hand of the Lord, will

have to withdraw and the land will remain entirely of Immanuel, Who, in it, will lift up a standard of Peace, that is, an invitation of peace to all peoples.

* * *

REVELATION OR REASONING

(Ephesians 1:17, 18)

May our testimony not be suspect, because we, perhaps more than many, have had to renounce the subtleties of our mind. Everything can be achieved by reasoning; and yet many things that seem to be clear do not appeal to the spirit. Because TRUTH is learned first within (truth in the inward parts, wisdom within (Psalm 51:6), and then it comes as a light to the intellect).

Some things that we have learned as by second hand, and that have not been confirmed to us by the Holy Spirit, we have not been able to, and we cannot announce them with divine courage. But there are other things that do not appear to be reasonable at first sight and seem to go against the Word (that is against the letter of the Word), and yet they have been (in simplicity) revealed within. In the beginning of my ministry, when my knowledge, even of the letter, of the Scriptures was much more limited than today, an old man of the church in which I was serving suggested to me, that on the example of my predecessor, I would do well to read to the gathering, in the first part of the service, the ten commandments. Even though I did not want to displease him, I felt in the depths of my soul, a NO. My mind could not have been able to explain, but my spirit felt like a small wound. What is the spirit? The answer would be long, but

this is enough for now: the spirit is the intimate part with which man can communicate with the Divine. "*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit* (Romans 8:16). The spirit is like the central motor of a machine, but it is the most important part. Pay attention to everything, beginning from the motor, the spirit. And remember that Daniel had an excellent spirit; that is, the central faculty of hearing the Divine. The reasoning comes AFTER, because the Lord sanctifies everything: body, soul and spirit (1st Thessalonians 5:23), He puts in harmony, and sanctifies us wholly. BUT it begins in the inward parts. He will make everything clear to us, according as it is necessary: light is sown to the righteous, and therefore the mind will be illumined, but the light begins in the most intimate parts of the Sanctuary. Remember that in the ancient tabernacle the most important part was the Holy of Holies, closed to any outside light, and where only the superior light could be seen. At that time I did not know why I could not, as a rite, read the ten commandments to the people; if someone had called me to reason with them, I would not have known how to do it; but later the Lord made it clear to me even in my mind.

Another remembrance: In a certain place I was advised that certain ones had committed the sin unto death, and that we should not pray for them, and we should not seek them, nor should we let them come to us. Outwardly it seemed that it was so: voluntary sin, to death, etc. But I experienced the same suffering within: NO. And from that time the Lord began to teach me what the sin unto death truly is, and how it is committed, and how it can be recognized, in order not to err.

In many things, although I would not know how to explain it at the time, I feel in my spirit that they are not like the letter makes them seem. There is some small thing, still unknown to us, some point that the Lord will make clear. Nor should

we be confused that we have to give a reason. We must give a reason why we are Christians, but that does not mean that we are called to demonstrate all the doctrinal points. In many things we must say that we do not know how to explain them logically and in order; that they are clear in our spirit but we wait for grace to have them clear and in order also in our mind, in order to be able to demonstrate them to others, harmonizing the Scriptures. Pay attention to the intimate revelation in the spirit. We must pray to God that He renders our spirit excellent and sensible, and that He teaches also in our mind.

The citing of verses upon verses of the Scriptures does not mean that one has the true doctrine of the Lord, because for every subject there is a subtle connection, and often invisible to all the rest of the Word. St. Paul was praying that the Lord would give to the church of Ephesus "*the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him [Jesus Christ], and that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened...*" (Ephesians 1:17, 18). Revelation within, then comes light to the eyes of the mind.

Of course, the revelation does not contradict the written Word. No. But we do not how to read well the written word and to harmonize it, if first we are not, time after time, case by case, illumined to know how to read, to harmonize, and to see the harmonious whole. And above all, remember that every gift comes from the Father of lights. Every light is in Christ, who alone is the true Light. How many things did we have to acknowledge that we did not understand them as we should, even boasting of ourselves and strengthening ourselves by wanting to quote the Scriptures! After certain events, the mind is called back to the Scriptures. After certain revivals, portions of the Word to which we had not paid attention are discovered. The Word was there, but we

did not see it and we did not read it according to God. Thus it is with other parts of the Scripture.

Wait, therefore, for God to reveal Himself in the spirit, and then illumine our mind; and then, at His command, we will be able to explain to others that which He has made us know.

* * *

HE THAT WAS CALLED JUDAS

(Luke 22:47)

“And while He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him: because he had given this sign: whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He.”

WAS CALLED; it does not say that he WAS JUDAS. Between calling oneself and the being, there runs an abyss.

Judas means “Praise.” When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she said: *“Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah.”*

Calling oneself something without being, digs an abyss. It is not by chance that the Holy Spirit, just now, brings to our attention that he WAS CALLED. Elsewhere in the list of the twelve, his name is mentioned last: *“And Judas Iscariot”* with the addition: *“that also betrayed Him.”* But now, in the consummation of the evil, he is presented as: *“He that was called Judas, one of the twelve.”* It was night; the Lord had, a short time before, triumphed over the agony of

Gethsemane, and while He still had the word in His mouth, behold, with the swiftness with which evil things move, a multitude arrived. The worst that can be imagined of betrayal and hatred was represented in that crowd: it was composed of chief priests, the heads of the Temple, the elders, Pharisees and sergeants; and they were carrying lanterns, torches and weapons. Two other evangelists tell us that it was a great multitude.

What could have been impressed in the movements of that mixed crowd, animated in varying degrees by the anticipation of the coming spectacle, can barely be imagined. At the head, before everyone, went a man who bore an illustrious name, around which name are the most glorious promises of the Scripture: "*He that was called Judas.*"

The one who was called Judas was coming to meet Him, in order to kiss Him and betray Him, the One who is the true Judas. Judas betrays Judas; the false Praise that goes to meet the true one, and gives it into the hands of the enemies. And like all that which is false simulates love, so the one called Judas gives a kiss. This was the sign.

It is no marvel that Jesus said: "*Judas [PRAISE!] betrayest THOU [Oh, what a holy name to cover such a wicked deed!], betrayest thou the Son of Man WITH A KISS?*". The betrayal was not enough; but in order to blacken it even more, even the kiss!

Those who fear God are invited to kiss the Son; the Church longs for His kisses. The false Judas, like that which is false, is also exaggerated: he goes before everyone, does that which no one could even imagine, and does it with a greeting: "*Hail, master.*" The malice of false praise can arrive at so much! It is not surprising that Jesus said: this is your hour, and of the power of darkness. But the immediate

scope of this writing is not about that miserable one who ended in such an unfortunate manner. Who would be able to justify him? And inveighing against him would not only be a useless act, but cruel. The measured Wisdom contented itself by saying that it would have been better if he had never been born. The scope of this writing is about the head of that immense crowd that runs against the Christ, who, even today, is called Judas.

He was one of the twelve, one of that group in whose record are the sweetest memories. The twelve persevered in the temptations of That blessed Lord; they followed Him into Judah, notwithstanding that they knew that it was the place where His enemies plotted to kill Him.

When Jesus asked them if they wanted to leave Him, they answered, by the mouth of one of them, that they had nowhere to go, because He had the words of eternal life. Judas had not distanced himself, apparently, but remained until the end, one of the twelve. When Judas showed his true self, it was the worst exhibition. The ungrateful, indifferent crowd, the astuteness of the enemies with insidious questions, the violence that they had tried many times to accomplish against Him cannot be compared to that unique act, in the night, and more dismal than the night itself, because the author separates himself from everyone, and accomplishes an act of simulated love, and has a name that is one of the saddest ironies.

Of all the wicked ones, the most wicked is the one who praises God with a false voice. Rather, precisely this is one of his principal characteristics; precisely this makes him wicked. We will call others with a different name. The one who has said in his heart: There is no God, is called a "Fool" (Psalm 53:1); but the one who takes that Name in vain: "WICKED." *"But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou*

to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" (Psalm 50:16). The wicked man is not an outsider, often holy in the spirit, and destined for the city of God, although to us it may not seem so, and he may not know it, but it is among those who are inside that the wicked one, the wicked ones must be sought. They are not those who fall continually into evil; for them there are other titles. But it is the one who is proud to call himself and to have himself called Judas, and goes before the crowd. He is not violent, but leads the violent ones. His weapon is a greeting that seems to be holy, a kiss that simulates love.

The greatest saints and the greatest scoundrels have been in the number of the twelve. The city of the devil has its best representatives mixed among those who are the city of God. Like the eleven did not discover Judas, so it is not easy to know them, not even today. The true and false Jews bear the same name, and often the false ones exceed the others in outward demonstrations. Around the ONE CALLED JUDAS, little by little there is formed a mixed crowd of scribes, Pharisees, high priests, elders of the people, sergeants, armed with various weapons and illumined by artificial light. When the number is complete and the preparations are terminated, the one called Judas is ready to put himself at the head and to reveal to everyone, in order to shock them by that which for a time was known to One alone, and then discovered to a disciple of love, resting on the breast of Jesus. The consummation of the horrible act began with a greeting and a kiss that are a mockery of the Love and fear of God.

"The Lord knoweth them that are His." That is, they can fool many, for a time, but God knows them, and at the end He will manifest them. The word continues, and the warning of the Holy Spirit seems like a thunder: *"Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity"* (2nd

Timothy 2:19). *“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God”* (Romans 2:28, 29).

The one who carried the name betrayed; the others who did not have the name but had the hidden reality were faithful until death.

* * *

PEACE, PEACE TO HIM THAT IS FAR AND TO HIM
THAT IS NEAR

(Isaiah 57:19)

This is what He wants, and He creates it with His lips, if we listen to him: *“Peace, Peace.”* Notice the repetition: *“To him that is far off, and to him that is near.”* *“I—continues the Lord—will heal him.”* It means that the people are sick. The Word of His Mouth, when it is listened to and obeyed, creates peace to the one that is far and to the one that is near, and this shall be medicine.

The message starts from a center and spreads to the circumference, from Jerusalem to the extreme ends of the earth. But, in the above-mentioned text, peace first goes to the one that is far off and then to the one that is near. Here, as in other passages, the language is inverted. And the man who, seeing and accepting that peace with one who is far away is easy, must procure peace with one who is near,

otherwise he will not be healed, and often the body also suffers because of agitation. For meditation: When we remain in the same environment for a long time, near the same people, we are tempted to grow cold in love. We are all weak and apt to discover first the deficiencies of others, and then ours. Alas, many of us are quick to spy on others and to use rigor. But we do not want to know ourselves. We judge ourselves with indulgence, even though we may see ourselves as lacking, we excuse ourselves because of temperament and circumstances. Only at a distance of time and of places can one see some Christian who does not see evil in others, but sees and deplores evil only in himself. Such an elevated state is reached only after painful experiences that have bowed one's neck and tamed one's pride.

Most of us delude ourselves and dream that other places are better, and that elsewhere people are more reasonable. We are moved by reports of distant missions. We say: "Oh how many give their hearts to the Lord! How those people are thankful for the least benefit; yes... But, here, here..." and we despise the here and the present. It is dutiful to bless the Lord for drawing us to do good to those that are far, but we must not forget those that are near, because it is among them that patience is exercised and proved, if we truly are possessed by the Love of Christ that exceeds all knowledge. The one that is far does not annoy and provoke us, the one that is near does.

"Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near."

Rather, if we are truly converted, we will begin with those that are near to live the life of Christ.

The fastidious reader, if there is one, will permit us a remembrance taken from a book rich with mercy and

tenderness, I mean to speak of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," In a rich house there was among the other slaves a little negro girl who was fretful and spiteful. A Puritan lady, a cousin of the owner of the house, was acting in an irritated and proud manner toward the little slave, and the little one was aware of it. Although the owner of the house did not claim to be a Christian, he was merciful. On one occasion he remarked to his fastidious cousin that the little captive Negro girl understood in her spirit that she was despised, and added that he marveled that so many endeavor to open missions far away, and neglect the opportunities that are close by. The little Negro girl was a mission that was close by.

Peace to him that is near! If one is not in peace with him, one is not even in peace with him that is far. If we do not feel gratitude and give help to one that is near, it is not true that we feel gratitude and are merciful with one that is far. The proof is this: He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

Many of us live by illusions, and do not want to understand that a holy life begins in the family, in the neighborhood, in one's own congregation, and then extends also to those that are far.

But those that are near annoy and provoke. We answer that it is precisely in contrast that Truth and Love are tested. As iron cleans iron, thus one that is near helps us to discover in ourselves that which we did not know.

The widow had to take empty vessels from her neighbors. There are many "vacuums" in us, even in a single day, if we examine ourselves in the light of Heaven. When we feel empty, God will fill us (2nd Kings 4). It is not easy to love the brotherhood that is close by; nor is it easy for others to love us. But the Holy Spirit commands us to love one

another for the love of Brother Jesus (Romans 12:10), because this is what "brotherly love" means. Beginning by love of Him, we will appreciate also the good that He has placed in others. Amen.

DIVINE IMPOSSIBILITY

(2nd Timothy 2:13; 1st John 3:9)

One of the first attributes we have learned that God possesses is Omnipotence, and it is on this that the mind of the Christian most often dwells. Only after many years of intimate communion with the Lord does one learn that the Love of God is above everything. At any rate, the thought of His Omnipotence dazzles and confuses us.

Yet, Omnipotence tolerates an exception, and, therefore, it is not arbitrary. There are, in fact, some things that the weakest of men can do, and do, whereas God not only does not do them, but He can never do them. For example, man can lie, deny himself, and be unfaithful; but God CANNOT lie, nor deny Himself.

"If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself," St. Paul tells us. And it cannot be otherwise; for Him it is not an effort to remain faithful, since faithfulness is, permit us the expression, part of His nature. Therefore, there are things that man can and knows how to do, but God absolutely cannot, because His very essence is opposed to it.

But the things that man cannot do are innumerable, especially, he is incapable of living a holy life without the communion of the Lord. "*Without me ye can do nothing,*" Jesus said to the apostles, speaking to them of the observance of His commandments. Except that, in the measure that we abide in Him, an extraordinary change happens in us: the insincerity and lying that were so familiar to us, so much so that we lied and acted maliciously without even thinking about it, begin to become strange. When a Christian says something that is not strictly truth, he feels a discord in his heart; rather, little by little he becomes another to such an extent that he cannot do and say the things of one time. Therefore, we explain to ourselves that which St. John says in the first epistle, in chapter three, verses 6 and 9: "*Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not.*" And "*he cannot sin, because he is born of God*" (King James version).

And it is not even our virtue, but an effect of our union with the Lord; let us note well, however, that the apostle does not say that we will not suffer some relapse, but assures us that it is impossible for the man of God to live in sin. It is a divine impossibility. We want Him to take possession of us more every day, and to progress so much in holiness as to abhor evil; rather, to not desire anything that might be able, even for one moment, take the vision of the Lord away from us. However, in the measure that we enter into the impossibility of God, we begin, within the limits given to us, to enjoy His power; we feel that we are part of Him, and we feel that the things that He does belong to us. If we desire to do His will, and to glorify His Name, we can exclaim with St. Paul: "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" *May this be our program: to have communion with God in such a way that His impossibilities will become ours. Amen.*

TODAY - THOU - THIS

If we want to succeed in something, we must constrain our attention and that of those to whom we speak, to a few points.

The Bible is a book of precision; it does not digress, but goes directly to the point of what is being proposed. Among the many incisive exhortations, we like to note these three:

TODAY – THOU – THIS

Today – and in some passages it is “now” – puts a limit on time. “I will go to the Lord later, when I can,” many say. But the Word of God says: TODAY, NOW; tomorrow is not ours, and even if we should live, tomorrow we will not have the same opportunity, and our soul will not listen with the same interest. It is a psychological law that, if we don’t translate our emotions into action immediately, they evaporate, and, disappearing, they leave us little by little insensible.

THOU. Many read and listen as if the message were directed to some person far away and, even if they admit that it is for them, they blend in with the great mass. In this the warning and the promise do not have individual value. Jesus died to save sinners. Every reader or hearer must say: “He died for me,” and put himself in direct relation with the Lord, as if he were the only one on the earth, and the word of God was directed to him alone.

THOU, THOU, THOU! Do not excuse yourself, saying WE, BUT THOU, hear Today, because after all it is You that, one on one, shall have to appear before the Lord. Of the others you do not know their soul and you cannot foretell their end. TODAY, THOU... But it is not enough. Another precise

action is necessary: "THIS" is assignable to an immediate object.

"BELIEVEST – THOU – THIS?" Jesus asked Martha.

Jesus said unto her: *"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."*

But the great announcement could have remained general and vague for that woman; and therefore, pointing in only one direction, He added: *"Believest thou this?"* Do you believe it now, in the moment that I am speaking to you, do you believe it, precisely you, without preoccupying yourself about what others believe and think, and believe "this;" that is, this truth delineated in clear terms, that "I – JESUS – AM – AND ONLY I AM – THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE?"

Every preacher and every hearer, if they really want to do a useful work, must keep these three words present: TODAY – THOU – THIS; these words indicate our actual duty. They tell us that we have to accomplish it, each one of us, within the limits in which the word of the Lord has indicated them to us.

* * *

A GOD WHO HIDES HIMSELF

(Isaiah 45:15)

“Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior.”

He hides Himself for the feeling; but not for the grace, He is in us and around us; but many times, we are not aware of it. A baby that is crying has its face to the wall and does not see its mother who is looking at it with love; thus are we, many times. It seems that He has abandoned us; but it is precisely then that He prepares some new BENEFIT.

HE HIDES HIMSELF IN ORDER TO TEACH US THAT THE WALK OF THE JUST IS BY FAITH. HE HIDES HIMSELF IN ORDER TO OBLIGATE US TO SEEK HIM WITH DILIGENCE, INVESTIGATING ALSO OUR WAYS.

HE HIDES HIMSELF BECAUSE HE WANTS TO DO US GOOD, MANY TIMES, IN SECRET. HE AND HIS BENEFITS OFTEN ARRIVE IN DISGUISE.

Jesus was walking on the agitated waters at night, and the disciples took Him to be a phantasm and cried out with fear. But He made Himself known, and said to them: *“Fear not, it is I.”*

He has a path in the midst of the sea, a way in the desert. His footsteps are in the great waters, but we have not recognized Him. However, when He hides Himself, He becomes more than ever the God of Israel, revealing something else to Israel, and revealing Himself even more. He hides in order to make Himself better known, because He wants us to know

Him, because in knowing Him there is eternal life (John 17:3).

A special revelation to a special people, and it is: "The Savior." He saves from whatever new danger, perhaps even unknown to us. While the sinful woman was crying at the feet of Jesus, He was speaking to Simon the Pharisee and it seemed that He did not care about her, but when He turned to look at her and speak to her, it was evident that, although he seemed hidden, he had been occupied precisely of her. And He said to her: "thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

* * *

NOT DOING ANYTHING AND DOING MUCH

(2nd Thessalonians 3:11)

"for we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." Literally it is: "Nobody working, and being above work." Another translates: "Working at nothing, and yet too actively working." Nothing profitable, but they do many things to hinder and to damage the good work of others. They are the lazy charlatans, the collectors and disseminators of news, reporters of scandals; they are the disorderly people who like to eat the bread of others, who always make castles in the air and pronounce bombastic words. They were doing nothing while others had to do, in order to watch out for themselves. To such, the Apostle commanded that they should work quietly, cease making noise and eat their own bread. Then he

adds, and recommends to the true Church: "*But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.*"

* * *

KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

(Matthew 5:20; 6:33; Isaiah 33:14-17; Hebrews 12:24;
Psalm 4:5; Jeremiah 23:1; 1st Corinthians 1:30)

PART I

The Two Righteousnesses

(Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 12:24; Matthew 18:23-35)
(Note verses 29, 30)

It is a vast subject that, for the benefit of our readers, we desire to develop in a practical way, more than by doctrinal investigations. Follow us with benevolence.

We are not concerned about our (human) righteousness; by the saying of Isaiah it is worse than a filthy rag, but we will deal with the two righteousnesses: one according to the law of the Old Testament, and the other according to Christ, which is the same as calling it "Righteousness according to the law of the Spirit.

RIGHTEOUSNESS ACCORDING TO THE LAW (Old Testament): It is useful to repeat that which must already be known, that is that the law of Love and Grace existed before the law of Sinai came. The Creation was as an act of love

and of Grace. Even after the fall the law did not come immediately, Grace came, based not on the merit of man, but on the sacrifice. Retribution based on the work of man manifested itself after the first homicide.

Abraham, and others after him, up to Moses, were not under the law of Sinai, because it had not yet been given. Coming closer to our subject, we will select two examples in which there was an appeal to justice, not based on penitence and mercy: The merciless creditor, in the time of Jesus and Cain in the first pages of the Scripture.

The merciless creditor: On the basis of the law of that time, he had the right to exact payment up to the last farthing, availing himself of the means that the laws and customs offered him. The reprimand and punishment inflicted on him by the King were not because he was exacting what was due him, but because he himself, after having invoked patience, had put himself under another law and was free from the Court of the Sovereign on the basis of Grace. For an identical case in one sense, but disproportionate in the measure, he should have acted in the same way as he had been treated, because it is abominable to have different weights and different measures.

By not having used grace as he had received grace, he fell back under the law given by Moses, and earned himself the title of Wicked—Evil (the word is the same). In the case of Cain, he had been warned and he did not submit. He hardened his heart and remained unrepentant. He killed his brother and thought that he could remain hidden, because he had taken the innocent one out of his usual places. The divine Word caught up with him: *“What hast thou done?”* *“The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”* There was nothing that could silence that appeal to justice, because in Cain, although he had been taught and

warned in time, there was no repentance. The voice cried and continues to cry.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes the event and its value in a few words (Hebrews 12:24): "*Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.* The comparison and contrast are between two bloods and two Martyrs: JESUS and ABEL.

Abel was a man of faith; he pleased God, but he was not able to help anyone. Cain had not appreciated the sacrifices, before the fratricide, nor did he have recourse to it afterward, because he was not penitent. Therefore he was exposed to Justice without sacrifice. The blood cried from the ground. The decree of heaven exiled that sad one, and made him a vagabond.

There is a justice based on retribution. But there is another, and it is summed up in the same words of the Epistle: "*The blood of sprinkling—Speaketh better things.*"

PART II

(Matthew 5:20; 6:33; Isaiah 33:14-17; Hebrews 12:24;
Psalm 4:5; Jeremiah 23; 1st Corinthians 1:30)

We have not used the title "Righteousness of God," but "Kingdom of God and His Righteousness," and this was done purposely.

Looking at Humanity as a single person, and the times as converging into "no longer time," we discover a plan of wisdom by which God brings man, little by little, to see and

to seek His Kingdom and His Righteousness. We are speaking of those to whom light and more light is offered (everyone has a little light, and is responsible according to it: John 1:9).

St. Paul (Philippians 3:9) testifies that he aspired *“to be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”*

The Lord Jesus commanded those who had followed Him on High (only such can receive the Message), that more than anything they had to *“seek the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness;”* continually seek, and with diligence. Our subject is not “Kingdom of God,” which we wrote about elsewhere, but “Righteousness.”

St. Paul did not desire the righteousness of the law, which was like his own, but the righteousness that is by faith. He informs us that although he may have lived the best that he could, nevertheless he did not feel that he was prepared for Heaven. He saw the need for the Righteousness that is by faith, and it is ABSOLUTE. Various passages, some of which we have already indicated, insist on walking in all righteousness; in having righteousness superior to that of the religious men of that time, and they invite us to consider as follows: Know that there is such a Righteousness that is so recommended and so effective and live in it and according to it, so that we also become righteous.

The Lord reserved eternal life for us after we believed and we are obligated to not remain always in elementary conditions. We have an imperative responsibility. God keeps a watch on how His Word is received. The One who is Righteous wants Righteousness; the One who is Love wants Love. Love and Righteousness go together. The harmony is

in Jesus. His sacrifice is: "Love and Righteousness," and He says to man: "God loves you of an eternal love," and also: "sin and evil are alien to the divine nature." The Cross has various Messages.

Jesus wants us to do that which He has done, in the measure that we grow in Him. For a long time we do not have a clear idea of the righteousness that God expects from us and we confuse it with the old one; that is, we imagine that we reached it if we have not wronged anyone. Not doing wrong certainly is a fruit of righteousness, but this was commanded also in the Old Testament. There is more, much more, in the school of Christ.

In Daniel 12:3, we read: "*that they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*" The words are prophetic of the New Covenant, and not of the Old Covenant. What do they mean?

Before proceeding permit us a remembrance, permissible because we can draw from the deposit of old and new things.

A troubled young man was wandering about in the Lazaretto (a hospital for contagious diseases) of Milan, searching to see if among the sick there might be a person very dear to him. At first he met a holy man, well known to him, who was in that place in order to serve those who were plague-stricken. He revealed to the holy man the reason for his coming, and then, the young man who had suffered many woes because of a tyrannical person, added, as if talking to himself: "And if I don't find her, I will find someone else... And I will do her justice."

The unfortunate one, desiring to take justice into his own hands, had not yet finished that outburst of vengeance that

there fell on him like a spark of fire from that holy man: "Miserable one! Do you know justice?" These words and the fearful question read to me when I was still a child were engraved in my heart, and returns to my mind. And I say to myself: "Do you know justice?"

But since the Wise One has said that it is necessary to seek the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, it is clear that it can be known, after having sought and known, within the limits possible, first the Kingdom of God. And it is also true that even knowing, there remains something more to know. We will have the complete light only in the beyond. Here we know in part.

What is "the Righteousness" of which we occupy ourselves? Does it consists in our being scrupulous and exact, in order not to be condemned, or is there something else?

PART III

(Matthew 5:20; 6:33; Isaiah 33:14-17; 53:12; Hebrews 12:24; Psalm 4:5; Jeremiah 23; 1st Corinthians 1:30; 1st John 4:17; Daniel 12:3; 2nd Peter 1:4; Obadiah 21)

"Do you know justice?" The question, like a repeated echo, has hammered me for years. And now there is a little bit of light:

Jesus Christ died for us and we must be ready to dispose our lives in favor of others. As He has become our Righteousness, trusting in Grace, we ask the Lord that others, by means of us, will know the Righteousness of God. It is the extension of the Incarnation of the Son of God, by

which He becomes the Firstborn among many brethren. The above affirmations appear to be bold and almost blasphemous, but they are based on the Word of God as a whole and in its various particulars.

The Church, we say the Church of Christ, is a Kingdom of Priests. St. Paul, in Colossians 1:24, testifies that he was fulfilling in his body that which remained of the afflictions of Christ for His Body, which is the Church. The Church, then, as a whole, suffers in order to become a help to those who are not the Church. The whole creation groans, travails and waits—more than waits—yearns for the manifestation of the sons of God. Love and sacrifice go together.

We repeat it until it becomes annoying, but we repeat that the plan of God is for us to become partakers of the divine nature by means of His promises. Christ, the Mediator is One. But in Him, the Church becomes like Christ, the Mediator. Let us remember what the Prophet said, that redeemers or saviors shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau, the poor Esau. Judgment presupposes Mercy and help. And thus the Kingdom shall be the Lord's (Obadiah 21).

"They that turn many to righteousness" is written in Daniel. Are there therefore men that after being justified, will justify others? There are; it is understood that it is always the Lord who incarnates Himself and works by means of them. The Righteousness of God, of the Kingdom of God is to live and to suffer for the unjust, in a manner that, being reached by Grace, they will also become just. It is to pay in ourselves the debts of others. It costs; therefore the Psalmist speaks of *"sacrifices of righteousness."*

Life is more than nourishment, more than the body. Jesus was crucified in the body, but also in the spirit and in the

soul; thus His saints, in the measure given to each one. As the sacrifice of Jesus, to the superficial eye, seemed and seems useless and ineffective (read again also Isaiah 49), thus the sacrifices of righteousness of saints seem useless and ineffective to themselves and to others.

“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord” (Psalm 4:5). That is, let your life be placed on the Altar for others, and do not be afraid that the Lord will abandon you or render useless even one of your tears. Live for Christ and like Christ. Suffer and be ready to be killed like Him, closing your eyes to the approval or disapproval of yourself or of others.

And like blind people who let themselves be guided by the Lord, and ignorant ones who do not know the way and the methods of Heaven; **TRUST IN THE LORD. AMEN.**

* * *

WAITING FOR THE LORD

(Isaiah 40:27-31)

“Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew

their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they walk, and not faint."

In the above words there is described to us a people who is losing strength. After a time of trials everyone becomes tired. No one can say that they have never become tired or boast that they will not become tired. We have heard some who affirm that they are not afraid of the enemy, but the time came that they were sifted and overcome. It is one of the trials of Jacob and also of Israel. Jacob is a figure of a child, Israel of the mature man.

It was one of the supreme lessons of his life when Jacob met the Lord at Peniel and did not let Him go until he had been blessed! He had his name changed from Jacob to Israel.

We are waiting for something, and by the Holy Spirit we have the assurance of it, but with time we get tired of waiting; at times doubt and discouragement come. It is then that we are tempted to say; *"My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God."*

Many times we do not see, not because we do not want to see, but because the Lord wants us to have the experience of which is written in Isaiah 45:15: *"Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."* The Lord is with us, but we don't feel His presence; at times we would like to pray or to cry and we cannot. *"My way is hid from the Lord."* But listen to what the Holy Spirit answers you: *"Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding."* Why do you look at yourself and not to the Eternal God? The enthusiasm of today needs to be rekindled tomorrow and one needs to be touched and retouched by that blessed hand, oh how many times, how many times! We

must drink at the fountain continually. Weak? Before you is the strong God, who has created the ends of the earth. Hebrews 7:25 tells us that He can save to the "uttermost," that is to the extreme. Before you come to desperation, the Lord intervenes.

It has happened to some to have prayed for something for years, and then, becoming tired, they gave up. But, in a time when they least were expecting, the answer came. The Lord had to clarify that surprise: Do you remember, years ago, you prayed, and then you became tired, and you stopped, but *I* did not get tired. Now I have answered you.

There are mysterious proceedings that teach the walk of faith. The person that pleases the Lord is one who considers Him to be faithful, and even close to desperation, says: "I believe." He reaches the extremity, and exclaims: I see NOTHING in me, but I see ALL in the Eternal God. At one time of his pilgrimage, Abraham received the revelation of the Eternal God. The people, the environment and our health change, but God does not change! He is the Everlasting God. We are called to lean not on the consolations, but on the Everlasting God. St. John saw a flying angel who had the Everlasting Gospel. Men want to discount the Gospel but it is eternal like God from whom it proceeds. He does not get tired, nor is He weary; His understanding is infinite. At times, we do not know what to do—tired and confused, we need strength and counsel. In Him we find everything.

Many young people get tired and no longer understand what to do. Full of enthusiasm, all of a sudden they faint and fall, because their enthusiasm lasts only for a time; it is by faith in the strength of the invisible God that one reaches the end.

He gives strength to the weary and increases vigor to those that are without strength. The choicest youths utterly fall.

Even they, the select ones, have not learned to distrust themselves in order to trust only in God. BUT, victorious; BUT!... they that trust in the Lord continually acquire new strength. They hope; that is, THEY WAIT.

To be able to wait is a secret of holiness. One of the most difficult lessons for the Church to learn is patience. "*Here is the patience of the saints:*" now is the time to wait...

Many, before us, have waited: Abram, Simeon, John the Baptist and others have waited for a long time. The flesh, always impatient, does not want us to wait; but we, by the Holy Spirit, must mortify the flesh and resolve to wait for the Lord.

We need a fresh anointing, day after day. We cannot fight the difficulties of today with the anointing of yesterday. The Lord wants to continually renew us. Many times we have thought about the difficulties we would have to preach again on the same passage of the Scripture. But the Holy Spirit assures us that if we are controlled by Him, we will receive fresh anointing for each time. The Lord always has fresh food for His people. He creates new heavens and a new earth. Four things are promised to those who wait: they will continually acquire new strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

In that parable of the workers of different hours there is presented a group who waited all day with their tools for work. They remained in the marketplace of vituperation until the owner called them! They, who waited so many hours, without being either ashamed or angry, answered with humility to the apparent insult that they were standing idle. Such ones are giants of faith and patience. It is a waiting full of love and reverence, and not of sleeping. And more grace

is needed for this than for working. Wait for the LORD, not for men, even if they are religious men.

Flying, running, walking—He will give us wings in order to make us fly on high, on the mountain, to take strength for the valley. The spirit of contemplation that will make us stay before the Throne, will render us vigorous for running in the way of the commands that He will give us by the Holy Spirit. And yet there is something more important than the running, and it is the walking, an often annoying walking, be it even at a slow step, but always decisive. It is the maturity of the saints.

The Lord said to Abraham: *“I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect;”* because only by acknowledging Him as the Almighty can we remain in His presence, and only by remaining in His presence, can we become perfect, and walk until the end.

* * *

THOU ART DUST

(Genesis 3:19)

Adam and Eve sinned and received punishment; at the end of the words that map out their destiny, God says to Adam: *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground.”*

A clearer explanation was necessary, and he did not dare to ask. The Lord continued: *“For out of it wast thou taken [from the earth];”* and even clearer: *“For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”* *“Thou art dust.”* This is the

discovery of Adam following his sin. God was not unjust to him condemning him to return to the earth, because Adam was of the earth.

You don't know it, Adam, now you know it. You are dust.

Take note of that "thou art." It means: "You, in yourself, without my breath, are nothing but dust. It was not necessary to tell it to you before now; but with your sin you have rendered punishment necessary, and the first consequence is that you must learn to know yourself. Therefore, oh Adam, do not become proud of your beautiful figure, your talent and your superiority over the beasts, because you, in yourself, are only dust. And, since you have sinned in this dust, you must give your dust to the earth; that is, yourself."

In fact, Adam needed a new creation. Before, he did not know humiliation, and he would never have known it if he had been obedient, but now he must understand what he effectively is. The serpent said that you will be like God; but behold what you are in reality: dust. Oh friend reader, let us reflect for a moment on this truth. I, you, in ourselves, without God, are only dust. Only dust is what we can truly say belongs to us. By this we must understand that we have no right to become proud. Look at the dust of the street, unstable, moved by every gust of wind; between this dust and the dust that forms my body there is no difference. There remains to me only to repeat: I am nothing but dust; and it is good to understand this: because in this there is my humiliation. But, in this, likewise, is the source of my true greatness.

In this dust He has breathed His Spirit, and from the humiliation, makes me a new creature; He will make me return, but He will not leave me in the earth, and will accomplish in me a work greater than the first creation. I

learn to know myself and to know my Creator; and in the school of experience, by means of the trial of humiliation, when I shall be called from the earth by Him, I will have the perfect knowledge of the immense love that He has had for me, by which He has not left me to myself, but from the mud He has elevated me to heaven.

And meanwhile it is good that I keep in mind that I, in myself, am nothing but dust; and that those aspirations that I have toward Heaven, I have received them from Him.

Oh Lord, teach me to know myself, and to lift my soul toward Thy Throne, in increasing gratitude and adoration.

* * *

UNITED IN THE TRUTH

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:3-5). “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: TILL we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, unto a perfect man [the perfect of “fullness,” the word used for the Church in Romans 11:25], unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

And yet, elsewhere, the Lord says: *“Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A*

confederacy" (Isaiah 8: 12). Therefore, true unity is that which the Lord makes by means of His gifts and ministries. The Church must be united even in faith and knowledge. For a time there is not unity in everything; if not, it would not be necessary to say: "*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge.*" That one is not united immediately in all things, can be seen also by that which the Apostle continues to write: "*that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine... But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ*" (Ephesians 4:14, 15). And then he adds (verse 16) that the increase comes about not only in our relations with the head, but also in our relation with the joints; that is, we grow and learn by means of the other members of the body.

Children are united in many things, if not, they would not be of the same family; they have the same parents, the same house, but they differ in many other things. However, they must learn. Unity of the faith and knowledge will come, among whom? It is among the children of the same house, that is, those who are called to the same vocation of the Church. We cannot hope for unity with others. And yet, how difficult is the unity in all the truth! The Apostle exhorts that we must follow and diligently seek, truth in love. Regardless of how much of a fight there has been in all times about His Name, about definitions and arguments on the interpretation of the Scripture, Christ, and all that refers to Him is truth. Religious wars, more than any other thing, have afflicted humanity. A discord in the family is the most difficult to tolerate. Therefore, the exhortation: "IN LOVE," in order to tell us that truth can be achieved by staying, remaining IN THE LOVE. Knowledge alone puffs up, whereas charity edifies. How will it be possible for two to understand the same thing when they still do not see it in the same way? One of them is in error, or partially in error or both of them

are in error. Now, among the human passions, vanity is the most difficult to die. Man, in himself, whether he is noble or common, is vanity. If weighed, he is lighter than vanity itself (Psalm 62:9); he does not like to admit that others have understood well, and he has not; he defends tenaciously, and at times with violence, his point of view. Mastering ourselves is truly a great victory; but in order to do this a serene mind is needed, and this cannot happen if our heart is full of pride. There is much apparent humility, but it is worse than any pride, rather it is the greatest of the prides. Unity is possible among humble hearts: true humility is the daughter and companion of charity. One who loves does not seek his own things, but tries to do what is good for others, and is disposed to listen to everything, and to reflect honestly if the others may be right in part, in everything; and if not in the substance, at least in the motives. Let us suppose that two who are filled with humility and charity are called to unite themselves on a controversial point. Each of the two will certainly want to be faithful to the Lord, but will acknowledge that the other brother also wants to be faithful. He would like to not contradict because it pains him to not yield, but he is disposed to yield if he sees that the other is right; we want to say that he would be happier to discover that he has erred, and not the brother. Both win; or rather, the winner is the Lord who has His way in both of them.

You have won, said an ancient noble to a Christian who had testified to him. No, replied the latter: you are the winner, because you have overcome the most difficult enemy, your own heart.

How sweet, how gentle and holy it is to be disposed to say to others: Friend, brother, I am in error, you are right! How holy is the behavior of one who is faithful and not stubborn, but disposed to die for the truth, while always remaining in love. And how painful it is for one who is filled with charity

to be obligated to contradict! And since he loves, he does not exceed the proper measure, he does not season his affirmations with bitterness and sarcasm; he knows how to say even that which is evil in the most merciful and prudent way possible. True charity is tied to true wisdom, which is yielding, that is easy, disposed to be persuaded (James 3:17). And where someone has followed the truth in love for a long time, he may be truly sure that precisely because charity hopes, he will pray and wait for the Lord to reach the others who also are the Body of Christ.

* * *

THE SECTARIANS

(1st Corinthians 1:11-13; Ephesians 4:4-7)

See! They are divided into many sects; they are not in agreement among themselves. Thus the enemies of Christianity insinuate, almost as if only in Christianity do divisions exist. See! They are divided in many sects; they whisper against the Protestants and the Romanists, almost as if no divisions existed among the latter. But some divisions are inevitable, because men, even the best, succeed at times to be in agreement on a principal theme, and differ in the methods; and, on the other hand, no one has the complete knowledge of the truth. In fact four Evangelists were needed to present to us a single Person. Variety is not opposition, rather, there is a variety that is harmony, and that gives unity.

However there are dangerous divisions that can arise even in the bosom of men that, in name, have the same credo and

belong to the same religious denomination. There are divisions that embitter the souls and lead to hatred.

If we open the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, beginning from the first lines we can guess what travail the Apostle had for that Church.

He wrote: *“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”*

As happens in almost all of Paul’s writings, the central argument of the letter is contained in these few words. “With all them that in every place,”—as if to say: you are not the only saints, that such are all those that call on the name of the Lord Jesus, in whatever place they may be: regional differences do not change their relationship with the Lord, and the important thing is that they call upon the Lord, both theirs and ours: here lies the unity. If we are united in this, we are truly united, but if we are not united in the Name of Jesus, we are separated, notwithstanding the apparent and superficial union.

Therefore the proof is: To give glory to Jesus, to the perfect Man; to Christ, that is, to Jesus, the prophesied Messiah, who has suffered for our sins and has entered into glory. Such a Person, Jesus Christ, is Lord, who is uplifted above every creature.

The heart of the Apostle was filled with pain, and he had to say things that were exceedingly serious, and he hastened to enter into the unpleasant argument with a manner that reveals ability and courtesy. He says: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among*

you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." It was like saying: We have said that which you have in Jesus Christ; however, pay attention to what you lack.

But with some men, general warnings are not enough; and the Apostle continues: "*For*"—take note of this "for" that says that he has spoken as he has always done, because he was obligated by that which he was about to say: "*For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.*" OF YOU, AMONG YOU. It was necessary to explain himself even better, and, he continues:

"Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." Paul had to make an effort in order to specify his complaint, also because he regretted naming others. He was almost violent with himself, as can be seen by the words: "*Now this I say.*" This, exactly; permit me to say everything.

This is the accusation. One says: As for me I am of Paul; another, with the same absolute tone, affirms: as for me I am of Apollos, and another cries: you are mistaken, I know better than both of you, and therefore, I am of Cephas; and the fourth, who had remained mute, the proud listener, breaks the silence, and, satisfied of himself, exclaims: you are all in error, because Paul, and Apollos and Cephas are only men, but I go to the source; I am of Christ.

I am of Paul, I!

Paul had preached, with emphasis, liberty in Christ and salvation by grace. "*I am of Paul*" was the party that thought that they were illumined, and seemed to say to the others: you, little minds, you have not understood Christianity. But

the one who was saying this was forgetting that Paul had likewise said that a man that is set free by Christ has become a slave of Christ, and that he must not be a slave of sin. "*I am of Paul,*" and by saying this he believed to have said everything, and to add: no more scruples, and therefore he ran the danger of falling into the most terrible of perversions; that is, to say that he believed in the Lord, but lived in sin. This was the most flagrant contradiction to the complexity of the thought, and to the example of the Apostle, because the same Paul who had preached the Gospel of the Grace and of the liberty in Christ, had continually exerted himself to keep himself as a slave of Christ, and to have the approval of the Lord every day, and to keep his conscience free from any offense. And I am of Apollos. Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew, and he had drunk of the fountains of Judaism and of Greek philosophy; he was an eloquent preacher who must have possessed a passionate way of speaking that moved the affections. Perhaps in his discourses he was apt to make a comparison between Christianity and the philosophic and religious systems of paganism, and to then show the point in which he had been convicted, and he finished by proclaiming the excellence of Christianity. However, Apollos was not saying only this; but the hearers were stopping at the more brilliant side of the discourse, and were saying: "yes, this is Christianity," and they too were beginning to speculate but they finished by losing themselves in subtleties and sentimentality. But, subtleties and sentimentality are enemies of the truth, and therefore, they had become vaporous Christians and instead of being eloquent like Apollos, they became loquacious, like all the empty souls. Therefore, while they were affirming being of Apollos, they were only the caricature of the noble and eloquent Apollos.

And I of Cephas. Cephas or Peter, which is the same, was a scrupulous Hebrew; let us remember that he did not go,

except for an insistent command, to the house of the pagan Cornelius. Peter was what we might call a conservative; and therefore very slow in accepting innovations. But Peter was preaching the Gospel of Grace; he gave glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, as his discourses and his letters tell us. But since every man has, after all, only one mind and a special inclination, the continuous emphasis to a pure life, to the severity with himself could be seen in his discourses. The hearers also have their tendencies, and therefore they hear in the discourse the part that favors them most, and therefore many said: "This man has hit the nail on the head; he knows Christianity," and they formed a party, saying: we want to live a pure life..." and the "pure" is intended rather in an external sense... They were the puritans of the Church, punctilious for every trifle, scrupulous in everything, but despising others.

"I of Peter," and they were the worst representatives of the generous Simon Peter.

I OF CHRIST!

Those who were saying this had never seen Jesus, and knew of Him by means of the preaching of the Apostles. If our mind is not humble, of Christ, we form an inexact and unbalanced concept for ourselves. Some see in Jesus Christ the tears that He shed over Jerusalem, others are struck by His courage, that, alone, with infinite authority, and with severe words, he chased the merchants from the Temple, and they continually hear the echo of "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees." These say that it is necessary to do as Christ did, that is to chase, to denounce, but they don't want to acknowledge that only Christ could do that, and that He did it for the glory of the Father, whereas a man, full of infirmity, must tremble before thinking of saying a single "woe to you." Others see in Christ the benefactor of the poor,

that He fed the multitudes, and say: "Feed the poor; this is Christianity;" but we forget that Jesus reprimanded the same multitudes, saying they had followed Him for the bread and not because of love, and exhorted them to labor for the food that did not perish.

Others see only the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, and forget that He affirmed that without Him we can do nothing. And, above all, many who say that they are of Christ, do not pay attention to this, that He was unmindful of Himself and had the glory of the Father as an ideal, to reveal Him to man, and to put down His life to redeem souls. He is the Son of God; the Son of Man. They do not want to know the whole Christ, because they follow what is in their own minds without emptying themselves, and they do not fall down at His feet to contemplate Him, precisely Him.

I am of Christ, some of the Church of Corinth were saying, while they were insulting that blessed Name, because Christ did not permit them to despise anyone, and above all to be irreverent toward those who had preached the Gospel. They could not, in fact, be of Christ if they were ungrateful to Paul, to Apollos and Peter who had worked for them. The Lord had said that one who gives a glass of water to a disciple, receives his reward; now, a little affection, a little esteem toward a disciple are more than a glass of fresh water.

They were the extremists; some were making idols of Paul, of Apollos, of Peter and they were in error, because the glory should not go to man; and others were saying: "we don't want to know either of Paul, or of Peter, or of Apollos;" and they thought that they had resolved every question, congratulating themselves, while with a smile, making others understand that they were saying it with an accent that was

equivalent to saying that they alone, *that they alone* were of Christ.

Precisely these were the worst representatives of Christ.

And, meanwhile, Satan was warming the souls of these four parties, and mixing everything up, and in this way the Church was giving a sad spectacle before a corrupt and inimical world.

The groaning of the Apostle: "*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*" Divided! You divide Him... and you give Him more sorrow than those at the foot of the Cross who cast lots for His garment, but who did not have the courage to tear the coat made without a seam. Was Paul crucified for you? The modest Paul puts his name first in the unfavorable example.

Crucified! Oh Corinthians, and we add, Oh Christians of all the world: rather than speaking vain things, and making idle talk, we must fall on our knees and contemplate that Crucified One; and, between sobs, ask for "grace to be crucified with Him!"

And now we turn our eyes to things close to us: the sectarians are now more tiresome and violent than ever. They say: come here, go there, and we seem to hear an echo of the warning of Jesus, when He prophesied that there would arise persons who would say: Lo, the Christ is here, the Christ is there.

Oh reader, you will recognize the sectarians by the lack of charity, which is the supreme gift of Christ; you will recognize them by the vehemence with which they speak; since their words are without sighs and without tears for others whom they believe to be or are truly in error. The

Scripture exhorts us to pray for all men; and lets us know that God wants that all men should be saved. Therefore let us not limit the Providence of God: His heart is big. There are sheep of another fold; there are many who shall be saved by that vital light that lights every man that comes into the world. Many will follow; many have followed that light, without knowing that it is the Word, it is Christ, the Lord (See John 1:4-9).

* * *

One day, in Heaven, we shall marvel to know that many zealous sectarians have perished, and many others, whom we could never have thought, shall have been saved. Let us be humble, and let us be charitable! Unity is in Christ; we are not perfect, but we are walking toward perfection.

Members one of another, we are continually growing in order to form a beautiful body, since it will be made worthy of that Head that is Christ. Let us love one another and bear with one another, and wait that the moment arrives of which St. Paul speaks in the letter to the Ephesians (4:13): *"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."*

MERCY

(Psalm 51; Luke 10:37; Hebrews 4:14-16)

The word MERCY is one of the sweetest words of the Bible. It is the daughter of Charity; companion of "Compassion"

and "Pity." "COMPASSION" means to suffer with. However, compassion is closer to fragile man. Mercy is closer to God—Infallible.

MERCY, that is to take to heart (to have pity) of the misery of another; condescend to the misfortune, that at times, has no pretense, and almost does not even ask.

The picture of the Samaritan is all "MERCY." While Charity is eternal, mercy is not eternal. "Mercy" can be applied ONLY where there is MISERY, because it is misery that appeals to mercy. That which is right does not call for mercy, but for justice. In heaven there is no misery, therefore mercy will not be necessary, but continual acts of the love of God (Revelation 7: end).

God is Love. He delights in MERCY. BELIEVING IN THE MERCY of God is part of true faith. It is the last appeal, when every other would not have the courage to come forward. See Hebrews 4:14-16. The soul is discouraged, as if there were no more strength to lift one's forehead; the Holy Spirit invites us first to consider the One who was tempted in all things, without sin, and to draw near (whatever the fearful thoughts may say) and get closer to the Throne (Elevated, Wise Power)—THRONE OF GRACE. A THRONE that is occupied in giving Grace, "*that we may obtain MERCY.*"

The soul had "drawn near to the Throne," and the MERCIFUL ONE will look for the one who has come near, who does not even know how to ask; and He will have MERCY. Later comes the special GRACE to help in time of need. For as much as it is possible to fragile man (and even the best are fragile), he is also called to have "Mercy," which comes in the Temple of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), and ONLY after the elder sisters are born, that is "Poverty in the spirit", the soul full of mourning and

“Meekness,” and THEN the hunger and thirst for righteousness. (May God be thanked that He judges us according to the hunger and the thirst). THEN, MERCY is born. And after, come the other two, with the conclusion of verses 10 and 11, and with the fruit of JOY and REJOICING. (Double joy, Isaiah 61:3; Psalm 89:15). While PURE LOVE makes us understand the DEITY (1st John 4:18), MERCY brings us to understand the work of the ministry of the Son of Man: “when he was yet a great way off, his father SAW him, he HAD COMPASSION” (Luke 15). He HEARD from afar the message to Jarius. A word of warning is needed here. As long as we reason with the enemy, we will be beaten. Little do we know the Word of God, its full interpretation, and little the mysteries of God. Reasoning on what we know, or have heard from others, the enemy tries to tempt us with insinuations. The only answer that will silence him is: “We have trusted in the Mercy of God, and we have consigned ourselves and our affairs to Him, for however He wants to resolve them.” This closes the mouth of the adversary.

The Truth of God reaches up to the clouds, His Lovingkindness extends to the heavens (Psalm 36:5 NASB).

Elsewhere the Psalmist says that he will sing a song of “lovingkindness” and justice (Psalm 101:1 NASB). The repetition in every verse of Psalm 136 (NASB) of the phrase: “*For His lovingkindness (or mercy) is everlasting*” is noteworthy. As if to say that at the base of every one of His acts toward the people, as a right of appeal to the people themselves, there has been “Kindness.”

And His marvels are recorded step by step, different in time and circumstance, but on the same support: MERCY. In Heaven we will be able to learn and to live another way; but no more mercy. The time of mercy, which makes us

understand so much and draw near so much to the heart of Jesus, that time is "NOW."

GOOD WORD, BUT OUT OF PLACE

We often hear some people who are caught in sin, repeat the words of Jesus in regard to the adulterous woman: "*Him that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.*" Others remember that the prodigal son had the right to have a feast made for him. Another who believes himself harmed like David by Saul, assumes the part of Samuel and reproves. All three are in error.

Admitted that we have the right that no one should throw the stone, and to be received like the prodigal, and it may even be true that we have been persecuted like David was, one notes that it was not the adulterous woman that said those extraordinary words that made all her accusers leave, but Her Defender pronounced them, while she was confused and in silence. It was not the prodigal himself who said the solemn words that it was right to make a feast, but the Father. It was not David who thought to send some prophetic message to Saul, but God used the prophet Samuel, and David did not do or say anything against Saul.

We heard a certain one who left us lamenting that it was necessary to go to seek for him, because the Lord sought for the lost sheep. But was that certain one a lost sheep? No; perhaps he was not a sheep at all. The poor lost one did not know that a hand of love would look for it, and was not pretending anything. Even in judging someone favorably or in calling them prodigals, it is necessary to put them in the

category of those who should not be sought, but wait for them to return. The lost coin was sought diligently with a lighted candle; the lost sheep was sought outside of the house; and the return of the prodigal was waited for. Therefore, others may defend you, or think to give merciful or rigorous messages, according to the case. But you, personally involved and responsible, be silent, and in silence and humility, pray and wait.

AFTERWARD...

(Hebrews 12:11)

“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (NASB).

AFTERWARD—The spirit of the world looks at that which is immediately under one’s eyes; whereas the Wisdom of God wants us to look at the end of things. He afflicts us in order to help us, to do us good at the end.

If we have this “**AFTERWARD**” before us, many things of the present time that tempt us lose their strength. They are alluring and seducing, but they have poison in the tail, and in the “**AFTER**,” they leave trails of bitterness and disappointment.

Whereas the suffering, trials, and the healthy chastisement of the Lord at present are of sadness, they lead to peace and to

the righteousness of the Lord. Let us learn to reflect on this important: "AFTERWARD."

* * *

DISPARAGING EARS

The title can seem strange and improper, but, if one considers it well, the ear that hears is responsible for the disparaging tongue. As a rule, refuse is not thrown into a good place, but in a place prepared to receive garbage. Some persons are informed of everything; they are the reporters of that which happens and is being whispered. One time, such a fellow stood to say that many evil reports came to him. Someone observed to him that they were going to him, and not to others, because he accepted them. The ear that is eager to hear evil reports attracts the slandering tongue. In fact, the slanderer would get tired if he did not find someone who listened to him. A serious countenance would stop the slandering word in the mouth of the one who was about to offer it, and if he has begun, he hastens to close his mouth.

A pointed question like this would also be good medicine:

"Are you sure, before God, of what you hear?" When one answers to "But," "If," "I have heard"—with seriousness, the slandering must either stop or seek other ears.

In Isaiah 33:15, one of the requisites for those who will abide with the Lord is: "*stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood.*"

The ear of the children of God must be kept pure, in order that it may hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. And if, against our will, we are aware that someone has sinned, our place is

not to speak and to hear slandering, but to pray for him (1st John 5:16).

WHEN HE REIGNS

(Isaiah 32)

“Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment” [because they will have loved the judgment first on themselves]. “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

Winds of adversity, sudden tempests within and without, and drought shall be met with the right remedy. Jesus shall be everything to those who have elected Him King, and have accepted the fact that judgment truly begins from the House of the Lord. Our own shelters and cool hiding places will no longer be. In the measure that He advances, our own methods withdraw, and in the measure that our methods withdraw, He advances in the territory. In the past, some of us have seen and heard something of Him and from Him, but with sick eyes and ears. Therefore, the vision and the voice have arrived confused. But now we will see clearly, with an open face, and we will hear well, because we will have received grace to pay attention. Now it will be given to us to verify the caricatures that we have seen and the strange and confused sounds. All will become clear and precise, where HE reigns. “The heart also of the rash shall understand

knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.”

Not only will sight and hearing be in place, but the heart and the tongue also will be in place, and how He wants them. Those who are rash and hasty will acquire the true knowledge, they will be sure of what they say and how and when to say it, and if they should say it. The people of the Lord must have His knowledge. Those who up to now have stammered, said little or badly, or have spoken where it was not needed, will be medicated in the tongue and will acquire a ready speech: yes, yes; no, no; ready to open their mouth in time to say a good word wisely, with measure and consideration, as it is said of Jesus, that He knows how to speak opportunely to the weary.

We will stop flattering people and having partiality. We will not say to a fool that he is a prince, nor will we caress the avaricious one so that he will not be avaricious, at least with us; we will not deceive him, telling him that he is generous.

Where Jesus has not yet begun to reign, being impartial and not drawing in the net of flattery, at least in part, or even involuntarily sometimes, is not possible. Speaking evil, iniquity and hypocrisy are found in worthless man, that is infatuated with himself. He causes people to stray from the Lord; he promises, and leaves the soul more hungry and thirsty than before. The avaricious person uses evil means; he aims to destroy the poor one.

But the prince, the one whom Jesus has made a prince of that Kingdom, accepts counsel from princes; he thinks and meditates as one should, and arises to do things worthy of a prince. He is established in the inner counsel and in his exterior life. The prince will have a message; he will turn to the well-to-do women, to the children who live securely, and

will invite them to hear his reasoning. Churches and little religious groups who feel that they are rich, are called to listen. They shall be disturbed year after year. One disturbance, one storm, and another will come. "*The vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come,*"

These women are obstinate. The message is reiterated: "Tremble. Ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones." How much damage is caused by false security! "Strip you, and make you bare, and gird sackcloth upon your loins." Sincerity and penitence. Desolation will come in place of that which was pleasing to the flesh. The fields and fruitful vines shall fail. "*Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city.*" Be careful, oh churches, of the triumphs! They are the proud ones who triumph according to the visible.

"The palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be forsaken forever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks."

When people arrive at greatness in the visible, their ruin is near. Of all the past, in the grandiose places, there remains a little bit of pasture for the flocks of the Lord, who shall be taught by the testimony of those ruins.

He continues to put everything upside down "*until the spirit be poured upon us from on high.*" There is nothing to expect by looking around. And then the desert will become a Carmel, or, as others translate: a fruitful field; and Carmel a forest.

"*Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.*" We do not know how to judge ourselves and consequently we will not be able

to live in His righteousness, if we do not let Him reign, and we are not governed by His Good Spirit. Then we shall have true peace: *“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.”* No more fear and agitation.

“And my people shall dwell in a peacable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”

When, where? You must begin now. Do not dream of future places and times, although they do exist. If you neglect this time, this place, for you they will never exist. Now, truly elect Jesus as King. Do we not recognize this time?

But where He is not wanted as King, we read: “And it will hail when the forest comes down, and the city will be utterly laid low” (NASB). Meanwhile, those who hear the message and love to have Him as King, a word of encouragement is said so that they will not become tired of doing good.

Patience is needed to tolerate insults, and to be considered like beasts many times. It is necessary to live always for Christ; always; even when it seems that there is no fruit. The work is not ours. It is He who sows the seed and sends, by means of us, often without our being aware of it.

“Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters,” whatever the waves of agitation and trouble may be. Blessed are ye who go with beneficent feet and hands, although there may be a lack of consideration.

“Blessed are ye that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass.” Oh reader, let us repeat together with all our heart: “Lord, may Thy Kingdom come in me, immediately: JESUS KING!”

EVERY STRENGTH AND POWER BELONGS TO GOD

(Psalm 62:11)

There are no dictators of the human soul. There is only one: God, because only He is Absolute.

Dictators who are moved by the spirit of the great rebel, Satan, and dictators who profess to dominate souls, thinking to do service to God, lead to disasters and they themselves end in disasters.

Let us take a look at dictators who think they are in order with God. But first we will say a word on the text, Psalm 62:11: "*God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.*" The word "belongeth" is written in italics, that is, it is not in the text.

The Word of God is eternal in the Heavens. It is a vast theme, but outside of the scope of the present meditation. The Holy Spirit repeats, explaining such Word of God. And it was the Holy Spirit that constrained the Psalmist to hear TWO times, that is to hear well, because two is a number of confirmation. A clear hearing imposes one of two alternatives: Either accept, bowing one's mind and heart, or to reject.

The Psalmist heard well: he accepted and preached to others: "*power—to God.*" That is, it comes from Him alone. It is more than this. This power is delegated to man, only within certain limits.

There is no true help from men, unless God Himself helps, serving Himself of whom or of what He wants. It is not

difficult to understand this, although, for a long time, even devoted persons oscillate between dependence on men and on God. The scope of this meditation is to say something about the men who have received from God some authority, and to note that such authority is not delegated in an absolute way, but is under the eye and the control of Heaven, in a direct or indirect way.

Let us select some line of authority.

There is that of the rulers, in which number we put the magistrates; that of the parents and the other authorities in the family, especially of the husbands. There is also that of the Pastors and that of the Prophets.

There is no authority if not from God; therefore, we must obey Authority. This rule has an exception, and it is when the law of man offends the higher law of God. The martyrs who refused to burn incense to the statues of the emperors disobeyed the human law, because they wanted to obey the Eternal one of Heaven.

May those lukewarm Christians stop blabbing sly excuses to justify their own weaknesses in having recourse to men, or to favor unjust undertakings; they repeat that they must obey the laws. No one is as obedient as a true Christian; but no one is more determined to say "No" when the commands of men clearly contrast the command of God.

There resound to the ear of the heart the firm words of the two Apostles—words full of respect to the judges, but likewise fire, in response to the injunction to not speak and teach in the Name of Jesus. They said: "*Whether it be right in the sight of God* [that is in the presence of the One who is superior to everyone, therefore even to you] *to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*" They suffered, it is true,

but they did not obey. The authority of God, intervening in time, had more than limited and deprived the command of men, who in other things, always had authority.

There is authority of parents, especially of fathers. No one has truly succeeded to write about the martyrdoms of children and of women, in the face of masculine authority. We shudder when we think about the abuse of that which the ancient laws called "Paternal Power." In certain times, in certain places, a twisting of the paternal look was enough to decide the fate of a little new-born baby.

Children are not the property of parents, but a gift of God for which they must give account. There are no absolute monarchs in families. In some places, on railroad cars used for transportation we have read these words: "Be kind to animals." In some places the law punishes those who mistreat animals. Have mercy, even toward beasts.

Some fathers and some husbands fall into error by reading only the part in their favor. It is true that parents must be revered, and woe to irreverent children. It is true that husbands must be to their wives as Christ to the Church. But fathers (and we say also mothers) must not provoke children to wrath; husbands, as Christ loves the Church and takes care of it, thus act toward your wives.

The eye of the Lord watches over human acts, and knows how to intervene to stop or to punish a proud father or an arrogant husband.

There is nothing worse than the abuse of Authority. It is not given for the gratification of one who is called to use it, but to make him a servant, and not an owner over those over whom he must command. There is the Authority of Pastors and spiritual conductors: A man who had truly learned to

humble himself in the long school and discipline of Jesus Christ, has left written: *"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder... Feed the flock OF GOD... taking the oversight thereof... Neither as being lords over God's heritage..."* (1st Peter 5:1-3).

I—says the Apostle—am not a dictator, but a simple servant. Flock OF GOD [not yours]. Neither as being lords.

"Lord" is one of the greatest words of the Scripture, and means absolute owner. The same Scripture admonishes that there is ONLY ONE LORD.

The authority of the prophets: In the Old Testament we do not read of a greater authority than that of the prophets. When necessary, they reprimanded kings and priests. Their ministry was so important that one of them has left written: *"And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet [by means of] was he preserved"* (Hosea 12:13).

We Christians, especially for the definition of the word "Prophets," as in 1st Corinthians 14:3, do not have a clear or complete idea of the prophetic ministry in the New Testament. Since the Holy Spirit is promised to all believers, and many receive it, the prophet in the New Testament does not have quite the office that he had in the Old Testament. But one must consider that the prophetic ministry is mentioned in the same list in which are mentioned the "Pastors, Evangelists and Teachers" (Ephesians 4).

Pastors and Evangelists and Teachers, even they must teach and edify as it is written in 1st Corinthians 14:3. It is clear that there is something distinct in the prophetic ministry. The passage in 1st Corinthians 14:3, where the scope of the letter

to that church is clarified, mentions, but does not exhaust the lines of the prophetic ministry.

Chapter 11 of Revelation presents the prophetic ministry in a vigorous way, and that leads to martyrdom. The prophets, more than others, were martyrs, and are martyrs even in the New Testament. The prophet is killed in Jerusalem.

Lord, raise up prophets!

But near great heights there are deep precipices. Precisely because they are invested with authority to speak in the Name of the Lord, if they are not truly controlled by the Holy Spirit, word by word, and even in their voice and behavior, by that dangerous fascination that comes from authoritative positions, they could transcend their authority. It is not an easy undertaking to obey God, and to not go beyond the limits. As for others, so it is for a prophet; absolute authority is in God alone.

The Lord kept Ezekiel closed in a house, tied and mute, for a time so that he would not be a reprover (Ezekiel 3).

Let us take a look at Elisha (2nd Kings 3). Subject as he was, like others, to passions and bursts of anger, Elisha scolded Jehoram, king of Israel: *"What have I to do with thee. Get thee to the prophets of thy father and to the prophets of thy mother... Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."*

The energetic Elisha was stopped in his burst of anger as by a secret warning, because continuing in that state of mind, he would not have been able to hear the voice and the Word of God. We seem to see Elisha sweetening his voice and with a countenance that was clearing up, and he said: *"But now*

bring me a minstrel," which means: I need to calm myself, because I cannot be in contact with the Invisible and prophesy.

The authority of God was keeping the authority of the prophet within just limits. Every strength and power, belongs, in an absolute way, to the Lord.

To Pilate who was boasting that he had authority to deliver and to crucify, Jesus answered with the authority that came from the Father.

We receive a great lesson from the behavior of the centurion who sent to ask Jesus to heal his servant: he said he had some men under his command, but that he himself was a man subject to authority (Luke 7); which teaches us that the more submitted we are to God, the more He will entrust delicate tasks to us, also giving us authority.

A word to children and to the members of a Church: It is true that God takes care of you, and that each one, if he pays attention, can hear the voice and teaching from Above, but it is also true that He has put you under some visible authority. And if such authority exceeds, there is a Most High above all others who sees and dominates everything in everyone.

We are all independent in that we depend, in an absolute way on God alone. And yet we are all dependent on one another. Sovereign, absolute and infallible is the Authority of the One to Whom all power in Heaven and on earth has been given. He is the Lord, because He alone has bought us with the price of blood.

THE MEASURE OF HEAVEN

The three words: WEIGHT—NUMBER—MEASURE, in the balance and accountability of Heaven, have another value and application than among men.

For a long time the descendants of Abraham were not able to take possession of Canaan, until the moment came that the inhabitants of that country were put out of it.

“But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again:”—thus the Divine Voice affirms—for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Genesis 15:16).

Before the punishment fell on Sodom and Gomorrah, it was necessary that they should reach to the extreme (Genesis 18 & 19). Before Babylon was destroyed, the Lord waited for its sins to rise, one upon the other, up to heaven.

In Ezekiel and in Revelation measuring is mentioned. It was a measurement by an Angel with a measuring reed. The works that the Lord has entrusted unto each one of us are also measured and numbered. Thus the sufferings and tears of the elect are numbered. We are limited on every side by weights, numbers and measures without being aware of it. To some it is easy to give messages and even to administer reprimands; to others, no. It is the Lord who gives authority over some, and not over others. Let each one stay in his place, and wait for the works that God has prepared for him, and which, in order, will present themselves one by one (Ephesians 2:10). The Church, as a whole, fulfills all the commands of the Lord, but the members have, each one, a part of the work, and of suffering (Colossians 1:24). We remember the words of Daniel to the wicked and profane Belshazzar (Daniel 5). In Luke 18 there is the picture of the

widow and of the unjust judge, a picture that closes with the words of verses 7 and 8: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily..."

When the last tear, the last sigh has reached the Measure known to God, the Lord will come down and rapidly execute His plan in favor of the elect who have not become tired of crying to Him (not to men) day and night. Oh—the Measurements of Heaven!

* * *

THANKSGIVING

(Psalm 116)

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God concerning you." This is one of the exhortations that close the first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians. *"Concerning you!"* God does not expect thanks from everyone, because He knows that not everyone can give thanks; rather, He expressly prohibits wicked ones to take His Name in their mouth, since the praise of God is suitable only in the mouth of righteous men. One who is not converted cannot and does not know, does not know how to give thanks; and even after one has accepted the Lord, much work of the Holy Spirit is needed in order for praises and thanksgiving to flow from the heart.

It is not easy to thank God: giving thanks supposes a very tender gratitude, which is a plant that does not grow by itself in the human heart. Thanking Him is not easy, because God,

more than everyone, is the least thanked, and no one is so much slandered as He. But, from His children, He expects praises and giving thanks.

* * *

Among the men of the Old Testament, David occupies perhaps the first place among those whose heart was flowing with praises and blessings toward God. The Psalms are rich with very tender explosions of love and gratitude. Among those that are most read, for giving thanks, is the 116th Psalm.

The Psalmist begins by saying: *"I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications."* Rather, in the text it is *"I love"* without adding *"the Lord,"* because one knows that he was speaking of Him, and that he could be occupied only of Him.

Then, as if he were speaking to an audience before whom he ran the risk of being considered a fanatic, he tries to give the reasons for his love. He seems to say: You do not know to how many titles of gratitude He has the right! Some of them are explained to you here: *"Because He"*—it is known of Whom he speaks—*"He hath inclined his ear unto me."* Inclined... unto me. *"Unto me,"* even to me, His ear! He not only deigned to look at me, but has put His ear close to hear my groaning. He encourages me to go to Him; therefore, *"I will call upon Him as long as I live."*

And then he feels the need to speak of past dangers.

"The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow." On the earth no hope remained for him. *"Then,"* note the victorious *"then,"* *"Then called I upon the Name of the Lord; O Lord I beseech Thee, deliver my soul."* He has finally named Him,

and now he wants to say something more specifically of Him. "*Gracious is the Lord, and righteous, yea, our God is merciful.*" "*Righteous*" refers to deserved punishments, but the word is preceded by "*gracious,*" and followed by "*merciful.*" Then he added: "*The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low.*" And after, the Psalmist speaks to himself, because it seems that something wanted to disturb him. And he apostrophizes thus: "*Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*" But he cannot continue, because, looking at himself, he feels that he is failing, and therefore he hastens to turn to God. This time, however, it seems that he forgets the audience, and from the third person, passes to the second.

"Thou, Thou!" He said "He;" now he says: "For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.

Death, but first tears, and then a fall, and what a fall! And many other times he had been about to fall, and God spared him other troubles and other tears.

And now the Psalmist wants to promise something, and makes his program, or rather rethinks that which he had proposed in his heart: "*I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed, therefore have I spoken.*" And then he is again constrained to speak of himself. "*I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, all men are liars.*"

But he cannot continue, because a thought that has been taking shape, suddenly chokes him: I, I..., but what can I do? And he cries "*What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?*" He almost reprimands himself that for a moment he had thought that he could return God's kindnesses. But he is perplexed and overcome by an accumulation of benefits, and devoured by the desire to show

gratitude and wants to do something. And he meditates for a moment on what he can give to God; he has finally found something, and exclaims in a triumphant tone: "*I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord.*" [The Italian version says "I will preach the Name of the Lord."].

"*I will take.*" We would have thought to hear: "I will give." But the Psalmist must still take, otherwise he cannot even preach. And thus, gratitude is expressed in his decision to take more.

"*I will take the cup of salvation.*" I will be occupied about Thee, and after I will be able to preach of Thee.

Oh God, it seems that I say, oh God, I will never be able to show you my gratitude, because I am too small, weak and poor. Your benefits have covered me, Oh God, You who know so much how to give benefits. Come Thou Thyself into my heart, refill it of Thee, and let me preach of Thee.

What therefore is the part of the Psalmist? "*I will take.*" And it is not a small accomplishment, because very few humble themselves to want to take from God the best gifts and all things. Come Thou, and the one who cannot stay with Thee, will go out of my heart, and then "I will preach" with courage and loudly. "I will preach Thy Name." And as a consequence of that "refill me of Thee": "*I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people.*"

Later, he completes the program: "I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the Name of the Lord." And not only this, but again he repeats: "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of His people," and he adds specifically: "In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem." And the joy overcomes

him and he cannot continue, and cries before becoming silent: "Praise ye the Lord." And then he remains in silent adoration.

* * *

GOD WILL PROVIDE

(Genesis 22:8, 14)

If someone had written, assuming that he might have been able to, the intimate story and the internal soliloquies of Abraham from when he heard the command until the moment in which he raised the knife to strike his son, if such a book had been written, it would be one of the deepest of the analyses of sorrow and of human conflicts. The Lord had anticipated the possible objections; that is, that he was an only son and that Abraham loved him, but He had not explained anything else. The Canaanites were using human sacrifices, and Abraham was known and esteemed, and many certainly knew of the arrival of that son to two old people, and they had to know something of that Promise. But now everything was going to pieces.

Abraham traveled three days with his son, and in what conflicts! His wife had remained in their tent, not knowing anything. It is easy for us to read that Abraham was waiting to receive his son from the Resurrection. But when? The man was sustained by a revelation. In the mystery, he heard like a new Name, or rather an attribute of the Omnipotent: **THE GOD WHO PROVIDES—THE LORD WILL PROVIDE—PROVIDENCE**. Permit us to repeat an observation of a general nature: we read the "By Faiths" of the Scripture

without pausing to consider what we would have done, how we would have felt if we had been in the shoes and the circumstances of those people. They were men of flesh and blood like us, and subject to the same passions like us. Such was Elijah; and yet he was not disheartened, but had faith. Such was Moses, and yet he remained constant, as seeing the Invisible. But the trial that Abraham had is above any human experience: the pain of sacrificing his only son, and the mental torture of having to be silent to his wife, and not understanding how it would be possible to have descendants by means of Isaac, and at the same time kill him by his own hand, and then to appear, solitary, in the midst of idolaters who knew him! It is said that the Lord would have given him back to him by resurrection, but it is not said when.

There are conflicts and mental anguishes that threaten to take away our reason. Abraham's three days of traveling are worth millenniums. Heaven will reveal it.

The saintly man, bowing himself in obedience, discovered another side of the attributes of God; that is that He is "PROVIDENCE."

How the conflict should be resolved, he left to God Himself, but there would be a solution, because God is just and faithful in His promises, and He is likewise absolute Lord in the commands. "He will provide," Abraham kept repeating to himself, in those three days of infinite sorrow and perplexity. And that word sustained him in the long walk, by which every step was bringing him closer to his Calvary.

When the young man asked him where the animal for sacrifice was, the saintly old man replied that God Himself would provide the Lamb. "*In the mount of the Lord it will be provided* (Genesis 22:14 NASB). It is the same as saying that where, and in what He wants, it will be provided. In that

occasion Abraham knew how much he loved God; it was not God who discovered it; He knows everything from Eternity. The language is inverted, and puts in the mouth of the Lord that which man should say: God will provide.

Among my recollections, there is one, left to me by the reading of one of the best books that I have had in my hands, and it is about a poor fugitive craftsman, who arrived at a time of necessity and misery in a city where he was seeking refuge and work. Only a little bit of money remained to him, and he felt the need to take some refreshment with food before presenting himself to his future benefactor. Upon going out he saw three or four beggars who stretched out their hand, and he said: Yes, there is still Providence, and he let slide into the hand of one of them the little that remained to him. Then he set out confident, comforted by this thought: The Lord would use him, a poor stranger, to help some unhappy people, and would He then abandon one whom he had used to help others?

Great is the mystery of Providence! An ancient mystic has written that we must consider how great is the Providence of the One who even makes a worm live in dry wood!

More than anything, we turn with our mind and heart to the words of the One who, after having spoken of the lilies and the birds that are both under the care of heaven, exhorted the disciples to believe and to trust that the Lord Himself provided according to the need.

Difficult and complex problems present themselves with mental agonies. To some the future is uncertain, and often frightening. But blessed is the one who, ceasing from tormenting himself in the how and when, will say, like Abraham: The Lord will provide. And as for the tomorrows, I will repeat the words of the Lord himself: tomorrow will

bring with itself the solution of the problem of tomorrow,
sufficient to each its trouble!

PROVIDENCE!

* * *

THE BREATH OF GOD

(Job 30:8; 33:4; 2nd Thessalonians 2:8; Genesis 15:21
Romans 8:26)

The undeniable fact that many are fanatics, and the fear that some of us have of becoming or being qualified such, tend to make even the most moderate ones be tempted to quench the movements of the Holy Spirit, or not to pay attention to the phenomena that cannot be explained on the basis of human reason. We forget easily, if we have even paid attention, that the thoughts and ways of the Lord are above those of man.

The Incarnate Wisdom has said to those disciples and to the disciples of every time, that to them it is given to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of the Heavens. Please note "Kingdom of the Heavens," words that make us think of the methods by which the Kingdom of God manifests itself.

May the errors of many and the undeniable mixtures, not intimidate us to make us lose what is true. In the holy fear and wisdom of Him, in which there is divine courage, let us resolve to live always more in the Kingdom of the Spirit, without paying attention to what the subtle reasoners think or

say. We know there is the logic of Heaven, above human reasoning.

An apostle has written that one who wants to become wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. There are many who even having accepted the first lessons of the Gospel (Good News), stop short when faced with the mysteries that surround some methods of Heaven; methods that work together to bring us always closer to the Lord.

It is written in Jeremiah 33:3: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee and shew thee [I will manifest] great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

But let us give a few examples: Permit me to testify of that which has happened to me many times, and especially on a memorable occasion. I must state beforehand that I have always been of poor health and that no doctor would have hoped that I would live to the average limit assigned by the Psalmist (Psalm 90); much less that I should go beyond such a limit. There are those whom the Lord never heals, and keeps always ill or weak so that they lean upon HIM.

On a certain occasion I was more tired than usual, and some well-intentioned brothers, ignorant of my weak condition, had led me from house to house all day. Grief because of letters received and unpleasant news had not been lacking. When I arrived in the meeting place in the evening, I was moving as if in a dream, fearing to fall with every step.

It was the time when great crowds came and filled the meeting place before the time. Escaping from everyone, I went to kneel down, not only to pray, but also to have a little relief. My head was heavy; it seemed that my heart wanted to leave me, a buzzing in my ears was confusing me, and I felt close to fainting. I barely had the strength to say: "Oh,

Lord! I am tired! I am tired!," while I was feeling that because of my state, unable even to remain on my knees, that I was unable to speak to a mass of people who had come from many places.

I was repeating: "Lord, I am tired."

But, behold, coming from I don't know where, these delicate words: "But I am not tired!" More followed after those words. Without participation of my will, my chest began to enlarge itself, and strong, abundant sighs were coming in successive stages, and at the same time I felt like a light touch on the upper part of my back.

The trouble of my heart disappeared, and also the heaviness of my head, and I was invaded by a vigor more than if I had enjoyed a long rest.

I have experienced this phenomenon of breathing in (Breaths within) many times, and it was always followed by that which can be called "Resurrection" for as much as it is possible to use such a word while we are still in these bodies (Romans 8:11). But that's not all. Many years ago I was led to visit an old brother who was qualified as being a fanatic. But I, only in seeing him, felt a spiritual attraction. I noticed that many times, without saying a word, he was emitting like a breath. He was not answering to the smiles of benevolent mockery of some who were going near to him, and he continued to emit those breaths. The time came that I too had, without the participation of my will, similar experiences. I was not oppressed by great tiredness and did not have an urgent need for strength precisely then, but I was under a mortal anguish and an afflicted spirit. Sad memories and serious preoccupations were oppressing me like a wave of evil spirits, taking away all my will. And then deep breaths came, followed immediately by breaths out of my

mouth. Oppression, heaviness and terrors would flee, and a great calm would enter.

During my mission in Buenos Aires, it happened many times in a meeting that an oppression would weigh down on everyone in a way that we could not even sing freely. And a brother who was very simple, one of the poorest, would stand and he would go up and down in the meeting place, and would blow with his breath as if he were seeing someone. Then, in strange tongues, he would rebuke, looking around. Little by little, his countenance sweetened, and then he would turn to the church with an affectionate behavior and tone of voice. At first, someone was upset and wanted to stop him, but some of us, invaded by a holy fear of God, were exhorting that no one should dare to contrast that which might be one of the ways of the Lord. There are ways that are strange to man, but that answer to the plans of God.

The result was that the oppression and the sense of suffocation would disappear, leaving a tranquil atmosphere, as if truly a wind had swept away pestiferous miasmas, and produced a sense of restoration and an odor of peace.

Oh, the breath of the Omnipotent! To it is connected the life of the first man. Has God stopped infusing in us, from time to time, a little of His breath?

Abram (Genesis 15:11) breathed against the birds of prey that were swooping down on the sacrifice. Is it possible that birds of prey, bold and numerous like they are in those places, were driven away by a puffing and blowing?

There is in 2nd Thessalonians 2:8, the promise that the Lord shall consume "*that Wicked—by means of—the spirit [breath] of His mouth.*" As a rule this is interpreted as being for the end. But is it strange perhaps, that from time to time,

He, using the mouth of whom He wants, breathes against wickedness or demons that at times hurl themselves in order to frighten or to destroy His people?

Life of the Holy Spirit, in how many things you go on spreading out and extending yourself, if we truly, truly renounce ourselves, and if, without reasoning, we abandon ourselves in His Hands and breath! Amen.

* * *

THE CHURCH IN THY HOUSE

(Philemon 2)

At the time of the apostle there were no Christian temples yet, and the brothers would unite in private apartments. However, it is recorded in a special way, that some of them had a church in their own house, and among these was Philemon.

Paul writes: "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer, and to Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house." It is not excluded, rather it is implicitly admitted that there was in the city some other place of meeting, because there would be no need to mention "the church in thy house."

Now let us make the hypothesis that these words "the Church in thy house" would occur in a letter written this year from one Christian to another, and we will have a clearer concept of what they mean and of the edification they give.

The house has become a church. Not only prayers and reading the Bible by each one privately, but regular meetings including the neighbors. From time to time, some new face is seen; it is one who would not have gone in another place, but who came because he knows that it's a question of a private gathering; he has come for friendship and mere condescension, but later on he will feel a lively interest to return. Being an intimate gathering, a greater harmony is felt. And any appearance of official action is absent, therefore there is a greater communion of the souls. There are no long discourses, but exhortations and testimonies. Christian confidences abound because it is a visit of friendship in the same time that it is a religious service. Friends and relatives are both sanctified.

The friend who has come for the first time remains touched because he has seen Christianity in the practical area of the family; he has been to visit other friends, but from the hours spent with them he has come away with the remembrance of useless discourses, if not outright evil; but now a gentle remembrance remains in his soul, and he says to himself: "this is new to me." While he has visited a family, he has met friends in Church. He will return, rather he will no longer find it difficult to go to a church.

* * *

The Church in your home means that your family is united in the Name of Christ, your house is a center of light in the neighborhood and makes it possible for everyone who has some contact with you to know the Gospel.

If many of our acquaintances do not come to church, it is well that that they should find a Church in our house. And if every Christian house were a Church, the gospel would spread with extraordinary rapidity. In the church that is in your home, a friend will be able to learn many things that he

would not learn even in other Christian meetings, because by the familiarity that he feels with you, he feels free to ask questions and can receive explanations. In this way the teaching becomes practical and personal.

The Church in thy house!

But many of us remember a time when our homes were meeting-places for intrigues. It is true that we had to be united in some circle, but we had an intimate group, and wanted among us, to make programs and to prepare the little politics. Passing from our little intrigues to the great political maneuvers that agitate the nation, we know that deep down everything is the effect of the intense activity in this or that home.

Therefore, if the world knows how to profit by the home, we Christians should use it for blessing. Every person of the family has some special knowledge, therefore, a Church in our home is an extraordinary opportunity.

In the past we have neglected this powerful force, but we want to understand the value of it for the future. Do we, you and I, want to have a Church in our home?

* * *

BUT GOD...

(Ephesians 2:1-4)

Note well the two words in the heading of this writing. They tell us that which God accomplishes when, humanly speaking, there is no hope. For example, let us take the

picture drawn by St. Paul of those who were at one time the Christians of Ephesus. "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

"BUT GOD... hath quickened us together with Christ..."

Nothing good was to be expected from corrupt men who were slaves of the world, of Satan and of the flesh. They had a deep corruption that extended to desires of the flesh and of the mind. BUT GOD, who is rich in mercy, quickened them.

There are no difficulties for the Lord, unless we ourselves want to limit Him.

BUT GOD... The two brief words are often indicated to remember how the ambitious designs of men have been upset. Let us see what Jesus Himself tells us with regard to avarice: *"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."*

BUT GOD said unto him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

"BUT GOD," and the designs of the man that the world calls wise, and is qualified as a fool by Jesus, are shattered in pieces as by a speeding bullet. Oh reader, do not make

programs without God. If you do, one day you will find a great "But" that will end your career, and will send you to perdition.

* * *

"BUT GOD!" Moses was an old shepherd, slow of tongue. Joshua was a man without great intellect. David was a shepherd boy. Jeremiah was very timid by nature. "BUT GOD" made them into giants. Many times, men have found themselves in situations that, according to the world, were desperate; but they were delivered in the last hour. God was watching

There have been sick ones who were abandoned by doctors but they were healed by God. There have been hardened sinners who have been transformed by God. "But God" is not limited to a few. Each one has or will have his "But God."

Reader, you too must meet these two words. What purpose do you want these words to have? To cause your perdition or cause your redemption?

MANY MASTERS

(James 3:1)

There are some to whom you can say neither "good evening" nor "good day," nor can you complain about the cold or the heat, nor mention that you have a headache, or that there is someone who is suffering, without them having to answer

with a lesson, accumulating verses upon verses of the Scripture.

They are the “Many Masters,” that is, they act like teachers in every line, in every time.

How should we act with such people?

Often silence is the best method, but sometimes, Christian charity exhorts us not to hide what is good, and with the meekness of divine wisdom, we say that the verses are exact, and that we do not deny them, but that suffering souls need not so much an accumulation of verses, as a merciful touch of the hand and a sweet smile of that Kind Countenance of the Son of Man.

The world has need of holy tenderness, of love and truth in God, and not of many Masters.

Oh Blessed Lord!

* * *

WE LOVE

1st John 4:19)

“*We love Him.*” Oh, not only Him, but “We love the Universe;” and in order to come closer to ourselves, we love all the Creation, all men. “Him” is not in the text. The love that we have for God is proved by the love that we have for the creation, for all men—UNIVERSAL LOVE. It is not easy to understand this immediately. The day comes that

Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, speaks to us openly of the Father and of the Creator. We become partakers of the Divine Nature (2nd Peter 1:4).

The nature—divine essence (we are not speaking of attributes) is: LOVE.

Let us not imagine that by repeating words we will possess Reality. Rather, we must admit that it is precisely the abundance of words, too much singing and discussing the things of Heaven without pausing to meditate them, that contributes to make us vain and deluded.

Jesus has brought and brings into our hearts Grace and Truth. By Truth is understood principally Substance—Reality. When St. Peter teaches that the precious and great promises are given for the purpose of making us become partakers of the divine nature, and when St. John says that what Jesus has been in this world, so must we be, they pointed to a Reality to which we must aspire, and which likewise is possible if we abide in Jesus. Otherwise it is impossible. Love springs, is infused and bears fruit in us from the Great Heart of Jesus Christ. Everything is possible in Him, but without Him nothing is possible.

God is love. We who are loved by God, nourished in that love, little by little we will understand that He is Love, and like Him, we begin to love, few and little at first, but, remaining in that fire, we will arrive at loving everybody.

We too shall love.

* * *

GLEANINGS

The Lord tests us in conflicts. One of the essential qualities of love is patience. Charity is slow to anger; suffers, and, at the same time, is not easily provoked, but is gentle and kind. Certain painful means are used to reveal us to ourselves and to bring us to the acquisition of the most difficult of Christian virtues: Patience.

And where is there greater need of it than with persons to whom we are closest? And who are they to whom we are closest, if not our own family?

Do not spy their behavior that can perhaps, for a time, become worse; but, by faith, sing of victory. The saints of the Lord must learn to sing by night: in the midst of troubles.

* * *

NO NOISE OF HAMMER, OF AXE NOR OF ANY
TOOL OF IRON

(1st Kings 6:7)

It is an undeniable truth that "the Church" is hidden in the Churches. We cannot limit it, and it is dear to us to remember the words of Jesus, and to give to them a nonsectarian interpretation. He said, among other things, that He has sheep that are of another fold; those also must He bring (John 10:16). The aim of this writing is to encourage those who are honest to not stumble at the noise of hammers

or of other tools of iron that are heard in various buildings, because although in those places there is "the Church," not everyone is "the Church." And it is also right to recognize that not all those who are destined to be "Church," are, in fact, immediately built into temple.

1st Kings 6:7 will help us to explain: "And the house when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building."

The subject is infinite; let everyone investigate by himself what the hammer, the axe, or other tools may be. The House—the Temple—the Body of Christ is built by means of ministries prepared and approved by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:11-16).

There are no noises during the building, but an orderly, diligent and calm work. This presupposes a preparation. Let us bless the Lord that He stirs up builders of the Temple and let us bless Him also for those in the caves who prepare the stones that must be used in the building. Not recognizing the two works brings misunderstandings. The excavators in the great mines and the stonecutters that work tirelessly by dint of hammer to work them are necessary. But it was not the same craftsmen that went to excavate and to shape the stones which they placed in the Temple of Jerusalem. And even if someone had that duplicate ability, his work did not proceed with the same method.

It is not easy to build; it was even less easy to build the Temple of Jerusalem. Many workers were needed. The excavators worked in the stone quarries, and it was hard work. They had to reduce the great masses of stone into pieces, and after taking measurements, they reduced each piece into the form that it could be used in the construction.

Then those who directed the transport were needed. The great work was accompanied materially by a cloud of dust, noise and voices. And finally, of the great masses of stone that were excavated, a relatively small part was brought to Jerusalem. Many crumbled pieces remained in the quarry and the vicinity.

When the stones arrived to the place of the Temple, the noises ceased. Neither hammer, nor axe, nor other tool was heard. Special artists selected the stones, each one according to its measurement, and they placed them one on top of the other, in the place and in the manner that the director of the craftsmen ordered—everything in its place without uproar or noise. The orders were precise, therefore no one dared to suggest or pretend that there should still be hammering. That which had been unavoidable and necessary in one place would have disturbed and brought confusion in another.

And now, a word about the Temple-Church:

The building is constructed according to the measurements of Heaven, measurements that only the Holy Spirit knows; and He lets them be known, step by step, to His servants. It was the Holy Spirit that directed the work in the quarries, and for the transport; and it is the Holy Spirit Himself who directs the building.

Not only was there no noise and dust, but no lamentation, as if the stones would each select its own place or the craftsmen would show a preference. Each one was fit and suited to the convenient place.

Stones out of place would have done harm to themselves and to others. But each one was situated comfortably where it was destined. We conclude: Do we truly want to serve the

Lord according to the methods and the measurements of Heaven? Yes or No?

Those who are honest and simple will say: Yes. And to them we turn and say that they should distinguish and reverence the two works, both of which are important; and that they understand and accept once and for all that the True Church, prepared in the quarries, is composed of submitted souls who enter into the Rest of Christ, allowing themselves to be managed and put where He wants. Amen.

* * *

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND HIM

A Preparatory Parable

Old Garment and Bottles; New Wine and Garment
(Luke 5:36-39)

The occasion that gave place to this parable that we will call the introduction to the other parables, is found in Luke 5, from verses 27 to 35. Jesus went out and saw a Publican by the name of Levi, and said to him: "*Follow me.*" Levi left everything and followed Him. And he made a great feast in his house; and there was a great company of Publicans and sinners at the table.

However "the Scribes and Pharisees" of that place murmured against the disciples of Jesus, saying: Why do ye eat and drink with Publicans and sinners? Jesus, answering said unto them: "*They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to*

repentance." But they were not appeased; seeing themselves stopped in that line; that is, unable to reply, they passed to another line of murmuring. They said to Him: "*Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?*" Three classes of disciples—they were leaning on the authority of John, and thus were isolating the disciples of Jesus. The "Why" that is read in the translation is not in the text, and therefore they were not asking; they did not want an explanation, but were accusing. The final interrogative statement was a mockery, by contrast; those fast, and yours eat and drink? And Jesus said unto them: "*Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*" What value does forcing one to fast have or doing it as a formality? Can you? True fasting is not by a rite, but dictated by the Spirit of God; in the absence of the Bridegroom, fasting will become spontaneous. In every trial, in every absence fasting is spontaneous, and often it is more so in the soul that gathers itself in silence, in mourning and in prayer. After this the Lord spoke about the garment, the patch, the bottles and the wine.

* * *

The Scribes and the Pharisees: We run the risk of not understanding the Word of God, if we aggravate the condition of that people, as if we were better than they. They were in the religious field, the respectable persons of the time; externally at least, many of them were correct. The evil in them was not the past, lacking as it may have been, but because they were rejecting what was new. Jesus was and is the new that transforms and uses the past. For them it was a new scene to see a Master at the table with despised classes: Publicans and sinners, officially called sinners, as by habit, opposed to the other classes of those who were separated or

saints (Pharisees). We cannot marvel because they marveled, because every novelty, although it may be excellent, makes some impression; and it is also advisable to not accept hastily that which is not very clear. However, neither should one systematically reject, because of hardened prejudice. It is necessary, with a candid soul, to examine, each time, ready to accept what is good. This explains what it means to become like little children, in order to be prepared for the Kingdom of God, open always to receive more. But in order to learn, humility and a good disposition are needed. If they, faced with the new fact, would have asked with simplicity, they would have been taught and blessed; instead they resisted and murmured. At the first admonition about the doctor and the sick, they could have begun to yield and to humble themselves. One of their prophets (Isaiah 1:5, 6) had said that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but they were not disposed to learn. Jesus said that He had not come for the righteous; and if they had wanted to read well their prophets, they would have been able to see that there is no one who is righteous. Seeing them hardened, rather than continuing to explain, Jesus put the axe to the root of the evil, and said that it was impossible, if one is not renewed, and does not want to be disposed to be renewed, to appreciate that which is from Him.

He spoke a parable unto them: "No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old." New not only in regard to the use; but also of another quality, as this is the meaning of the text.

"And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and

both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, the old is better.”

It is not only a question that the work and the new thing will be lost, but in the interest of the old itself, it is better not to patch, because the rent will become worse. This is what happens wherever the Gospel is forced on souls who do not want to be renewed and they become worse. The “constraining them” of the fourteenth chapter of Luke is to a discouraged people who were not proud (Luke 14:23); therefore it has another meaning. The comparison between the two wines and the two bottles is a little more difficult. Everyone understands that the old garment is inferior to the new one; but it is not so for wine. According to the earth, the old one is the better one, but the values of Heaven are not those of the earth. The Lord, in the communion, said that he would not drink more of the fruit of the vine, until He would drink it NEW with the disciples in the Kingdom of the Father. We must still drink of the wine of the earth when we celebrate communion; but He points out to us a new wine, and the word NEW refers not to the time, but to another quality. On the day of Pentecost, the cavilers said that they were full of new wine. Without wanting it, they were saying something of the new wine. St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians (5:18) to be not drunk with wine wherein is excess; but to “*be filled with the Spirit.*” Of the two wines, the old one and the new one, we are called to the comparison between all the excitements and efforts of the flesh, to the sure guidance and to the renewal by the Holy Spirit. Only by means of the Spirit are we made new. New wine and old bottles are not in agreement; the bottles break and the wine is spilled. The new ferments continually; applying the example to the work of the Holy Spirit, as long as we are in this tent, there is a continual fermentation. New wine, now more, now less, works continually: there is never enough in the work of renewal. The bottle signifies not so much the body, as the

whole of our humanity, and more than anything, our will. One cannot be with the Lord, continue to know Him, to grow, and to tend toward perfection, if one's will is not new and decided against the flesh. Our mind must be renewed. What is it worth to force messages and persuasion, where the heart is obstinate in the old? The new agitates, but the flesh escapes again from certain shocks that shatter many prejudices, and seems to take away all that we have caressed. The old of our morality, our way of seeing, and many things that form an intimate part of our being, that old one, only the souls consecrated to Heaven are disposed to sacrifice it while others hold on to it tenaciously. Moab was resting on its lees: before God, the old wine of Moab was nothing but lees (NASB says dregs of wine), useless, damaging things, considered important; we have rejoiced in things that perish.

The old and new refer also to time. That which was new and alive yesterday can be perishable today. Only the Lord is always new, even being the Ancient of Days. His Grace is always fresh, His guidance always lively and ready. In the ancient Tabernacle the bread was renewed day by day; and thus virgin oil had to be put into the lamps every day. From stature to stature, the Lord has something to tell us that we could not bear at another time. It is possible that we, even having accepted the new years ago, now we do not want to progress: we have established ourselves in the old experiences and we do not want anything else; but we do not know that the manifold wisdom of God has ways unknown to us and that we must be renewed and learn every day. One who stops goes backward. Of many of us it can be said that which the Lord was lamenting against one of the seven churches; that is, that He had not found their works complete in His sight. Now, in ourselves, we are never complete, and He, the Lord "*is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all*" (Ephesians 1:23), but there should be in us at least the holy desire to be renewed every day, the disposition to receive the

new garment, and to be made into new bottles, in order to carry His work in us, and to contain His wine.

The Scribes and the Pharisees had formed their habits, and approved of themselves, being wise in their own sight. In comparison with the life and teaching of Jesus, they felt disconcerted; and therefore they were resisting Him. A fundamental work was needed; they had to be completely renewed, and only then would they have understood that Jesus, by means of the convulsions of the new, gives true peace. He did not insist, and it is because of this, that certain times, the Holy Spirit keeps our mouth closed before hearts that are not disposed to hear. One who hears is from God, because he is on the way to understand, and to allow himself to be renewed.

And we, what are we? Old garments, perhaps? Old bottles? We have not always been such, because when we accepted the Savior we had to be prepared in order to accept Him. What are we now? Has He finished working, to give us His wine to drink? Are we new or tenacious in the past, in that which at one time was new, and now has become old food? Among the events recorded in the gospels, there is that of the blind Bartimaeus. He had his outer garment, which for the poor served also as a covering, and perhaps it was no more than a miserable rag; Bartimaeus wanted to run freely, because Jesus was calling him; he took off the garment, threw it away and found himself at the feet of the Lord. He recovered his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

May the old rags and prejudices be far from us; God has a plan of which we have understood very little; the Holy Spirit has been given in the Church in order to make us aim for perfection. It is necessary to run forward, to the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, Lord, by which we must suffer the loss of all things. And everything can become an

impediment, even the good of the past, if it is not renewed by the Holy Spirit. In order to understand Him, and to continue to understand Him, we need to be new, always new. While in that to which we have arrived we must be complete in His good judgment, for the rest, it is necessary to be humble, and therefore to become like little children. If we want it, and go to Him continually, He will know how to make us ready to have a new garment that is always His glorious righteousness, and to be made new bottles, in order to contain the new wine that He, starting from now, gives us to drink. And as for us, where we do not see this work of preparation in the hearts of others and the disposition to allow themselves to be renewed by Him, it is better not to waste time. It is better to work where He has made the necessary preparation in the souls. Only there will there be fruits for Heaven. The worst obstinate ones are precisely those who are such in the silence of their soul; their resistance is subtle, shrewd and tenacious; we pray that the Lord will reach them, breaking the hardness. We cannot do otherwise.

* * *

POOR IN SPIRIT

(Matthew 5:3)

The Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount!... Yes, but in order to understand the Sermon on the Mount, it is necessary to understand the Beatitudes, and in order to understand these, it is necessary to rivet well in our minds the first Beatitude which is their foundation, without which it is vain to speak of the Beatitudes and of the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of

heaven." All the other Beatitudes are based on this, and are its daughters.

POOR IN SPIRIT, NOT POOR OF SPIRIT. The spirit of man, the intimate part tied to the soul, to the heart and to the intellect that unites us to the divine is the center of man. God uses our spirit which He illumines, in order to investigate ourselves. Poor of spirit means to have a weakened spirit. God does not want this, because He rather wants to invigorate us in the spirit, like the wise mechanic takes care that his machine, especially the central motor, is kept in good order. Poor in spirit means feeling oneself poor before our own spirit. Literally it is: **POOR TO THE SPIRIT.** In order to understand this better, we remember that which is written of certain people who are wise for themselves and to themselves...

Poor in spirit does not refer to the discouraged man, and even less to one who is desperately anxious, because such a one is proud and feels discouraged because he cannot have his own way. In order to have an example, let us note the work that the Lord did with Job. Now, Job had a certain poverty in the spirit from the beginning, otherwise he would not have been that holy man that is described in the first pages of the book of Job. We can have a little poverty in the spirit, and we certainly do have it, or we would not be of Christ.

If we had not recognized a relative poverty, we would not have accepted the Savior, because only one who feels needy goes to Him. But the poverty of the Beatitudes is the fullness of poverty toward which He wants to bring us, in order to give us the Kingdom to which He has elected us. Job remained firm in the face of all the storms that deprived him of goods, children and soundness of body. The greatest test for him began with the mixed attacks of his three friends,

united together, and Job was very eloquent in defending himself. The friends were not persuaded but their mouths were closed. Let us understand one another: seeing another whose mouth is closed does not always signify winning... They kept silence but did not say he was right. Then one intervened who is a type of Jesus Christ, and of the pure and true ministry. The discourse of Elihu is marvelous; Job did not reply, and neither did he make any confession. Then God Himself spoke to Job with an extraordinary discourse that can be divided into two parts. He put before him the powers and processes of Providence, that man can neither control, nor understand. In the beginning of chapter 40, Job answered thus: "*Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.*"

Job was humbled, put to silence, annihilated! Does God want us like this? And with our mouth closed even for that which is good, He who has given us the gift of speech to use it for His glory and service? God cannot want us to be silent for that which is good.

God continued to talk. Please read the other two chapters and it can be noted that they are occupied also of the dangers of man and show that he cannot deliver himself: "*Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low.*" – "*Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee*" (Job 40:12, 14). Now it is also true that from our pride and dignity, from our riches (self-styled) in the spirit, God alone can deliver us, undress and save us. Chapter 41 describes that monster against which no man has strength, and that makes the sea boil (often our sea).

This time Job answered well: "*I know that thou canst do every thing.*" But while he was answering, he reprimanded himself with the same words with which God began to speak

to him: *"Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?"* It is Job who scolds Job, surprised that Job still goes around him. It is the saint who does not want to be dishonored by himself, either in good or in evil. He forgets and renounces that part of himself. But he continued, because he was no longer discouraged, no longer did he desire to flee: *"Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not."* Yes, the man of God lives in the sight of the Marvelous One.

"I uttered that I understood not." He does not say that he does not want to understand, if God will make him understand. He recognizes his ignorance, and at the same time, he is thirsty for Light, to the glory of God! *"Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me."* He wants to enroll in the school of Wisdom, as he had been exhorted by Elihu. *"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear."* He had only heard, and they may even have been the ears of the spirit. But hearing does not yet mean knowing, and there is much to know thoroughly. One begins by hearing, but it is necessary to go forward. And then there is the triumphant affirmation in which there is no "but," no "if," nor any excuse of false modesty.

"But now mine eye seeth thee." *"Wherefore I abhor..."* What thing? It does not say, because even here the translator has added. *"And I repent in dust and ashes."* Let us stop excusing ourselves because of things and circumstances! It is the "myself" of each one that must be rejected in order that nothing remains of us, and all of Him.

Now, oh Job, the King will be able to entrust to you a delicate work, the greatest in the universe: interceding for your needy brothers who have offended you. God did not even say to Job that at the first occasion he would have had

to do that; it was not necessary to say it. He commanded Job's three friends to have recourse to the INTERCESSION of Job.

In the message to the three friends, God called Job for a good four times, His servant; four is a figure of the Church. They had to go with a perfect sacrifice of seven and seven, and Job would have offered the sacrifice, and their foolishness would have been forgiven. And they went to Job.

But let pause for a minute; Job is still there, on the dunghill, with his flesh full of worms. Could he not now say some word of resentment or "I told you so?" But Job said nothing. At least, so destroyed by plagues, could he not say say: "wait a moment that I may pray to God to make me more presentable before offering sacrifices for you? I am so deformed and ugly." Nothing, nothing. Job did not see himself. He was poor in his spirit. Job does not see and does not look at Job, and is ready for his three friends.

But, afterward, Job receives the full basket. Read the rest of the book. All this is a prophecy of the Church, and the Church is called to the Kingdom, with the King of Meekness and of Righteousness. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*"

* * *

THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

“And Jesus went about... But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:35-36).

It is better to start from verse 34: “*But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils,*” when Jesus had healed the dumb man possessed with a devil. It seems to us, in fact, that there may be more connection between verse 34 and 35 than appears at first sight.

When I read of the compassion of Jesus, and look back a little, I see in the background the figure of hatred and of its first minister: malicious gossip. Jesus was healing the sick, and the Pharisees were insinuating: “*He casteth out devils by the prince of the devils.*” But Jesus was continuing to go around doing good. The Pharisees hate and slander. Jesus does not get discouraged, nor does He get tired; He does not waste time in discussions, but continues rapidly in His Mission. We can put the two behaviors opposite each other: The hatred that tries to entrap: “*He casteth out devils by the prince of the devils;*” and the love that does not get tired: “*But Jesus went about... preaching, healing.*” “*And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*”

Many times it was the people who went to Jesus, but more often it was Jesus who was seeking the people. His work was untiring, varied and large.

In the cities, in the villages, in the synagogues He was preaching, healing and teaching. But more than the soul of the multitudes that came, we want to fix our attention on the

attitude of the Benefactor. Jesus saw the crowds that came and He felt compassion because they were tired and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. The reason was His compassion.

“BUT WHEN HE SAW THE MULTITUDES,” the word translated “saw” has a strong meaning; it means to have intuition, to see with knowledge, to see in depth, intimately. The seeing of Jesus was not a superficial glancing around; He saw, read, realized and scrutinized the intimate part of the soul of the multitude that came. There is a difference between seeing and seeing. Jesus sees the multitudes; He looks in the depths of the soul and under the visages tanned by the sun and the faces spoiled by habits, and reads a pitiful story of sin and misfortune.

Because He has a special way of seeing, He feels a special compassion. Seeing the multitudes, He had “compassion.” Jesus did not feel that love that is inspired merely by pity, which is nothing but condescendence. The Love of Jesus is identification of suffering, and the word “compassion” is well suited to describe it. The phrase that is translated: “He was moved with compassion” makes us think of the victims who were sacrificed, and whose viscera were torn out, so that His compassion was an intimate suffering: Jesus felt as if His viscera were cut into pieces from the deep pain. We can have an idea of such compassion from what a mother must feel at the bedside of a dying child or if a child is torn away from her by cruel hands and killed under her eyes. In such cases, the viscera are pierced. There are extremes of love that lead to extremes of compassion. And precisely this was the love and compassion of Jesus.

And there was a reason for so much compassion that others did not know: “*Because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*” They had been tired

out. A work could be seen on them that had reduced them to this condition. Jesus read in that crowd an imposing scale of troubles and emotions. And it is easy to imagine what could have wearied them such as injustices, misery and sin. They were "scattered abroad." They seemed to have no definite aim; they were going like those who go here and there, in different directions, without a goal. That crowd had many who claimed to be leaders but they could not trust anyone: they were passing anxiously from one to the other, and remained dissatisfied everywhere, because in none of them did they encounter one who would understand and take care of them. There were the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but they were not sufficient guides, and then they did not love the people. This makes us think of someone who is afflicted by an incurable sickness, who is under the illusion that he can find an efficient remedy and devours avidly the various drugs that he receives and runs anxiously from one doctor to another. We think also of some poor ignorant person who wanders from sanctuary to sanctuary, believing one to be more blessed than the other.

The multitudes were tired, overwhelmed and without aim or direction, and such they appeared to Jesus. Awakened by His passage, the multitude hurried to run on His way; they needed a leader who would take care of them. Sheep do not know how to find the road when they are lost. And such the multitude appeared to be: sheep without a shepherd.

As they were passing, He saw everything, and since He read in depth, He felt compassion; rather, it seemed that the misfortunes of those poor people were passing all on Him, and forming like a bundle that would come and place itself on His shoulders. If someone had been able to observe Jesus, he would have seen that after a few moments, the troubles of everyone were depicted on His countenance, and the suffering and the languor of the people were carried by Him.

But there was no human eye that could read Him. Jesus understood others, but He Himself remained, for the most part, misunderstood.

THE REMEDY: He had gone out, going about, teaching and preaching; this was His principal aim; and healing infirmities. Now, in the face of that scene, he felt the needs of that multitude even more vividly. Turning to the disciples He said: "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.*" There were great opportunities in that crowd, men and women who, from the height of misfortune, abandonment, and sin could be rehabilitated and redeemed—a great harvest. He saw the opportunities that were not being met because of a lack of workers. From the immediate scene a vision occurred to His mind: it seemed that the crowd was being enlarged, that the horizon had no borders, and that the crowds would be coming from beyond Palestine. It seemed that the centuries would flow in a few minutes; and before Him even the future generations would pass. And Jesus was seeing the great mass of humanity of every time and place, coming on His passage, tired, scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. It seemed that, speaking to those few disciples, He was seeing the future disciples, and to these and to those He would say: "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.*" And after such a sad affirmation, He exhorted those and these: "*Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into his harvest.*"

This remedy perhaps seemed inadequate then and perhaps seems inadequate to many even today; and yet it was what Jesus indicated. Healing the infirmities, that's good but there were invisible sufferings of the soul; correcting the errors, excellent, but there were the causes of the errors; to bring a little justice among men, a grandiose ideal: an entire social program could have come to the mind of Jesus, and yet, for

that immense sea of troubles, He had only one thing to suggest: "Pray that other workers be sent (pushed)." God Himself must push them. To push (drive) is a strong expression; and the workers must be, by the grace of God, moved by that same compassion that Jesus had and has; because in His movements, in His compassion He also was driven by a great mover. With His love there was another Love that He had made His own, that of the Father.

The workers, the twelve and the others that would come, had to have the same program as Jesus: the announcement of the Gospel. They had to point out to the multitudes the unique remedy in this: that they should seek the true leader, that they should no longer go wandering, and that they should gather themselves together under the One who truly loved them, Jesus the Shepherd. Go to Him, and leave the care of the rest to Him.

And we have a responsibility. When we meditate on all this, and passing through the streets, we think of the wasted energy, and useless attempts at redemption on the part of men, we see that even today they always carry the stamp of agitated troubles and lack a sure direction in life, and we feel, by ourselves, our insufficiency to help them. However, we pray, we pray because other fingers, not seen by us, point in the same direction to Jesus Christ, and that many and many voices are crying out in the world: "He knows everything. He is moved by compassion; and He alone has the power to save."

ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

(Hebrews 12:15)

Let us read: "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."

Where is such a root? Is not all strength of the old man destroyed? Does evil come only from outside, or does it find something in us that answers to it? No isolated portion of the Scripture gives the complete answer, but rather the Word taken as a whole, and the experience by which even the most saintly must confess that something remains in us, which we must guard against as from our worst enemy. The "I," the old Adam, is not destroyed, but is subdued only if, and as much, and as long as we live in the Spirit, and by the Spirit of God we depend on Grace.

In chapter 11 of Isaiah there is one of the most beautiful figures of the soul in the picture of the good and bad beasts that live near one another. As long as one lives at a high elevation, the bad beasts can do no harm. But if we come down, they regain strength and do damage.

Let us not deceive ourselves. The beasts are there, and there are also the roots. Only if we stay at a high elevation there is no danger.

Living on High, that is the same as saying living in Grace, brings us to distrust ourselves and to lean always, in everything on the Lord. We will have as much of victory for as much as we are in Grace and no more (Romans 6:14). Let everyone be careful; pay strict attention not to fall and never move away from Grace, otherwise some hidden root that seemed to be, but is not eradicated, sprouts up, lifts its head

and disturbs. And the evil is not limited to one alone, but it extends to others; it goes to touch and to awaken roots that are in others, and many become infected. It is the contagion, the pestilence of the evil.

Two lines are clear: The roots are there, and remain during the earthly pilgrimage; there is a design of Providence in this. Such roots are kept subdued only by the strength of the Lord that is given to all those who appreciate it and want it; only Grace can keep them down and render them innocuous.

In order to be victorious, the life of the Christian must always depend on Grace. No progress gives us the right to distance ourselves from Grace: rather, the more we go ahead, the more the dangers are multiplied, as we are more exposed to the traps of enemy spirits that easily find entrance into the hearts that yield to pride or allow themselves to be overcome by a wrath that becomes irritation. The Scripture tells us in the words: "*Neither give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27).*"

* * *

SOBRIETY

(Romans 12:3; 1st Peter 5:8)

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Sobriety is knowing how to stay in the right measure in everything; and like every other virtue, it begins inwardly; outward behavior is a son of how we feel inside. If we remind ourselves that

not only we are the children of God, but there are many others, often more enlightened and blessed than us; if we remember that many times our excessive zeal or our obstinacy has caused troubles; if we keep in mind that we do not know our heart, and we can be seduced by some hidden pride or egoism, if we doubt about ourselves, then we will have sobriety; that is we will have equilibrium and measure. We will not seek to please ourselves, but will procure the good and edification of others.

Some are quick to say: "The Lord has told me. He has revealed to me... etc."

Listen: One who truly receives a revelation must be well assured first if it is the Lord, and he will do it with humility, asking that his heart be examined for hidden motives. At times we can see according to some secret inclination of the soul. Assured that it is from God, he must know why it was revealed to him. It can be that he is called in a special way to pray; and, above all, he must be careful to keep his mouth closed, and not to boast. The Lord is jealous of His secrets. When the owner of the vineyard (Luke 13:6-9) revealed to the servant the history of the sterile fig tree and commanded him to cut it down, the servant was not happy about the ruin of that tree. He did not take advantage of the revelation, and therefore he did not speak badly; but he gave himself tenaciously to a work of mercy. He begged that the tree be spared, and he offered to give it special care: *"Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it."*

Be sober. Do not insist too much; do not prolong a conversation even though it may be excellent. It is necessary to measure oneself continually in the balance of God, so that He will preserve our heart full of love and keep our mind calm. Be sober. And it is so important that St. Peter, at the end of the first epistle, wanting to warn to guard against the

enemy who goes around like a roaring lion, begins thus: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1st Peter 5:8).

Lacking sobriety, one does not watch, and therefore is exposed to the attacks of the devil. Nothing will help so much to keep us sober as a profound conviction that we are nothing, keeping in mind our weaknesses and errors, and at the same time, having absolute confidence for ourselves and for others (He loves also the others. Remember it!) of the Kindness of the Lord.

It is painful to establish how some of us sin more of those very subtle sins that escape detection, but that are more deceiving and more serious. Little do we know of the sins in the spirit, because we deceive ourselves that by now, we have reached a sure condition. By ceasing, be it even for a little, to feel that we are incapable of any good, but exposed to every evil, we do not keep our eye and our heart fixed on Grace... And then...!!! The honest and humble reader knows what we want to say. Oh! the pride of the so-called saints!

In order to live in the physical life, we must never be lacking air. In the same way, in order to keep ourselves in the life of Heaven, we can never be lacking Grace, not even for one minute. That's why the Man bearing Grace came from Heaven, and in Him is offered and given Grace in abundance and continuity. Sin does not have dominion in those who live in Pure Grace.

* * *

I WAITED, WAITING

(Psalm 40:1)

The first words of Psalm 40:1 say: "*I waited patiently for the Lord,*" and they imply not only a length of time, but also, please permit us, a length in the exercise of patience. "Patience" is one of the great words of the Scripture, which, like all the great words, can be evaluated if we read it in the vocabulary, language of the Holy Spirit.

It is not only an enduring and a suffering, because even those who do not know God endure and suffer, but it is a suffering in sweet resignation, in which there is no lamenting or secret resentment or rebellion.

Such is the patience we read of in Psalm 40, and in other pages of the Scripture. One notes the crescendo that leads to "Patience" in Romans 5, and in James 1, not to mention other passages.

The first words of verse 1 of Psalm 40 are translated by some thus: "In waiting I have waited." To minds that are not trained in the reasons of heaven, such an affirmation can seem strange; however, looking in depth, it includes something of the Wisdom that comes from Above, and makes one suppose that the Psalmist, constrained by circumstances, had to wait, and did not do so like one who bows his head to a storm to which none may be exposed without having wanted it, but with a resigned and happy spirit.

It is a waiting united to an intimate surrendering of oneself, and even this surrendering of oneself is a fruit of knowing

the faithfulness of God, whose Providence extends to all things. It is a saying, in the inner man: These impediments seem to be created by man or by demons, but are in fact in the plan of God. It is He who wants me to wait, and He wants it for my good. He is intent to create in me the disposition to wait. The time, the times and everything are in His Hand. No one can defeat or even delay the plans of God. He would be able, in an instant, to resolve all of my problems and longing, but He doesn't do it because He likes me.

Materially, I am a creature of a short time, but in the camp of the spirit I am in the eternity of God. That which is years here, are not even seconds in the eternal clock, where there is no longer time. Therefore, my waiting has a reason: the Lord wants to do me more good than I can ask Him for or imagine.

Waiting supposes keeping a watch, being on guard at His doors; it supposes that we enter into divine interests.

We have desired many things and we wanted them immediately; and then we discovered that if we had had them, they would have hurt us. The Father of enlightenment and mercies wants to engrave in us absolute trust in His love and wisdom, by which we must say, with a holy rejoicing, that obstacles, waiting or even denials are for our good, and for everything that is denied we will have something solid and eternal.

The fascinating subject would lead us into a vast and pleasing territory; but the limits of a periodical constrain us. It is not easy to love, to know, to obey immediately the sovereign will of God. One of the signs that He wants something of us, is that we, in the flesh, have no exaltation; rather, according to the old man we would prefer to say

“No,” and we say “Yes” for His sake. As long as we are agitated and in a hurry, and the brain is as aflame in a fever to want, immediately... Be careful!..

Calm! Holy calm of Heaven!

The widow waited and returned patiently to ask for justice and she obtained it.

The sinful woman at the feet of Jesus was weeping, while Jesus was not turning to her, but was occupied with her enemy, but then she received more than she expected.

Oh—the true waiting, the waiting that pleases God. Amen.

* * *

LET US REJOICE IN THE GOOD WORK OF OTHERS

(Psalm 106:4, 5)

Often there come to me religious periodicals which, although they uplift the Only Lord, use different methods among themselves, and from ours. I bless God for them.

We know that we have a ministry that is quite limited, and that we can reach only a few, and that these few must be in the spiritual stature in which the Lord wants them, and that He, as He wants, distributes in the various classes of the great School of the Lord. Let us acknowledge it: while some (I say some) who read us are not edified by other writings, it is likewise true that other pious souls are not edified by our writings. Setting aside the possibility of insinuations and prejudice, and remaining charitable and serene, we observe:

There is one Lord, but many servants. Each servant has authority only in that which God entrusts to him. The souls are not, and do not remain in the same stature and are put by God in the classes that He wants. One who is of God learns from everyone and from everything.

May God be blessed for many of His workers who work hard like us, and more than us.

* * *

REVELATION

The book is called "REVELATION." It sums up all the preceding revelations. In Revelation the center is entirely on high. The Temple and the ark are on high. The servants are angels; the orders are given by Jesus for each of the angels—messengers—of the seven churches. The Lord is seen walking, that is in continuous vigilance, in the midst of the seven churches. He is the Inspector, and the center of everything. Everything is seen in a superior light. The victors receive a new name, that is a more solid Christian character, and a more abundant revelation of God, "of My God," that is of Jesus. The city comes down from Heaven; that is, it takes orders only from on High. The angels touch earth for a moment, and then return to their center. There is no primacy of places, nor of men; everything is moved and directed from on High and for the glory of God. In the book we read the complete revelation of Jesus, the precise concept of the Church; the final dangers that it encounters, and how the servants of Jesus must be considered. Church and servants must live on high. John gives very little information about himself: he has neither the time nor the desire to be occupied

about himself. He says that he is a servant, and that's enough. Only Jesus must remain in sight. What are the names of the seven angels of the seven churches? We will know the names in heaven, where there is no more danger to put men before the Lord. Their testimony? A little is enough. We must be occupied about Him, who was killed and has returned to life.

In the measure that the servant and the Church grow toward Revelation, they learn to live a hidden life; Jesus must be seen: He must increase and we decrease (John 3:30). We cannot understand future things well if we do not see clearly the things THAT ARE (1:19). There is a "FROM NOW ON" in the life of the saints, after every new and fresh revelation of Jesus Christ.

* * *

IN THE TRIAL

The greater the trial is, the more are the invaluable riches. There is an intimate relation between suffering of the body and the perfection of the soul. While sight and hearing of below become weakened, heavenly ones become acute, in order to contemplate the King in His beauty, and to hear His voice. It is a poor word to say to others: "patience, courage," if it is not God who says it. But I believe and I can say that the Lord has said the two holy words of comfort and other intimate consolations that human language cannot even repeat. The joy and the pain, especially if external, render little souls egoistic, or, to say it more exactly, they discover the hidden egoism; but in the elect they work as revealing instruments of a hidden strength and a faith that is no longer even our faith, but that of the Son of God. We remember the

exclamation of the suffering Apostle: "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).

* * *

THE STROKE OF THE SWORD

Part One

(John 18:10-11)

Permit us to remember some strokes of the sword that have not helped the work of the Lord.

Returning to Italy after a long absence, I noticed in the compartment in which I was traveling someone who was selling copies of the Gospels. In order to facilitate his work, without disclosing myself to him, I also bought a few copies. Seeing that, in silence, I was intently looking at those little volumes, some bystanders also bought. I was going to the home of some relatives, and upon leaving the train I invited my fellow traveler to join me. I presented him to my relatives as a servant of the Lord who was selling evangelical books. To my fellow-traveler I said: "my relatives are truly, according to the light they have, pious souls," and I named their church. The zealous fellow traveler looked at me and my relatives as though scandalized and began to shout: "And how can they be pious souls, if, and if... they are not...". He grabbed his little briefcase and left without saying goodbye, while one of my relatives, a true gentleman, was thinking to

invite him to eat with us. I remained as I remained; that violent one (and not violent in order to take by force for himself the Kingdom) had destroyed the patient work of others. This happened a long time ago.

More recently: Three brothers in Christ, we were traveling in an automobile toward a certain place, when we noticed a man who was carrying a suitcase and traveling on foot. We invited him to come into our car. He accepted thankfully. One of us read in his aspect that he was an intelligent and diligent worker, but of those who declare that they do not believe anything. One of our group began by telling him that even he had found himself on a road traveling on foot, other means of transportation having failed him. A sweet and gentle conversation was beginning, when lo and behold one of us asked him, point-blank, the question: "Are you saved?"

The one who had started the conversation that seemed distant, but had a kind scope to it ("Let your gentle spirit be known to all men" (Philippians 4:1-9 NASB), felt a wound in his heart at that importune or hurried question, and saw the pilgrim respond with a smile and a scornful gesture, and then, he said that he had to get out, and he did...

For several years someone known to me, who in himself is impatient and violent, under the hand of the PATIENT and WISE LORD, has been in correspondence with a gentle, cultured, well-intentioned soul who has tried the best that he knew to win souls to Christ and to draw near to persons of other camps.. It is not easy to reach the right measure of Heaven, especially in certain environments. The one who has been in correspondence with such souls has discovered in their energetic and resolute character, a holy flexibility, if they are given the opportunity to discover controversial points by themselves. While a martyr of patience is doing his best, a saintly man to whom credit cannot be denied for

having worked for a long time and for having generous intentions uses violent, absolute, imperious writings.

Ah! Brothers; the people must be helped to see for themselves the Truth in general, and in the particulars. Wanting to impose our views on them, even if they are right, is wanting to dominate them.

Deep down, our soul recognizes only one Lord, Jesus Himself. In the days of His humiliation, He gave the message, waiting for the people to be persuaded by themselves.

We must distinguish. When we are dealing with upright souls, we feel that they will not remain in error, and we must speak and write to them not assuming a tone of superiority, showing ourselves to be infallible, but making ourselves small, and saying that we are not better than they. We should say what is necessary, and add: Now, I too, have need of light in many things.

The visible things not yet touched by man and the Invisible teach the line of least resistance.

Let us come to Peter. In our text he is Simon Peter—neither entirely Simon nor yet Peter. Having a sword, he drew it out and struck the servant of the High Priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus said to Peter (the Holy Spirit uses charity, and does not call him Simon): “*Put up thy sword into the sheath.*” Such an unadvised, violent act, was putting in danger all the work of the Lord, and if Providence had not intervened, Peter would have given the enemies of Jesus a powerful weapon, the only thing that had the appearance of legality in order to press charges. The subject is vast.

Part Two

(John 18:10-11)

We have all "dealt blows of a sword," but the time comes that we must understand once and for all that severity can be used by ONE alone. The Word of God is a sword; however, of the Spirit, and is used by the Holy Spirit.

Some cite the fact that Jesus chased the merchants from the temple, and pronounced those famous lines "*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees,*" but this often hides a lack of conscience or bad faith, because those acts and words were brief, only in those rare occasions, and were preceded and followed by bursts of sorrow.

But let us return to Peter. And Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it out. It's surprising that he still had it, since he was the disciple of an unarmed Master. Jesus never told anyone to disarm, because His correction does not begin from the exterior. Other teachers, before and after recommended, we should rather say forced, exterior holiness; Jesus always begins with the inner man.

Peter slept when he should have stayed awake. Now, thoughtlessly, he acted when he should have done nothing. He hoped to succeed in defending the Lord; and how could he in the face of a band of armed men? Besides, Peter had seen that when Jesus said: "I AM," the enemies had fallen to the ground, and that Jesus gave Himself into their hands. It is not possible that Peter was thinking to defend himself because they were seeking only Jesus, and he could have fled. Therefore what induced Peter to do an act contrary to the teachings of the Master and contrary to every reason and prudence? Our questions are vain, because in the mind of Peter there was confusion; heedless of what was before him,

he wanted in some way to atone for having slept when he should have been awake. With a movement more mechanical than voluntary, using an object, that, after all had been made to be used, he resorted to an act of violence.

Two servants, each of a Priest, were opposite each other. Caiaphas, the owner of Malchus was not present. Too high to go himself, he had sent others. The Owner of Peter, the Priest Jesus, was there. And Peter showed his Owner what he knew how to do. Not being able to strike the owner, he aimed for the servant, and with a stroke of the sword that would have been able to cut off or sever one's head, he cut off the ear of Malchus. But he had no time to repeat the blow, because the prompt warning of Jesus stopped him: "*Put up thy sword into the sheath*" said to him calmly the One who alone was calm in that agitated rabble! Peter obeyed. The Lord hastened to put in place and to heal the ear of Malchus. On the scene of violence and mercy there was silence.

A few reflections: Malchus may not have been one of the sergeants, but that does not change the fact that he was accompanying persons of authority, and therefore was, for the moment, considered as an assistant of the sergeants. It is no wonder that Jesus was being arrested, because preventive arrests or for investigation are used even in the more civil and humanitarian processes. It was undeniable that Peter was of the company of Jesus. It is clear that an act of violence, especially with weapons, committed by one of the company could have been qualified as violence of the whole group. Whereas no act of accusation could be formulated, and nothing was, Peter, with his act of violence, precisely he, was putting Jesus, in a legal way, in the hands of the Authority. Innocent or not, the arrest must not be opposed by violence. That was enough to create a criminal process against Jesus, the Head of that Company. Ah! It is often the

friends thinking to—but not knowing—to help us, they consign us, tied, into the hands of the enemies! Because a defense done with unjust methods kills even the most just cause.

However, the incident of the sword and of the ear that was cut off fell into oblivion, as if it had not happened. Everything was voiced at the process except for the fact that Jesus had healed the ear. He often heals the ears that we have wounded. His Providence covered the harm that was done.

But the lesson remains in the Church. How many blows of the tongue (and at times not only of the tongue)! How many ears and hearts have been wounded, because well-intentioned, but thoughtless and violent persons put in danger the work of humility and mercy of others.

But it seems to us that it is enough. Reader, enter into yourself. Meditate. God does not need your zeal, because the wrath of man does not fulfill the righteousness of God. Put your sword back into the sheath. We need more, always more of charity, and not of charity alone, but also to know how to discern the voice of the Lord from that of the accuser of our brethren.

The fortress that the enemy seeks to conquer first is Charity; because after that, all the other fortresses must fall.

* * *

BE NOT OVERCOME OF EVIL BUT OVERCOME
EVIL WITH GOOD

(Romans 12:21)

The counsel that Paul gave to others must have resounded many times to his own ear, and many times it has resounded to the ear of other faithful servants of the Lord and has been a great comfort: "*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*"

These words complete the exhortations of chapter 12 of the letter to the Romans, and particularly those of verses 9 to 20 that contain great practical counsels, and for a climax, there is that of doing good to the enemy. Here, the apostle could have closed, but it seems that a sad thought crossed his mind: Charity; not avenging oneself; that was good; but someone could say, and perhaps he himself had been tempted to say it: "Yes, I have done good, but I can no longer do it; I don't want to do evil, but now I am tired of men." And this melancholy *but* threatened to exaggerate and to cover with a cloud, even to hiding completely that which was written. The apostle felt the danger, and hastened to add: "*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*"

It is clear that the words of the text are not a repetition of the thought already expressed; that is to not avenge oneself, rather do good to your enemy: rather, it seems to us that the counsel: "*Be not overcome of evil*" is given precisely to the one who, passing through, had shown a charitable and generous spirit and had given proof of sincere consecration. And to these, the apostle speaks, because they, especially at the end, run the serious danger of being overcome by evil. In

fact, many lives that have triumphed in the hardest battles, have been broken because of misunderstandings and continuous annoyances. Many have ended by saying: "it's too much, we can no longer do it," and have remained discouraged, incapable of doing evil, and willing, perhaps, even to do good in case of need, but with their hand as if paralyzed, and rendered impotent for further activity. And it is precisely persons of upright character that run this danger, and who, more than others, need to keep in mind continually the words: "*Be not overcome of evil.*"

From the reading of the text, two ideas are suggested: Be not overcome under the evil (the preposition is translated "of" but also means "under"); and the other idea suggested is by the preposition "with," "*but overcome evil with good;*" in place of "with" could also be read "in," as it is in the original, and thus the second part of the verse would be: "*But overcome evil in good.*" Therefore, do not remain prostrated by the weight of evil; evil is there, it cannot be denied; conquer by remaining firm in good. There is no other remedy against evil except to persist in good.

But when is it that the Christian is overcome by the evil?

He can be overcome when the continued mistreatment by another embitters his character, especially because of the pains inflicted by evil speaking. This is difficult to endure for a long time when, having been harmed, he remembers and experiences again the pain for that which he has suffered.

Then, after having undergone repeated disappointments, he begins to doubt all men.

The remedy: A remedy must oppose the evil, and, that is, the good, rather, only by remaining in the good, can we face, without being overcome, the evil that can come to us from

others. Darkness is dissipated by light and not otherwise. That's why he added: "*But overcome evil in good.*"

"In good," is a condition. "In good," for a Christian, is that state of soul that is irradiated continually by the light that comes to him from Calvary. The more we are rooted in Christ, the less we are affected by evil; rather, remaining firm in this good, the evil itself appears to us under another aspect. We are brought to consider that those who do or attempt to do us evil, are victims themselves, and because of this we must bear with them and love them, and pray that the Lord helps them.

Those who do evil harm themselves more than us, also for the habit they have formed of harming many and for the danger they incur because all may not be disposed to have patience and tolerance in a Christian manner. For this we must be afflicted for them.

Those who believe that they are doing us harm, deep down they are benefiting us, because they inspire us to watch ourselves and to be vigilant.

At times the Lord permits us to be mistreated. And if we see in others the rod by which the Lord corrects us, we cannot help but bless them. David did not look at Shimei who was cursing him, but to his own sins, and Shimei appeared to him as a part of the right punishment that he deserved.

It is certain, however, that the evil that is done to us is not in direct ratio to our sins; often we are accused of something that we have not even dreamed of committing; no matter! Perhaps we have committed other sins of which if men do not accuse us, our conscience must bother us. Furthermore, the evil makes us reflect on that which we have done, or are tempted to cause to others. We suffer when we are despised

or injured, and we are sensitive to the least insult; but others also are sensitive. If the least ingratitude is heavy for us, let us remember that even we have been ungrateful many times, and therefore we learn to no longer be such in the future.

Many times we have been ungrateful, not to mention other things, toward God. From suffering we learn to evaluate how God, our Father, has suffered and suffers for us. Therefore, the evil is a grandiose discipline, and should call for our blessings on those who are responsible. The victory of the Christian is not like that which the world appreciates; Jesus conquered when He seemed to be conquered. After all that He had suffered from the hand of men, He was excusing them, saying to His Father: "*They know not what they do,*" and He was praying for them. Let us seek the good of our enemy, pointing out his virtue. In this manner we can win him over.

However we must not win him over to us. If we were fighting for a crown here below, it would be useful to win the enemy over to us. Men who are in politics seek to reconcile their adversaries and make them friends. But we want to win over to Christ those who mistreat us.

Calm and patience can win them over. The conscience of the enemy, after all, can make him recognize the wrong; the trust we have in him will make him find the best in himself. Let us not get tired; Jesus Christ never got tired.

"How they love each other!" is said many times of Christians. "How they know how to suffer and to love!" It is good that this should be said also and always.

At a signal of an emperor of a great country, the soldier who was on the tower threw himself down, and the emperor showed the visitor what subjects he had. Let us act in a

manner that the world will see, that for the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, we know how to suffer and to win.

After all has been said, it seems that those who have done us evil transform themselves for me and for you, oh my brother, and we would like to open our arms to receive them in our heart, putting them among our best benefactors. And we thank them for the good that they have involuntarily done to us; and we pray for them, because we can find ourselves together to sing the hymn of love and praise before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

* * *

THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN

(John 8:2-11)

While I write I have before my eyes some English verses that speak of the "prodigal daughter." The verses say that we all have a heart for the "prodigal son," but question what our sentiments may be toward the prodigal daughter. "Oh Christ," exclaims the writer, "it seems to us that we have not yet learned the lesson written on the sand, because women are still despised and stoned in Christian countries."

And now, with a mixed sense of fear and reverence, we approach the great episode that is one of the most precious gems of the Gospel.

* * *

In the steps of Jesus there had been blessings and pardon everywhere. But now, almost at the end of his career (since the episode is assigned to the last period of His life here below), His enemies prepared a trap by which His reputation

of forgiving will be destroyed, or it will be possible to accuse Him of not being respectful of the laws.

He was in the temple; it was morning: "The Scribes and the Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst..."

Behind these brief words there is a history of spying and plotting. The Scribes and Pharisees had decided that they had to have recourse to a similar case; and, when the opportune time came, they found it.

They made the woman stay in the middle. The expression in the text is very lively: they set her in the midst, that is, the group arrived with the woman and suddenly formed a circle and left her in the middle all alone, under the fire of the eyes of the accusers.

And "*they say unto Him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.*" This woman! Their finger and their look were indicating the guilty one. This is the fact. And they added, as a warning to Jesus, that He would not be able to violate the law, since He had said that He had not come to annul it: "*Now Moses in the law commanded that such [such] should be stoned.*" And fixing their eyes on Him, they added: "*But what sayest Thou?*" SUCH—THOU!

They remained at attention, as in an air of triumph, believing to have finally caught Him in contradiction. In fact, "*This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him.*" From the only two answers that they believed possible, they would have had something of which to accuse Jesus.

But Jesus did not answer, and, instead, "*Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground.*" They were looking

brazenly, but Jesus did not want to add His to the looking of the others, and by a sense of modesty and compassion, He did not want to increase the confusion of the woman by looking at her, because He already saw her marked by the horror of the publicity: and as if He did not want to see or to hear, He bowed His head. He could have asked where her accomplice may have been, but He said nothing. "*He wrote on the ground.*" What did He write? It is in vain to inquire, and we do not remember elsewhere that Jesus may have written. But it is certain that He alone has the right to write, and no one can cancel it, and He alone can cancel that which others have written. Perhaps He wrote that a new law had come into the world, the law of forgiveness in His blood? Or perhaps, as some imagine, he indicated the sins of the accusers? We do not know. However, those present could remember the words of Jeremiah: "*O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters*" (Jeremiah 17:13).

And here there were those who had voluntarily rejected the light refusing to accept Jesus, who, by the word of the most venerated of their prophets, deserved to be "Written in the earth." This makes us think of those that, by the same Lord, are written in Heaven.

Jesus remained, with delicate grace, bowed toward the earth; meanwhile, the woman was exposed to the looks of everyone, except for One alone. They did not stop, but they insisted in asking Him. He, then, lifting Himself up, and looking at them with a look that fathomed the abysses of the heart, said with a tone that united rigor and tenderness: "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.*" Then He lowered His eyes again, this time, perhaps

moved more by compassion toward those men, and again He began to write on the ground with His finger.

But His look, accompanied by the penetrating and profound words did not remain ineffective. "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." They went out and no curious look, no voice followed them or reproached them, for Jesus felt compassion even of them.

Then there remained two on the scene, and they met, one on one, Misery and Mercy. "When Jesus lifted Himself up and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?"

Woman, hear, a new judge is listening to you, but alone, now that there are no indiscreet looks. He addresses the word to you. He does not ask you for humiliating particulars, as the sinners do. He knows your history, but likewise He is not ignorant of the temptations of which you were a victim, and your misfortunes.

"She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee." He alone was without sin, but He was not condemning! And He could say, and says: "Go," a word that was like a deliverance from the past. Then he added a command for the future: "*Sin no more.*" And there was no need for recommendations, because the love that had forgiven was infusing a new strength, by which alone "sin no more" would become possible. Mercy forgave, but did not palliate the sin. First grace, and then the command. Oh reader, permit a word: Jesus knew that the woman had sinned, if not, He would have spoken differently. If we are not sure that another has sinned, we must not even use a language that, although it may be compassionate, seems to

be a confirmation of accusation. It is not right to suspect, or to permit that others suspect or insinuate by evil whispers.

In addition, we must not use this episode to cover ourselves. The woman did not argue or blame anyone; she did not defend herself. It was Jesus who answered her accusers, and it is He who must answer our accusers. Let us repeat those great words to defend others, when we are sure and it is known to us that they have erred, and never to invoke the compassion of others for ourselves, since we, if we are of Christ, must become more severe with ourselves every day, and merciful toward others.

* * *

WE KNOW

(John 7:27; 1st Corinthians 8:2)

The Jews, contending about Jesus, said: "Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is. Then cried Jesus in the temple as He taught, saying, "ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but He that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know Him: for I am from Him, and He hath sent me."

Did they know or did they not know? They pretended to know; and Jesus answered them in two ways that gives one to understand that they knew Him, and yet they did not know Him. They boasted that they knew whence Jesus was; but Jesus said to them that they did not know the One from whom He had come. And yet He said to them: "*Ye both*

know me, and ye know whence I am." That is, you think you know; and in fact you know a lot about me, as much as appears in the visible. They saw Him outwardly; they knew Him as a carpenter and considered Him to be the son of a carpenter. They thought He was born in Nazareth and truly the appearances led to this superficial knowing. But how much there was behind that appearance! He was born in Bethlehem, and they did not know it; He proceeded from God, His Father, and they did not know it nor did they want to hear it, much less believe it. Therefore they did not know who He was or whence He came. What they knew, not only was not worth anything to them, but it rendered them enemies of Jesus Christ, because they were moved by the appearance, and the appearance deceives, because it tells only one side of the truth, and nothing hurts the truth so much as knowing it only in part. Behind the visible they did not see, or they were not disposed to grasp the Invisible. The greatest conflict in life is to see according to what can be seen. The earthly man stops at the visible, or at that which he hears with his material ears; the heavenly man does not judge according to the sight of his eyes and the hearing of his ears (Isaiah 11:3) because he is provided with other senses in order to see and to hear according to God.

And of that which we know, how do we know it? What do we know of the motives, of the actions of another, in good or in evil? What do we know of God? Also, things of which we are more sure, what do we truly know? These questions ought to constrain us to reflections of sobriety and humility.

The Apostle says (1st Corinthians 8:2): "*And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*" He does not say that he knows nothing. Of some things, we know something, but only in part. And even that little, we do not know it as we should. HOW! How should man know? This refers not only to the clarity of

knowledge, but also to knowing with one's heart full of love. Jesus knew what was behind the easy and light words of the rich man, and yet He looked in his face and loved him. To know and to love truly requires all the Grace of God. One who grows only in knowledge will always know little and poorly and if he does not grow at an even pace, and even more, in the love of God, he will resemble Lucifer, who has knowledge without heart. Seeing only, without loving and praying, makes us spies and like snakes. God wants us to know, but in Him, and through Him, and then we will know and we will love.

How many times, oh my brother, another boasted that he knew you, and you are sure that he did not know.

Apply this to others, and try to know as God wants you to know.

THAT WHICH REMAINS

(Zephaniah 3:11, 12)

“In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.” Do not put this prophecy entirely in the future, otherwise we will not obtain any benefit. It has had its application in every epoch of the Church, and is being

fulfilled more so in a time like this. We will try to understand it and to see how it applies to us.

In that day that the Lord will have had the opportunity to have been well listened to by us, and we will know how to be ashamed (verse 5 of the same chapter), and we will have pure lips, and will call upon the Name of the Lord, and those of us who truly fear Him will put ourselves shoulder to shoulder in order to call upon Him and to serve Him in one accord, which is the accord of the Holy Spirit in us, and among us. In that day (and not before), precisely because we have repented and been ashamed, He will cause us to not be ashamed of our works. The Lord has redeemed; the Judge has forgiven, and no one will bring accusations against the elect. There remains the memory of how much He has loved and forgiven: We know that in the past we have erred against Him.

You will not be ashamed, because then He will remove from among you your proud exulting ones. It has been our pride, and that of those with whom we were associated that constrained us to be ashamed even before the people, as well as among ourselves; then, the last cause of shame is removed. The various forms of pride in us have been discovered, and we cry continually to God: "*Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins*" (Psalm 19:13). The Holy Spirit alone can make us understand, each time, how many forms pride has. The prophecy here does not refer so much to our pride, although it is understood that it has been uncovered and rejected; it refers especially to a people with whom we were associated, and of whom, perhaps sometime, we have boasted—"*Your proud ones.*" That "your" is an indirect reprimand that we ourselves have helped their conduct either with praise or with unwise actions. There is also another tender thought: we must love them and pray for

them, not as an alliance, but as a debt of love, because they belong to us; they are ours.

Triumphant: they are in the habit of being triumphant. Pay attention; there are such ones who always want to be right, who love to say the last word, never yielding, who excuse themselves by alleging the triumph to the justice of God. They are not disposed to collect their thoughts piously, and to reflect that, in everything or in part, others can be right. God wants us to be absolute in only one point: in uplifting Him. In this, also with meekness, never yield. But in things in which we are involved, many times the passion of our personality clouds our judgment. It seems to us that we are right, and we are not; the past demonstrates that many times we were wrong and we did not want to admit it. Some are obstinate, and are always proud, exulting ones. One day the Lord will take them away. But go slow on this point, because we cannot understand how He will take them away.

It is clear that Jesus conquered from the top of the cross. To the carnal mind it seemed to be defeat. Was He a Conqueror, hanging on the cross in ignominy, between two thieves? And yet He *was* a Conqueror. The measurements of Heaven are different from those of the earth. For Israel, according to the flesh, their victories were often material and visible. The prophet of that time had fire come down from heaven once. But we are under another Spirit; that is, the same Spirit works in another direction. Victory is by faith, and often it is when we are defeated in the visible. None of us has the authority to take the proud, exulting ones by their arm or by their neck and put them out. No, no. It is said that the proud one not only has triumphed, but is triumphant even now. He will be the one to put us out. In the visible, Jesus was put out of Jerusalem, but in the kingdom of the Spirit, it was the prince of this world who was put out. While the proud one, used to winning, puts you out, in reality he is putting himself

out. Be careful that you do not mistreat anyone, excusing yourself that God blesses you.

There are many manners of blessings, and some, if they are legitimate, are sent as a trial for one who is accustomed to living in the invisible. The proud one, therefore, chases you out, and triumphs, saying that God is with him, not with you, otherwise he would not have triumphed, or continue to triumph. Do not be dismayed; be careful to be in order with God. Remember that at one time Saul, who had already been rejected, was among the prophets, and he even prophesied. It does not say that it was the devil that made him prophesy. Be careful; the words and plans of God are full of profound mysteries. Nothing is a sign, rather that Little Child, so small, so poor, born in a manger, laid down to rest, wrapped in swaddling clothes, is a symbol as when one is imprisoned by circumstances. "*And thou [yes, precisely you] shalt no more be haughty [therefore you have been haughty] because of my holy mountain.*" How many times, under the guise of giving glory to God, and even saying that we are nothing, etc. (the many forms of affected humility), we have been haughty for the things of the Lord. Here a PAUSE is needed in order to reflect. If not with words, we have spoken of Him who is humble with a spirit of pride. But now, it's enough; enough. And then, not before "*I will also leave in the midst of thee [and each one of us will be reduced to the minimum, and will disappear from himself, and also from among us], an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the Lord,*" or as others translate: "Who will take refuge only in the Name of the Lord." He will have no other fortress. Amen.

SPEAKING—BEING SILENT

Someone said: "Speak when silence is a fault; be silent when the word offends." There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. It is written in Proverbs 31:8: "*Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.*"

There are evil silences, as there is evil speaking. But we want to occupy ourselves of some silences that are warnings and examples according to God.

SILENCE (Mark 9:9): There was not a word on what they had seen and heard on the Mount of Transfiguration, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. "Rose" refers to the historical event of the resurrection, and to the rising (to the resurrection) of the Son of Man in us; that is, to the realization of Him in us.

And then the Son of Man in us will know to whom and how to say the great things of Heaven, which the eye and human mind (not transformed) cannot understand. SILENCE! YOU keep silent!

(Matthew 27:12-14): "*And when He (Jesus) was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.*" Judges study the physiognomy of the accusers and of the accused. Pilate noted in Jesus a perfect silence: not a word, and not even a discoloration or changing of His visage. There are forced silences that allow catching a glimpse of waves of anger; but in Jesus the silence was absolute.

"*Then Pilate said unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee?*" He did not say, "Why

don't you answer?" But: "Don't you hear?" The governor marveled greatly.

There had been a few sergeants who expressed admiration for a manner of speaking that was different from any human language, and said that they had never heard anyone speak like Jesus.

Now it is Pilate who marvels at the opposite; that is, of His silence.

Among the titles in Isaiah 9 that are given to the "Son" there is that of "Wonderful."

No one ever spoke like Jesus. Although it is not written in the letter, there is a sense in the whole of the picture of the accusers, of the judge and of the Accused that proclaims: "No one ever kept silence like Jesus."

SPEAK (Ecclesiastes 3:7; Proverbs 31:8, 9): There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. In the school of Jesus Christ we learn to know the times, the circumstances and the measure.

In Colossians 4:6 it is written: "*Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how to answer every man.*" The manner and the effect, "with Grace" does not mean with pleasing phrases of human gentleness, but depending on the Lord. The word "Grace" is the same as that in John 1:16 and 17. In order to say, "according to God," and "to His glory," and have it benefit us, it is necessary to depend on Him alone, otherwise we err.

We invite the reader to unite himself with us in prayer so that the Lord may give us grace to know when and how to speak, and when and how to be silent. There are manners of

speaking and malicious silences of simulation or dissimulation. We will limit ourselves to a few points:

“Open thy mouth for the dumb...” “Judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”

A personal recollection will help us to explain. Permit us.

A little group of brothers were commenting on serious matters of the work, especially of a certain assembly. In said church, I knew a servant who was faithful and enlightened. Right at that time there was somewhat of a discord between me and the brother, a discord which no longer exists, and which was followed by a sweet and profound communion. At the time of which I speak, my heart was as if embittered by painful recollections. The brothers were criticizing and I was silent, even though I knew that speaking evil is not from God. Pride is subtle and finds a way to excuse everything; For a few moments I was silent, approving myself of the silence, saying to myself that after all it was not I who was speaking evil. But the delicate voice of the Holy Spirit was reprimanding me for sinning by being silent.

I knew the facts, and although they were insisting by saying: “he has also persecuted you,” I had to open my mouth to explain and to clarify. I give the glory to the One who can do all things in us; I spoke in favor of the absent one, as perhaps the best defender would not have known how to do. I did not lie, no, because Charity is tied to the truth, and not to what is false. Obligated to contradict, I offended some of the friends, but I succeeded in touching the hearts of some. The Lord allowed me to present an honest portrait of the saintly man, even admitting that each of us, at times, goes too far and causes misunderstandings. Among the most painful recollections of the past, I often derive comfort, and yes we all need comfort, the memory of how many times, with my

pen and with my voice, and precisely in times of discord, I have opened my mouth for an absent person. Permit me a few testimonies that confirm and strengthen the theory.

“Open thy mouth for the dumb;” he is far away. Don’t pay attention to the fact that someone will be offended. Remember the words of Jesus (Matthew 7:12), and obey them, even if others do not practice them in your favor. The commandment is not conditional to whether others do it for us, but if we desire that others should act in that manner, Let us read it: *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.”*

Laws? Here they are: they are in you. The Lawgiver is with you; and He expects from you what you expect from others. The court, the lawyers and the witnesses are in you: *“This is the law and the prophets.”*

* * *

FEAR NOT

At the birth of Jesus, the first words that the Angel addressed to the shepherds were: “FEAR NOT.”

After the resurrection, the first words addressed to the women were: “FEAR NOT.”

For every extraordinary event, man becomes fearful and afraid, because sin has taken away true courage. Because of this, the first words of heaven are: “Fear not, fear not.” It

does not pay to give messages to one who, paralyzed by terror, cannot listen to them.

However, it should be noted that "Fear not" is not addressed to everyone.

At the birth of Jesus, "Fear not" was said to the shepherds, but no assurance was sent to Herod and to Jerusalem, who were instead disturbed at the visit of the wise men.

At the resurrection of Jesus, when an Angel came and rolled away the stone, the guards trembled for fear and became like dead; they did not hear any "Fear not." The women, instead, had the words of assurance: "Fear not ye." For the same event some remained terrified and others were comforted.

"Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified." Those who fervently seek Jesus, have no reason to fear.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw that he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." The voice of the Holy Spirit had said to them that that child was destined for great things; they followed that voice, and hid the child. "By faith..." "were not afraid." Accepting the announcement of God, they were not afraid of the terror of man.

And later: "*By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*" The power of Pharaoh would have terrified him; however, Moses saw, by faith, the power of the Invisible, and he did not fear the visible. The Hebrews did not fear to cross the Red Sea. The Egyptians wanted to follow them, and were

submerged. "Fear not" was only for the Hebrews; the act of the Egyptians was foolhardy.

Fear not "YE."

Let us open the book of Revelation to chapter 1: John saw the Lord Jesus, "*and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*" And when the Apostle saw Him he "*fell at His feet as dead.*"

Many, upon meeting Jesus, will not hear "Fear not;" and instead they will say to the mountains and rocks: "*Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb*" (Rev. 6:16).

Fear not—"YE." "FEAR NOT YE"—YE—YOU children. The fear of children is without foundation because they have the protection of the Father.

* * *

But to the "FEAR NOT" of God it is necessary to answer in faith. One who continues to fear is not fulfilled in the love of God. Sin and the lack of faith allow fear to persist. Remaining timid after the assurance of God is a sign of cowardice, and more than anything it is the effect of hidden sin that has not been brought to the feet of Jesus.

These—the fearful ones—have no assurance. They shall have their "part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Let him that is fearful and afraid go and return to his house!

But "fear not ye." Whatever may happen, God is above all. Fear not "YE," because you are already assured in Christ.

* * *

DO NOT LAY HANDS UPON ANYONE TOO HASTILY(1st Timothy 5:22)

They write: "URGENT: We need a meeting place, a great people is among us! Provide us a Pastor."

And the meeting places are built; and men who will preside are sought or they offer themselves, even with bitter competition. And then, many who were enthusiastic are no longer seen and the numbers diminish. Under the fire of the Holy Spirit the tares, the failures and the scandals are discovered. This is because we do not pay attention to the Word of God, given to us by the mouth of one of His Apostles. Let us read it: "*Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.*"

The warning was directed to Timothy, but it is sacred in every time, and follows the other warning, and that is to have no prejudice or partiality.

Do not be hasty to ordain Pastors, because they must be proved for a long time before having hands laid upon them. If God has not called them to the ministry, or if it is not the time, you, says the Apostle to Timothy, by ordaining them, make yourself partaker of the sins of another. Laying on of hands is a serious proceeding that supposes various questions:

To whom, and when to do so? And who must do the laying on of hands? --- To whom --- when --- And by whom!

It is certain that the traffickers of souls, the sectarians, do not pay attention to the warning of the Apostle! Such ones were not lacking and will not be lacking in every time. But the word is directed to those who love to hear it and to obey it—

to persons like Timothy, who, even though they may be a little timid and weak or hasty, have the fear of God in the depths of their heart.

* * *

OF THE BEATITUDES

(Matthew 5)

In the school of the great Teacher it seems that we are affected by vertigoes. And the law, and the prophets? Let us leave all to Him: everything will be fulfilled and accomplished in Him.

A rapid comparison to the past and to the future: The Pharisees have their righteousness, but it does not help them enter into the Kingdom of Heaven because it is an outward righteousness; "yours," that of the disciples, must abound; a righteousness that begins within. Laws, prophets? A law more exacting than that of Sinai is before you: not only "do not kill," and many "DO NOTS," but even not to hate, nor desire illicitly. Where there is evil, be reconciled immediately, while you are on the way, and don't wait for the judgment. Inner holiness is so important and vital that it's worthwhile to deprive oneself of that which is otherwise lawful and useful, rather than to cause someone to stumble; let your speaking be governed by a yes and a no; let not your mouth say more than your heart feels.

* * *

GOD IS NOT A MAN

(Hosea 11:9)

After the accusations against Ephraim, the Lord exclaims: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together."

Then, as if speaking to himself, He reveals that which He is about to do, and He continues: "*I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim.*" And the reason for such a determination is one alone: "*For I am God, and not man.*"

If He had to execute the ardor of His wrath, the punishment would have had to be prolonged, because Ephraim had done everything to provoke God to the extreme. Justice requires that wrath should fall upon the one who is guilty. But the book of Hosea, as well as the rest of the Word of God, is rich in mercy; God Himself had already said that He wants mercy and not sacrifice; the prophet, with the marriages with unfaithful women, is one of the most tender symbols of the mercy of the Lord. Although according to man there was no hope for Ephraim, according to God, there was hope. He who has created him and carried him for years, and now that He has seen him grow old, He cannot permit that he be punished to the extreme. How could He see him destroyed? The divine nature, the essence of which is MERCY, takes the upper hand over the same requirement of Justice, and He holds counsel with Himself; how could He give Ephraim into the hands of the enemies, how could He, since His compassions were kindled? The anger that would want to execute Justice is stopped by Mercy. This is not injustice since the Lord acts in accord with Himself. God is not man

who wants vengeance and who goes to the extreme of anger. Precisely because He is God and not man, He withholds His anger, remembering that we are dust, and if He who is the Judge did not intervene Himself with Mercy, the souls that He has created would perish. Let men judge as they wish; He, who is God, must stop the wrath. A little punishment there has been, but only a little, He will impede the rest, because He is God and not man.

God and not man! Woe unto us if our Judge were a man like us! Man, who is easily moved, is also ready for anger and vengeance; his mercy is limited; for him some offenses are unforgivable. None of us has been offended as long and profoundly as God has been offended; rather, we do not have the right to consider ourselves truly offended, because we ourselves are lacking. God has not permitted anyone to mistreat us to the extreme. But who can measure the wrong, the long abuse that was done to Him? Considering that He is slow to wrath, we can have an idea of how much it took for Him to reach such heated anger as to see that now there was no more remedy. Who will be able to escape from that wrath, so long repressed, once it is kindled? No one would be able; but He will intercede with Himself, and will have as a basis our misery and His immense compassion. God has created and carried, therefore He will not want to destroy; with Him is Justice that we have offended by our misdeeds; with Him likewise is Mercy that has its rights, based on His own divine nature. Because He is just, He punished Ephraim; because He is merciful, he stops His hand and no longer punishes. He is God and not man.

We would like to repeat these words to infinity. And since we would not believe Him, He had recourse to the greatest acts of His Wisdom. Man is slow to believe in the Mercy of God because he wants to have something on which to base his hope; and when he has gone beyond in offending God,

He doesn't hope in Him anymore. But behold, He Himself offers His hand and invites man to hope. Time was needed to believe that God is more merciful than man; for a time we were afraid of Him and hoped more in man than in Him. We would not believe the message of the prophet; and behold, ONE came WHO WAS God and also Man. He did not come to make God merciful, because He has always been merciful, but in order to make us read the heart of God, that is Love. Justice and Mercy met in a Man who is also God. As God is Just and Merciful, so He knows how to be merciful. He made Himself Man in order to tell us that by taking our humanity on Himself, He wants us to believe that He knows that we are weak. Because He is GOD and not man, and because He is MAN, and not simply man, we have firm confidence. He exhorts Ephraim to return to the Lord and says to him: "*Wait on thy God continually.*" These words are a prophecy of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "*Wherefore he is able also to save to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.*"

* * *

SILENCE

Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him." The brevity that we have imposed upon ourselves does not permit us an examination of that gladness, nor of the wonderment of Herod in having heard of Jesus, nor that his memory should be rekindled about the homicide of the innocent Baptist, nor of the desire to see Jesus, without seeking for him. Now

Herod offers him a sort of distraction: "*Then he questioned him in many words.*" The word has a complex meaning, and makes one imagine that it was idle talk and bantering, as if one were before a magician to be intimidated or entrapped with artifices and flattery.

But, not a word or any sign on that serene face! "BUT HE ANSWERED HIM NOTHING."

SPEAK

"*Call to Me*" (Jeremiah 33:3 NASB).

Calling is more than speaking. It is the burst of a live desire, often after or accompanied by pain. "*Call to Me,*" says the Lord—not to others; to Me. "*And I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*"

It is not an asking for things that do not concern us, at least now. He does not satisfy vain curiosity. The "Call" supposes a strong need because of some perplexity or trial. There is a secret, a purpose. In answering, He continues to reveal Himself and to reveal. Call to Him, to Him. Be careful not to call to others. The elect are known even in this: they "*cry to Him day and night*" and wait with patience, like the widow, for Him to answer.

He will answer, giving us and telling us more than we have asked.

* * *

THE ART OF CORRECTING

(Acts 20:31; Ezekiel 3:25, 27; Luke 19:41, 44)

God sees everything but He does not let Himself be seen. He has our movements under His eyes and is used to our ways. He knows our thoughts from afar; the word is known to Him before it rises to our mouth; notwithstanding this He leaves us in great liberty. He corrects rarely and little, and only for as much as we have received grace to obey. He corrects with measure. He uncovers the evil and points to the remedy.

We must learn the art of correcting from Him

Correcting? But only if it is given to us, when and how it is given. Seeing is one thing; correcting is quite another.

A wise doctor does not cure a complex quantity of ills by medicating them all at one time, because in that way the medicines would exceed the resistance of the sick one and would kill him instead of healing him. The wise doctor pays attention to strengthen the organic resistance, and then to confront the illnesses one at a time. The able doctor measures the heartbeats of patients at the same that he is managing the knife that cuts.

(Let us ask for patience, because who knows, someone may wrinkle their nose, thinking that we are recommending medicine and operations. No, dear ones. He who writes, for almost half a century has not known medical care, Patience, oh reader! Pass over the parenthesis).

We return to the subject: Let no one arrogate to himself the authority to correct if he has not received a command, each time, and he does not ask for and keep the measure of Heaven. Among the meanings of washing the feet, of which

we read in John 13, there is that of correcting and of a daily bathing.

If the Lord sends someone—IF HE—SENDS--, blessed is the one who receives him. However the one who is sent must go prepared by God Himself. He uses a man of mercy. In order to correct, it is necessary to love. Discernment of spirits is not given to one who does not love, because the gifts of God operate by means of Charity.

One who is sent, must move in the spirit of the One who has commissioned him: he must, as the Lord did, get up from the table, lay aside the garments and bow himself down in order to help others to become great. He has the basin of water and the towel ready. Jesus began to wash, without speaking. He spoke only when Peter resisted, but then He was silent. The operation of washing the feet was CARRIED OUT IN SILENCE.

The teaching came later, when they had already been cleaned and refreshed; we mean to say symbolically correct. As for general cleansing (pardon), the disciples were already cleansed, except for one.

Correcting? We must seat ourselves in the school of the Great One who is a Teacher in everything, therefore also in correcting.

We will never get tired of repeating that it must be God who has commanded to correct. If He has commanded, let us ask Him to give us the MANNER and the MEASURE.

A glance at the prophet Ezekiel. We know little of the men in the Bible—of some nothing, or almost nothing. In the third chapter of Ezekiel, we read that the Lord locked him in the house, tied him with ropes, and made his tongue cleave to

the roof of his mouth. It is not necessary to know the details of what the ropes may have been, and how the tongue was immobilized. It is not strange to think that, in a certain way, Ezekiel was paralyzed. He was not to go out. Ezekiel could hear and understand as before, but he did not have the use of his feet and tongue. He had to remain still, still and in silence. To the tacit objection that the corrections were necessary, the Lord observed that He knew that the people were a rebellious house. We often want to be more severe than God, and run quickly to the shelter. But even though He sees also the hidden roots, He waits. Be still, in silence, you, oh son of man, until He opens your mouth to speak in His Name, and only in His Name (Pay attention!). They will come to you; listen to them, suffer and be silent. When He delivers your feet from the ropes and commands, then you will go. In the meantime be still and silent.

Take note of the mercy and wisdom with which the Lord treated the woman of Samaria.

Take note of the words of St. Paul to the elders of Ephesus whom he had admonished for a long time, with many tears.

And, above all, consider that which is called the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem when He heard the Pharisees that, in a tone between scorn and reproof, were suggesting to Him to silence the "Hosannas."

What He saw! He saw, and because He loved, and was giving His life, He prophesied against the city. But how did He do it? Let us read: "*And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it* (Luke 19:41).

It makes us think of the desolate sorrow of one who embraces the inanimate body of one he has loved much, and still loves. He wept over her! Whip-lashing—"Woe unto

you” we will leave to Him. If He constrains someone, the latter must keep in mind that He uses one that, at the feet of Jesus, has received Grace to love and to understand. If he does not love, he cannot correct. You, oh man, if you are not invaded by the Mercy and light of heaven (Love and discernment go together), you are not even sure that you have seen and understood clearly because your eye is darkened. If you love and see, and you have not received a precise command, pray and be silent.

The art of correcting? Oh, the Lord Jesus Christ is needed, by means of the Holy Spirit!

* * *

READING THE PARABLES

PART ONE

(Matthew 13:1-23)

“Why speakest Thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”

To the outsiders it will remain a parable, but the disciples will investigate and will receive precious teachings. Nothing seems easier than a parable; and yet to us there is nothing richer of many meanings, and so difficult to understand well. Who are they who do not profit from the parables? Those who do not have, and lose even what they have; who seeing, do not see, and hearing, do not hear; *“Make the heart of this*

people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isaiah 6:10). Here is a language that itself is also a parable, in order to explain the parables. Perhaps the Lord capriciously takes away from some poor person even the little that he has? And He does not want to heal and to convert him? No. God is not unjust; but is merciful toward all people. Those to whom the parable does not bring benefits are those who, in their pride, think that they have and instead they do not have, or they do not have as they should, or do not appreciate the little that they have, and end by losing it. They see and hear without paying attention, therefore they do not understand. They do not love to see and to hear directly from the Lord, to enter into a relationship with Him. Their heart is fattened by cupidity, and therefore their ear is heavy and their eye as though veiled; they do not love to come to Jesus to be converted and healed.

The Lord speaks in parables; they try to ask about the hidden meaning; they have a little bit of interest to learn. "*It is given unto you.*" He is speaking to the disciples, those that love Jesus, that for love of Him, are ready to renounce everything, principally the ONESELF of each one. "*Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*"

PART TWO

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Mystery or secret—there are no secrets to hide. Everything is revealed in the luminous face of Jesus Christ; one who goes to Him will not remain in darkness. Let him go, therefore,

and have an interest to know; let him investigate for love and not for curiosity, but to know the heart of God and of the Son always better. Such ones who follow Jesus will understand the mysteries, not immediately, nor all at once, but in the measure that they follow the Lord, the light will be always more resplendent in the walk, until noon of the day, that is, the full Revelation or Apocalypse of Jesus. The truth wisely guarded in the Mystery is revealed and discovered more every day. The Name of the Lord shall be Wonderful, Counselor (Isaiah 9:6; 28:29). In the devout examination of the parables, the disciple passes from marvel to marvel, and admires the wisdom and love of God always more.

PART THREE

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

“Know ye not this parable? And how then will ye know all the parables?” (Mark 4:13). It is necessary to understand the first lesson well. It is clear that the Sower is the Lord Himself, and whoever sows for Him. The seed is the Word. Only the true Sower can sow the true seed. There are false sowers and false seeds; but let us be occupied about Him and of as much as is from Him. Mark speaks of persons to whom the seed has been sown; but it should be understood that the persons are identified by the use that is made of the seed. The hard ones, the light ones and the thorny ones who have been sown have become thus, because their heart that is hard, light, or thorny has not profited from the good seed. Man becomes according to how he profits or not from the Word of God, when such Word comes to him.

PART FOUR

THE STONY GROUND

Nothing hardens the heart as much as WALKING in the counsel of the ungodly; STANDING in the way of the sinners; and SITTING in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1).

“When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom and understandeth it not [does not even want to understand it] then cometh the wicked one, catcheth that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.”

And such a one is the man who has received along the way.

PART FIVE

THE STONY PLACES

“Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.” The explanation: “But he that received the seed into stony places [again the person and the use are identified], the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he no root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.” Souls who are light (no depth), and want to remain such, moved by every wind; they accept quickly, and immediately, at the first storms, they turn their backs.

PART SIX

THE THORNY GROUND

“And some [part of the seed] fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.” The explanation: “He also that received the seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” Also here the man becomes similar to the use he makes of the Word.

PART SEVEN

THE GOOD GROUND

“But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.” The explanation: “But he that received the seed into good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Hearing, understanding, and bearing fruit: We must pay attention to how we hear and what use is made of what is heard. The hearing of the disciple is for the word of God: faith comes from that. Hear of Him, and you will believe always more; keep the hearing free from evil speaking and vain discourses and fill it with the voice and word of God, and you will believe. Hearing, you will understand. It is the same as going to Jesus, and abiding in Him, and contemplating Him. The fruit comes spontaneously, because it is He who bears fruit in us. There is variety in the quantity of fruit, but not in the quality. The quality must be one alone—fruit of heaven; that is, fruit of the Holy Spirit, not fruits, but fruit (see Galatians 5:22). The quantity varies, due

to different intensities of consecration. Immense fruit—one hundred; or sixty, or thirty. The maximum is presented first, and we should all aim for the maximum: the highest vocation. The church is called to one hundred; it should not occupy itself with the sixty or the thirty. Man is identified by the seed and becomes like the word of God, like what he hears and contemplates. We become like Him.

And He did not say anything else; and yet there is so much more to say. The Holy Spirit warns that the ground that is hard, light or thorny is not obligated to remain such. The powerful work of God can dynamite and break the hardness of our hearts, if we want it. The lightness can be remedied by allowing the Spirit of God to excavate us, in order to eliminate the stones that impede the seed from taking root. The thorns must be pulled out by the roots, in order for the good seed to have good development. The farmers say that the best terrains are apt to yield many thorns. It is necessary to uproot them, and the energy of the terrain will be used in a good way. In every soul there is, or there has been, a little of these three terrains; but the Lord has worked, and works in order to make us into good terrain. Such we were, and such we will become if we distance ourselves from the Lord; but He has worked and works. He works in our terrain so that it will bear fruit and more fruit, up to the maximum, the fullness. Keep in mind that this word "FULLNESS" is one of those with which the Church is defined (Romans 11:25). Fruit: we should aspire to one hundredfold. If before starting out one is happy with thirtyfold, he will not have even that.

In order to have fullness of fruit, an ardent zeal is needed, an intense charity. May all the powers of the soul be aimed at a single thing: to be fully disciples of the Lord.

However, be on guard as the good fruit comes with pain: the Lamb is eaten with bitter herbs. The truth makes its way in

the midst of contrasts. They "*bring forth fruit with patience*" or suffering, because there is no patience (or perseverance) without suffering (Luke 8:15).

* * *

THREE QUESTIONS

(Exodus 3:11; 5:2; 1st Samuel 17:26)

After forty years in the monotonous trade of shepherd of sheep in the peninsula of Sinai, Moses had become another man; but he no longer thought of an attempt to deliver his people from Egypt.

One day, God spoke to him from a burning bush, and said to him: "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Then He said: "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

"And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

"Who, me?" Moses remembered in one moment the power of Egypt, and it seemed impossible to him that a man would

be able to accomplish such a high mandate; but even if someone should be able to do so, he could not be that one. "I?" and it seemed that he wanted to add: I, old shepherd, made wild by a solitude of forty years, I should go into Egypt to deliver the oppressed people from a powerful king? Thus Moses, who had been rendered meek and humble by long years of work and meditation thought, and in part said. And he remained with his face hidden, with his head bowed, barefoot before the Lord.

But it was precisely to that old man, with the hidden face and bare feet, that God continued to speak saying to him: "*Certainly I will be with thee.*"

* * *

Another scene: "And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." "Who is the Lord?" This is the question of the proud man, used to trusting in his own strength, and dazzled by worldly splendor. "Who is the Lord?" It has been observed that many can say "God," but only those who are humble can say "The Lord." As Pharaoh asked himself, without waiting for an answer, because he did not want to know who He might be, many ask the same way, in order to continue to go in their own way. "The Lord?" some do not want Him. Perhaps they recognize that a supreme being has created the universe, but they do not care to submit themselves and to call Him their Lord.

In fact, only those who have bowed their own will to that of God can say "Lord." But Pharaoh had to understand that his rebellion was worth nothing, and later, under the mighty hand of God, he had to let the Hebrews leave. Let us open

the Bible to 1st Samuel 17, and read that narrative that is so familiar, of David who killed the giant Goliath.

No one dared to reply to the arrogant and wicked challenge of the giant. One day his words arrived to the ear of a new, and up to then, obscure person who had arrived in the camp. He was a young lad but he had God in his heart, and the anointing of the Spirit was upon his head. Humanly speaking, he was the least suited to face the giant, because he had no armor; but the little David looked to God and not to the giant, and when he heard the blasphemous cries, and saw the Hebrews terrified, he asked: "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?*"

When David put the Philistine before God, he appeared insignificant to him. And later on, trusting in the help of God, he killed him and thus delivered the Hebrews. If we are with the Lord, we can, like David, ask ourselves: What are the greatest difficulties that seem to cross our path before Him?

Who are they who sneer at Christianity and the Word of God, and who are the many who would like to suffocate our witnessing, and who are all they, why must they terrify us and distract us from the work of the Lord?

Paul, in the midst of a thousand difficulties, was able to say that he could do all in Christ who strengthened him. But let us remember that he had likewise said that Christ lived in him.

Let us be humble; let us acknowledge the Lord at the head of each of our undertakings, and in the walk assigned to us by Him, let us go ahead courageously in His Name.

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE

I have read your letter with attention... I can imagine your zeal, because even I have had it. It is zeal that the Lord permits for a time, until we enter, as a matter of fact, into the Sabbath (Rest), (Hebrews 4); and until we realize that the most important thing is not what the Lord wants to accomplish by means of us, but that which He continues doing in us, bringing us to the ministry in the spirit, a ministry that is above space and time (Colossians 1:23). He accomplishes His work in us in the presence of the Angels (Ephesians 3:10), until, having arrived at the apocalyptic (Revelation) stature, the first and center of our serving is to God Himself, in His temple (Revelation 22:3)

Certainly, the more you rise in the spiritual camp, the more you will become strange to the very brethren (Psalm 69:6-8), and it is no marvel.

Your desire to approach someone is good. God uses man. But John the Baptist and the woman of Samaria pass into the shadows, and one remains, like on the Mount of Transfiguration, with Jesus alone.

In the end, there is only one Master and Conductor, but He uses many, and then He eclipses them. The glory is in heaven (Colossians 3:3-5; John 12:26). Follow Him; one who follows Him does not expect honor from men. The Father, in His time, will honor him.

* * *

The subject of the ministry of women in the church is very important. You understand well that women can speak in church. I beg you to note that women can prophesy (Acts 2:17): "*And your daughters.*" Here it would not have been necessary to add: "*your daughters*" because "*children*

(*figliuoli*)” certainly includes also women. But the Holy Spirit added: “*And your daughters,*” knowing the future oppositions to the ministry of women.

According to 1st Corinthians 11:5 it is clear that women can prophesy. But what is prophecy? The answer is in 1st Corinthians 14:3: “*But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation, and comfort.*” To edify leads one to suppose the widest ministry in the word.

The observations of Paul regarding that women should be silent refers to inconvenient places and do not annul the general rule that women can prophesy. Married women were exhorted to not interrupt discussions (it is not a question of preaching), but they had to ask their husbands after.

* * *

Yes, ministries and gifts are by the Holy Spirit. However, there are many who say that they are baptized with the Holy Spirit, but they are not. Others are, but are not ordained to preach; and others, even ordained to preach, at times err, because they do not wait for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are listed in 1st Corinthians 12:7-11.

When one who is baptized does not wait for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he errs, and more than others, because in that moment he is not guided by the Lord, and not even according to the understanding of man, but is confused. This explains the many extravagances of many who pretend to speak in the Name of the Lord. One who is baptized with the Holy Spirit must, more than others, feel himself to be a slave of Christ, and must be careful that he is truly guided from on high in everything.

* * *

BLESSING THOSE WHO BLESS

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

We cannot all be Abram, but we can all bless. All are not used in powerful operations and difficult apostleships; but we can bless those that God uses, and help them. God has provided that we can take part in the good of everyone by loving, praying and cooperating.

One can curse in many ways, not only by speaking evil with one's tongue. So there are many ways of blessing. Wherever there is good, we try to rejoice and take part in it. This also means to say: *“Ever follow that which is good.”*

Wherever there is evil, try not to have any part in it, nor to encourage it in any way, direct or indirect. This means to say *“Abstain from any appearance of evil.”*

Bless, and you will be blessed. Bless Abraham, and the children of Abraham, and you will partake of his blessings. Don't envy the good: help it. There is room for you, my brother, my sister.

These writings are done by means of sacrifices. If you believe that they uplift the Son of God, partake of it also yourself. Begin now: pray for those who want to serve the Lord. We desire that they reach many. Pray for those who will read them. Pray for those who work for their distribution. Souls who are far away can be blessed by them. Do you want to have a part in it? Ask God, and He will tell you how. Thus it will be also your work. The world is tired of maledictions. There are many critics and those who speak evil in every camp! It is necessary to aim at being among

those who bless and help in every good work. That which is done in the Name of Jesus Christ, and for His glory, will bear its fruit.

* * *

IDLE WORDS

(Matthew 12:36)

Even idle words must go to judgment; how much more the evil words! Idle, useless words are worth nothing to anyone.

Nothing stirs so much and inebriates the soul as does speaking. St. James expresses this thought efficaciously, when he says: "*The tongue is a fire... it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*" (James 3:6).

It is not even necessary to say evil in order to become agitated; it is enough to begin with useless discourses. Like one who becomes inebriated, who at first is calm, and later on is heated up, thus one who speaks, if he is not moved by holy aims, ends by being inebriated of words.

There is a judgment. Whoever does not want to go to judgment in the beyond must pay attention to the judgment of the here and now. Blessed is the one who loves to be judged now. The Word that we hear is that which judges us.

* * *

THE EVILS OF PROSELYTISM

(Matthew 23:15)

Let us read again attentively and in the fear of God, the many repetitions of "*Woe unto you*" in St. Matthew 23. Rather than marveling at the Scribes (the doctors) and the Pharisees (separated, saints) of that time, let us examine ourselves, who knows, we may resemble them in their methods of proceeding that attracted those expressions of "*Woe unto you.*"

Our subject is "Proselytism." Let us limit it to the connection with the propaganda of Christianity. Rather, let us admit that it is done for the purpose of propagating the pure gospel. Let us suppose it to be in the best interest, that is, that it tends to give to the world the true doctrine of Jesus Christ, as it is, simple and unadulterated. Jesus has commanded to witness of Him and also to teach, but has condemned "proselytism."

Therefore there is a difference. What? The difference is in the purpose and in the method.

First purpose: The witnesses of Christ; those, that is, who have seen and heard Him of Him are constrained to speak (Acts 4:19, 20). They are not occupied of themselves, but of the object of their witnessing. They don't say what they have gathered from human voices, but what they truly know by direct connection.

The Lord has spoken and speaks; otherwise the sheep of today would not be able to hear His voice. The Lord lets Himself be seen in the spirit even today, because it is the office of the Holy Spirit, among others, to present old events

as though happening before us, and to allow us to see Jesus, although we desire to see Him in His fullness.

“Witness!” a great word. The Witness inside of us speaks in secret so that we proclaim, when and how God wants, even from the rooftops.

Proselytism is quite another thing. Perhaps there are few seductions so dangerous as those of the spirit of “Proselytism.” It has tempted, and tempts even the most sincere. However, such ones do not remain slaves of proselytism.

I will give an example, because facts are more eloquent than words. A few days ago I had the honor of receiving a visit from one of the most saintly men that I know; a man who has experienced the Grace of God in the soul and in the body. He was healed of a serious illness. His face has been an inspiration to me. He is a witness of Christ, but he has fallen into a trap. He is as though possessed by a mania that has pushed him to establish meeting places (they call them Churches), whereas the Lord has not called him to that. Establishing meeting places has its consequences. If God Himself does not do it, giving us the authority, it happens that in order to keep the groups united, and to give the appearance of prosperity, it is necessary to have recourse to poor tricks. Some who are or seem to be influential are honored in order that they return and lead others; creating positions that are not necessary: Deacons, Administrators, Governments! How many things! How many things! It becomes necessary to attend to a certain competition with who has more people...!

And even a saint, having burdened himself with Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:3), little by little he comes down to some human agreement. He lives agitated in a continual running as

if he were carrying the Universe, forgetting that it is the Lord who builds, using the builders. It is He who watches, using, we acknowledge it, also the watchers. The saintly man keeps falling and becoming sterile, unless the Lord sends him some serious trouble or permits a crisis, and he will be delivered.

We are speaking of a proselytism seen at its best. It is too tiresome to occupy ourselves of other proselytisms.

Proselytism damages the one who does it, and the disciples. These are bound, not to Christ, although they hear the blessed Name repeated; they are enslaved to a group, to a sect. In order to keep themselves prosperous and to defend themselves, they must use artifices, among which is exalting themselves and their leaders and speaking evil of others. From this is born the most serious of all hatred: religious hatred, that is, under the aspect of religious zeal.

The Remedy? Let us repeat it: we have all been, at one time or another, attracted by a little of proselytism. And if a little of it has remained, the Lord will deliver us, because we want to be delivered.

One who wants to serve God must be careful to be faithful to that which He commands, day by day, minute by minute (Psalm 90:12 and Matthew 6:34). He must be convinced that the Lord does not make him responsible for the success, but that he be "faithful" (1st Corinthians 4:2). In addition the servant of Christ must be assured of the Sovereignty of God, and that which is done for Him, and in His Name, is never without fruit. The bread cast upon the waters is not lost. It is necessary to enter into Rest. We know that nothing can be truly received, made one's own, except that which comes from heaven (John 3:27). Rest in Christ! One works little, but there is much fruit. Another word: It is true that we cannot separate the tares, and that only the Lord can deliver

us from them. However, the proselytizer seeks numbers of people. Because of this he is tempted to afflict and distance some that, although errant, are full of contrition. He treats them coldly or chases them out, because a few who have influence "want it so" and he does not want to lose them. The tares are not the ones who are surprised in some fault; they form another category. Tares are those who are intermixed with the people without being the people. Such ones are the boldest ecclesiastic rulers. The proselytizer has need of them, and if they go away, he looks for them and caresses them. They count numbers, cast votes, and often are even ready to give something to those who love to receive gifts.

Oh my brother, know that it costs to serve Christ. Remember that those who long for the approval of men cannot truly "Believe," that is, have pure faith. Jesus has said: "*How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?*" (John 5:44).

Do not envy anyone, if you see that he seems to prosper. At times the Lord permits that the Gospel is announced also by those who are contentious (Philippians 1:16). God knows those who are His. Do not be afflicted when you see the maneuvers of others. Do not imitate them. Serve God in the method of God. Keep yourself only in that which He has assigned, and know that from Him, not from men, you will have the approval in His time, in the day that He will work.

As an encouragement and confirmation read again: Malachi 3:16-18.

PEACE—REST!

* * *

THE SEED THAT IS CAST AND THE GOOD
SLEEPING

“So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself (spontaneously); first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come” (Mark 4:26-29).

The man who throws the seed here is a servant. It is understood from what is said after, that he does not know how the seed grows; the owner knows it. The Sower is always the Lord, and He is everything; but He uses men. The seed is thrown to the ground: note that throwing, like something that is apparently lost, and that one resolves to throw away, and makes an effort to dispossess oneself of it. The servant who is energetic and full of faith sleeps and rises night and day alternating rest and work. First comes the grass, then the blade, then the full corn in the ear; a gradual and continuous process in all things. The reaper can be others, or he himself, always at the command of the Owner. The servant full of faith, energy and patience waits for the ear to bring forth corn, and when the corn is ripe, he puts in the sickle immediately. There is a long waiting, but a ready carrying out at the end of every expectation. The parable, more than referring to the final harvest, makes one think of a partial, constant and faithful work of every servant that waits for the right time of God, and reaps or gives the final touch to the work entrusted to him for everything, in the opportune time. Everything must come to maturity, but when it is ripe, it must be immediately reaped. The parable is relative to the method and behavior of the true servant, for everything that has been entrusted to him; faith and discernment; rest and work; waiting with discernment; and, at the end, accomplish,

each time, that which the Lord has given him to begin. Faithful and persevering sowers, who, in the good time of God, are also reapers, that is, they accomplish in God, that which they have begun in Him.

* * *

HIDDEN MANNA

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna” [literally: that has been hidden] (Revelation 2:17).

The Lord said to the disciples that it was given to them to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to the outsiders, they are presented in parables. Nothing seems easier than a parable, and yet there is nothing that includes so many hidden meanings as a parable, which, many times, literally seems to be absurd or inapplicable, but makes sense if we gather the hidden meaning.

In the seven messages to the seven churches of Asia after He has presented Himself to each one under a special aspect, and after He has warned each one of a special danger, Jesus makes a promise to each one. And thus there are seven promises that deal with hidden things, with mysteries.

To the first overcomers, those who have persevered in the first love and first works, He would give to eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God. Someone translates “wood” instead of tree; and the thought is the wood of all the trees, on both sides of the river, like the trees of a forest. Jesus is compared to a tree, and also His Church is compared to trees. Eating often indicates communion, participation in the life of the tree, and of the trees that have

roots along the waters of that river, that bear fruit in every season, and whose leaves are always green.

The second overcomers are those who do not allow themselves to be frightened by the things they are about to suffer. Take note that the letter to the church of Smyrna follows the other to the church of Ephesus, who is warned to return to the first love. In fact, one who keeps himself in the first love is also victorious against fear, because "*perfect love casteth out fear*" (1st John 4:18). Therefore, the overcomer, in the church of Smyrna, would not be afraid of the second death.

The third overcomer, those of the church of Pergamos, would have to fight against the worldly and religious mixtures. To them the Lord would give to eat of the hidden manna, kept hidden for the time of adversity.

As the Lord kept the provision of water and manna in reserve for the ancient people in the desert, so He has hidden food for people who are faithful to Him in difficult circumstances. It is a food hidden to superficial souls who do not like to penetrate the mysteries of the Lord and do not take time at the feet of the Master; but it is given to those who walk from revelation to revelation, and therefore from victory to victory. Together with the hidden manna, He will give to each overcomer a white stone, on which He writes a new name that no one knows except he who receives it. A white stone suggests three qualities: hardness, purity and gentleness. A single one of these qualities, not accompanied by the others, would cause an imbalance in the Christian life of the man. A firm and good character must always be accompanied by purity, otherwise it is a hardness that pretends from others, without life in ourselves. And the gentleness of Christ is always needed; but not only the gentleness, also the firmness and the purity. The new name is

known only by the one who receives it, and it is a direct, personal relation of each one with the Lord. There is something that the Lord gives to every mature saint that cannot be understood by others.

The overcomers in the fourth church where the astute Jezebel had corrupted the majority, would have had power over the nations; and they would have ruled them with a rod of iron, that would have broken, as the vessels of the potter are broken; that is, the vessels of clay.

To the overcomers of the fifth church, that which had lived in a time of profession without strength of Spirit, the Lord would have given a white garment; that is, the fullness of the righteousness of Christ. The overcomers of the sixth church who persevere in keeping themselves ready to meet the Lord will become columns in the temple of God and will have a fresh and new revelation of the Name of God, of the name of the city of God, that which comes down from Heaven; that is, they will see the New Jerusalem, the Church on high, and not in parties and sects; and they will have the new Name of Jesus revealed to them as they have known Him till now. And one who overcomes in the last church sits directly in the throne of Jesus. Complete victory and rest, by faith.

These victories begin now, passing from one revelation to another of the Lord Jesus, following Him in the various aspects that are presented in the seven epistles, hearing from Him to guard ourselves from one danger after another, and allowing ourselves to be worked within. He has the food that is reserved and hidden for the souls that truly love to consecrate themselves always more to Him, and love His appearing.

THE WEEPING OF ESAU

(Hebrews 12:16; Genesis 25:29-34, & chapter 27)

Esau wept. It is precisely the Esaus who know how to cry easily, and whose tears have deceived many. But they cannot deceive God, because the tears that touch the heart of the Lord are daughters and companions of true penitence.

When he knew that Jacob had been blessed in his place, Esau wept. But it is likewise said that he found no place of repentance; that is, his tears did not move Isaac from that which had been done. The old man, although he loved Esau by preference, still could not revoke the blessing, *"I have blessed him, and he shall be blessed"* (Genesis 27:33).

"And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?"

Isaac answered: "Behold I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee my son?"

"And Esau said unto his father: Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept." First he had cried out bitterly, then he lifted up his voice and wept.

But he did not find room for repentance. The blessing given to Jacob was not revoked. And some infer from this that the weeping of some who have offended God is worthless, and they cite the example of Esau. But those who say this,

discouraging the souls, are in error, because they do not distinguish two acts of the life of Esau.

Esau had no blame for losing the blessing: He did not have to repent for that for which he had no responsibility (read all of chapter 27 of Genesis, and it can be seen that Esau was entirely innocent of the conspiracy contrived between the mother and Jacob). The key to "*he found no place of repentance,*" must be sought in something else. It is necessary to go back to chapter 25 of Genesis: "*Esau came from the field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.*"

One should not think that he was really dying of hunger. That saying: "*I am at the point to die*" is an exaggerated expression of those to whom the earth is everything and who are afraid of losing it. The birthright was a right that does not have earthly value, but only for heaven. The heart of Esau had never become attached to that holy right that for him had no value for carnal ends. "*I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?*"

At the first opportunity, in order to free himself of a little discomfort, Esau deprived himself of something that, for him, was insignificant.

The Holy Scriptures, in Hebrews 12, depict that character with one word: PROFANE. Esau, the profane one. The despiser of the goods of heaven, who does not care for them,

is profane. What good would the blessing do later on to one who was profane? Therefore it was useless to cry. We do not read that he ever cried or felt the least disturbance for having despised such a great good. He could have, while eating, begun to feel some intimate commotion. Nothing of the sort.

The state of the soul can be seen from the outward behavior, already dead to the things of heaven. "*He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way.*" Our relation with the Lord is established in the depths of our spirit. One who is pious finds the way to run to the mercy of God, and is accepted.

* * *

THE BEAM AND THE MOTE

(Matthew 7:3, 4; read verses 1-5)

This, like all of His parables has an infinite extension.

After the "Judge not" and saying that as we judge, we shall be judged, the Lord asks a severe question followed by an imperative: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

To understand and to apply how and where these words belong, it is good to remember that they are part of the Sermon on the Mount, which, according to St. Mathew, was addressed to the disciples that, having followed Jesus on high, drew near to Him, and He spoke to them slowly and incisively, after He was seated. His posture is recorded in order to illustrate a calm teaching. The message is to the Church, or let us say it, precisely to those who follow Him.

The contrast is between "thou" and "thy brother;" between "mote" and "beam." Beam is a serious evil; mote is a little straw, at times hardly visible. "Thou" is the "judge," "thy brother" is the one at whom is aimed the judgment of the... of the... "saints."

The word is more than a simple seeing or looking; it is contemplating with marvel, scandalized so that the thin piece of hay is magnified to the eye of the fastidious spy. "Thou" does not observe that which truly is a beam: the beam that is in his own eye.

The Lord had already taught that the "light of the body is the eye," a subject worthy of study, but it would be too much to couple it with the present meditation. From the question, it is clear that Jesus informs that each one who looks and contemplates the mote in the eye of another, not to help, but to marvel about it and worse, that one has a beam in his own eye. The evil of the others is a mote, like a nothing, in comparison to the ruin in which the too just one finds himself hardening his soul, and in a tactless way looks at the mistakes or the misfortunes of another.

The comparison is frightening, and no one would dare to do it, if the Infallible One had not spoken.

There are other lessons, among which is this: even the most saintly have at times a beam or a mote in their eye. The qualification "hypocrite" is hard, and we have thought it to be applicable only to those enemies of Jesus who boasted of holiness. But here "hypocrite" is said to each one who observes his brother, because there is a relative hypocrisy: we should not marvel about it. Peter simulated in Antioch (Galatians 1). Paul made a little play of words before the Sanhedrin composed of Sadducees and Pharisees (Acts 23).

It is necessary to face the truth squarely because only by it will we advance. We must give way to the love of the truth, cost what it costs. The Lord does not want us to remain with a beam, nor with a mote, and he points out the remedy. And it is to "thou," to each one of us, because we all have looked, contemplated and spied without helping, and it is to "thou" that He addressed, branding them with the qualification of "hypocrite!" The word makes us tremble, and it is good to tremble (Psalm 2:11; Isaiah 66:2).

There are two operations that seem to be left only to the working of "thou," but both depend on the Grace of God. Thou, oh hypocrite, bring it on high before the Lord who teaches you, acknowledge that you are an egoist, and that for a long time you attribute and weigh things according to what you imagine is to your advantage, even religious advantage.

This terrible "I" is the beam that, rich with vanity, makes you great in your own eyes, and accuses others. You must extract it. It is a sacrifice, but He will give you the strength, and afterward, in contrite penitence, you will recognize yourself for what you are, and you will arrive at the poverty in the spirit that is the basis of the Beatitudes.

Certainly, your weak brother needs help; perhaps the Lord will send you to him (If He sends you! If!) to wash his feet. Come down off your horse and help him with delicate tenderness, showing yourself not as one who is proud, but like the Samaritan. The art of correcting is and will be learned and used only by those who have before themselves the picture of their own miseries, as if they were saying: "Oh my brother, I who correct you am more needy than you, and anything but better than you. It's a question of a little bit of hay in your eye; and who knows how it happened to you! Don't be discouraged." With a merciful eye, careful of the how, without making suggestions to him, with the attitude of

one who has suffered and is contrite, remembering the Hand in which the stigmata of the nails have remained.

Removing the beam is the intimate work between you and God. Discover it—Consider—Repent—BE CON-VER-TED! Make an about-face to yourself. Turn your back on your I, and direct yourself to Heaven.

He who has resolved the problem of the beam will render you able to use mercy and to give help to others. One day, another, moved by the same spirit—Poor and merciful—will help you also.

* * *

SPIT ON THE EYES AND ON THE TONGUE

There is nothing more ignominious than spit; we find it mentioned three times in the life of Jesus; therefore, it must have a meaning.

“And they bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech Him to put His hand upon him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha; that is, be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain” (Mark 7:32-35). “And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, He asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that He put His hands again upon his eyes,

and made him look up: and he was restored and saw every man clearly. And He sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town" (Mark 8:23-26).

In both of these miracles, the Lord worked in a manner different from what one could have expected. For the deaf one who stammered, they desired that He would put His hand upon him; for the blind man, "they besought Him to touch him." For the first case the Lord separated them from the multitude; for both of them He used also spit. For the stammerer it is said that, after having spit, He touched his tongue; for the blind man it is recorded that He spit on his eyes. What did the Lord want to say with such an unusual act? Be it far from us the idea that He would do this as a remedy, because even as a remedy it would not have helped to restore speech and sight; and He had no need to use remedies according to man. Therefore let us, with reverence try to discover the secret in those two acts; and in order to do that, let us see if there is some hint on spit in the illustrative pages of the Old Testament.

When Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman that he married, and asked themselves if the Lord had truly spoken only by Moses, the Lord was displeased. It is recorded that the anger of the Lord was kindled against them. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and Miriam became leprous. Moses cried unto the Lord that He should heal her. *"And the Lord said unto Moses; If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received again."* It is understood that the greater punishment fell on Miriam, who was the oldest, because she was the inspirer of the murmuring against Moses. It can be noted that if her father spit in her face it would have kept her ashamed for seven

days. She was healed, but she had to undergo confusion and vituperation for seven days. Spit, therefore, was a sign of confusion and vituperation.

When the brother of one who died refused to marry his sister-in-law, so that the name of the deceased would not be lost, he would be punished in this manner: "*Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face*" (Deut. 25:9). Barefoot and spit upon because he had no interest in the memory of his dead brother.

In the prophecy regarding the Lord Jesus, we read in Isaiah 50:6: "*I hid not my face from shame and spitting.*"

Explaining the Bible with the Bible, the principal meaning of spitting in these cases is to give a visible vituperation. Let us understand one another; it's not that Jesus ever vituperated anyone, no; but he was attracting vituperation on that tongue and on those eyes. It was the outward symbol of a hidden condition of evil that is in the eyes and in the tongue of man, the two principal organs of sin, although even the other senses are used in sinning. The perfect Doctor pulls out the sickness in order to cure it: therefore let sickness that cannot be seen appear on this tongue, and let these eyes be covered with confusion, and then they will see clearly—tongue and eye pure, but first spit upon. And also another thought, not only what appears to us, as soon as He touches us, that is, we are revealed to ourselves and confused by the spit in the face, because to us belongs the confusion of face, but it is also a symbol of what we must suffer by the tongues and the looks of others. Recognize yourself; and be disposed to suffer vituperation from others. A consideration will help to clarify this better. How can it be explained that many whom we cannot deny have been truly filled with the Holy Spirit, have, immediately after the great blessings of God, demonstrated

foolishness in many things? The answer is only one, and it is humiliating, but likewise comforting: they have been spit upon their tongue and on their eyes, so that the first thing that appears outwardly is that which was hidden in them, under a coat of respectability. His spit is needed to show it to us. However, He spits and shows us what we are, but He does not leave us as we are.

Spitting and vituperations of all kinds fell upon Him, and He did not hide His face, because He wanted to bear even our confusion of face and vituperation, together with our sins. Spit is to reveal to us that which we are, and to make us be ashamed; but He does not want us to remain discouraged. A certain confusion we must undergo as an experience for us, but He has said to His Church (Isaiah 54:4): *"Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more."* How much there is to be forgotten. What would heaven be if the memory of the past should persecute us? But He has taken it, in order to give us, for eternity, not only the pardon, but the free courage of a pure life, as if there had never been anything to make us feel confused. Gentle and Blessed Lord!

One who prays for a person and feels the need of that person as if it were his own, can truly pray an efficacious prayer. Only then will he feel the pain and cry to the Lord with all his heart. One who has such persons with this spirit that help him to pray is truly rich. This intimate communion of sufferings and interests is received by grace and is given to those who are disposed to give their life for others.

* * *

SILENCE

The Israelites had been defeated. Saul, Jonathan and many others had been killed. David heard the news of it and he mourned. In his great, luminous soul, David saw a danger. It was the prophetic seeing that admonishes in every time, not to make reports, especially to those who rejoice of the evil of others. He said: *"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."*

The Philistines had no need of information, because they had returned to the battlefield, spoiled those who were killed, cut off the head of Saul and sent the news everywhere. They knew, but others did not know, and did not scorn the grief of those who have mourned.

Do not report! Dignified behavior should be observed in misfortune: SILENCE!

SPEAK

We wait for the example and inspiration by contemplating that Great Life. He was silent when we, in His place, would have spoken; He spoke when we would have been silent.

To the "What evil hath he done?" of Pilate, Jesus answered nothing. We, affecting false modesty, would have, by fits and starts, recited a list of accomplished works, and what works! Jesus was silent. But He was not silent when it came to telling him that He was the King that was born. To the question: *"Whence art thou?"* addressed to Him after Pilate had heard, trembling, that Jesus had made Himself the Son

of God, Jesus did not answer, whereas affirming that He truly was the Son of God would have earned the protection of the fearful and vacillating judge. He answered, and corrected the proud affirmation of the same judge who had the authority to kill and to release, with serious and solemn words that had to wound completely the pride of the ignorant one. Jesus answered: "*Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except...*"

Going back one step, before the Sanhedrin, called together hastily at an off hour, in the face of the contradiction of false witnesses who were not succeeding in substantiating anything, when it was expedient to fabricate some kind of accusation in order to preserve the appearance of legality, Jesus did not answer. When the high priest, despairing to see the victim escape him, adjured Him to say who He was, or rather, who He qualified Himself to be, Jesus answered with: "*Thou hast said,*" that is, He truly is the Son of the Blessed One, and that the Glory as the Son of Man was waiting for Him.

It was His speaking that gave His accusers the basis for the process. It was His resolute silence, and the words that struck the vanity and pride of the governor that pushed him to send Jesus to the cross. It is true, moreover, that the name of Caesar sealed the decision.

We are, how far and how far, far from *that* speaking and from *that* silence. Without losing our esteem for a great Apostle, but for the purpose of showing the distance that exists between men, even the best, and the Son of Man, we remember the behavior and the speaking of St. Paul before the priest who commanded someone to strike him on the lips. And we remember the useless stratagem of calling himself a Pharisee, knowing that the Sanhedrin was composed of Pharisees and Sadducees, and Scribes. If we really want to

know who Jesus is, let us compare Him to the best men of every time, of every place.

SPEAKING—SILENCE.

It is in His school, penetrated by His Spirit, after a long and loving contemplation that we learn. No one was ever silent and no one ever spoke like Jesus was silent and spoke! And... He still SPEAKS.

The Good Shepherd is often silent about our errors; He waits for the time and the opportunity to correct, knowing that we cannot bear much. But He speaks immediately when we are truly in danger. He is ready to help and He says to His own: "*Fear not.*"

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE

Many torments travail us because we are slow to enter into the "Rest of the Holy One" (Hebrews 4); and only after many difficulties we learn to distinguish in ourselves and in others, the difference between "soul and spirit." Although often in the New Testament the word soul includes also the spirit, thus indicating the entire personality, yet there is a distinction between soul and spirit (human spirit) (1st Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12); there are people who have an elevated and fine spirit, but an agitated soul tending to egoism; there are those who have a cultured, gentle soul, but their spirit is almost insensitive or worse, open to the spirit of evil. Speaking of those who love the will of God, the perfect harmony of the TWO in one is slow (and, I fear, alas, never complete in this earth). When it is the soul that

dominates and the spirit is weak, man is animal. When the spirit controlled by the Holy Spirit dominates, man is spiritual. The two will become one; that is, not two forces that contend, but the human subjected to the divine; the long conflict in us discourages and tempts us to doubt.

Not understanding the conflict in others leads to judging them wrongly and to become scandalized. Many elders, dear souls, have a right spirit, but yield to the impulses of the soul. Let us comfort them and pray for them; if the root in them is good, in time all will be well (Job 19:28). Even mature saints have had long conflicts, almost despairing; but God who wakes allows them to suffer, never abandoning them. The emotive part must be reduced, and we enter into pure faith (Isaiah 50:10). As the light increases, we discover a seed in us that we had never seen: we become ashamed of ourselves. God warns that He knew us and knows us; He saw the monstrous abysses in us and yet He elected us! It is necessary to make us see ourselves (Psalm 139, especially vv. 15 & 16), and after we have discovered our "nothingness" and that we are "sinful in everything," we make a funeral to the past and no longer lament about ourselves; but knowing that nothing is good in us, we enter into Rest, trusting confidently in Him who works and will work, and we do not remember anything of ourselves, except the grace that has sustained us.

The trial is great; only the Lord has sustained you to bear it with sweet resignation; and He will still give you sufficient strength. It is hard to see a child suffer; doubly hard if there is also poverty. The enemy will often come to travail you with the question that he was asking the Psalmist: "Where is thy God?" We must answer as the ancient saint did, that our God is also in the heavens; that is, He fills all the heavens, and does that which pleases Him. But we must know that only that which pleases God is lastingly good. At the same

time, imitating the widow of whom it is written in the eighteenth chapter of St. Luke, we must not become tired of praying and waiting.

As far as my writing to your daughter, I would do so if I had the inspiration from Above. Lacking a guidance of the Holy Spirit it is better that I do not write, and I add, it is better that you speak little to her, very little of religious things. Salvation belongs to the Lord. We have often tired ourselves out, trying to persuade and to reason; but if it is not the Lord who brings the message by means of us, our efforts are in vain. He is not indifferent to your groaning and crying. You will reach your daughter by continuing in holy silence and speaking to her heart by means of the throne of God; that is, by saying to Him that He should tell her that which you cannot. The greatest ministry is that in the spirit. Wait in faith, without spying for immediate results; because it is likely that, precisely now, the difficulties will increase; but it will be to test your faith.

* * *

BARREN THAT DID NOT BEAR

(Isaiah 54:1)

There is a special people that seems to be unfruitful in the eyes of others, and, perhaps even more so, to its own eyes! A barren woman was considered unhappy by the Hebrews. Rachel, Hannah, the Shunamite and Elizabeth were without children, and they obtained them by grace. Hannah sang after the Lord comforted her: "*The barren hath borne seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.*" Isaiah

exclaims thus: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud... for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord."

It is clear that the barren one is not disposed to cry with joy, because she does not see the motive and all is arid around her, while others seem to have much fruit. But this travailed soul (the Church of Christ is a suffering people, trampled upon and called to walk by faith) is, by faith, invited to rejoice.

All is not work of God that is called work of God, and all that appears to be sterility is not sterility. The work of the Lord is accomplished in a mysterious way, and, at times, we serve more and better when it seems that we serve little or not at all. That barren one does not see children, but is immersed in the love of Jesus. One day she will have and will see many children and will remain surprised about it; souls that have been edified by her without her being aware of it, and in whom she will have allowed the odor of Christ to penetrate; the greatest work has been profound and hidden. Courage, therefore, oh modest souls; leave the honors and the noise to one who wants them, and as for you, be content to abide in Him and to be faithful to Him. He will answer about the fruit.

* * *

IN THE FLESH YET NOT ACCORDING TO THE
FLESH

(2nd Corinthians 10:3, 4)

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.” The Apostle wanted to say: weak like other men, yes, but we do not allow ourselves to be led to use means according to the flesh. As for us, we are fragile, but we strive to live and to walk above our weaknesses.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down [making prisoner] imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

The means that he used, he took from God and not from human prudence: and the aim was not to win the opposition to himself, but to bring minds to the obedience of Christ.

Being in the flesh, we are men subject to infirmity; but not according to the flesh means that we must try to be governed by the Lord, for the glory of His Name.

* * *

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

(John 11:25)

The highest terms of faith are:

GOD JUSTIFIES THE WICKED—GOD RAISES THE DEAD.

It was not easy for the disciples to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but after they were assured of it, they became steadfast and resolved, and gave their lives for Him.

It is not easy for us to believe that we too live resurrected in Jesus, but if we believe this, we also become resolved even to martyrdom.

Martha, in a veiled reprimand, said to Jesus: *“Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.”* “Jesus answered: *Thy brother shall rise again.*” Martha replied: *“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”*

It is not difficult to affirm that we believe in a distant event of which we have neither positive nor negative proof. But Jesus, inviting her to look close up in space and time answered: *“I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”*

These living words must possess all those who have accepted Jesus Christ, and love to live in Him. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross and His resurrection are the basis of the Christian life. Therefore the apostolic preaching and every true preaching insists on these two points, leading to persecution in that time and in every time. Rather than trying

to define "life and resurrection," we will trust in Him to affirm them. There are truths of which we have proof only by an inner assent and that we can neither describe nor demonstrate. They are: Life and Resurrection. "Believing in Jesus" is more than a mental act, although it supposes it.

Believing and coming go together; one who believes comes to Him, and one who comes to Him is kept firm in believing. We must be occupied about this, leaving the rest to Him; that is, to resurrect us and to keep us living. Life and immortality are in God alone; we know it, but it is from Him that they are received and are maintained by means of Him. One who is resurrected in the spirit lives on high. One who is dead that believes, receives life, and one who is living and continues to believe, does not die. That which is commonly called Death is only a shadow: Jesus Christ has taken the reality.

There are various ways of alluding to the transition from earthly existence to the life of the beyond; and they can be understood as one would understand speaking about a traveler who gathers up his tent and goes elsewhere, or like renewing an outfit, taking off the old to put on the new one. We are not "the body," but we live in it. In the same manner the pilgrim is not the tent, but takes refuge in it till he no longer needs it.

Those who have truly believed in Jesus and live in Him are not afraid of Death (Hebrews 2:15), rather, they wait serenely for it, knowing that one cannot truly enter into the Life of the beyond until one has exited the earthly one. The guarantee is absolute: Christ in us, hope of glory. Amen.

WILL WE KNOW EACH OTHER?

In the measure that we live in the sight of the Lord we become upright and wise of heart; we love His punishments and scourging. We do not run away from the consuming fire (Isaiah 33).

In such a measure, we see the distant country which the purified eye discerns always closer; we contemplate the King in His beauty; we understand the great communion of the saints, the great family in the earth and in heaven.

Many times we are asked: "Will we know each other?" The answer is that those who die in the Lord do not lose, but they gain when they are delivered from the encumbrance of the earthly body.

It is not related in what manner the three disciples, on the Mount of Transfiguration, recognized Moses and Elijah, but it is not bold to state that they recognized them without Jesus having to tell them who they were. It goes without saying that the three had no earthly image of the two. Here and there, in the prophets, there are hints of having seen persons of the other world. Paul affirms in an unmistakable way that for him dying was gain. But seeing and being brought to the great assembly (Psalm 40, Hebrews 12) depends on the intimacy that one has with the Lord; not an abiding in Him, in order to have this or that blessing or to admire oneself, but an abiding in Him because of love. It is necessary to understand pure love; that is, that which does not expect anything but to please the loved person.

It is useless to reason with one who does not want to listen or is too literalistic. The Revelation of Jesus was given to a man

who was in the spirit, and it must be read in the spirit. An invisible world becomes visible and real to St. John, and to those who read and meditate in that spirit, seeing one thing after the other. Take note of the use of the great word "Then" in the Scripture.

Those who aspire and receive the rare Grace to be brought, so to speak, above present things understand why many saints went happily to cruel deaths. They saw Heaven open, angels and other saints who were waiting for them.

There are angels of agony by the bed of the saints.

Will we know each other? Oh, yes. *"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known"* (1st Corinthians 13:12).

* * *

AVARICE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

(Colossians 3:5; 1st Timothy 6:9, 10)

This subject is little known because we think we know it. "Idolatry: root of all evils." These affirmations constrain us to look at it better to see if we have called by another name that which is precisely avarice, or as others translate in Colossians 3:5 "covetousness." Living in an orderly manner is not avarice, but holy economy and discipline, and knowing how to appreciate even crumbs of bread. In fact, such are the ones who, at an opportune time, accomplish the greatest economic sacrifices. The generosity of the lazy and

dissolute fellow is illusory, because he ruins what is his and that of others. *“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, and covetousness [avarice], which is idolatry.”* *“And (yes, also) avarice.”* But is it an economic defect? No, it is more than this: it precisely, more than all that which has been mentioned in the catalogue of very wicked things, is idolatry; it puts itself between us and the Lord. Many evils give us a little respite, but idolatry never, because it is continually before us.

In 1st Timothy 6:9, 10 we read: *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”* Here the text refers to “love of money,” but it extends to all things, and money is taken as a representative sign.

Avarice, root of all evils, is a snare. A snare used for pulling, committing evils that the avaricious person commits without thinking; he does not know that he could become a murderer, impure, a liar, and he excuses avarice by another name, and he is not aware that the enemy puffs up his soul and clouds his mind and precipitates him from one evil to another, and to all the evils. Avarice is an inner condition: fatal egoism that leads to covetousness in all lines, for us and toward those for whom we have partiality. It is a hidden evil, because the roots are not seen. The vigorous branches testify of deep roots. When you see a big tree, you know it has many roots. When you see a man full of evils, a liar, proud, impure, full of hatred, there are many branches. The Word says: look under the ground; discover the roots; they are avarice, covetousness, greediness. Cut that root, and the branches will dry up. Many men of great gifts in the service

of the Lord have made shipwreck. The cause has usually been attributed to many things. No. We have erred. The Word that we have before us tells us that there was hidden idolatry; a root not known to anyone, except to the Lord, and from which evils have come forth, one branch after the other, until the evil became so great as to suffocate all the good that was there. Avarice was the root. For example: the friendship that ended in an illicit relationship of parties or the like started when someone allowed themselves to be bought by gifts. One who does not shake his hands to not take anything unless God sends it, is entrapped by presents, and enters into familiarity with one who gives; from familiarity to many sins, there is only one step. How can one, in fact, be evil speaking, sectarian, and so on and so on, if one does not enter into a certain intimate relation with the persons, and with whom is one tempted to enter into an intimate relation, if not with those who know how to buy?

My sister, my brother who read, tremble, and may God would make me who writes tremble! "*Thy money perish with thee,*" the apostle reprov'd Simon the sorcerer. And one who fears the Lord should rebuke any desire or offer of seduction, because behind it there are many evils, all the evils. One thing after another, one convenience after another, in the house, on our person, and our heart grows bigger and becomes puffed up. Things have their association, and passions also have their association. Once the doors of the fortress are opened to the enemy, he enters with evils that he selects. Many who began only by the greediness to become rich have ended in shameful failures, of which they themselves have marveled. Snare and root. Pay attention! Love poverty, because near it, only near it, holy virtues can be planted. The King of Heaven has given us the example by selecting poverty; He was born in a stable; He never had a house that He could call His own. But the nominal Church, for many centuries, has given a nauseating spectacle of

greediness, and does so even today. If one looks carefully, behind all the ecclesiastic scandals, at their root, there is avarice. Either they must divide some property, or some have become great, because of the gifts, and flattery has made their head turn. Avarice, greediness and the love of money are the ROOT of all the evils; a snare to entrap in every evil and in every shame.

Is there not a remedy, some knife that can cut this root, as soon as it begins to appear? First of all it is not easy to see it, precisely because the root is a snare. But is there a remedy that can outright impede its appearing? There is a remedy, and it is indicated by the holy and pure Mouth of Jesus Christ. Let us open the Gospel according to St. Luke, in chapter 11:41, and we read: *"But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you."* Elsewhere: *"Sell that ye have, and give alms."* To the rich man: *"Yet lackest thou one thing [and it was the root]: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me."*

But, someone will say, must we all sell our goods and remain without a house, all of us, and become like beggars? Jesus did not say this, although in the letter it seems that He may have said this sometimes. To the rich man the command was specific and personal, and he would have had effectively to sell and to give. Others do not have this command, but in one sense, they must sell just the same. How can this be explained?

The word of God must be fulfilled first in the spirit, and then it must be practiced outwardly. True sacrifice is within, in the depth of our being, and Jesus has given us the example even in this. He is the Lamb slain in the spirit before the foundation of the world. By the Spirit, He said: *"Lo, I come"* (Hebrews 10:7), and He made Himself ready. Before the

material cross was in existence, the cross was already planted in His heart, And, if one reads well in the text, Isaiah 53:9, it can be seen that the word "death," was the last act of a sequence of deaths. His birth and appearance in the stable was His funeral begun in heaven, from when He annihilated Himself, and lowered Himself.

And the life of saints must have a great funeral. All that belongs to us must be renounced forever, given, or ready to be given to all the poor, to all humanity toward whom we are debtors, for the love of the Great Poor One, of the One who made Himself poor, and in the walk of holy poverty has given us the example, and has put Himself at the head of the line. Then, if He is pleased to make us His administrators with houses and vines and money, so be it, but HIS ADMINISTRATORS, because as for us, the goods have been sold. Whether it was notarized or not, for us it must be the same, remaining in our things as though they were not truly ours. They are sold, and we must, at a hint from the owner, be ready to dispose of them as He wants. If the prince of this world comes, and allures with an object to be placed next to another, one suit to another, an expensive article to another and then, by the relation of things, incites also to beautify our appearance a little better, etc., etc., we must tell him that we have nothing, because those things are not ours, but of the Lord, and not ours.

Permit us, at this point, to cite something from the life of Carlo Borromeo, whatever our views on his doctrine may be; the example regards his poverty. He was a very rich man, but he considered himself an administrator of the Lord, and not the owner. One night, in winter, he was wrapped in an old overcoat and was suffering the cold; one of his friends asked him why he did not wear the garments that he usually wore in public. "Because—answered the man who was voluntarily poor—because those do not belong to me;" they belonged to

his office. And he was such a man who knew how to sleep on a bare board, because the pestilence, the needs of many poor people required from him one sacrifice after another, up to giving the mattresses from his bed. He did not sell all at one time, but yet, in the spirit, he had sold all for the love of the poor in Christ Jesus.

The life of abnegation is not measured only by the quantity of that which one spends, and that truly must be a secret that can leak out, but must not be discovered by the one who does the good; true holiness is measured by how we use the things that we call ours, and that we should have already sold when we were bought by the Redeemer in the market of vituperation.

Verse 41 of chapter 11 of St. Luke is translated from a version that seems to us to be very close to the original; that is, it is necessary to give that which is within. We must place in disposition our inner riches and all that which can be desired. "And behold," someone translates "behold" "quickly," like the appearing of lightning. Behold, quickly everything will be clean unto you, Oh, how much our soul desires purity, His purity! Blessed are the pure in heart, because they shall see God. We are called to look at, to contemplate the far country; the King in His beauty.

"Behold, all things are clean unto you." Be it far from us, or strictly controlled and submitted to that powerful Hand, all the various desires that rise from the depth of the flesh; kept down by Him, and He alone can keep them down. And those who fall, and we have fallen, it is because He has wanted, for a time, to abandon us to our strength that is not strength, in order to constrain us to investigate our life, and to discover if there be some snare, some hidden root; and the snare, the root were there: multiform avarice, with the love of money, of presents and of things, and of the appearance, and the

beautifying of house and things, and persons, with the snare of vanity, and... But now, the warning rings out, oh, what a loud sound like a trumpet. People of God, who boast of many things, sell, sell everything, within and without, in order to follow Christ. Undress yourself of yourself, in order to follow Him who was denuded of everything, in order to be infixed on the Cross, and then behold, immediately, without your strength, all things will be clean unto you. Amen.

It is true, many do not understand the trials and suffering of another; but this answers to a divine purpose. If we were to always receive the tenderness and comfort that our humanity desires, we would not learn to know the delicate comforts of the Holy Spirit (the Comforter). On the other hand, if some soul were not used to understand us, at least in part, we would fail, and would have doubts about the Lord.

Therefore, He has arranged that the majority do not understand us; but, likewise, from time to time he makes a present to us by means of someone; a touch of human tenderness and elevated understanding. Let us bless Him in all His ways. Let us recognize as wanted by Him the indifference of the many, and the concern of the few. Only thus will we be impartial, and will not forget the Creator for the creatures.

* * *

SILENCE

(Psalm 19:1-4)

Contemplate the heavens: they are a book (Psalm 8). They speak, on condition that man is silent and becomes receptive.

The heavens recount and pour out words; they declare science and knowledge. They speak by day and teach in the night. We are in the night of the Dispensation; only the stars can be seen.

They have words, and behind the words they have the Voice; there must be understanding and meditating on the "Voice," without which the words do not illumine.

In these heavens, of the precise lines, there is a tabernacle to the sun—to the Lord. We are thinking of the Kingdom of the Heavens, the executive plan of the Kingdom of God. The Heavens recount, speak and teach. And yet they do not speak, and do not let voices be heard, although they have words and voice. There is a time that words and voice distract, whereas the plan is: Tabernacle to the Sun—to Christ, the center of the Universe.

Oh saints of God! Teach the divine silences!

* * *

SPEAK

(Luke 13:15)

One day some gratuitous informers, reporters of scandals, presented themselves to Jesus. They had purposely made the trip.

Among the mockery and the feigned commiseration, they reported that Pilate had mixed the blood of the Galileans with the blood of the sacrifices.

The mouth of Jesus opened. He was silent about the past of the dead ones, but gave an incisive and severe warning to the informers, a warning that ended with:

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Jesus speaks and causes to speak when we ignore our own misdeeds and we are occupied about the misfortunes and errors of another.

To a saint who looked around, instead of walking straight ahead, Jesus answered, rapidly and severely: *“What is that to thee?”*

* * *

VOLUNTARY RELIGION

PART I

(Colossians 2:23)

We desire and hope that honest and simple souls may be comforted and delivered from weights that they take, thinking to serve better, or that others lay on them because of excessive zeal or other motive.

We remind that exaggeration harms the cause that one wants to defend, and that only in the truth is there safety. Someone used to repeat that it is not necessary to take a step longer than the leg permits.

Above all, we must meditate on the life and method of the One who gave teachings according to what the disciples could hear, and that He expects the fruit that is a consequence of abiding in Him, like the branches of the vine.

We know of some who have left occupations and places, not because the Lord commanded them, but driven by enthusiasm, or having read of heroic acts, or because of some suggestion that comes and is spread in the hypnotized masses.

Oh Christ! Oh Christ! How many errors are accomplished in Your Name. Bless this writing, in order that honest souls may be delivered from that which is not from You, or that You do not command or that You will command when they

have been prepared by You for obedience to that which only You will command.

We also have read the book: "What would Jesus do?" and we also have cried at the pitiful picture presented in the first pages. The answer to the question: "What would Jesus do?" is: We should never be in a hurry to accomplish plans that, although good in themselves, are not presented to us by God Himself. He has His method, and it is: The Grace that opens the way to the Truth. Abiding in Christ, one bears fruit like the seed which, when it is sown, brings forth fruit; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. There are many ruins and delusions because we do not want to start and continue as God wants. Evil is ancient, as ancient as human vanity, because vanity is a lens that wants to enlarge and exaggerate. There has been at all times a certain amount of voluntary religion, because there is in everyone a certain amount of pride and vanity, by which, deep down, for a long time, even sincere Christians imagine, although they do not say it, that they earn Heaven for themselves, that their prayers, and so on and so on, change things.

Prayers, a holy life and good works are necessary, but they must be the spontaneous fruit of Grace. The life of Jesus in us must bear fruit, because without Him we can do nothing.

Let us guard ourselves against the subtle winds of religious pride, the most ruinous of prides, and let us fall like dead people at His feet, because He is our life, and we can move only when He, who is Life, works and moves in us; that is, by pure Grace.

The Lord has healed and heals; He has worked powerfully and He works. But He does not need theatrical spectacles to do so, nor exercises on the sick ones. There are many who go away deluded or crushed from such demonstrations because

they receive nothing, or not in a permanent way. But the pill against the unfortunate ones is already in place; that is, that they have not had faith.

As if the others may have received, at least everyone, because they had faith! As if, many times, the faith of those who pray must replace the weakness of the sick one, as is clearly written in James 5:13 and ff. For one who leaves happy, ten leave almost in desperation from certain pompous gatherings.

Yes, yes, praying for the sick is from God and guided by Him to do so, and truly in His Name, ready to eclipse our names, as did Peter and John, who hastened to honor the One who works by mercy and not by the merit of men. Read again Acts chapter 3.

How much difference there is between those men and US! How many programs, with announcements and pictures of powerful men! Oh Lord, open our eyes!

PART II

(Colossians 2:23 and 3:3, 4)

Someone asked why many sick ones are not healed, although they call the Elders; or why many who are demon-possessed are not delivered, and the like.

The question is serious, and requires a frank and honest answer. The Lord never deceived anyone, nor commanded the impossible; we mean to say that with the command, He promised the help. Therefore, we have not understood His Word as we should. After having prayed, I answered and

answer, even knowing that in the vast territory of the Spirit we can say little:

Rather, all of us must be sure that the Word on which we base the working is directed to us; or, to make it clearer, if we have been commanded to lay on hands or other actions. But there is more. In Colossians 3:3, 4 we read: *"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then ye also appear with Him in glory."* Let us strive to read the above words well. The promise that we will appear when Christ appears does not refer only to the single event of the Return of Christ, but to whatever manifestation or revelation of Him in us. "In glory" does not refer only to the future, but to every work that glorifies the Lord. A dead man cannot preach, lay on hands, pray or rebuke demons.

I can, it's true, shout biblical verses to the ear of a dead person, but he cannot obey them because he is dead. We are alive and dead at the same time. Alive in the body, we say, but we are dead because the life of Heaven, the true life, is hidden with Christ in God. If He comes down in us and revives and works, we work. If Christ who is our life manifests Himself in us, each time, it is in vain to want to apply biblical verses. We are like a dry rod in the hand of a dry servant of Elisha (Gehazi). Life comes from life; in order for the Word to become life in others, it is necessary for the great Life of Christ to flow in us, precisely for that message, for that act or prayer. Then! Oh then! Christ always had his request granted. Then the result is sure.

We must learn the vocabulary of heaven. There is a seeing, there is a confessing Christ Lord that is of the Holy Spirit; a calling of the Elders that is of the Holy Spirit, to men who consider themselves dead in themselves, but alive in Christ, and, enlivened by Him, they will extend their hands in which

there will flow the life of that Powerful One who governs the worlds. Then, the anointing of oil will not be of material oil, but of the spirit of God that resurrects the dead.

The Scripture is before us but it is only letter until it is pronounced by the Lord Himself. Only that which comes out of His mouth bears fruit, and is Spirit and life (Isaiah 55:11; John 6:63).

For a long time we strive to work on our own, imagining that we can make the cause of Christ advance. Yeast and honey were permitted in the sacrifice of the first-fruits: a little puffing up and human bounty. But the time comes when we discover that we must consign ourselves to the Lord, and serve Him, in His temple (in us, in the spirit). If He wants something from us, He who has no need of anyone, it is He Himself who must do the work, using us. Our part is to identify ourselves with Him, and say to Him: Here I am.

PART III

(Colossians 2:23)

We also have made the observation, therefore we do not marvel. Except that, as the good example and wise words of someone have reached us after years, we cannot abstain from pointing out that which is according to God, because of the fact that many do not understand, and some become scandalized. One who is right in his heart will not stumble, or will not remain in confusion, even if he has fallen into it for a time.

An observation: must we content ourselves with a life of meditation and contemplation, while on every side there are so many unhappy ones who need salvation and help? We

want to work for the Lord, they tell us, or we are made to understand; and they multiply activities and programs.

Permit us to refer to that which we have noticed many times, looking at workers who unload and transport objects. Someone tries to attract attention to the fact that he works hard, while others move quietly and efficiently. In every field, true workers accomplish their assignment in such a way that it almost seems that they are not working; others, instead, show that they are making an effort, showing by this either inability, or a desire to make themselves admired. This happens in serving the Lord. There are some that the Scripture calls young men, selected young men, who work hard and get tired; and others do more than them without showing it, because they hope and depend only on the Lord (Isaiah 43:22). *“But thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.”*

We answer: *“Salvation belongs to the Lord.”*

“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

“The breaker is come up before them; and their king shall pass before them” (Psalm 3:8; Psalm 127; Micah 2:13.

It is clear that there are builders and watchmen, as it is clear that there are those who follow the King. But it is implicit that neither the watchmen, nor the builders, nor the followers select the work and the limits of it themselves. The Lord builds; He watches; and He condescends to use men in His service.

The one who writes remembers that time in which a fever of activity and programs invaded him; and remembers also with gratitude the encounter with some rare men, whose character

and example are of edification to him. Some are still on earth, advanced in years, possessing admirable energy, but firm in waiting on the Lord that only He moves and guides them. To the credit of such servants are many works accomplished without having had support of propaganda. I would recommend to the reader that he should treasure the experience of such men, while the Lord still keeps them on the earth.

I have never seen characters so energetic, united to such a strong decision that they do not like to do anything by their own wisdom, but seek the guidance of the Lord, always, in everything. I remember a saintly man who went with the Lord years ago. He was a sick man who could barely stand on his feet and his breathing was labored. He was immersed in meditation and prayer to the point of seeming to be the living picture of a man of tears and of contemplation. And I had the privilege, alas, only a few times, and for a short time, to be able to accompany him in some visits. It seemed that he could not take one step, heavy as he was, and, I learned later, his legs and feet were a little swollen. But he, receiving strength from Above, step by step, as though leaning on the Invisible, tired out even the young men. He was always tired and never tired; without strength and receiving strength.

And I know of other similar ones, of whom one could say: Modest workers, but PRODUCTIVE. We say PRODUCTIVE and not ELOQUENT.

In Acts 16:6, 7 we read about Paul and companions: "*Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.*" How much time they spent in these voyages and attempts to work is not written. It had to be at least some months and it was

not a small grace to be aware of the impediments of the Holy Spirit. They had a program that seemed reasonable and imperative, but the Lord had disposed otherwise. The need certainly was great in the regions mentioned (and where is there no need?), but they were called elsewhere. They stopped; God wanted them and He brought them into another continent.

To the light and easy insinuation that men who like to live in absolute communion with the Lord, abiding in Him (John 15), contemplating Him (2nd Corinthians 3:16-18) and serving Him in His temple (Revelation 22:3), that such ones become lazy contemplatives, we answer: If such ones truly abide in the Lord, contemplate Him and serve Him in the spirit, if they are truly such, they are identified and in unison with the heart of the Lord, and cannot be deaf or indifferent to the least hint or sigh coming from Him. Such ones seem to be, but are not lazy. Precisely they are the great workers, men and women who in a short time and without noise, accomplish much, in various ways, almost without being aware of it themselves. They are not anxious about their work, or that they must run, but they live in the Lord.

We are brought to think about the servants of the great ones of the earth. It seems that they do nothing, but they are all ears and attention, and to the least hint, to the least sound of the bell, they run quickly and silently. Then they return to their post. We remember the Cherubims seen by Ezekiel who were rapid, direct and decisive, and when the wheels stopped, they also stopped. They moved like thunderbolts, but they stopped suddenly. Their spirit was in the wheels.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY

(Philippians 1:3)

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."

We are thankful for the memory that others have of us, when they have it; but the spiritual depth to which St. Paul had arrived was needed in order to give us a prayer which we perhaps would never have thought of: Paul remembers the Philippians and presents them every day to God by saying: *"I thank God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy."* He is careful to make them understand that it is not by his own merit that he remembers them.

He says in an indirect and fine way: "do not attribute it to me if I have presented you, as I would have already forgotten; but it is God who sanctifies my memory, and He makes me remember you." And Paul says all this in a most gentle way, that is veiled under thanksgiving to God. The thanksgiving is there and it is profound.

And that thanksgiving also had significance, although the apostle may not have wanted to give it. If it was not by virtue of Paul that the memory was alive, but only by the grace of God, it was not even by virtue of the Philippians that the memory of Paul was awakened toward them. He would have forgotten, and the Philippians, although affectionate to Paul, were not such extraordinary persons as to pretend that the oblivion that extends over human things should make an exception for them. "I have not forgotten you; but it is not because my memory is tenacious and steadfast, or because you do not allow me to forget you, but because God keeps

my memory alive. Our tender relationship is due to the continual breath of the grace of the Lord.”

Noble thanksgiving. When we, in our work, remember someone that we had decided to abandon to themselves; when in our prayer the special need of some brother presents itself to our mind; when gratitude makes us remember the benefits we have received and puts us back into tender correspondence with neglected persons, it is the Spirit of God that has worked, that has revived and sanctified our memory. And therefore, even we, with the apostle, thank God, and from every tender relation we find a reason to give glory to Him.

* * *

THAT WHICH IS REQUIRED

(1st Corinthians 4:2)

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” That’s everything.

Often we are confused when we look at the manner in which others are used. Some face sacrifices and privation, and even martyrdom. Others see many gathering themselves around their testimony and preaching; and we, considering our very limited results, are tempted to be discouraged, and to say that perhaps there is no work for us.

Go slow!... It is not given to man to judge what is important or not. At times, things and work that seem to be insignificant are of great price before God. Certainly, the

flesh wants noise and a spectacle, but our duty is to know the will of God, particularly in regard to us, and to be faithful to that. He has warriors who go to the battlefield and He has silent martyrs of the spirit; He has watchmen who cry to Him night and day, in the powerful ministry of intercession (Isaiah 62:5, 6). In the waiting rooms of the great ones of the earth, trustworthy service people stand ready for a call. At times no one calls them for many hours; their service is to not do anything, but to keep themselves ready and vigilant. *"Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters... so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God"* (Psalm 123:2). Of all the specific functions rendered to Jesus, none succeeded in being more acceptable than that of Mary of Bethany. She sat at His feet to listen to Him. He wants to speak to us, and seeks souls who listen to Him and understand Him. At the end, the meditative disciple broke the alabaster box and poured the oil of great price, just a few days before the cross. She was faithful to her part.

There are quiet souls who apparently do nothing, but they know how to encourage in time, and have ready, in the Name of Jesus, the glass of cold water for the tired pilgrim who is almost fainting. Faithfulness, faithfulness is what the Lord requires from each one according to what has been given to him. Loving Him, we are faithful to Him, and it is part of our true service to not do less than that which He commands and in that which He is pleased, but not even to go beyond, by our eagerness. The watchman dies at his post.

* * *

MORTIFIED IN THE FLESH—REVIVED IN THE
SPIRIT

(1st Peter 4:1)

“Flesh” in the language of the Scripture is “will of man” that includes our manner of seeing, and tendencies. “Suffering in the flesh,” that is, contradicting our will and obeying that of the Lord means accepting mortification, receiving slaps and turning the other cheek, suffocating bursts of pain, and being silent in the face of injustice; knowing the miseries of others, but not disclosing them, although others open their mouth wide or lay snares against us. And so many things cause pain and agony to the human in us. But if we become hardened against ourselves, and suffer an inner crying, suffocating the cry of protest, precisely when it seems that we can no longer bear and are groaning within ourselves, looking to Jesus, then the spirit, the superior life in us grows.

There are two plates of a balance; while one rises the other goes down. There are two lives: in order that one may thrive luxuriantly, the other must be mortified.

Oh, reader! Which one do you wish to choose? Remember it: the satisfaction of your “I” weakens the life of the spirit in you.

Suffer therefore, even if it seems that your heart is breaking. In the silence, your spiritual life will rise higher and higher toward Heaven, while you, oh travailed one lose, lose, and lose up to disappearing before yourself (John 3:30).

* * *

It is impossible to see the works as we would like to see them, because the plan of God is mysterious; He selects His own in secret, in the midst of storms. The army of Gideon

did not know that it was being judged, and the three hundred who were alert and faithful did not know that they would be the only ones to be selected.

* * *

DOUBTING ONESELF

“Now when the even was come, He sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat meat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” They had been near the Master for three years, but always, rather, more every day, the disciples had felt the distance between themselves and the Lord. Now, on that evening, on that occasion, the few words that fell without anger, but with serene meekness, struck their hearts; each one felt afflicted, and from the sadness, there escaped from the lips of each one this question: *“Lord, is it I?”*

“One of you shall betray me,” said Christ. One, each one, under the strength of that gaze and of that voice, lost confidence in themselves, and began to question. Jesus had affirmed; the disciples, speaking of themselves, asked: *“Lord, is it I?”* and the question in that painful moment really admitted a doubt. They did not feel capable of such, it is true; but they had had so many surprises that they did not dare to affirm that it could not be them, and therefore they asked, each one, leaving it to Jesus to answer. No one felt capable of reading in his own heart, and he seemed to say: Lord, perhaps I am capable of such, perhaps in the depths of my soul I could betray you. I do not know; you tell me, who knows how to read me—is it I? Only the Lord reads within us; many times, we cannot do so, and if we do, it is only in proportion to the light received from Him and for Him. We

consider ourselves capable of many things when we measure among ourselves; but before Him, the confidence in our strength fails, and many times, before Jesus, we have seen abysses in us that we would never have dreamed to discover.

And still: each felt struck on their own account: "*Is it I?*" No one had in mind, under the immediate unexpected affirmation of the Lord, to say: "*Is it another?*" In the light of Christ, no one dared to doubt the one next to him. "*Is it I?*" Ah, it is always better, oh my Lord, that question: "*is it I?*" rather than "*is it another?*"

And thus I read in Thy Word many things of which the human soul is capable, and I am tempted to say: men would do and do this, and I think of others; but make it so, Lord, that I draw close to Thee, and sit down to dinner with Thee, beginning to scrutinize myself, and then when there is a dark side of the soul to be examined, or I want to measure the abysses of the evil, I will not look too much around me.

Someone has said: "Is there a sin of which I have not at least thought?" I read about men who were ungrateful to Jesus. They crucified Him, they scorned Him. And if I am close to Him and dine with Him, the question falls on me: "Is it I, Lord?" And if He assures me that it is not I, I feel that now it is not I, because He has changed my heart.

If, however, I wish to know the abysses of my soul, I must ask Him for this. Oh Lord, reveal me to myself.

* * *

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

(John 5:39)

Words are used and abused. The Jews thought that because they were investigators of the Scriptures, they possessed eternal life; but they were mistaken, because the aim of the Scriptures is to witness of Jesus. They did not have the word of the Father abiding in them, because they did not believe (and therefore they were not coming) in the One whom He had sent (read verses 38 and 39 of the fifth chapter of St. John).

The present times are full of investigations of the Scriptures, but we become confused if we do not fix our eyes squarely on Jesus; only in His communion will we know the truth, and we shall be free (John 8:36). Jesus is Light; one who follows Him cannot remain in darkness and no one can follow Him if he does not love Him.

We must guard ourselves against destructive writings and discourses that do not edify. The Lord gives a spiritual sense of smell to His own, and lets them sense that which is not from HIM, although having pretensions of Biblical knowledge. We must be witnesses of Jesus Christ, therefore of His death, Resurrection and of the Blessed hope; and we avail ourselves of the Scriptures, and we will be brought to every truth, without being confused by the shouting of many who speak of religious things, and have not consecrated themselves to the Lord and do not honor the Guide that He has left: the Holy Spirit. Another essential point for investigating the Scriptures is to keep in mind that every passage must be considered in its relation to the entire Truth. We remember someone once asked about a controversial

subject, and he wanted the answer with a yes or no. We told him that in order to understand well, it is necessary to take into account all the plan of Redemption and to understand it. Let no one allow themselves to be attracted to isolated verses.

Immortality, Resurrection, second Death, which many discuss, are words full of great meaning. It is necessary to distinguish. There are many who have the name that they are living, and yet they are dead. Thus "death and life" have a different meaning, according to whether one is speaking of standing on one's feet, animal life, or of a superior life.

Resurrection and second death have vast meanings. God is the source of Immortality (the Deity lives in Jesus, fullness of God, Colossians 1:19).

Be careful not to proceed imprudently about the Name of Jesus. He must always be mentioned with reverence; rather, one should not speak unless guided by the Holy Spirit. That which God does is eternal; the life that He gives is eternal; that is, one drinks continually at the fountains of Health.

It is necessary to unite to the reverent examination of the written Word, the live Communion of the Word made flesh. Only in this is there a guarantee.

* * *

FOOD IN ITS TIME

(Psalm 145:15; Prov. 30:8; Matthew 6:11; Luke 12:42; 2nd
Peter 1:12)

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

It has been said that if someone should meditate Jesus on the cross for a few days, if he truly meditates, fixing his eyes on Him in every movement and hearing the words, that he would become another man. We add that if anyone, putting aside every other thought for that time, meditates the “Our Father” point by point, he will become another man, grateful and devoted toward Heaven and merciful and charitable toward all men.

At the head of the second part of the “Our Father” is the request: “Give” us “this day” “our daily bread.” We cannot take it ourselves, but only receive it from the One who has it, and take it “Today.” The Christian has only one day before him and it is “Today.” “Bread” is a food that requires labor and is essential to maintain life. “Our” indicates that is not only mine but shows that the one who is asking is part of a large family. The “our” warns that in order for each one to enjoy the food, he must divide it and ask for it also for others. The individual need is satisfied in the collective need. Each one is as though split into two who become one; he has an individual and a collective relation toward God and toward men. “Bread” is that which is necessary; it is not necessary to give particulars. It refers to the needs of the body and to those of the soul. One does not seek more or less than what is needed. More would be harmful, causing indigestion and the infiltration of poisons caused by indigestion. Long meetings, accumulation of Biblical verses

crammed into the mind without meditating them, or better yet, without receiving them, produce a poisonous weight. If we can elevate ourselves from material things to the spiritual, we will understand how harmful "too much" is. A small amount, taken with pleasure and assimilated, is better than too much that leaves us confused.

The days follow one another, but they are not exactly similar. Like everything else, there are not two days that are perfectly alike; because of this, the Holy Spirit exhorts us that we must pray to "Count our days" one at a time. Because of this the Lord Jesus admonished us not to be anxious for tomorrow, because sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matthew 6:34).

Coming down from the general considerations to the particular, having learned that God has time, number and measure, we must strive to understand how to become administrators of His goods to one another, for as much and how He wants. Before proceeding, it would be well to read again Proverbs 30:8. I have never heard such a request: that one should not be given riches or poverty, and yet it is a vital request. The rich one becomes proud; the poor one despairs. There are spiritual "rich ones" (permit us the language): those who are "too righteous; the too saintly."

There is too much in many lines. They, oh they pray, and have calluses on their knees, and they make it known. They read and read; sing and sing; and so on and so on! And, alas, here is the reason why precisely in the shadow of Christian temples there are so many unbelievers, and among them, precisely the children of the servants of Christ! Wearied from a young age with many sermons at home and outside, they have ended by hating the Church and the Bible. Oh the ruin of too much! This is because one has not has not paid

attention that the servant of Christ must give "food in its time."

For when and how much and how, the guidance of Heaven is needed. There are ills that are cured by fasting or semi-fasting, or with a measured diet, until the body recovers strength. It is the same in the spiritual field; that is why the Heavenly doctor often draws us into the desert where everything is scarce, and he often separates us from usual places and groups in order to renew the desire for communion and food in us.

St. Peter speaks of the "present truth," wanting to say not only of Him and that which is of Him, eternal Truth, but of some particular line to which, in special times, special emphasis must be placed. We find the words of Jesus in Luke 12:42, 43: "*Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom the lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*"

That steward was a dispenser loyal to the mission entrusted to him, and was wise in how to fulfill it. Such a one knows the food and those who must receive it. Blessed is he, if the Lord finds him administering as He wants; that is, to those entrusted to each one, whether they be few or many, and in the method and measure, not as the recipients think, or others suggest, but only as the Lord wants. This is imperative. The Lord who commands will give us Grace, if we depend on Him, and are also fed ourselves, day by day.

* * *

THE SOUL THAT EXALTS

THE SPIRIT THAT REJOICES

(Luke 1:46)

The Lord brings us to the condition that, even though listening to everyone, we meditate and compare that which we hear, whereby we come to be taught definitively by Him alone.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of the most beautiful figures of the church and must be understood, because holy examples, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, contribute, when we desire to imitate them, to make us grow in the Lord.

The first act in which she is presented is when, with dignified simplicity, she answered the Angel and when she had the explanation of the salutation, she showed herself ready for the will of God.

The second example is the silence she kept with Joseph about the mystery of the incarnation. It is impossible to explain to man the things above human experience. The third example is in the Song as it is written in Luke 1:40-50.

There is more; but we will stop at the first words of the song. In response to the feast made to her, and to the praise addressed to her by Elizabeth, she said: "*My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior*" (NASB).

As for the praise, she answered indirectly by saying: "*For He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden,*" meaning to say: Do not praise me, nor marvel that He has selected precisely me. Wanting to demonstrate Power and Mercy, he has, by reason of contrast, served Himself of a

low means. Looking for an extreme of lowliness in the face of the Infinite, He has selected me. Let us return to the first verse of the song.

The soul—The Spirit. After centuries, these words have not yet been evaluated in their great significance; that is, the harmony, equilibrium and peace between the soul and the spirit.

In some school, from some Teacher, Mary had learned to distinguish between "Soul and spirit," and had arrived at Unity in herself, and inner peace, harmonizing the two faculties: the one that communicates with that which is under the sun, and the other that goes beyond the stars. In the quiet, modest atmosphere of Nazareth, by staying humbly before the Lord, meditating, among other things, the Song of Hannah (1st Samuel 2), she had intuited and learned that which some of us, only after many years, begin to understand; that is, there is soul distinct from the spirit, from the human spirit, and it is the will of God that the two become One; that is, they enter into a perfect harmony. In Mary there can be seen the soul subjected to the spirit, because the spirit was subjected to the Omnipotent. He is the Perfect Savior, if we truly submit to Him, not only for the beyond, but also for this earth, because He creates in us an inner peace. The two become "One." The Lord has come to bring Peace, and to make of the two One, not only outwardly between two peoples, but also in the conflicts of duality in us.

When the soul commands and the spirit is almost set aside or silent, man is "Animal." When the spirit is inundated, rather invaded, filled with the Holy Spirit, man is spiritual. The battle between the soul that tends toward and is attracted by that which is under the sun, and the spirit that tends toward that which is Above is a long and painful battle. But the day

must come that the soul surrenders and is submitted to the spirit.

The soul of Mary was not puffed up with vanity and did not become confused by the praises of Elizabeth. She said that her soul honored, exalted and uplifted only He who is truly worthy of praise and honor, the absolute Owner, of whom she was only a servant, and also of low estate. She said as much because her spirit was rejoicing only in the One who is from Above, rather in One alone, in God, Perfect Savior, who saves even from the attractions that the soul, left to itself, has toward earthly things.

Egoism and all that which is iniquity is as much subjugated, as much as the inner life, irradiated by the light of Heaven, by constant discipline, tends only to that which is from Above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. Amen.

* * *

NOT UNTO US... THE EARTH, THE HEAVEN

(Psalm 115)

There are those who stumble at the Word of God. There is a secret way that we do not know. The Lord knows by what ways He has led some to believe, and why others, hardening themselves, find excuses to stumble and to announce scandals.

We invite you to consider that Lydia, a seller of purple, disposed herself to listen, and therefore the Lord opened her

heart to believe. Many stumble and boast that they find in the Scripture itself arguments for their stumbling. There are those who repeat: "*the blood is the soul,*" and therefore, when one dies, the soul goes underground, and then God will recreate again. We answer: the blood is the soul of the flesh; that is, of the visible, **BUT IT IS NOT THE PERSON.** Jesus said that we should not fear one that kills the body, but cannot kill the soul. The soul, in this sense, is not the blood, but something quite different, because at death, if the blood has not been shed, it freezes in the body.

There is another impediment. We are told that we will not go to Heaven because the Lord said in Psalm 115:16: "*The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath He given to the children of men.*" It is true that He said this, but precisely this tells me, and you, reader: If you and I have accepted Jesus, you and I will go to Heaven. I do not define what Heaven may be; I note only the contrast to the "earth" of which we read in the cited Psalm 115:16. If we accept Jesus, by Him we are made children of God. God is Father, and in His house there are many rooms (John 14:2). The Psalmist knows the vain shouting of men and how they teach shadows. We must be careful not to limit idols only to statues, which may or may not be qualified as idols according to the use that is made of them. But there are idols of the heart, there are phantasms of the mind that deceive and have no reality. The Psalmist raises the prayer: "*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake*" (Psalm 115:1). Let us read it with attention. It's like saying: We know, Lord, that we do not merit anything, but Thou, in helping us, give glory to Thy Name; to Thy Name in us, because we consign ourselves to Him. Help us. "*Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?*" (Psalm 115:2). We call upon the NAME: JESUS CHRIST.

VANITY

(Psalm 62:9, 10; Romans 8:20, 21; 1st Cor. 1:12)

Someone said that vanity is a lens that magnifies even the smallest objects. Of all the passions and weaknesses, vanity is the one that remains until the end. Only a constant vigilance, if we remain in the Grace of God, can make us discover it in ourselves and overcome it. The Psalmist exclaims: *“Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.”* Vulgar man tries to make himself great by means of vanity; true nobility does not exist, because we are, in ourselves, all poor sinners, and of earth. Only One is noble, the Man Jesus, who came from Heaven, the Gentleman of the parable who came to take the Kingdom. If nobles and vulgar people were to be weighed, they would be found to be lighter than vanity itself. The Psalmist adds: *“Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.”*

From whence is this vanity and what will be its end? Let us read in Romans 8:20, 21: *“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”*

When man sinned, he fell under vanity, which is nothing but the counterfeit of reality. The more man is immersed in evil, the more he is puffed up, wrapping himself in vain thoughts. With the pardon, he begins to enter into the true knowledge of himself; that is, he is vanity and he desires more and more that which alone is reality; that is, God. In the measure that

the Holy Spirit controls us, we discover the vanity, and we are delivered from it.

There is also vanity in the religious camp, and how much: appearing holy and wanting to almost beautify the cross of Christ. St. Paul purposed to announce Jesus Christ in a powerful way, that is, by the Holy Spirit, but likewise, as the Holy Spirit knows how to do, in a simple way, in order that the cross of Christ would not be rendered vain and of no effect. The flowers and tricky arguments would have caused them to lose sight of the Savior.

Oh, so many vain announcers of Christ get out of here, because men want to see Jesus! And so that we do not attract attention to ourselves, the Apostle reminds us that our life is—and must remain—hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3).

Love to be hidden! So that the blessings received do not puff us up, we must keep present the warning of Jesus to the disciples: They had to rejoice, not because the demons were subject to them, but because they had received the Grace of God.

* * *

If the Holy Spirit opens your mouth and what you say is from Him, if you see that the one to whom you speak is distracted, yawns, and sooner than listening, tries to interrupt or contradict you, man of God, know that he is not of God. Only one who is disposed to listen is from God (1st John 4:6).

* * *

YOUR OWN AND ANOTHER'S
TRUE RICHES AND ILLUSORY RICHES

(Luke 16:10-12)

The parable in Luke 16:1-12 is, in the opinion of many, one of the most difficult, and yet the meaning is clear, if we consider the aim of it; that is, don't be avaricious and make good use of this earthly life because all will be lost except that which shall be done and given in the Name of the Lord.

It is difficult, and at times painful, to lift oneself above material things. If our senses are not exercised to the Eternal Reality, we see these as uncertain and vaporous, and what we see and touch with the bodily senses seem to be solid and to have value. But it is the opposite. The Lord qualifies earthly riches as unjust, because the social economic system is based on egoism. He calls them small or insignificant, and says that however we have obtained them, they belong to others; in exchange, true riches are offered to the true disciple as a gift from Heaven; legitimate and precisely of the one to whom they are given.

The comparison seems to be, but is not bold, if we consider that empires and great buildings have perished, seas by shipwreck and other occurrences have swallowed enormous riches, and, above all, if we remember that we all must die, and that we do not bring anything with us from this earth, except that which we have given in the Name of CHRIST.

Earthly riches are ephemeral, insignificant, and they are not true (lasting) and not even ours; of whom, therefore?

Although not sinful in themselves, we must say that earthly riches are, except if administered for Heaven, under the command of Mammon, Prince of this world. Jesus has said in an incisive way that we cannot serve two masters; that is, God and Mammon. But only what He has for us are truly riches “Imperishable [unchangeable]—undefiled” [that is, acquired truly honestly, with the price of blood]. And “reserved in heaven for you” (NASB 1st Peter 1:4).

There are those who lose their head in that which belongs to others and is insignificant. By running after that which is false, they will never receive that which is true.

To Heaven, therefore, oh my soul, turn your desires to Heaven, and send as much as you can up there. Amen.

* * *

SPEAK

(Acts 9:27; 11:25)

“But Barnabas!” Thank God for Barnabas, otherwise even St. Paul would have been neglected, or who knows how discouraged he may have become. We affirm that a time of calm meditation was necessary for Saul in order to be truly prepared for the great apostleship, but likewise we note that the reception that he had in Jerusalem was not encouraging; quite the contrary. Let us read:

“When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple...” The language of the

Scripture is brief, but the Holy Spirit makes us read according to the needs. They could not believe that Saul was a disciple. But there was one who believed: Barnabas, the son of consolation, the man of good works.

To the credit of this saint, if there were nothing else (but there is more), there would be, and it is not little, having taken (Taken! What a word!) Saul, and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the Name of the Jesus.

Had Barnabas been in Damascus precisely at that time? It is not written, and I prefer to say that he had not been there. But it is easy to suppose that the man of good works fixed a searching and benevolent eye on the newcomer, so as not to be carried away by the impressions and opinions of others. What we are saying also is not written, but it is reasonable. The son of consolation arranged a face to face encounter with Saul, who, of course, had to be travailed; he put himself near him, and with an encouraging smile, wanted to hear from him. The man of good works believed the sincerity of Saul's testimony. Then he "took hold" of him (just as if he had brought him. Oh tenderness! Oh love!). He "took hold" of him as by the hand, declared himself responsible, and stood up for him, saying: "*this man has said the truth.*"

After a few years in Antioch, the man of good works saw the great work and felt that Saul was needed. He started out and went to seek for him! How much history is not written! Speak!

SILENCE

KEEP SILENT, JOB (Job 33:31)

The command is to a saint, not to a wicked person—to one of the best persons that we read about in the Ancient Book. Four individuals had spoken; Job, by himself, more than the three friends united together. At the end, the messenger of Heaven comes forward: Elihu.

But for Job, who was sure of himself and his own righteousness, it was hard to keep silence. Although Job may not have opened his mouth, Elihu read his anxiety, his inner reasoning and stopped him, proposing a dilemma to him: "Two of us cannot speak. If you speak, I will be silent." He encouraged him to trust, telling him that he was his friend and wanted to justify him, leaving him in a good condition and not oppressed.

But Elihu insisted: KEEP SILENT—and I will speak. (Be silent in your mouth and in your heart. Empty yourself of yourself and listen, and I will teach you that which you have only begun to know.

I will teach you wisdom).

* * *

LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED

(John 14:1)

These first words of chapter 14 of St. John are familiar, but many times the familiarity causes the essence of some expressions to escape.

We wish to emphasize the word "YOUR." Jesus was speaking to the disciples after Judas Iscariot had left their company, and therefore, to a group of persons who were all affectionate. They were imperfect men who would still have moments of weakness, but they were always more affectionate and devout. To such He was speaking, and to such He speaks, always saying: "*Let not your heart be troubled.*"

In addition, it is opportune to note the moment in which these words, the beginning of a great discourse, were pronounced; that is, after that which was said and done and is recorded in chapter 13 of the same Gospel. The disciples dined together with Him and had their feet washed by Him, a symbol of the daily sanctification in Christ and had partaken of the institution of the Communion, and heard the command: "*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*" Communion with the Lord, in His death, in the hope of His return; lessons of daily sanctification and of humility had preceded; therefore, those words: "*Let not your heart be troubled.*"

The assurance is not for everyone, but for the intimate disciples of the Lord. And, still, those men had to have trust

in Jesus; there is in the words that follow, a tender alternating of: "voi, vi" ("you" referring to the disciples, and "for you," what the Lord would do for them).

Repeating these words to everyone: "*Let not your heart be troubled*" is at the least thoughtlessness; because if a soul does not trust in Jesus and does not have communion with Him, that soul has a certain reason to be troubled. Someone observed that the state of man in this world is similar to that of the islands of the Eastern seas that have a rich vegetation, but are continually flagellated by hurricanes and turned upside down by earthquakes. Hurricanes on the outside and earthquakes on the inside are the image of the human life. And in order not to be troubled, it is necessary to be in the place where the words of the text want us to be.

"*Let not your heart be troubled.*" These words are for you, reader: but study them in connection with the rest of the Word of God. The promise is yours, on condition! In repeating these words to others, explain to them that they too, in order to avail themselves of them, must be of Christ, and live for Him.

* * *

LIGHT AND SONG IN THE NIGHT

(Proverbs 31:18; Job 35:10; Zechariah 14:6, 7)

The poet of Israel wrote: "*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor*

night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."

We repeat: "At evening time it shall be light;" this is because when I, man, am trapped in a thick obscurity, then I long for the light of Heaven—before, I paid attention to my insignificant candle, which did not allow me to appreciate the sun.

In chapter 31 of Proverbs there is one of the most symmetrical pictures of the Church in the figure of a virtuous woman, rather, of the virtuous woman. Of her, among many other things, it is written that "her lamp does not go out at night" (NASB). This is a strange language if it is understood literally, because the lamp is not to be used except at night. Other passages of the Scripture will help us to understand. In Solomon's Song, chapter 4:6 it is written: "*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.*" Therefore, one is in the night.

In Romans 13:12: "*The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.*" Again, one is in the night.

In Job 35:10 we read: "*But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night.*" Again, there is the night. There is no light here, but there are songs. And in Acts 16:25 we read: "*And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them.*" Again one is in the night, rather, in the darkest and coldest hour. Light and songs in the night are the privilege of the souls of Heaven.

Precisely in the most tragic hours, like Job on the dunghill and like Paul and his companion with their feet in the stocks,

in a fetid subterranean prison where they had been thrown, hungry and wounded, precisely in those conditions there were "Songs in the night." The heavenly messenger, Elihu, as we have mentioned above, reprimanded Job, who instead of contending, should have turned to the One who can, and only He can, and He also wants it, give songs in the night.

He gives light and song, when, according to the earth, we should be immersed in obscurity and desperation. Rather, God waits precisely for those conditions in order to illumine us in the soul and to fill us with joy. They are the mysterious ways of the One who guides the blind (His blind ones) (John 9:39) by ways that they do not know (Isaiah 42:16), that from the grinding of the sorrow He makes the oil of joy come out (Isaiah 61:3).

The thoughtless and scornful song, the pretended lights of human ability dissipate, and Heaven makes its way in us. From the third person we pass on to say Thou, when, as it is written in Psalm 23:4, we go through the valley of the shadow of death. Rather, it is precisely then that we enter into the Kingdom of Light and the song of Eternal Love. Amen.

* * *

THE LAST—THE FIRST

In the epistles of St. Paul there are fleeting flashes of light, autobiographical notes and expressions that reveal the result of great conflicts. They are equivalent to confessions. The words in the heading of the present meditation are his, not

ours; his, in the sense that they describe the concept that this Saint had of himself, comparing himself to the elect and to the sinners. He says that he is not worthy even to be called an apostle. The memory of the blood of many Christians, and above all, the martyrdom of Stephen, never left him, although he also said that he had acted in ignorance.

He never doubted his calling to the ministry and that Jesus had loved and still loved him. He knew that he was elect and holy, however in such classes Paul qualified himself as the LAST; not as having arrived late, or as being at the end of a long list, but last in the sense that he felt himself to be the least suited to be qualified a saint and apostle, although he was one and the other.

But in another area he affirmed that he was at the head of the list! The last of the saints, seeing them all better than himself, he considered himself the first of the sinners. "*Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*" (1st Timothy 1:15).

We seem to see him, this man of ardent Faith, persevering in obedience to the heavenly vision; he, whose countenance was wrinkled by tears and suffering, firm between two masses of people, or to say it better, who had put himself at the tail of one of the multitudes, that is in last place among the elect. I am the last among you, he says to the elect. Turning himself then to the mass of unhappy people, to the sinners, preaching Grace, he gives them a word of encouragement: Come forward, come to Jesus. He has saved me, precisely me, the first of the sinners.

THE END

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