

GREATER PERFECTION
Conferences

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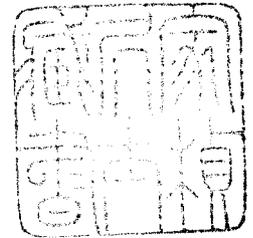


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I. RELIGIOUS HUMILITY

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways" (Prov. viii, 22)

ONE of the important feasts of the Church is that of "the Nativity of the holy Virgin Mary, whose glorious life is the ornament of all the churches. Sprung from a royal race, sprung from the seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Juda, and from the noble lineage of David, Mary shines forth to the world" (Antiphon 1 Vesp. of Feast of Nativity of B.V.M.). This is she of whom Solomon in prophetic vision sang: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?" (Cant. of Cant. vi, 9). This is she, the peerless one, the powerful one, the mighty woman God had in mind when denouncing the serpent in the garden of Eden: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel" (Gen. iii, 15).

No wonder the Church rejoices with boundless joy in this happy festival which is in truth the beginning of our salvation. No wonder the Church shouts with exul-

tation in the Introit of the Mass of the Nativity of Our Lady: "Hail, holy Mother! giving birth to thy Child, thou didst bring forth the King, who ruleth the heavens and the earth forever and ever." Truly St. Anne in bringing forth the Morning Star brought forth through her the Sun of Justice, Christ, Who is our God. **And if our joy be not so great as that of the Church, it is only because we do not understand the greatness of the mystery that has come to pass.**

Because of the Word, Him "Whom the whole world availeth not to contain" (Gradual — Mass of Nativity of B.V.M.), Mary figured in the plan of creation from all eternity. She was to bear the Creator of all things; she was to bring forth Him Who made her, Who "being made man shut up Himself within her womb" (Gradual — id.). For this reason it is said of her: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old, before the earth was made. The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived" (Prov. viii, 22-24). Ah, yes, Mary owes all her glory, all her marvelous privileges to her Divine Son, her Saviour and Redeemer and ours. From all eternity she alone, because of the dignity to which God was to raise her, was exempt from the curse of Adam by virtue of the anticipated merits of the Word. Her Immaculate Conception accounts for all her graces and dignities, her joys and sorrows. In itself it contains all her feasts, because the Lord possessed her from the beginning. Her nativity is so glorious only because of the splendor of her conception.

Some of us are too apt, however, in venerating the Blessed Virgin — and who among the creatures of God is deserving of higher honor? — to overlook one thing, very important, and recognized most clearly by Mary herself. She gave expression to this thought in her sublime hymn of praise and thanksgiving when she said: "He that is mighty hath done great things to me" (Luke i, 49). Why, we may ask? The answer comes back: "Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid" (Luke i, 48). Unlike Mary, we are too prone, in our admiration of the gifts, even the gifts we perceive in her, to forget the Giver, the bountiful Father of all. Mary never forgot. Mary never forgot because she was humble. It was this very humility that drew forth the Eternal Word from the bosom of the Father to repose Incarnate in the bosom of Mary. What an ineffable reward for profoundest humility! And now His delight is to be with the children of men, with us, for whom He is our sole hope of happiness and peace.

For us who are religious, who have left all things in the sole aim of seeking and finding in Him our fill of happiness and peace, must also be realized the truth of these words: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways" (Prov. viii, 22). They shall, if like Mary, we clearly understand and sincerely acknowledge that "He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His name" (Luke i, 49). Arriving at this truth, we shall have begun to quench our spiritual thirst in the bottomless well of humility, from which thereafter we can quaff deep, refreshing draughts, for "he that shall

drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst forever" (John iv, 13).

Let us consider these great things. God created us. But for His loving thought of us, we should never have been. Do we appreciate the wonderful gift of life? God did more. He called us from earliest infancy to become His children by the grace of adoption. We were baptized, and received the gift of faith. We could just as easily have been born of semi-barbarous parents in the wilds of Africa, or of these super-civilized modern pagans. But God in His preventing mercy gave us the Church for our Mother. Have we ever thanked Him for this stupendous gift, lavishly bestowed? God did still more. He provided for us by means of a truly Christian and Catholic education that the virtues instilled into us at baptism might thrive and bring forth fruit. But for God's love, all this might just as readily never have happened. Even then God was not satisfied. God did yet more. He whispered to us "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, follow me" (Matt. xix, 21). This, too, was not enough. We heard the call. We could have stopped our ears, and like the Jews of old, complained: "This saying is hard, and who can hear it?" (John vi, 61). In our blindness and pride we might have turned aside. Ah, but God's love for us knows no bounds. So He gave us the courage to leave all, father and mother and brethren, for His sake. What an excess of love! Surely "the Lord hath possessed me in the beginning of His ways" (Prov. viii, 22), for He had me in view from all eternity and counted out with gen-

erous hand the numberless benefits He was to pour out on me, a beggar.

In another sense, the novitiate is for you "the beginning of His ways" (Prov. viii, 22). He does not leave you in doubt as to what they are. He called you from the world that you might give yourselves wholly, unreservedly to His love and service. He called you to live the Christian life perfectly. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke ix, 23). And He adds: "Now, therefore, ye children, hear me: blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. . . . He that shall find me, shall find life" (Prov. viii, 32, 33, 35).

You came to religion to seek and to find — to seek life in its fullest perfection, and to find it in the one Being in Whom it exists perfectly, Christ Jesus, your Master and Model. To find this perfect life, you have only to keep the ways of the Lord. His way is the way of the cross which you must shoulder daily, cheerfully and courageously, if you wish to have realized in you the name of disciples. The way of the cross is the path of sacrifice and self-denial. Only a humble soul can walk this path securely. If you wish to understand something of Mary's humility, think of the sufferings she was called upon to endure — Joseph's doubts, the thirty-three years of anticipated agony with the shame of Calvary always before her, Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the pain of exile, the return, the loss of the divine Child, the sorrow of separation at the beginning of His public life, the

passion, and the foot of the cross. She drank the chalice to the dregs with the ignominious death of her All, but it was humility that made it possible.

You must learn of Mary. At the start of your religious life, ponder over and assimilate these thoughts. Realize that everything you have you owe to God — life, faith, health, talents, virtue, vocation. Tell Him you know you are nothing. If nothingness has favors showered upon it, nothingness can, at least, and must, be grateful. But how can you manifest this gratitude? By carrying the cross willingly. For you the cross is the rule. Only a humble soul can shoulder this cross. The proud man will rebel. But remember, it is the keeping of the rule, not the donning of a distinctive habit, that makes you a religious. You came to religion to keep the ways of the Lord — to become perfect. Keep the rule perfectly and that is all you need do. This applies to every detail of the rule, not only to such as appeal naturally. Every detail of the rule is the will of God: you honor Him as much in keeping one as in keeping the other; you dishonor and offend Him in breaking one as in breaking another.

It may be to your liking to spend the prescribed time of prayer in chapel. You would not for a minute think of omitting it or shortening it. But with regard to — let us say — silence, your sense of obligation is not nearly so keen. You talk when you please and as long as you please. Now bear this in mind: the violation of that silence, that is by breaking it altogether, habitually, or by shortening the period of silence, that is, speaking without absolute necessity even one minute or one sec-

ond before the time enjoined by rule, is just as serious in God's sight as omitting or shortening your prayers of adoration. The same thing holds true with regard to duties — recreating, retiring, eating, rising, meditating. You give God just as much glory in eating, or recreating, or going to bed according to the rule, as you do in meditating, in praying, in adoring before the tabernacle. Why? Because the rule in every detail is God's will. You cannot say you are doing God's will and pleasing Him when you choose what you like and do it, and at the same time omit what you dislike. If you wish to say in all sincerity, and you must if you are to fulfil the end of your vocation, "the Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways," you must above everything else, and always, keep the rule, and keep it perfectly. Otherwise you are not a religious but a sham and a hypocrite in the sight of Almighty God.

Why does the Church sing of Mary that her glorious life is the ornament of all the churches? Because she obeyed the will of God in all things perfectly; she kept the rule as it was laid down for her in the decrees of Divine Providence. And she was able to do this because she was humble. If you, too, are to become the ornament of the churches, and you must since you aspire to be the spouses of Christ, learn humility of Him Who was meek and humble of heart, and of her who conceived her Creator, by humility calling down upon herself the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. You who aspire to be the spouses of Christ, the spouses, remember, of a crucified Christ, are also called by humility to draw forth the

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Word from the bosom of the Eternal Father to repose in the secret tabernacle of your hearts. To accomplish this end, the desire of Him whose delight is to be with the children of men, subordinate your will to His in all things, in the perfect keeping of the rule and the commands of superiors. So imitate her, "the Virgin Mother of God, whose nativity was the herald of joy to the whole world; since from thee arose the Sun of Justice, Christ our God, Who, destroying the curse, bestowed the blessing, and, confounding death, gifted us with life everlasting" (Antiphon at Magnificat 2 Vesp. Nativity of B.V.M.).

2. RELIGIOUS CHARITY

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind—and—and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"

(MATT. xxii, 37, 39)

IN OUR first conference we saw that the foundation upon which our religious life is to be built is humility, which for us means in particular the cheerful and ready acceptance of the self-denial and mortification imposed by rule. It is the faithful observance of rule that makes us religious. Let us never forget this important truth if we wish to be religious after Christ's own Heart. But surely we had no other motive in view when entering religion than to fulfil, as perfectly as we could, the counsel of our Saviour: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke ix, 23). And by accepting generously from the very first this yoke, which by His grace, is sweet, and this burden, which by His love, is light, we disposed ourselves in all sincerity to repeat what the Church places on the lips of Our Blessed Mother: "the Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways" (Prov. viii, 22).

But the true life of a religious does not consist in mere external conformity to rule. No. To act thus would be to place ourselves in the same class with the Pharisees, of

whom Our Blessed Lord said: "This people honoureth me with their lips but their heart is far from me" (Mark vii, 6). We have a very striking instance of their conduct in this matter as narrated in the Gospel. We read that one of the Pharisees came to Jesus, tempting Him, saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matt. xxii, 36). He asked this question, wishing to ensnare Jesus into a statement that would get Him into serious difficulty with one or the other of the numerous pharisaical sects. To the law which Moses had received from God, these men had added successively so many minor and minute details relative to its observance, that the original principles had long since been lost sight of, and they individually prided themselves on the scrupulous exactitude with which they conformed to the *letter* of these individual laws, even to the last comma. This was their religion. For the spirit of the law they had no regard. As long as they appeared holy and edifying in the sight of men, nothing else mattered. Indeed, they performed all their so-called good actions only to be seen by men. It was this hypocrisy that merited for them the scathing rebuke from the lips of the gentle Redeemer, when He called them "whited sepulchres, — full of dead men's bones" (Matt. xxiii, 27).

Our Lord knew their hearts, and the purpose of the question. By His answer He swept aside all their carefully planned human legislations, and restored and perfected the spirit of the Old Testament. "Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole

mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets" (Matt. xii, 37-40).

By these words Christ clearly laid down the law of charity, of love, manifested in His own life from the moment of His conception. This principle of charity is the supreme law and quickening spirit of the New Covenant, taking precedence and holding absolute sway over the law of fear of the Old Dispensation. It is the heart, then, the intention, the will, that gives life to our works — not the exterior conformity to established custom, or the mere outward performance of matters of obligation. Or, as Christ said on another occasion, "It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing" (John vi, 64).

Hence it is not sufficient for us to adhere solely and strictly to the letter of the rule. We must acquire its spirit, if we wish to be religious deserving of the name. And what is this spirit? It is the spirit of charity, of mutual love, — the vivifying spirit of every religious rule.

St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians stresses this thought most emphatically: "I . . . beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called. With all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity, careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One body and one Spirit; as you are called in one hope of your calling" (Ephesians iv, 1-5).

As you well know, all the faithful form one body with Christ the head. And this Supreme Lawgiver Himself pointed out in very definite terms the mark by which the body of His faithful would be known. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples: if you have love one for another" (John xiii, 35). "Mutual love," says Abbot Marmion, "is the distinctive sign whereby the members of the Christian family are infallibly recognized, the sign given by Christ Himself. It is the same for the monastic family, and the true mark of the protection of Christ Jesus over a religious community is the charity that reigns between its members." "Charity," he continues, "is the cement that joins together its different members" (Christ, the Ideal of the Monk, Chapter iv, No. 5).

Charity is humility in blossom. It is more. It is the fruit of humility. Without humility there can be no charity. This is self-evident. The proud man loves neither God nor his neighbor; he loves only himself. All his actions, even his seemingly good ones, begin, develop, and end in himself. And self-love is neither love nor a virtue: it is superlative selfishness. Only the humble man is capable of real love that is not sentiment, but the strong, faithful, devoted love, supernatural love, the love Christ teaches in His gospel and above all in His life. And it is this life, this love, the essence of this life, that we try to perfect in ourselves by living the common family life of the community under a common rule, the expressed will of God.

Note that I have said "a common rule." The rule

was intended to be, and should be, common to all. But what happens only too often? Individual members, like the Pharisees in the Gospel previously quoted, set up individual rules for themselves. As was mentioned before, certain religious may choose for themselves certain points of rule to which they adhere because they feel so disposed; for example, the prayers of rule, or the appointed time before the tabernacle; and ignore other points, as silence or community recreation, because these do not coincide with their natural inclinations. What are they really doing? Like the Pharisees, they are setting up for themselves a code differing from the prescribed law, and if they persist in following out their own tastes they will eventually think it better to spend an hour in chapel than at recreation; to recreate during the time set aside for recollection; or to shorten the duties of obedience to follow out the fancies of their own imagination. And so, because they have set up their will for the will of God, and perverted His law, God will, little by little, allow them to fall. And all because of their pride. If pride, then self-love, and lack of charity.

Please remember that you came to religion not to develop individualism, but to lose it. In accepting a garb common to all the members of your community, you thereby renounced your rights to individualism, and gladly professed to follow the common life, to eat the common food, to do the common work, to sacrifice your interests for the common interests, to sacrifice your will to the common will, the will of God made known to you in the rule and the commands of superiors. The person

who fails to live the common life, the family life, the community life with the community as prescribed by the rule in the spirit of the rule, "the cementing bond of charity," is a failure in religion, and does not possess the first idea of how to achieve the end supposedly had in mind when entering religion.

This divine charity which is not only of counsel but of commandment is one in its essence, yet twofold in its aim. It is a supernatural love directed toward God and through God to our neighbor. It is a supernatural love arising in God, born of "One God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in us all" (Eph. iv, 6). It is that "unity of Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. iv, 3), for which Christ in His sublime prayer to His Father on the eve of His passion prayed: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us" (John xvii, 21). For love is born of God and resteth not but in God. For love is God. And God is Life. And Life is Love.

This supernatural love, this life born of God, is the soul of the religious body, the community. Without it the body is only a corpse. How does this love, this "unity of the Spirit," this oneness of intention or will manifest itself? First, it is directed toward God in keeping the rule, which is the manifestation of His will, perfectly; not to be seen by men and esteemed thereby, but because His will is the Only Good toward which we should reach out, the accomplishment of which is the sole reason of our existence. A religious at the very beginning of his

following of Christ, the Beloved of his soul, should in truth be able to apply to himself the words of his Spouse at His entrance into the world: "Behold I come . . . that I should do Thy Will, O my God . . . Thy law in the midst of my heart" (Ps. 39, 8-9).

Possessing this divine love in his heart, the religious must necessarily show great love for his brethren, and prove this love by the works of charity he performs for them. St. John says that the man who claims he loves God, yet hates his neighbor is a liar. Love is life. And life is activity. So love, if it be genuine, ever seeks new ways of reproducing itself. Remember, too, that the charity Christ wishes us to practise, especially in community life, is not only negative charity — that is to refrain from uncharitable thoughts, words, and acts — but above all positive charity — the doing of kindnesses toward our neighbor because in him we see the image of Christ, and what is more important, putting ourselves out in the doing.

If we really desire to know the measure of our love for God, we can easily determine its intensity and quantity by asking ourselves just how much we actually do by way of charity toward our neighbor. That does not mean the person toward whom you may naturally feel an attraction; one easily and cheerfully performs acts of natural virtue in an instance such as this. But we are speaking not of natural, but of supernatural virtue. What was it that Our Lord said? "If you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? But I say to you, love your enemies,

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do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad" (Matt. v, 46, 44, 45). According, then, to Our Lord's own words, you are the children of your heavenly Father inasmuch as you do your good works in the spirit of that same Father, "who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad." Does the sun of your charity diffuse its beams in equal intensity of heat and light upon both the good, those who are agreeable and striving to become perfect, and upon the bad, those who are disagreeable and indifferent? You love God exactly as much as you love this latter class. Remember love proves itself in deeds; otherwise it is not love that springs from the heart, but love that springs from the lips. Love such as this is not love but a delusive echo protesting its fidelity in honeyed phrases that are as "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal" (I Cor. xiii, 1).

If, as St. Paul entreats, you are to "walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called" (Eph. iv, 1), you must support one another in charity in the spirit of your rule. As exteriorly you form one body in the organization of your religious community, so interiorly you must be "one spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. iv, 4). If it is the soul that gives life to the body, then it is only the cement of love, supernatural love, that will preserve in your community "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. iv, 3). Walking thus through life in the perfect love of God

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and your neighbor, you will be that blessed "nation whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 32, 12); Who will pour on you in abundance the blessings of "the undefiled in the way: who walk in the law of the Lord" (Ps. 118, 1).

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"I give thanks to my God always for you, for the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus" (I COR. i, 4)

OUR first conference was concerned with the necessity of living from the very start of our entrance into religion in a manner conformable to these words from the book of Proverbs: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways" (Prov. viii, 22). We saw then that if this truth were to be accomplished in us, we would have to submit cheerfully to the way of the Lord marked out for us — our rule. In our second conference we learned that it is not sufficient to live up to the letter of the rule. The Pharisees did that with regard to the law of God, and they were far from being found acceptable in His sight. We must strive to acquire what the Pharisees lacked, and for the lack of which they were so severely condemned by Our Lord: the *spirit* of our rule, the cementing spirit of charity. This fundamental law of love was expressed by Incarnate Love Himself: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength; — and — thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. xxii, 37-39).

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You entered religion responsive to the invitation of the Son of Man: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke ix, 23). Your presence here proves your generosity in heeding the call to perfection, for that is the meaning contained in these words of Our Lord. To become perfect, you must keep the rule perfectly; that is, strive to develop in your lives, with the help of God, the spirit of your rule, the bond of love in all its perfection. In other words, to keep your rule perfectly, you must keep the one commandment perfectly. "If any one love me," says Jesus Christ, "He will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him" (John xiv, 23). The word to be kept is the one commandment on which "dependeth the whole law and the prophets" (Matt. xxii, 40). The sole condition and reason for its observance is — "if any one love me." And who is more worthy of love than God, Infinite Love? The reward — beyond the understanding and power of man to conceive — is union with God. "My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him." There is no possible doubt as to Our Lord's meaning here. "We will make our abode with him," that is, dwell with him continually, unite ourselves in the fulness of the Godhead to his soul, made to our own image and likeness, so that we two shall become one spirit. **Do you begin to understand the sublime end of your vocation, an end not impossible of achievement, but desired with desire by your Divine Spouse Who has called you from the world for**

this one, only purpose? His promise of the reward, union with Himself, is infallible; but it depends on your keeping His word *perfectly*.

How are you to acquire this spirit of divine charity in the plenitude of perfection? Of ourselves we can do nothing, for we are unprofitable servants. Saint Paul, however, answers this question in his epistle to the Corinthians: "I give thanks to my God always for you, for the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus" (I Cor. i, 4). All grace, then, that is given us, all the graces we need for the fullest development of the life of the soul, are found in Christ Jesus, the fountain of grace, and flow into our souls through Him by the directing hand of the Father. Christ came on earth to lead men to the Father: "That all may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee: that they also may be one in us" (John xvii, 21). You will attain to the Father, arrive at the union of love, only through Christ, Who is for you "the way and the truth and the life" (John xiv, 6). He is the Way that you must follow; the Truth that you must believe; the Life that you must possess.

What does this mean? It means that if you aspire to keep the *one* commandment perfectly, and this Christ expects you to do, you must put "on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xiii, 14) as the apostle tells us. How then are you to go about clothing yourselves with Christ? "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Matt. vii, 7). Ask. For what shall you ask? For one thing only, that for which Our Lord taught us to pray, "Thy will

be done" (Matt. vi, 10). And what is this Divine Will for you? Again St. Paul has the answer ready. "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (I Thess. iv, 3). Asking for the accomplishment of this adorable Will, you shall certainly receive, "good measure, and pressed down, — and running over" (Luke vi, 38). Seek. Whom shall you seek? God, the First Beginning and the Last End. The beginning and the end of your creation, the cause and triumph of your existence. Whom shall you seek? The Father, by means of the Word Incarnate, Who for this very reason took upon Himself human flesh. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself" (John xii, 32). Seeking God through Christ, you shall certainly find Unity in Trinity. Knock. Where shall you knock? At the door of Christ's Heart, His human Heart. How shall you knock? Gently, lovingly, persistently, by keeping His word. And so knocking, it shall be opened to you, for He tells us "I am — thy reward exceeding great" (Gen. xv, 1.) "My delights were to be with the children of men" (Prov. viii, 31). Truly you have cause to sing aloud with the Psalmist: "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord: seek ye the Lord and be strengthened; seek His face evermore" (Ps. 104, 3-4: Introit, Friday in Ember Week in September). And the echo of this your joy finds renewed expression in the words which the Church uses: "I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 121, 1: Gradual, 18th Sunday after Pentecost).

Where is this house of the Lord which you are to enter

rejoicing? It is within you — it is your soul. “ Know you not,” says St. Paul, “ that you are the temples of God? ” (I Cor. iii, 16). And why do you enter? To find God; for the apostle continues, “ the spirit of God dwelleth in you ” (I Cor. iii, 16). To do God’s will, to keep His word perfectly, to clothe ourselves with Christ, all of which are identical in meaning, you must give your soul an opportunity to grow freely, unstintingly. You must live a life “ hid with Christ in God ” (Col. iii, 3), “ for save Thou be with us, O Lord, we avail not so to live as to be pleasing to Thee ” (Oration, 18th Sunday after Pentecost). Only when Christ is with us in all we think, say, and do, even in the most trivial matters — and yet hardly trivial, but rather sublime since He is their main-spring — are we living lives pleasing to the Father. This is the work of a lifetime; it is the first and principal work every religious, cloistered or uncloistered, has to perform; it is the primary object and aim of every order and community.

In order never to lose sight of this sublime task, you should keep, therefore, like Mary your Mother and model, these words in your heart, pondering over them within you: “ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ” (Phil. ii, 5). To have the same mind with Christ, means to think in all things as He thinks; to speak always as He would speak; to will, that is to do, what He wills, what He wants done at all times; to desire ever only what He desires — His glory, your sanctification, and the sanctification and salvation of all mankind. A tremendous and exalted privilege this; and yet

it is but the true realization of the title “ spouse ” to which you all hope some day, God willing, to lay claim.

There are Catholics who pride themselves on being Catholics, yet who are such in name only, the sacrament of Baptism having enrolled them among the children of the Kingdom. Aside from that, religion has no part in their lives. Unfortunately, there are some “ spouses ” of Christ, who became entitled to the name on the day of their profession, the day of their second baptism, and who pride themselves on their exalted dignity, yet for whom the actual realization of their vocation clearly manifested in their condition of “ spouse ” means nothing, and has no part in their lives. These are so absorbed in striving to become excellent teachers, nurses, book-keepers, cooks, what not, that the affairs of the soul are relegated to a minor level, and eventually almost to oblivion. Christ looks in vain into such hearts to find His image reflected therein . . . a growing and daily increasing likeness to the Crucified. “ O souls, whom I have espoused,” He seems to sigh over them, “ seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you ” (Matt. vi, 33). Why are you so solicitous about what you shall eat, or wherewith you shall be clothed? “ Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field. . . . God doth so clothe, how much more you, O ye of little faith? ” (Matt. vi, 28-30).

It is just because they are lacking in faith that these

indifferent religious have become obsessed of the material and so pitifully blinded with regard to the spiritual, to their one true Good, Christ Jesus, Who weeps over them as He long ago wept over Jerusalem. "If thou also hadst known," He grieves, "the things that are to thy peace" (Luke xix, 42). This is the cutting lash that rips His Heart in jagged shreds, "thou wouldest not" (Luke xiii, 34). Can it be possible? What is it we see? A God sorrowing in the bitterness of rejected love over the wilful blindness of His creatures, His spouses. "My Beloved to me, and I to him" (Cant. of Cant. ii, 16). But "thou wouldest not." "We will come to him and will make our abode with him" (John xiv, 23), but "thou wouldest not." "My delights were to be with the children of men" (Prov. viii, 31), but "thou wouldest not." "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come" (Cant. of Cant. ii, 13), but "thou wouldest not." "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke xxiii, 43), but "thou wouldest not." "Have I been so long a time with you, and have you not known me" (John xiv, 9), but "thou wouldest not."

Ah, no. "Thou wouldest not." But I, your God, *would* become a fool for your sake, a leper, a worm and no man, despised of men; hoping against hope that some day you who call yourselves My spouse would esteem it a privilege to become a fool for My sake. But no. That would cost something. That would hurt. And nature dislikes hurts. Out of love for you, My spouse, I gladly gave up heaven and came down to earth to suffer and labor that you, who by sin had become My enemy, might be redeemed.

And you, whom I chose to raise to the closest intimacy with Me — but you would not — find it too much to give up the baubles of earth for the true and lasting delights of heaven. Remember that "not every one that saith to me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father Who is in heaven" (Matt. vii, 21).

But, Lord, "we have left all things and have followed thee" (Mark. x, 28).

"All things?" In word, yes, in theory. Repeating this often, you delude yourself into thinking that you are fulfilling it in practice. **Are you honestly, sincerely, striving to please Me alone in all things, even the very smallest? Are you giving Me alone the complete love of your heart, using all creatures — persons, places, things — only as I destined them for your use, that they should lead you to Me?** You revolt at the thought that a bride, who has vowed fidelity to her bridegroom, should deliberately let her affections rest in another. It is perfectly wrong, you say; and so it is. And it is perfectly right for you, who are My bride, to let your affections, according to your estimation and actions, rest in a miserable creature, whom I drew out of nothing; and give to Me, your God, to Whom you vowed fidelity, to Whom you gave yourself absolutely body and soul that I might do with you as I chose, only second place, if that, in your heart. If you loved Me, you would think of Me as often as possible, "for where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also" (Matt. vi, 21). If you loved Me, you would visit Me in your spare moments. If you loved Me, you would

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think of Me first in every difficulty, in every temptation. But you come to Me for advice and consolation only after seeking it in vain from creatures. If you loved Me, you would exert yourself to become more like Me, so that with My vessel of election you could truthfully say, "The world is crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. vi, 14). How great, then, is your love?

God grant that this reproach may not apply in all its severity to any of you. Yet even some of you may be afflicted, perhaps, with the palsy of indifference, or sloth, or carelessness, or a purely sensual affection for some created object — yourself, too, for that matter. **Whatever it is that is holding you back from seeking God alone, through Christ Jesus, His Son and your Master, be generous. Give it up for Him Who gave up His life for you. "Bring up sacrifices, and come into His courts"** (Ps. 95, 8). Seeing your faith, and the desire henceforth to serve Him only, He will say to you as to the one who was sick of the palsy: "Arise and walk" (Matt. ix, 5). Since He is God, His words produce the result they signify. If each day you walk before Him holily, you shall become perfect, thanks to the "grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus, that in all things you are made rich in Him" (1 Cor. i, 4-5); "Who through the Communion with Himself will make you to be sharers in His own supreme Godhead" (Secret of Mass of 18th Sunday after Pentecost).

4. PERFECT LOVE OF GOD

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph. iv, 23-24)

YOU have already seen how vital it is for the accomplishment of your vocation to acquire the spirit of your rule, the spirit of supernatural love. This can be achieved only by the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus, Our Lord. He clothed Himself with our humanity to bridge the void between the Infinite and the finite. He came upon earth not only as the Redeemer of mankind, but also as its incomparable Teacher. He willed to live in the world for thirty-three years to give us an example, to hold up before us an ideal.

Nor did He intend that the ideal should be viewed merely in the abstract, as something worthy of admiration, but hardly of imitation. Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, lived, and toiled, and suffered, and died, that you and I might know how He wishes us to live, and toil, and suffer, and die. He did vastly more than simply give us an example; He bought for us at the price of His blood all the graces we need to live the life He would have us lead. That is why we ask for all good gifts through His mediation. "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you" (John xvi, 23). That is why the Church in all her supplications to the Father