

**English translation of
“The Mirror of Prayer”
by Bernardino da Balvano.**

**Translated
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Translator’s note.

This translation is based on the introduction, text and footnotes which were published by P. Costanzo Cargnoni O.F.M. Cap. In I Frati Cappuccini: Documenti e testimonianze dell primo secolo, Edizioni Frate Indovino, Perugia, vol III/1, pp.555 – 636. The only additions to the notes made by the translator are references to Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents, edited by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. and William J. Short O.F.M. Conv., New York City Press, New York, London, Manila, for an English version of quotations from the Writings or Biographies of St Francis.

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Introduction by Castanzo Cargnoni O.F.M. Cap.

Bernardino da Balvano (+ c. 1568/70) was a great apostle and preacher who worked predominantly in the district of Southern Italy. Many small booklets which stirred popular piety for a long time were the result of his pastoral activities. The content and diversity of topics in these writings are to be found in summary fashion in his most important and most prolifically published booklet entitled The Mirror of Prayer which appeared in Messina in 1553 and was reprinted fourteen times within the space of about seventy years. It is an enjoyable little pocket book the product of both the spiritual and apostolic real-life experience of its author. In thirty-three very compact short chapters, as well as a final appendage (which in our opinion was a separate little work, entitled The Seven Rules for Good Living, mentioned by his biographers), the subject of interior prayer which leads to the gift of mystical experience through meditation on the mysteries of Christ is set out with great clarity, simplicity and fervour. However, it is not so much an authoritative and abstract lecture as it is a very concrete manual in which the essential theoretical directives are passed on in a practical manner and applied by means of specific and realistic exercises that can be easily assimilated by the reader. It is this "practical quality" which makes the work popular in character and appropriate for a spiritual guide and a true master of prayer.

As a fervent and clear-thinking preacher, Bernardino da Balvano makes the pages of his booklet ooze with useful suggestions and oratorical style, and it still remains an example of sharing a spiritual experience as well as presenting a method of prayer. In fact, he used to proclaim this teaching and method of prayer from the pulpit. He did this in 1553 in Messina where the faithful who were enthusiastic and committed became so fervent that they repeatedly demanded that these devout teachings be printed for their use so that they would not forget them. After a week spent in studying Sacred Scripture in order to consider all that concerned prayer, the author wrote a summary of the content of his preaching which he put together in a small booklet that he included in a letter dated 6 May 1553 from the friary ("ex nostro paenitentiae loco) to the Inquisitor in Messina. He said that the content included: "What is prayer, how many kinds of prayer are there, how should we prepare ourselves, what conditions are required, what is necessary and useful for prayer. Then there are thoughts on the method of praying, how to pray to God and to the Saints."

In more detail, there are three types of prayer: vocal, mental and mixed. Obviously he dwelt more on mental or interior prayer dividing it, according to the tradition of the Church, into four steps or acts: 1) "The inner reading of the soul" with its "chapters" or setting; 2) meditation as a attempt to "stimulate our inner feelings towards God" by means of various pious emotions in the heart (love, hatred of evil, fear, hope, sorrow, joy); 3) perfect prayer, which develops in three acts: oblation (offering to God), postulation (asking from God), and thanksgiving (giving thanks to God). This interior exchange goes through all the mysteries of the life of Jesus, paying special attention to the sorrowful mysteries of the Passion, and particularly the scourging, which is the author's favourite example, the "model" chosen from all the other mysteries of Christ. This kind of spiritual experience, by means of a free gift of God, may lead to the fourth

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step in interior prayer which is: 4) ‘the indefinable delight of absolute contemplation’, or “a sweet experience and most beautiful experience of the divine riches”. This “enlightens the intellect and inflames the will with sweetness”, so that the soul “understands at depth with tranquillity and loves strongly with delight, understands profoundly and desires ardently”.

The originality of this method consists in the manner in which the mysteries of Christ, which are the necessary medium for contemplation, are enumerated and proposed “in memory of the thirty-three years in which the loving Jesus lived with us on earth”, and then “are experienced” with their “delightful fruits and very rich treasures”. This affective and interior prayer does not remain focused on self but opens out in a meaningful fashion to all our brothers and to the whole of humanity. It is divided into nine states, which are associated with the merits of the nine times Christ suffered by shedding blood. Bernardino wrote another spiritual booklet about this subject.

The style of this portable booklet, which is set out with clarity and emotion and written as a conversation between Christ and the soul, conveys concise statements and spiritual unction which makes it one of the best examples of early Capuchin spiritual literature, which some have compared, perhaps with some degree of exaggeration, to the golden book of The Imitation of Christ but compared to which it is certainly more optimistic in spiritual outlook. In the chapters and passages that have been reproduced here the modern reader can certainly experience this particular kind of spirituality, which is rich in ascetical nuances and resonant with the love of the living Christ and the paschal mystery.

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Concerning the divisions of prayer. Chapter 1

4140 We must firstly pick out and identify the equivocal and ambiguous terms that contain and include various components and then define each one. Firstly, you should understand that there are or can be three kinds or ways of praying: firstly vocal, secondly mental and thirdly mixed. The first is performed exteriorly by the lips alone. The second is performed internally by the mind alone. The third is performed with mind and with voice. We shall speak of all three in more detail below.¹

Concerning exterior prayer using the voice alone. Chapter 2

4141 Prayer is external and only vocal when people recite the office or prayers, psalms or Our Fathers without paying any attention with the mind or worse, when they

¹ This is a very practical division. Even though it is not perfect it is well adapted to popular teaching. It is already contained in St Bonaventure, *In IV Sententiarum*, dist. 15 art. 2, q. 3 concl. (*Op. omnia IV*, 374ab).

deliberately distract themselves by occupying themselves with futile thoughts or with the affairs or business of the world, as, for example, what happens when people who are not devout pick up the Rosary and say Our Fathers while they go shopping in the square. Others interrupt them at the same time as they are saying their prayers by speaking about unrelated matters or about one thing or another and sometimes when they are walking up stairs, going through courtyards² or gardens carrying on business. Foolish women recite the Rosary while carrying out domestic duties. Another one stands at the window to see who is passing by while reciting Our Fathers. Another one sings Psalms to display her sweet-sounding voice or allows other distractions such as these. They do it deliberately and do not want to pay attention.

St Isidore spoke about this kind of prayer when he wrote in the seventh chapter of his third book³ *Del sommo bene*: “Prayer is pure when a person is not preoccupied, while saying it, with thoughts pertaining to the world. Whoever is occupied with worldly business distances his soul from God”; and a little further down he says: “People will not be heard by God when they speak a lot, as if wishing to compel Him or influence Him by much talk. He is certainly not appeased by lengthy arguments, but rather by a pure intention.”⁴ The seraphic Saint⁵ Bonaventure calls such person’s people who bark rather than pray since they bark and shout out with their voices but remain silent within, not paying attention with their hearts.⁶

4142 How do you expect the High God to pay attention to your prayers when you persist in not paying attention? It is futile and unproductive for the tongue to labour on the outside if the heart does not pay attention within. Voices that lack desire and awareness cannot expect the Great God to listen to them and the Church says of them in chapter *Sedulo* dist. 38: “They know that their voices will not reach God’s ears if the affection and attention of the soul is lacking.”⁷

Such persons are completely unworthy of being heard, instead they ought to be severely punished,⁸ because, their way of undertaking prayer, shows little respect for such a great God. In reference to them the living voice of the Lord Jesus says in St Matthew 15: “You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: ‘This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”⁹ This attitude is to be avoided and we should pray devoutly like faithful people, as the Church says in chapter *Quando de cons.* Dist 1: “O most beloved brothers, when we are at prayer we should be careful and attend to the prayers and try with all our hearts to put aside every human carnal and worldly

² Corte = cortile.

³ This is how it was written more correctly in the first edition in 1553: while in the 1564 edition the verb *scrisse* was omitted.

⁴ Cf, St Isid., *Sententiarum* lib. III, c. 7, n. 8 (*PL* 83, 677).

⁵ An adjective not found in other editions.

⁶ There is a similar thought in the *Regula novitiorum*, c 2 (S. Bonav. *Op.omnia VIII*, 477a).

⁷ Cf, Dist. 38, C. XII: *Sedulo monendi* (*CIC I*, 143).

⁸ *Assai*: only appears in the 1553 edition.

⁹ This quote also appears in the *1536 Cons.* n. 36, 2; (n. 210), cf. Mt 15, 8; Mk 7, 6; Is 29, 13.

thought, nor should the soul think about anything, except what it is praying about".¹⁰ We shall not discuss this anymore.

Concerning the four steps in mental prayer. Chapter 3

4143 The second way or kind of prayer is performed with the mind alone when the devout soul who is free of any other thought is recollected within and has raised the mind to God and produces acts of love by means of pious affections towards God. These are generally of three types: acts of oblation or giving, lovingly offering oneself to God; acts of beseeching or pleading, asking something of Him either for oneself or others; acts of gratitude or thanksgiving, expressing thanks for the many gifts which He had bestowed each day and acknowledging that He is ready to give more.¹¹

This prayer is of more noble character, more excellence and worth more if the one that performs it is pleasing to God. In some way such persons are united to the citizens above in such a way that those who are saying the prayer share while on earth in the angelic office and taste here, to some degree, what they will taste fully in the heavenly home.

I do not wish to commend or praise such as these any further at present since only the tongues of angels would suffice to give them proper commendation and praise. However, it is fitting that with the prophet I exhort them to saviour this by means what they do and experience in order to see how the Lord's presence may be felt while at prayer.¹²

4144 Full mental prayer is achieved in four stages: the first is called reading; the second meditation; the third prayer, the fourth contemplation.¹³ To throw greater light on these stages and to make them clearer, we will briefly explain them below by setting out the rules for each one of them and by giving an example so that it is easier to perform them.

Concerning reading, the first act of mental prayer. Chapter 4

Just as when reading books, a person commits things to memory and makes them almost become present, this also happens when a person who wishes to meditate concentrates on things including their cause, reasons and circumstances, retaining them within the soul thus making the things on which the soul wishes to meditate present to it. Just as in books the chapters are set out in sequence to create greater order and to assist the memory, inner reading does the same thing during holy prayer, as if there was a book in the soul, and the various topics are like chapters in a book to afford greater assistance to the soul.

4145 For the present we wish to make six points concerning these matters:

¹⁰ Cf. *Decreti tertia pars de cons.*, dist. I, c 70: *Quando autem* (CIC I, 1313).

¹¹ That is the act of offering, asking and thanking.

¹² Ps 34, 9.

¹³ These are the four classical stages: *reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation*.

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First, think of whatever you wish to meditate on, either a mystery or passage of Scripture, with all its background of place, time, the way it happened and anything like that.

Second, think about who is involved in the mystery, who uttered the saying or composed that piece of Scripture with its circumstances of power, of wisdom, of justice, of goodness, of perfection or the like.

Third, think about why it happened, to honour God, for the salvation of souls, the bewilderment of the devil, the destruction of vice, the strengthening of virtue, as an example of goodness, clarification of doubts and so on.

Fourth, think about whether it was performed for the love or benefit of someone, his situation, whether he was friend or foe, whether it gave him pleasure or pain, was useful or not useful, what it required of him, and what he hoped to gain.

Fifth, think about how the activity was carried out and what actions did it involve, in public or in secret, whether it was performed with humility, patience, in silence, with compassion or the like.

Sixth, think about what was the frame of mind and inner emotion, whether the person was pleased with this, or whether he wished he could have done more? Were the circumstances well planned and carried out? This will afford you not only a broad path for meditation and thinking about many aspects of a mystery or passage of Scripture, but will also prepare you well for sacred meditation and make it very easy.¹⁴

4146 To make this clearer we shall give an example below concerning such inner reading with its circumstances by applying it to the painful scourging of the Lord, which will serve as a model for all the other mysteries.¹⁵

An example of interior reading. Chapter 5

When the spiritual person places himself devoutly in a fitting posture, as will be described below in chapter 23, to meditate for example on the painful scourging of the Lord, he will carry out the exercise like this.

Imagine¹⁶ with attentive thought of mind, seeing Jesus Christ bound to the pillar with His head bowed to the ground, naked and trembling all over, and around him Pilate's violent servants with scourges in their hands ready and waiting to scourge Him in the middle of

¹⁴ These "chapters" or circumstances connected with a mystery about Christ are used widely in spiritual literature and come from the monastic tradition and the *devotio moderna*.

¹⁵ This is probably the first outline of another very popular spiritual book by Bernardino da Balvano: *Il mistero della flagellazione di N. Signore Gesù Cristo ridotto in forma di meditazione per tutti i giorni della settimana*, Venezia 1559, which was translated repeatedly into Latin, French, German and Dutch in the first decades of the Seventeenth Century.

¹⁶ This is an example of "imaginative meditation".

the courtyard of the iniquitous judge and in the company of many people who were standing around.

Imagine¹⁷ seeing such a horrendous spectacle with your eyes and hearing the harsh lashes and bitter strokes with your ears, and pause here for a moment to consider this mystery, as if you were present and it was taking place in front of you. This will be the first stage, that is, thinking about the mystery and what you wish to meditate on.

4147 Then, O pious soul, enter further into the second stage that is the one that experiences suffering. After you have thought about the mystery in the above manner¹⁸ in which you thought that you saw the meek Lord bound to the pillar and harshly scourged. On account of the bitter flogging His sacred blood issued from every part of His body and because of the cruelty of the torments His entire body was covered in lacerations and He groaned to Himself and cried sorrowfully. He is there before you all frightened and recognising who it is who is suffering,¹⁹ you will discover at the same time that He is truly the All-powerful God, who became human for love of us, and who if he wished could terrify all the heavens with one glance, move the earth to tears, make hell tremble and, with a single word, destroy every creature. Nevertheless, with all this, He meekly stands there bound, allowing Himself to be hit and scourged by most vile villains, as if He could do nothing.

At this point begin to think of His power, how stupendous and marvellous it is that He made the heavens and the earth and all that they contain out of nothing, in addition to the wonders that He worked in the Old Testament. He cleansed lepers, made hunchbacks upright, cured the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, walked on the waves of the ocean, multiplied bread, cast out devils, and performed other stupendous and marvellous works in front of those whom you see treating Him violently.

4148 More than that, consider that He who is the supreme wisdom and glory of the angels could be so viciously embarrassed and despised by filthy sinners and by those upon whom He had conferred gifts and marvellous graces even though He was totally perfect, never committed sin, and was completely innocent and holy,

At this point begin to think of how marvellous His perfection is, how bitter the scourges are, how cruel are the sufferings and the bitter pain of Christ, how exalted, stupendous and awe-inspiring is the love of him who underwent meekly so much for us! How cruel and merciless are the angry Jews and Pilate's servants who struck Him so callously! How iniquitous the judge who gave the order!

Then, thirdly, think about the love of the meek Lord who underwent all of this. Then admit that it was for your sins not His, because He was completely innocent. You committed the fault willingly, while He who is bound tightly suffers the punishment. Then think of who you are and what you have done to Him who is bearing such great

¹⁷ In the text *Parasi*.

¹⁸ In the text *del modo*.

¹⁹ In the text *quel lo pate*.

pain for you. What have you to give Him in payment for such great suffering? You are a bag of bones, a vase of muck, a vessel of filth, full of so many errors, overflowing with vices and sins. Think of how you have so wickedly offended Him, and how you thanklessly offend Him each day.²⁰ The fact that He, while naked, felt the scourges for you, while he was just, and you were a scoundrel and wicked, gives you something to think about! Not only has he never received anything good from you but He cannot receive it (because he does not need anything), while you, after receiving such good things, do not endure even a word for Him.

4149 Fourthly, consider then for what purpose and for what reason did the loving Saviour endure so much that His precious blood flowed out of His sacred veins because of the power and violence of the scourges. You will find that it was only to show His great love for you, to free you from eternal scourging and bring you back to lost joys, to destroy the rule of death, to give salvation to the whole world, to carry out His promises in action and to strengthen the faithful for suffering, to remove the consolations of the world, to destroy the vices of the flesh, to honour His divine Father and obey Him perfectly. Consider all these things in deep and attentive thought. How wonderful His love is! How ungrateful you would be not to love Him in return!

Fifthly, consider the way in which he suffered, how meekly He stood with His eyes fixed on the ground, without complaint or threat, without uttering a word like a meek angel.²¹ They rained down the harsh strokes mercilessly and he offered Himself lovingly to the scourging. They shouted with noisy voices that were filled with insult and the merciful Saviour remained as if he were deaf not moving His lips against them. The wicked servants laughed in derision while kind Jesus, having compassion on them, shed tears for their sins. On all sides he was threatened and embarrassed by the pagan people, but the very sweet Lord did not raise His eyes or show any sign of being disturbed or impatient.

Now think about how to imitate these virtues and how to endure adversities meekly following the example of Christ, not by just having inner good will, but displaying such sentiments externally by actions which are meek and compassionate.

4150 Sixthly, think of the amount of courage and longing with which He underwent everything. You will find that He was more distressed over the sins of those who flogged Him than over his sufferings. Although He suffered such great pain for us, He wished and ardently desired to suffer much more for our salvation. How much he also wished that His sufferings would be fruitful for all and bring about their salvation! With what anticipation did He look forward to the day when he would place His delicate flesh into the hands of his enemies and receive many scourges for the Father's glory and the salvation of the world! Here think of how much love you give to Him, how much you are willing to suffer for Him, what effect have Christ's sufferings had on you.

²⁰ This is Capuchin plain speech, which was found already in Giovanni da Fano, in the booklets on the Rule, concerning which see C. Cargnoni, *Fonti, tendenze e sviluppi della letteratura spirituale cappuccino primitiva*, in *CF* 48 (1978) 355 nota 195.

²¹ Cf. Is 63, 9.

If we would concentrate on the mysteries in this manner having these thoughts or others which the Holy Spirit will inspire in those who frequently exercise their minds on these mysteries, we shall be²² easily prepared for the second activity of mental prayer that is called meditation. David spoke of this when he said concerning himself in Psalm 76: “I thought for a while without speaking about the days of old and I remembered the eternal years and in the night, I thought carefully within my heart and I pondered and my heart was purified.”²³ This is how he was prepared by thinking within himself for fervour of spirit and holy prayer.

Concerning meditation: the second stage of mental prayer. Chapter 6

4151 So that something will begin to happen in the well-prepared subject even before a fire can be kindled it is necessary that the timber be dried. To achieve this, even though the Holy Spirit assists our weakness,²⁴ it is required that we do not neglect to prepare ourselves and seek His help. We do this by performing the second act of mental prayer, which is called meditation. This is only brought about by thinking carefully about what you wish to meditate on, carefully investigating the reasons and causes of this matter, attempting to stimulate a sensitivity towards God from within ourselves and thus devoutly preparing oneself for acts of prayer, so that such acts may be more lovingly produced as David says in Psalm 38: “My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out.”²⁵ In chapter 50 of his book concerning mind and soul Saint Augustine says: “Meditation surely gives birth to knowledge, knowledge brings compunction, compunction brings devotion, and devotion produces perfect prayer.”²⁶

4152 Because of the different circumstances in which a person might find himself and the various stages and desires within him, there is a need for many kinds of meditation which prepare a person for prayer since one method is not suitable for everyone. A person who is joyful needs one method, a person who is sad needs another, a person who is timid and fearful needs another, a person who is excessively confident and presumptuous needs another.

Suitable remedies are applied according to various characters and defects since what helps one person injures another. Just as a physician performs his function with the same purpose for everyone, namely, to restore health and life, yet prescribes different medicine for each one according to their constitution and complaint, so too all devout persons have the same aim, namely to promote spiritual fervour within themselves by means of meditation in order to arrive at perfect prayer.

4153 Although there are many ways to stimulate feelings according to the various circumstances of a person, there are six particular ways which cater for the six kinds of

²² In later editions we read *sarano* (*they would be*) which involves a different interpretation, an exchange of subject where what has gone before becomes the subject.

²³ Cf. Ps 77, 6-7. In the primitive text it says *David was speaking about himself in Psalm 76*.

²⁴ Cf. Rom 8, 26.

²⁵ Cf. Ps 39, 4. (Vulg. 38, 4).

²⁶ Cf. St Augustine [attributed], *De spiritu et anima*, chapter 50 (PL 40, 816).

feelings in the soul through which this can be achieved, namely, emotions of love, hatred, fear, hope, suffering and joy.²⁷ Love is directed towards God, one's salvation, one's neighbour, virtues, grace and other good things. Hate is directed towards sin, concupiscence of the flesh, voluptuousness of the world, towards all things which are contrary to salvation, injurious to the soul, dangerous to our neighbour and which dishonour God. Fear is generated by God's judgement, the torments of scoundrels, doubts of one's own salvation, the cunning of enemies, one's own frailty, the uncertainty of death, the severity of the Lord's justice, the torments of hell and other such things which should be feared. Hope is directed towards God's grace, the remission of sins, freedom from anxiety, the hope of Jesus Christ's intercession with the Father, being provided with what we need, being assisted in the service of God, being freed from battles with the Devil, being comforted by good works and crowned with glory and other things that we should hope for. Sorrow is directed towards offences committed against the Divine Majesty and against our neighbour, concern about our own damnation, the fact that we have lost heaven, merited hell, displeased Christ, given pleasure to the devils, deprived the angels of pleasure and being the cause of the sufferings and death of Christ, and other things which should make us sorry. Joy is directed towards having been redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, being made heirs of heaven, having our faults forgiven, having assisted in doing good, being guarded by angels, defended by Christ, comforted by the Holy Spirit and so greatly loved by the Eternal Father, and other similar things which could and should make us happy.

4154 Since this has been written to console simple souls, we recognise that those who are not so advanced should perform these things more gently according to the requirements of various circumstances and degrees of proficiency. We will set out an example of all the emotions mentioned above, keeping in mind the mystery of the scourging of the Lord. [...]

In the chapters which follow up to chapter 12 examples are provided for the various emotions that the soul lives through and experiences during meditation (love, hate, fear, hope, sorrow, joy). They resemble an inner conversation between the soul and Jesus that displays the contrast between the sanctity and dignity of the Lord and the shame of the sufferings which have been caused by various sinful attitudes. At the end a hymn of praise and blessing similar to what follows bursts forth.

4155 Arise, my soul, why are you so sluggish? Embrace the feet of your suffering Lord and kiss His sacred blood. Lord, may you be blessed now and forever. Rise up angels, men and women and all of you bless, thank and together with me love the finest Lord. O sweet Jesus, drive away from me all filthy objects of love and pleasure and put hilarity and vane consolation to flight, cast away honours, preferment, pomp and the glorious deeds of the world far from me! May I name no one as giving me contentment or pleasure in the present life, but may I wish the Lord Jesus, who endured such a harsh scourging at the pillar for love of me, to be engraved on my heart. I shall no longer love

²⁷ The various kinds of emotions which are here gathered under six headings receive strong emphasis in spiritual writers such as Mattia da Salò, Silvestro da Rossano and others.

pleasures because I see You, O glory of the angels, being flogged! I shall no longer love pomp because I see You stripped, O beauty of Paradise!

I shall not love smiles but Your tears since I see You crying with deep sighs for my salvation, O happiness of the Saints! I shall no longer engage in longing for love or attending dances, because I see You tightly bound, O freedom of the Blessed! Let there be no pleasure in my body because I see You enduring such suffering, O sweetness of life eternal! I shall be negligent in Your service no longer because You endured such exhaustion for me, O gentle rest and sweet repose of all Your servants! My ears shall no longer listen to vain and vulgar songs but only to Your sacred words, because You were so unjustly cursed by the vilest of people, O harmony of heaven and venerable majesty! Let nothing be able to distance me from You, O my sweet love, no matter whether there is prosperity or adversity, let me give myself in everything to Your service because You have done so much for me, O highest contentment and true peace! O Lord, Your blood alone will be my wellbeing and my riches, my satisfaction and consolation, and I give You my heart, so that in love and thought it You will always be where my salvation and wellbeing lies. [...] ²⁸

4156 O my soul, was there ever anyone who hoped in the Lord and was embarrassed? Was there ever anyone who turned to Him with a contrite heart who was cast away? He did not scorn the publican or the tearful sinner or contrite Zacchaeus, or the disciple who denied Him or even the thief on the cross. Why did he do this? He did this so that you, O my soul, if you wanted to return to Him with all your heart, would place great trust in Him. My Lord's scourges free you from eternal punishment; His nudity covers your shame; the foul spittle on my Lord's face confers eternal splendour on your face; His patience cleanses your anger; His being bound tightly means your perpetual freedom. What more can I say? His precious blood will wash all your horrid sins, and what He suffered for you will be your greatest promoter and powerful champion before the Father. Therefore, place your hope in Him and you will never be embarrassed.

Blessed be You, my Lord, and all Your weariness, sorrow, torment, sweat, poverty, anxiety, insults, persecution, scourges and every other kind of suffering, at present and forever [...]. ²⁹

4157 My Lord, blessed be Your scourges and cursed be my sins which caused them. Blessed be the ropes which bound You to the pillar; and cursed be my frivolity and my waywardness, which were the reason for these scourges. Blessed be Your bitter blows and harsh knocks, and cursed by my shameful life which has offended You. Blessed be Your crown of thorns and cursed be my ambition and vain adornments which caused it to be placed on Your head. Blessed be Your purple garment and Your being displayed

²⁸ This passage is taken from Chapter 7; *An Example of Meditation That Produces Love*. This also explains how emotions are developed, how to arouse inner feelings in these words: "In order to arouse yourself sometimes talk to yourself, sometimes to those taking part in the mysteries, sometimes address the mystery and its causes, sometimes listen to what they are saying to you in words that will arouse emotion." Note the fervour of the prayer which is simple, be in love with the suffering Christ and very practical.

²⁹ Chapter 10 *An Example of the Practice of Hope During Meditation*.

shamefully to the people and cursed be my vanity and pride because of which You were so embarrassed in this way. Blessed be Your meek silence and cursed be my violent anger which caused You so much sadness of heart. Blessed be the heavy cross which You carried on Your wounded shoulders and cursed be my disobedience that imposed such a burden. Blessed be the wounds in Your hands and feet and cursed be my wicked deeds which forced the blunt nails through them. Blessed be the lance and Your open side³⁰ and cursed be my bad thoughts and old hatred that is not willing to forgive. It was these, O my Lord, that pierced Your heart. Blessed be the blood that You shed from everywhere and cursed be my extravagance and cruelty towards my neighbour which slashed You so violently.

4158 May You be blessed all over, O sweet Jesus, my Lord and my God. Blessed be Your head, which was crowned with thorns for me, Your face which was defiled with spittle, Your tearful eyes, Your ears which were filled with abuse, Your sweet lips which were made sour with gall and vinegar, Your broken shoulders, Your wounded flesh, Your hands and feet pierced with nails, Your wounded side, and all your other limbs which were tormented for love of me. May they be blessed forever! Blessed be the suffering, the pain, the privations, the weariness, the sweat, the tears, the sighs, the sobs that You and Your sorrowful Mother uttered for me. I thank You eternally [...].³¹

May You together with Your Father and the Holy Spirit be blessed forever! Blessed be Your works, nativity, life and death with all Your deeds which were filled with such sweet fruit. May heaven, earth, sea, angels and all other creatures bless³² You now and forever. *Amen.*³³

Concerning Prayer and Acts of Prayer. Chapter 13

4159 Sow a garden and care for it so that it yields fruit. Such a procedure purifies and strives vigorously to win victory. This is how a spiritual person begins the work on inner comprehension and starts meditating so that he can go on to the other acts of mental prayer more easily and with greater peace. When a tree does not bear fruit, the gardener has worked in vain. When the soul does not produce acts of mental prayer, reading and meditation it produces little fruit. Consequently, we shall offer this chapter which deals briefly with prayer and its acts.

Prayer is nothing else than when the soul puts aside all other considerations elevates the mind to God by means of attentive interior reading, and rouses itself by means of contemplating pious emotions of love, hatred, fear, hope, sorrow or joy (as described above with respect to meditation), and being completely on fire, produces prayerful acts directed towards God.³⁴ These acts are or could be of three kinds: oblation, that is,

³⁰ *Lato* in the text *costato*.

³¹ From Chapter 11. *An Example of the Practice of Sorrow During Meditation*.

³² In the text *benedicanoti*.

³³ This is the end of Chapter 12: *An Example of how to Practice Joy during Meditation*.

³⁴ This definition includes classical expressions taken from saintly fathers, theologians and medieval writers.

offerings to God; requests, or making demands of Him; thanksgiving, expressing gratitude to Him.

4160 St Paul wrote about the first, which is offering, in chapter 12 to the Romans: “I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern God’s will”.³⁵

The same apostle speaks about the second act of prayer which makes requests or places petitions: Colossians 1: “Therefore, we also, from the day that we heard it, cease not to pray for you and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: that you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing; being fruitful in every good work.”³⁶

The apostle Paul spoke about the third act which is thanksgiving in Thessalonians chapter 5: “Pray without ceasing. In all things give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”³⁷

4161 Therefore when you go to pray to God, there is no need to appear empty handed before Him; rather let your heart be full of good will in order to offer Him assurances of holy and upright desires. When you have done this, ardently ask with trust to obtain what you need from Him, and when you have received it, give Him abundant thanks, so that your prayer may be complete.

The lawyer who cannot put his case and arguments to a judge is a fool. The person³⁸ who approaches God to obtain grace and does not know how to pray in the appropriate manner is even more forlorn. There are norms, rules, standards and practices for everything. Would prayer alone be the only thing that does not need a teacher, order or a system? Thus, while many pray, few succeed because they do not know how to pray properly or wish to learn what they should be doing.³⁹

Therefore, so that all may practice effective prayer, after explaining mental prayer, which involves offering God things that are worthy with an ardent will, asking Him for what is necessary and thanking Him with a pure heart we shall dedicate a specific chapter to each one of these acts.

Chapters 14 – 16 describe the three acts of mental prayer analytically. Here we mention only certain significant passages from chapter 14.

³⁵ Cf. Rom 12, 1-2.

³⁶ Col 1, 9-10.

³⁷ 1 Thes5, 17-18.

³⁸ Quello = colui che.

³⁹ Bisogno = quello che è necessario.

The First Act of Mental Prayer which is called giving or offering. Chapter 14

4162. The rich gifts and splendid presents that good vassals bring to their prince with love make it easy to approach him and make him smile and inclined to readily give them what they ask for. By offering pious affections to the High God devout persons pave the way for their prayers to reach heaven and dispose the divine Majesty to answer them easily. Such pious affections are of three kinds: the first are dispositions to avoid something, the second are dispositions to implement something, and the third are dispositions to endure something. In the first case we willingly offer to avoid completely what we know is displeasing to the all-powerful Lord. Next, we are prepared to truthfully practice completely what He demands of us with a sincere heart and to fully implement what He wills.

Following this we all put ourselves into His fatherly hands with a peaceful mind and a pure heart being disposed and ready to take on everything contentedly. This comprises the first act of interior prayer which is called giving. One offers to avoid evil with a ready soul, to do what is right and to endure adversities in order to freely offer something to God for one's own salvation and to set an example for our neighbour.

4163. In Psalm 96, David instructs us about the first kind: "For thou are the most high Lord over all the earth: thou are exalted exceedingly above all gods. You that love the Lord hate evil: the Lord preserves the souls of his saints, he will deliver them out of the hand of the sinner."⁴⁰

He points out the same thing about the second kind, which involves presenting oneself as prepared to carry out the divine will. Psalm 36 says: "Trust in the Lord, and do good, and dwell in the land, and thou shalt be fed with its riches. Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the requests of thy heart."⁴¹ This is the same as saying: "Offer yourself willingly to do his will and then ask Him and he will give."⁴² When he prayed in this manner in Psalm 118 David offered to both avoid evil and do good: "I have hated and abhorred iniquity, but I have loved thy law. Seven times a day I have given praise to thee."⁴³

David spoke about the third kind, which is being prepared to endure adversities, in Psalm 56: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready: I will sing, and rehearse a psalm,"⁴⁴ and in Psalm 37: "You heard me, O Lord my God, for I am ready for scourges: and my sorrow is continually before me."⁴⁵

4164. This manner of acting, according to which gifts are first presented to the great masters before favours are asked of them, goes on also in the world. In this way when the

⁴⁰ Ps 96, 9-10 (*Vulg.*).

⁴¹ Ps 36, 3-4 (*Vulg.*)

⁴² *Saratti* in the text = *sará*.

⁴³ Ps 118, 163-164 (*Vulg.*).

⁴⁴ Ps 56, 8 (*Vulg.*).

⁴⁵ Ps 37, 18 (*Vulg.*).

mind has been raised to pray to God with pious sentiments first offer devout actions and then you may ask for what you need and for divine assistance. The great God is the source, the means and the end of all good. Therefore, since God is the author of all good, let us begin our prayer by praising Him and lovingly offering Him acts as to the One who accomplishes everything.⁴⁶

In the second act of prayer let him ask with trust and beg with emotion. This is what the saintly Ambrose did himself and taught others to do as he says in chapter two of his book on the institution of virgins: “The prayer that observes order, beginning with divine praise, is good. Just as when we start to trade with men we try to appear honest, should we not do so all the more when we pray to the Lord? So at the start let us offer God a song of praise, as the Apostle says.⁴⁷ Christ, the teacher of truth, laid down the same rule and pattern for his Apostles when it says in St Matthew chapter 6 and St Luke chapter 11: “Master, teach us how to pray,” and He replied: “When you pray, say: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come.”⁴⁸ This is how I demonstrated the first act of prayer, in which by praising God the soul presents itself as ready to do His holy will, abhorring all that it prohibits, carrying out what it commands and patiently enduring what comes to us.

4165. I maintain that this is the first act of interior and mental prayer, since the first fruits, the tithes, the gifts and other offerings are, in the long run, pleasing to God and are accepted by Him to the degree that they are presented to Him from a generous heart which possesses these inner dispositions. Anyone who does not willingly avoid evil, who does not do good works and does not endure things that are adverse, will experience little or no enjoyment in external things. There are many who make long prayers, and because they do not focus their mind on God, or willingly and inwardly promise to avoid what displeases God, embrace His will through actions and exercise patience in adversity,⁴⁹ go out from prayer not having changed themselves for the better, remaining what they were before or even worse, loving their own will, becoming dissolute, proud, sowing discord, cruel, pompous, rash, unjust, liars, envious, without shame, irreverent, not at peace and filled with all kinds of vice.⁵⁰ How does this come about? This happens because, although they had good intentions, they have not offered themselves interiorly to the Lord in prayer, nor do they pray for the very thing that they need. He who is in a fire and does not feel the heat, or is penniless in the midst of plenty, or cannot see light at midday is indeed in a miserable condition. How much worse is it to be with God each day in prayer and repeatedly ask Him for things and never receive anything, to talk to the teacher of virtue for a year and not acquire at least something beneficial for your salvation, because you have not prayer as you should have prayed?⁵¹

⁴⁶ This is a very important observation about the practice of prayer and the fruit of great spiritual experience which is also taken up by Mattia da Salò.

⁴⁷ Cf. St Ambrose, *On the Institution of Virgins and Mary's Virginity*, chapter 2, n. 8 (PL 16, 321).

⁴⁸ Cf. Lk 11, 1-4; Mt 6, 9-10.

⁴⁹ In the Venice edition of 1564 instead, because of a change to the original text, we read: *né abbraccian con opera il suo volere e nella contrarietà non si mostrano pazienti.*

⁵⁰ This list of vices is taken from Rom 1, 29-31.

⁵¹ This is another example of changes in syntax in the 1564 edition where we read: *vien dal non orar come si conviene?*

4166. So that your prayer may always be efficacious and fruitful always keep the act, which consists in offering, in the first place. Then you will be wrapped in God for interior reading and enkindling through holy meditation, readily offering yourself to leave aside all that is displeasing to the divine Master and whatever separates you from what is good and leads you towards evil. Then you will be ready to do what you see is pleasing to Him and to receive His rich gifts and fatherly caresses and whatever the Lord allows to come upon you that goes against you or is unpleasant. By doing this with a willing heart you will have accomplished the first act of prayer which consists in offering up and you will be ready for the second and its consequences, which is to ask for and obtain what you seek.

Another two chapters about the remaining two acts of meditation or mental prayer, namely the act of petitioning and thanksgiving, follow this (Chapters 15-16). All of these three acts are put into practice in the following chapter.

An example and the manner of arousing the acts of prayer. Chapter 17

4167. Actions speak louder than words and we give an example to make it easy for those who are undertaking this practice. A doctor does not perfect his art by study alone. If he does not have experience he will be ignorant of medicine. It will be of little benefit to a Christian to know about prayer and its acts if he does not know how to become involved in the exercise. Let the teacher write down the example for his disciples, who by following this become as perfect as what is written, equal to the master or sometimes even better by means of developed resourcefulness or repeated study.

So that the faithful who are new to prayer may have the road opened for them, we will provide a short example as a model of how to practice the mysteries of the sacred art of prayer which for those who regularly dedicate themselves to praying with fervour will yield wonderful fruits of holy prayer. Everything is a bother for a person who is negligent or lazy, but a person who is anxious and keen about doing good never gets tired and always takes on greater things with relish. When learning any art a person experiences difficulty and pain at the beginning, but continued perseverance makes it easy to grasp the art and to practice it with pleasure. I maintain that it is the same with prayer in which at the beginning the soul feels exhausted and experiences pain, nevertheless if a person practices it continuously and customarily with love, he will be able to pray with ease and will taste the greatest happiness through the experience.⁵²

4168. If a person does not want to fail he should proceed in an orderly manner with everything and have a model if he wants it to work well. Therefore, having set out above the rules and manner of undertaking interior reading with respect to meditation we shall now also give an example of how to practice the acts of prayer.

When the soul is focused within itself through concentrated inner reading, and is properly aroused through fervent meditation along the lines of the above sentiments, namely,

⁵² This theme is strongly emphasised by the Capuchin theorists on prayer.

hatred of evil, love of what is good, fear of God, hope of divine mercy, sorrow for sins committed, joy over good things, as if the Lord were drawing you away from your sins, exhorting you to perform virtue, offering you grace, and rousing you to thank Him, He will lead you to acts of prayer, to which you should readily offer yourself.

4169. *For example,* He says: “O beloved soul, for whom I have done so much good, why are you so ungrateful in recognising this? I became man for you, so that I could give you a share in my own goodness; why do you despise me? I was enclosed in the Virgin’s womb for nine months, to provide room in heaven; why do you abandon right living and the environment of holy religious conviction? I chose the shame of the manger and the coarseness of the straw for you to provide you with the comfortable relaxation of the honourable palace of heaven. Why do you seek so many pleasures and not wish to suffer any inconvenience for me? I shed my blood at the circumcision and when persecuted I fled⁵³ into Egypt to make you holy and to take away all your fear; why then don’t you change and be patient in persecution? I was subject to my Mother, went into the desert and was tempted to set you an example and to teach you; why do you turn away from obedience, not wish to suffer and be so fragile in temptation? I lived with weariness and taught the truth in order to draw you towards my law; why do you not observe my precepts?

I performed unheard of signs, stupendous miracles and other well-known acts to make you really certain and confer salvation on you; what is your excuse for doubting the faith, embracing error and not accepting my teaching? I was transfigured on the mountain to prove my glory; why are you so half-hearted in doing good things? I entered Jerusalem with humility to give you honour in heaven; why do you seek so much happiness on earth? After seeking my Mother’s permission, I went to death for you so as to confer eternal life on you; why then when you have been called into my service do you allow yourself to be held back⁵⁴ by your family? At supper I washed the feet of my Apostles and also instituted the sacrament to provide you with food and make you humble; why are you proud and so negligent and lazy when receiving Holy Communion?

4170. When I prayed in the garden I sweated blood to give you comfort and perseverance in prayer; how can you be frightened and have such little regard for prayer? I was betrayed by a disciple’s kiss, taken by a soldier, abandoned by the Apostles, presented to the High Priest, struck in the face, denied by Pilate, and tormented throughout the night, to free you from all evil and confer complete redemption on you: why do you commit so many errors and not love me with your whole heart as you should? I was falsely accused by the Jews, ridiculed by Herod and unjustly condemned by Pilate to free you from a just sentence by dying and confer high honours on you: how can you utter so many calumnies, despise the poor and minors and value them so little

⁵³ In the text *fugii = fugetti*.

⁵⁴ *Intertire = trattenero*. – The mention of Jesus getting His Mother’s permission before going to His death on the cross is related by pious authors, as in the *Meditationes* attributed to St Bonaventure. In the Capuchin noviciate in Lombardy, and probably in other Provinces, before going to sleep at night the novices among other things used to recite: “And you, O most holy Virgin, give me too this most holy blessing in memory of the blessing which you gave to your divine Son when he left you to go to His death on the cross...”

and treat them badly? I was stripped naked to provide you with the robes of glory: why do you seek the good life with such vanity? Behold me bound to a pillar with such disrespect to free you from your sins.

What is it, then, that leads you to waste the whole day in amusements and exert your self at dances? I am here struck most harshly to turn you away from eternal scourging: what excuse can you bring for not doing proper penance for your sins? Furthermore, dear soul, not content and satisfied with this, my head was crowned with thorns to give you the crown of the eternal kingdom: why do you seek honours, positions and titles out of ambition and in disrespect for me? I carried the heavy cross on my weak shoulders to make the journey to heaven pleasant for you: why don't you take my yoke upon you? Both my hands and feet were pierced with nails to draw you into my kingdom: then why do you run away from me and follow the world? I was raised on high between thieves with shame on the cross: so that you could find a place in the choirs of angels triumphantly and gloriously: why do you not reveal all your sins to a confessor in trust because you are frightened of suffering a little scorn or disgrace? I was shouted at with mockery by everyone so that you might be sublime and honoured; why do you scurrilously insult everyone and even curse me and all my saints? Everyone shouted against me "Death! Death";⁵⁵ I shed many tears while praying to my Father for him to pardon them and you: then, why, having lost sight of this, do you not forgive offences, but causing much damage seek revenge all day long?

4171. The thief confessed to me and I promised him Paradise so that he could ask me for heaven: why do you deny me and not ask me vigorously for what will provide for your salvation? I gave my Mother to John as his mother, and gave her John as her son as a powerful advocate for you: why, then, are you not devoted to her and so slow to invoke her? My mouth tasted vinegar and bitter gall so that you might taste heavenly beverages: why are you not satisfied with what is necessary but pour into you throat without restraint? Being in such pain that I cried out "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me,"⁵⁶ in order to make you patient and strong in tribulation: then why are you so unstable and become sad and disturbed by every little thing. When I tasted the bitterness of gall I cried out in a loud voice: "*Consummatum est*. It is consummated",⁵⁷ to make you constant and give you perseverance: why do you let yourself be conquered by temptation and stop the good works that you have begun?

When I came to the end of my life, I commended my spirit to the Father in tears, to make him be merciful towards you: why do you then become dispirited in your worries and toils, and leaving him aside invoke the devil in anger? My body became pale and motionless on the hard wood to make you resplendent and immortal in paradise: why then do you give yourself to lust and desire fine clothes and soft beds? My side was pierced with a cruel lance to plant perfect charity in your heart; why don't you love your neighbour as yourself, and love me more than anything? I was taken down from the cross and my afflicted Mother cried with great sorrow to make you compassionate towards

⁵⁵ Cf. Jn 19, 6.

⁵⁶ Cf. Mk 15, 34; Mt 27, 46.

⁵⁷ Cf. Jn 19, 30

those who are afflicted: why are you so cruel with respect to the needs of others? My naked body was wrapped in a sheet to give you abundant spiritual gifts: why do you get rich on the goods of others and seek only passing wealth. My body was placed in the tomb of another to put yours in the heavenly realm: why are you buried with so much show and tales of glorious deeds⁵⁸ as if you were not going to rot or could not survive unless you were wrapped in precious cloth, marked by ornate grave stones and marble tombs with many images engraved on them?⁵⁹

4172. My soul descended into Limbo to visit the ancient fathers and undo the power of the devil and confer full authority over him on you: why then do you not resist him powerfully and bravely? I rose on the third day in victorious glory to confer on you a fresh, commendable, heavenly, uncomplicated and virtuous life: why then are you so dissolute, full of vice and perverse activities in the way you live and conduct yourself? After I rose I spent forty days in the company of my disciples, sometimes hiding from you, to provide you with a blueprint for honest living: why are you so fond of hypocrisy so that it becomes necessary for me to prove my glory?

I ascended above the heavens to my Father in triumph and majesty to be your continual advocate and effectual protector before Him: why don't you come to Me with assurance and trust in all your needs? I sent the Holy Spirit into the world with rich gifts so the he could arouse you, direct you and lead you: why don't you accept Him and obey all his saving inspirations? On the final judgement day I will appear in glory and majesty and the living and the dead will come together in my sight, to confer proper glory on you in body and soul if you have been faithful and eternal punishment if you have rebelled: why then do you not fear, serve and obey Me? Am I not the God of Sabaoth, supreme Emperor and Monarch of the universe? Perhaps you think so little of Me and abandon Me in disgust because you see Me bound to the pillar? I am, I am He who has supreme dominion over life and death.

4173 Therefore, beloved soul, do not think poorly of me, repent of having offended me, persevere in my service and ask for all that you need with trust, since I am aware of everything that you ask and ready to hear you. Pay attention now to all the good things I, together with my Father and the Holy Spirit, have done for you, and of what I have prepared for you in the heavenly kingdom. Make yourself aware of the benefits, and do not be ungrateful to the benefactor but always thank him in all humility, so that these things will be preserved for you and then more will be given to you,⁶⁰

Now faithful soul wake up to what you are doing! Rouse yourself from the sleep of tepidity and with heartfelt affection towards God produce acts of prayer and before offering this say:

⁵⁸ In the text *fausti* = *fasti*.

⁵⁹ We read in the 1564 edition: *if they were not wrapped in precious cloth, and placed in marble tombs engraved with many images.*

⁶⁰ This is an example of a swift and devout summary of Christ's life and the history of salvation.

“O my omnipotent Lord, who is just, holy and merciful, full of beauty and clemency, I have appreciated what you have done for me, and how ungrateful I have been towards you. I am sorry with all my heart for having offended you and from the bottom of my heart I loathe not having recognised this and also of having been the cause of so much of your suffering, in your birth, life and death, in your poverty, sweat, wounds, scourging, insults, torments, tears and in such a painful death. From now on, O my God, by means of your grace and great favour I promise to wish not to offend you any more in any way. I am ready to avoid all sin and all that might lead me into sin. I shall abandon evil practices, amusements, ostentatious displays, vanities, strange ways of life, evil longings and desires, excessive eating, thinking of or watching whatever is not proper and all other evil and its occasions. I wish in all humility to confess everything to a priest, following your command, with sorrow for what has happened and a firm proposal to not do it anymore.”⁶¹

4174 In addition I offer, O my Lord, to always obey you promptly, from the present instant to the end of my life and I wish to be always continuously fervent and careful in your service observing what you command me without transgressing in anything. Beyond this, O benevolent Father, I offer myself into your most holy hands being prepared to patiently endure what you allow to happen to me whether it be adversity or tribulation, sickness, persecution, calumny, anxieties, slander, toil, aggravation,⁶² injustice, suffering and death. If any of these should happen to me, to those whom I love or who are dear to me, I shall not leave your service, (if your mercy helps me), knowing for certain that whenever you allow some adversity to come to me all will work towards my salvation and greater reward.

To achieve all this, I place everything in your hands as my loving Father. Do to me what you will so that I may never offend you”.

4175 Now you come to the second petitioning act and say:

“O most clement Redeemer and sweet Father, because we are here impoverished without you, nor can we do any good deed without your contribution, by your mercy give us grace and extend your help to us. O merciful Lord, forgive all the sins committed against your divine Majesty, and give me the strength to resist the temptations of the enemy and the grace to never offend you. Do not look upon my ineptitude⁶³ and ingratitude. Cancel this and dispense me from all the heavy punishments that my horrible sins justly deserve and free me from hidden deception and all evil through the merits of your precious blood.

Give me the grace, O my Lord, to please you always and to observe your holy law. Defend and maintain me and the whole Christian population in your service and consent to convert others to the true faith and good conduct, so that everyone may do your will both in heaven and on earth. In the end, lead everyone to the consummate joys of the heavenly home where you live and reign forever with your Father and the Holy Spirit.”

⁶¹ This is reminiscent of expressions in the Catechism and in the Act of Contrition.

⁶² In the Venice edition of 1564 we read erroneously *travagli gravemente* (f. 69v).

⁶³ *pocagine* in the text = *dappocaggine*.

4176 Thirdly with respect to the act of thanksgiving, say:

“I thank you, most excellent benefactor, for the infinite number of times when you gave me, who am so ungrateful, so many favours so generously. You conferred them and set them out. As far as I can, I offer you abundant thanks because you created me in your divine image, capable of reasoning and destined for eternal happiness. I glorify you for the many creatures that you placed at my service and for having given me the company and security of the angelic spirits. When I had been called to the true faith and saved by your own blood you made me an heir of paradise where you have placed and kept so many good things for me.

I thank you, Lord, because you restrain and govern my soul and body like a good Father. Fulfilment awaits me. You have not overlooked calling me in many ways towards what is good and have taken such attentive care of me. I thank you especially, most dear Father, for all the pain and toil you have undergone for me: being born poor, circumcised on the eighth day, fleeing into Egypt, and other things especially the scourging (and I do the same for the other steps in the Passion). I thank you for being stripped for me, bound to the column and flogged cruelly. May the blood which you shed on the ground for me be blessed, Lord! Blessed be the whips, the column, and the cords that bound you! Blessed be your wounds, your sighs, sorrows, crying and the injuries which you endured for me a miserable and unfaithful creature!

4177 O my Lord, may you be ever blessed and thanked! May the angels and saints, heaven and earth, the sea, men and women, bless you!⁶⁴ O my Lord, because I am so poor and you so rich and not because you need it, but recognising you as my Lord and my sole patron, as a tribute and as a sign of thanksgiving, in memory of this painful mystery of the most harsh scourging, I offer you an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* on behalf of myself and the Christian people, and by means of this, open my heart and myself to you. Accept me, O God, out of your mercy. Even though I am poor I too approach heaven's bench with your assurance of mercy⁶⁵, in search of all that it covers. Lord, may it please you, through the merits of this mystery, to accept my down-payment and myself together with it. Grant what I ask in my prayer so that I may remain here with you in the state of grace and then reign in glory above”.

Concerning Contemplation: Chapter 18

4178 The elephant becomes excited at the sight of blood and the faithful soul is set alight for fervent prayer by Christ's mysteries. A soldier is strengthened by the example set by a stout-hearted general, and a Christian becomes strong by the vivid recollection of the life and deeds of the Saviour.

Holding onto the image of sweet Jesus and finding happiness in Him through intimate love is the most effective remedy for the deceit of the vilest enemy. Through tasting soothing milk, a child conducts itself compliantly and rests in the arms of its dear mother:

⁶⁴ In the text: *benedicanoti* = *benedicano*.

⁶⁵ In the text: *polisa* = *polizza*

and by means of inner sweetness and heavenly consolation a spiritual person engages in holy prayer frequently and, with very little effort, discovers abundant repose and lasting strength.

Such a person, who has had the experience of heavenly gifts, readily despises everything. Divine consolation is not given to those who seek pleasure and delight in what is corruptible; but to those who, for the sake of God, deprive themselves of the comforts of this world. The kind Saviour often gives a taste of indescribable sweetness in deep contemplation, as a down-payment⁶⁶ on perpetual happiness, in order to arouse this person and make him better prepared to serve you.

4179 Contemplation is a high-quality disposition and a very sweet savouring of the divine riches, when the soul, having been cleansed and warmed by inner reading and holy meditation, being raised up on a high, beyond the thought of passing things through frequent and devout prayer, soothed and at peace, tastes supreme goodness⁶⁷ through a marvellous awareness of the divine mysteries. Just as the sun illumines, warms and makes grass grow and plants take root, so divine contemplation enlightens the intellect with marvellous sentiments, inflames the heart with wonderful sweetness and confers perfect activity on both, to the extent that, according to the character of your infallible wisdom and human capacity, it mulls this over profoundly in peace and loves strongly with sweetness, understands at length and desires ardently. This is how it is with the mystery of the scourging when we think of who it is that is being scourged, for love of whom, by whom and for what reason,⁶⁸ and so on with the other mysteries.

4180 As set out above contemplation opens up an understanding of how wonderful was the power of the one who suffered, with what marvellous wisdom it was that planned and arranged in every detail, how exceptional was the integrity and ardent the love that endured such bitter suffering for the vilest of creatures and wicked sinners and what an obligation such goodness imposes on us. This is how the pure soul who prays well acquires through the gift of contemplation a most profound understanding and an exceptionally marvellous disposition, which goes beyond all human thought, in so far as it understands the divine mysteries so deeply with a certain relish, which there is no way to express, neither in word nor in writing, but which is well understood within by a heavenly gift. The will is drawn so gently to the love of God and to these mysteries that many times it forgets itself and is transformed into God so that it is living in Him more than in itself and tastes here below in part what the saints possess completely in paradise. Although this experience is possible for the well purified soul, it cannot be explained in full, since the exalted experience and sweet taste of contemplation so fills the soul with exalted things that no words can be found to express it adequately and how it comes about.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ In the text: *un caparro = caparra*.

⁶⁷ Splendid definition that captures the sentiments of Bonaventure.

⁶⁸ In the text: *pensando quello è flagellato, per amor di cui, da chi e per che cagione*.

⁶⁹ These observations are interesting in so far as they indicate a vivid experience of the author concerning contemplation and how it is beyond description.

4181 Because this is a gift from the Lord, who gives it when He wishes, to those who have very pure souls and who are very dedicated to prayer, in order to arouse them, you do not need to investigate it very much, but strive to be careful concerning prayer, thoughtful concerning interior reading, and fervent in holy meditation, and perform the acts of each of these with great love, leaving the gift of spiritual savour in contemplation to Him who distributes all in an orderly manner for the good of His servants. When the Lord gives you this taste, I am sure that you will cry out with the Queen of Sheba what is in chapter 10 of the Book of Kings: “Experience proved to me that not half of what I have actually tasted was told to me”.⁷⁰

To conclude I quote what the Prophet David said in Psalm 33: *Taste and see*, I learnt how sweet the Lord is.⁷¹

Concerning the third kind of prayer namely mixed. Chapter 19

4182 Because the pre-eminent Creator of the universe made rational creatures that are composed of spiritual and corporeal natures, the rational soul and the body, therefore there also exists mixed prayer which unites mental and vocal prayer. Because a person is more perfect as he lives more according to the spirit than to the flesh, prayer is more perfect when it involves what is mental rather than vocal.⁷²

Certain methods of mixed prayer, such as how to recite the Psalms, ejaculations, or “prayers of rejoicing” or others are described meticulously.

The third step occurs on impulse or out of an excess of love, when the soul which has been filled with spiritual sweetness, by means of the vigour of ardour, emits sounds as if moved by an abundance of fervour. This is not the same for everyone but differs according to the various emotions of the soul and movements of the spirit. Sometimes the soul, moved by inner fervour, addresses God as Lord, at other times as Father, often as Spouse or in similar amorous terms. The Canticle is full of this and the Saints call it joy, meaning inner joy, which is displayed by being happy.⁷³ The Prophet David speaks about this in Psalm 88: “Mercy and justice shall go before thy face, O Lord. Blessed is the person that knows jubilation”; and in Psalm 46: “God has ascended with jubilee.”⁷⁴

4183 The fourth step usually occurs by recognising what is owed to God by both the natures that He has given namely the spiritual and corporeal. This is carried out in the body by the voice and in the soul by paying attention. In each of these ways the devout person may pray fruitfully in mixed prayer, taking care to focus more on the mind than on many words,⁷⁵ as Saint Isidore says in chapter seven of his book on *The Highest Good*: “It is good to always pray with the heart as well as with the voice, to glorify God

⁷⁰ Cf. 1 Kings 10, 7.

⁷¹ Ps 33, 9 (*Vulg.*)

⁷² This concept was already contained in *Alb. n. 3* and *Const. 1536*, n. 42,5.

⁷³ Cf. Augustine, *Exposit, in Psal. 32: CCL 38*, 253s (and the second reading of the Memorial of St Cecelia, Virgin and Martyr on 22 November); S Bonaventure, *Leg. maior* 10, 4, FAED, II, p. 607.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ps 88, 15-16; 46, 6 (*Vulg.*)

⁷⁵ This expression is taken from the *Cost. 1536*, n. 42,3.

with spiritual hymns, but, to pray with the voice alone without the inner heart amounts to nothing.”⁷⁶ The Apostle says: “Sing to the Lord with your hearts”⁷⁷ that is make melody not only with your voice but also with your heart.

In Chapters 20 and 21, Bernardino da Balvano pauses to deal with the “necessity” and “utility” of prayer coming to the same conclusion as St Augustine.

“I assure you together with Saint Augustine that the divine mercy will never leave us, while we are careful about prayer.”⁷⁸

Concerning preparation for prayer, firstly, concerning the six things that go before it. Chapter 22

As the author summarises at the end of the Chapter, this preparation consists in six things: “Having Catholic faith, being reconciled with one’s neighbour, being free from mortal sin, being moderate in life style, using a private place, at the right and proper time. Concerning the last three he has this to say:

4184 The fourth prerequisite is moderation. It is necessary for a person to be sparing in food, drink and sleep, since what undermines the will is not conducive to prayer. One cannot fill the stomach with putrid and delicate food and entertain wholesome and holy thoughts in the mind. Neither can one rejoice with the world here below and then reign above with Christ. Whoever prudently deprives himself of exterior things for the love of Christ, will receive the inner consolation of holy prayer with greater abundance. When this is accompanied by moderation, the soul can easily fly towards God and ask Him for whatever it wants.

Thus, the Angel said in Chapter 12 of the Book of Tobias; “Prayer is good with fasting”, and the Lord said in Chapter 17 of the Gospel according to Matthew: “This kind of devil is not cast out but by prayer and fasting”. In the Fourth Lenten Sermon holy Bernard says: “Fasting confers trust and devotion on prayer”. This is how prayer and fasting are combined. In a similar vein he wrote: “These brothers control one another, and both receive consolation.”⁷⁹ Prayer provides the strength for fasting, and fasting acquires the grace of prayer. Fasting strengthens prayer and prayer sanctifies fasting and presents it to the Lord.

Whoever lives with moderation will be ready for prayer and will undertake it effectively, as it says in Chapter 4 of the Book of Judith: “Know that the Lord will hear your prayers if you continue with perseverance in fasting and prayers.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Cf. St. Isid. *Sententiarum* lib. III, c. 7, n. 30 (PL 83, 678).

⁷⁷ Cf. Eph 5, 19; Col 3, 16.

⁷⁸ St Augustine develops this concept in many passages of his works; for example, Cf. *Ep 137*, n. 20 (PL 33, 525).

⁷⁹ With regard to the quotes: Tob. 12, 8; Mt 17, 21; Mk 9, 29; Pr 18, 19; Bernard, *Sermo IV in Quadragesima*, 2 (PL 183, 176).

⁸⁰ Judith 4, 11 (*Vulg.*)

4185 The fifth prerequisite is to select a comfortable place. Although in many respects the Church is a suitable place to pray, nevertheless at times one is constrained to choose a private, appropriate, and quite place away from noise, in your room, an oratory, garden, or other place, concerning which the same rule does not apply to everyone, rather each one should pick the spot where he feels the greatest peace. This is what the Saviour says in Chapter 6 of the Gospel according to Matthew: “But when you pray, enter into your room, and having shut the door, pray to your Father in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you there.”⁸¹

Although a person can pray anywhere, nevertheless those who are not so perfect have great need for peace of mind and place is necessary for them even to avoid human applause, as Isidore says in the passage cited above.⁸² Prayer is more fittingly undertaken in secluded places. One can express what they want more easily where God is their only witness, because hypocrites pray to be seen. Their efforts do not please God but gain glory from mortal men. In the first place have a clear inner conscience and then select a place to pray where you may do so with the greatest ease and peace.

4186 The sixth and last prerequisite is to choose a suitable and proper time. Although a spiritual person can always pray,⁸³ producing pious feelings towards God, professing an ardent desire to be ever ready to serve Him, desiring to receive from Him what he needs, offering Him much thanks, an hour should never pass when this does not happen, still the saints set certain times aside to pray more efficiently, as is proper.

The Prophet David prayed to God six times a day and he rose at midnight to sing the divine praises, even though He was King and very busy. He knew well from experience that, as he had experienced divine favour, all would go well. However, human lethargy is so strong today so that even those in religious orders who have plenty of peace hardly say any prayers. This is certainly something to lament, that being besieged⁸⁴ from all sides by the enemy, stripped of virtue; they cast aside the weapon of holy prayer.

Although prayer should be continuous for the main things that are needed, yet because of the great confusion in how we spend our personal time we should for many reasons designate two special and appropriate times for prayer⁸⁵ in the morning and in the evening. Set aside one hour or two in the morning at the beginning of the day when your stomach is settled, and you have dressed and do not need to change again to begin the day. As you have to work during the day, once you have prayed and offered and committed yourself to God, you will find that everything will go well. This is what the Holy Spirit said in the Book of Ecclesiasticus: “The just man, that is the Christian, will give his heart to resorting to the Lord early in the morning, and he will pray in the sight

⁸¹ Cf. Matt 6,6. The principle of choosing a quiet place to pray is a golden rule which shows once more that our Author has great experience in praying and this reflects the freedom of the early Capuchins who freely prayed in the woods, in caves, in a garden, in a church etc

⁸² Cf. Isid. *Sententiarum* lib. III, c. 7, nn. 20-21 (*PL* 83, 676).

⁸³ A thought contained in *Const. 1536*, n. 41, 3.

⁸⁴ In the text: *assaggiati*. In other editions this is corrected to *assedati*. What can we say today if even then they lamented a lack of silence and quiet? Regarding the seven times for prayer Cf. Ps 118, 62, 164 (*Vulg*).

⁸⁵ Note also in this passage a similarity to the text of the *Const. 1536*, n. 41, 4.

of the most High.”⁸⁶ In chapter 8 of Proverbs we read: “They that watch for me the early morning shall find me.”⁸⁷ David said in Psalm 5: “Harken to the voice of my prayer, O my King and my God. For to you I will pray: O Lord in the morning you will hear my voice.”⁸⁸

4187 Praying at night is most suitable because at that time a person can examine what he has done during the day, and being sorry for his mistakes, can ask pardon with a heart prepared to confess everything to a priest, according to the divine command, and to thank the Lord for the graces received, so that should death occur suddenly, that person would be found in the state of grace through inner contrition and be well prepared because he has been praying to God. David refers to this in Psalm 140: “I have cried to you, O Lord, hear me: harken to my voice, when I cry to you. Let my prayer be directed as incense in your sight; the lifting up of my hands, an evening sacrifice.”⁸⁹ Holy Cyprian taught the same thing concerning praying in the morning and in the evening in Sermon 6 concerning Sunday prayer. He said: “He should pray in the morning and evening at the setting of the sun.”⁹⁰

Concerning six methods of preparation or rather items which must accompany prayer. Chapter 24

4188 The more important something is the more preparation it requires. Once the priest who wishes to celebrate Mass has prepared the altar, he puts on the sacred vestments. A queen who is about to enter the King’s palace takes a few maids with her. So too a devout person who wish to appear before the Lord to engage in prayer, (in addition to the preparations mentioned above) should take care of something else such as composition of place, so that by means of fitting reverence he can have more confidence when at prayer and entertain secure hope. Therefore, the Holy Spirit said in chapter 32 of Ecclesiasticus: “Because of your reverence good grace shall come to you.”⁹¹ Psalm 9 says: “The Lord listens to the desire of the poor and accepts the preparation of their heart.”⁹²

The first part of the preparation involves the place and actual position of the body when at prayer. Still it is left to the free choice of those who are praying how they position their body to generate the most devotion. Some have prayed to the Lord with the mind while their faces looked up to heaven, as David did in Psalm 122: “To you have I lifted up my eyes, you who live in heaven. Behold as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters. As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress: so are our eyes unto the Lord our God, until he has mercy on us.”⁹³ Others, like the publican,⁹⁴ have

⁸⁶ Sir. 39, 6 (*Vulg.*)

⁸⁷ Prov. 8, 17 (*Vulg.*)

⁸⁸ Ps. 5, 3-4.

⁸⁹ Ps 141, 1-2.

⁹⁰ Cf, St Cyprian, *Serm. 6: De orat. Dominica*, n. 13 (*PL* 4, 560).

⁹¹ Sir 32, 14 (*Vulg.*: “*Pro reverential accedet tibi bona gratia.*”)

⁹² Psalms 9-10, 38 (*Vugl.* Ps 9, 38 “*Desiderium pauperum esaudivit Dominus, praeparationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua*”).

⁹³ Ps 122, 1-2 (*Vulg.*)

⁹⁴ Cf. Lk 18, 13

prayed with their face bent to the ground. Others, like Moses,⁹⁵ have prayed with their arms extended. Others have prayed with joined hands or in a similar manner as devotion dictated.

Some prayed standing, others spread themselves out on the ground and many knelt devoutly, which is the most common way according to what Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 3: “For this cause I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, after whom all paternity in heaven and on earth is named: that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man.”⁹⁶ To make clear to you in a word what should be your posture when praying, think of how mortals stand before the Pope or the Emperor when asking a favour or discussing something with them. You ought to assume a posture of greater reverence when you pray to the immortal God, whom the supreme powers adore while trembling, and I assure you that you will obtain greater graces more easily when you come to prayer disposed and devoted.

4189 The second method of preparation⁹⁷ for those who need to pray is having the right intention so that what is asked for is just and proper and involves all that is pleasing to God and is not asking for what is vain, for profit or something else that is evil. Thus our requests should only be for what is good for the soul, such as the remission of sins, the gift of grace, right living and the glory of paradise, or else things that pertain to the body such as health, sufficient clothing, matters of learning, having children and the like. We may always ask for the first kind of things, which pertain to the soul, and are nothing but good,⁹⁸ unconditionally. We may ask for the second kind of things, which pertain to the body, although when they are used well are of benefit to the soul, but which can still often be offensive and are not specific, that is neither good nor bad⁹⁹ depending on how they are put to use. We should ask for these conditionally so that the Lord would grant them if they work towards salvation. However, things which are evil cannot be requested under pain of sin, nor are they worthy of being granted. Indeed, any one who asks for them should be punished in the same way as God’s wrath punishes those who offend Him by committing sin or the like.

Thus, David says in Psalm 65: “If I have looked at iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”.¹⁰⁰ If I asked a virtuous man to do something that is unjust or which would bring him harm¹⁰¹ then the greater the evil the more the great God will be offended by a request for him to do something improper. Thus, we have to be very circumspect in prayer and only request what is good and holy.

4190 Since we do not know the best way to go about things, let us place ourselves in the hands of Divine Providence (when we pray), because in the Gospel according to Luke

⁹⁵ Cf. Es 17, 11-12

⁹⁶ Eph 3, 14.

⁹⁷ A second way of preparing for prayer

⁹⁸ *Eccetto* = se, altro che.

⁹⁹ Mali = cattive

¹⁰⁰ Ps 65, 18 (*Vulg.*)

¹⁰¹ gli si fa ingiuria.

he says: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him?”¹⁰² With regard to this Basil the Great says in chapter one of his Book of Rules: “When you pray, be careful not to ask for one thing instead of another and provoke the Lord to oppose you. Do not ask for money, human glory, power or for anything that is weak and corruptible, rather seek the Kingdom of God and all those things that are necessary for the body will be given to you; as he says: “Seek the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things will be given to you as well.”¹⁰³

There are two ways of praying: one is to give praise with humility, the other, which is inferior to the first, is to demand. Therefore, when you pray do not begin immediately to demand because if you do it will appear that you adore God out of necessity. To achieve this when you start to pray withdraw from yourself, your wife, your children and the earth and pass over to heaven, leaving aside every visible or invisible creature and begin to praise the Creator of all and while you are uttering such praise do not let your mind stray here and there. In Sermon 19 on *Blessed are the Immaculate* Saint Ambrose states the same when he says: “When you pray ask for grand things, that is those that are eternal and for nothing less. Ask for things that are divine and pertain to heaven, so that you become like the angels in heaven. Do not pray for money because it is rust.¹⁰⁴ Do not ask for gold because it is metal nor for possessions because they belong to the earth.”¹⁰⁵ Such prayer will not reach God. He will not even hear it even though¹⁰⁶ you wish it deserved to be his gift and that he would listen to a pious voice that was full of grace and devotion.

4191 The third method of preparation is¹⁰⁷ that it is necessary to pay attention so that your mind is not wandering around. This was dealt with in part in chapter 19 on mixed prayer and will be dealt with in part in the beginning of the treatment on mysteries in chapter twenty-five.¹⁰⁸

Because our mind is set in frail flesh, as a ship is on the sea, mysteries are conferred on it to make it steady, as an anchor steadies a ship. For if the mind is not focused prayer will not be very successful. Therefore, the Church says in chapter 10 of *Quando de cons.* Dist. 1: “Therefore, when we are at prayer, most beloved brothers, we ought to pay attention with all our heart and engage in praying while putting aside all thought of the carnal and secular man. During that time allow the soul to think of nothing but prayer. To achieve this before coming to prayer the priest ought to prepare the minds of the brothers by saying: *Lift up your hearts*, so that the people answer: *We have lifted them up to the Lord.* We have lifted them up to the Lord with a warning not to think of anything but the Lord. Shut the heart against the enemy and open it only to God and do not allow God’s enemy to approach during the time of prayer.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Lk 11, 13.

¹⁰³ Cf. St Basil, *Rules* ch. 1, n. 2 (PG 31, 1327).

¹⁰⁴ *Ruggia* in the text = *ruggine*.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. St Ambrose, *Commentary of the Psalms* 118: *Serm* 19, n. 11 (PL 15, 1549).

¹⁰⁶ *Eccetto* in the text = *se*.

¹⁰⁷ In the text *gl'è = è*

¹⁰⁸ See above and below.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Decreti tertia pars de cons.*, dist. I, as in note 10 above.

In the Sixth Book on the Sacraments in chapter 3 Blessed Ambrose exhorts us saying: “Let your prayer not be uttered only on your lips but be attentive with all the strength of your soul. Enter the seclusion of your heart and gather everything there. Do not treat the one you wish to please as nothing or someone of no consequence. Be sure to pray from the heart so that you will deserve to be heard when praying with your mind.”¹¹⁰ Paul said the same in his First Letter to the Corinthians in chapter 14: “I shall pray with the Spirit and with the mind.”¹¹¹

To stir things up in memory we need to carefully mull over basic things. When begging for grace from God the mind should be fixed on prayer and the soul attentive as Blessed Ambrose says when commenting on chapter 14 of the First Letter to the Corinthians “I shall pray not only with the lips, but with the feelings of the heart, so that I may deserve to be heard.”¹¹²

4191 The fourth method of preparation is when praying to search for deep confidence in obtaining what is asked if this is for the honour of God and our salvation. Such confidence can come from three sources: firstly, from God’s omnipotence and riches since nothing is lacking in these attributes and he can bestow them copiously and lavishly. The Apostle speaks about this in chapter 9 of the Second Letter to the Corinthians: “God is able to make all grace abound in you”.¹¹³ Secondly, from his infallible providence, because once he had promised this it could not fail. In chapter 11 of Mark the Lord says in this regard: “Therefore I say to you, all things you ask when you pray, believe that you will receive, and they shall come to you.”¹¹⁴ Thirdly, such trust comes from the great love that he has towards us and his goodness which is prepared to give us greater things than we are prepared to receive. The Saviour speaks of this in chapter 16 of St John: “In that day you shall ask in my name and you shall receive, because the Father loves you. Up to now you have not asked anything in my name: ask and you shall receive.”¹¹⁵

You should not doubt when asking him for necessary things which he will give copiously to everyone by means of his power. Therefore, James the Apostle says in chapter one: “But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men abundantly and does not reproach. It will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For whoever wavers is like a wave on the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore, let that man not think that he will receive anything from the Lord.”¹¹⁶

Thus, you ought to pray with confidence expecting to receive from the Lord in due time all that is not contrary to salvation. St Isidore says in chapter 7 of the Third Book of the Sentences: “The feelings towards God of the one who is praying should be such that he

¹¹⁰ St Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* Book II, ch. 3, n. 13 (PL 16, 476).

¹¹¹ 1 Cor 14, 15

¹¹² The quote was not identified. Insistence on attention of the heart is strongly stressed in *Const 1536*, n. 42, 1.

¹¹³ Cf. 2 Cor. 9, 8.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Mk 11, 24.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Jn 16, 23, 26.

¹¹⁶ James 1, 5-8.

does not doubt the effectiveness of his prayers. We pray in vain when we do not have trust and hope. So, as the Apostle says, ask with faith, not doubting anything.”¹¹⁷

4193 The fifth method of preparation is to try and have deep interior and exterior humility. By recognising one’s needs and bringing them before the Lord from within we admit that we are unworthy to receive grace from such exalted Majesty and that what we ask will be granted by divine generosity and not on account of our merits. This is like what Abraham did in chapter 18 of Genesis: “I will speak to the Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes”.¹¹⁸ Outwardly, going down on both knees, getting rid of great ostentation and the flamboyance of having ornate cushions¹¹⁹, comfortable footstools, one should remain with head bowed and completely devout as is in keeping with such great Majesty. Nor should one approach the altar or sacred places too closely out of reverence for the Lord being convinced that the further you stay back out of humility the closer you come to God for him to hear you, as the Spirit states in chapter 35 of Ecclesiasticus: “The prayer of he who humbles himself shall pierce the clouds and he will not be comforted until it comes near; nor will he depart until the most High accepts it.”¹²⁰ In Psalm 101 the prophet David says: “He has regard for the prayer of the humble; and he has not despised their petition.”¹²¹

An unfortunate proud person is disliked by everyone and when a pompous person begs they are given nothing. The person who is ostentatious when praying can cry as much as he likes but he cannot make a request until he becomes humble. This is contained in the ninth chapter of the Book of Judith: “O Lord, you have not liked the proud from the beginning, but the prayer of the humble and the meek is fine.”¹²² Therefore, the one who wishes to be heard when he prays should pray with deep humility and then his prayers will always be accepted.

4194 The sixth method of preparation is perseverance because we are always in need of the Lord once more and the obligation of thanking him increases. Thus, it is fitting that our prayer be unrelenting and if it does not obtain a favour immediately that it keeps knocking and waits till the door is opened.¹²³ A drop of water penetrates a rock not because it is harder but because it falls¹²⁴ often and the person who persists will win what is unwinnable through humble perseverance and will bend the Omnipotent to listen to his request.

A person will go repeatedly to a Prince’s palace to obtain a favour without obtaining it immediately. We think that we will be heard by the immortal God by reciting a couple of *Our Fathers*. Even though he is always ready to give we are not already ready to receive.

¹¹⁷ Cf. St Isidore, *Sententiarum* lib. III, c. 7, n. 15 (PL 83, 674s).

¹¹⁸ Gen 18, 27.

¹¹⁹ *Cussini* in the text = *cuseini*.

¹²⁰ Sir 35, 21

¹²¹ Ps 101, 18 (*Vulg.*)

¹²² Cf. Judith 9, 16 (*Vulg.*) “nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to you, but the prayer of the humble and the meek have always pleased you”, the text in Judith 9, 11 is slightly different.

¹²³ Cf. Mt 7, 7; Lk 11, 9.

¹²⁴ *Vi caschi* in the text = *casca*.

A person desires to receive much but only provides small vessels. The Lord delays to grant what is asked of him because we are not capable of receiving it or in order to give us something bigger at the right time.¹²⁵

4195 By means of lengthy prayer Elizabeth and Zachary begged to have John the Baptist in their old age. Thus, in Book Two of *The Sermon on the Mount* St Augustine says: “Knock, as one having great faith in him whose promise does not deceive”. He then says: “Whoever asks receives and he who seeks finds and the door shall be opened to him who knocks. For this reason perseverance is required in order to receive what we ask for and to find what we are seeking and that the door may be opened to the one who is knocking”.¹²⁶ Near the end of chapter 7 of the Second Book on the Highest Good Isidore wrote: “This is why the prayers of some people are heard much later so that while they are waiting they can become more eager and their rewards increase like when frost delays the harvest so that the longer it takes for the grain to appear the richer the harvest¹²⁷ will be. How many times¹²⁸ when we pray we are not heard quickly and when we think about our conduct we attribute this to our faults and divine justice. Sometimes when we persevere in prayer and are not heard it is to our advantage and not disadvantage. Often¹²⁹ God does not answer the prayers of many as they would like because he answers them for their salvation.”¹³⁰

4196 Let the heart of the one who is praying be consoled. Let him carry on valiantly and wait for the Lord and he will receive all that he asks for appropriately.¹³¹ Because we should ask for nothing else in prayer than God’s honour and salvation it is not proper that we should cease from prayer until we have obtained what we have asked for. Nor should we make much of the sweetness we taste when praying since this is not as acceptable to God as greater humility. Milk is fed to children, but solid food is served to adults. Sometimes God gives consolation and savour to those who are imperfect to entice them and not to those who are perfect so as to give them a greater crown in heaven.

The one who looks beyond his own comfort must be regarded with greater love by his patron. When we persevere in prayer without feeling gratification the Lord God is more pleased and he confers glory and a greater reward on such a one. Because of this let all of us persevere in prayer. The Holy Spirit¹³² says in chapter 7 of Ecclesiastes: “Better is the end of a prayer than a beginning.” The Acts of the Apostles says of Mary and the disciples: “All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus.”¹³³

¹²⁵ This is an example of Bernardino of Balvano’s concise style which some have compared to the *Imitation of Christ* by A’Kenpis.

¹²⁶ St Augustine, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Book II, nn. 72-73 (PL 34, 1302).

¹²⁷ *Ricolta* in the text = *raccolta*.

¹²⁸ Or every time

¹²⁹ *Molta volte, spesse volte* = *many times, frequently*.

¹³⁰ St Isidore, *Sententiarum. Lib. III, c. 7*, nn. 21-26 (PL 83, 677).

¹³¹ Cf Ps 26, 14 (*Vulg*).

¹³² Qo 7, 8; but in the Vulgate we read: “Better is the end of a prayer than the beginning.” (Ecclesiastes 7, 9).

¹³³ Acts 1, 14.

These therefore are the conditions that should accompany prayer: posture of body, right intention, being attentive, trust, humility and perseverance.

Regarding the results which should be present following prayer. Chapter 24

4197 The first result is listening to the word of God reverently and attentively and being prepared to put it into practice. Because just as you wish to be heard by the Lord when you pray to him, so he also wishes to be heard and comprehended by you in sermons and holy books when he speaks to you, for we speak to God in prayer and he speaks to us in sermons and in readings from Sacred Scripture. When ever we do not want to listen to him, he will not hear our prayers. The Holy Spirit gives witness to this in chapter 28 of the Book of Proverbs: “Whoever turns his ears away from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination.”¹³⁴

The second result which should be present after prayer is obedience to the divine precepts. With what kind of confidence can a person who does not want to be continually subject to God but to despise him ask for grace from the Lord? On what grounds can he ask him for pardon if he does not seek to stop offending him? Therefore, after he has prayed, a Christian should carry out the will of God so that he might be both well prepared for prayer and better disposed to receive grace by observing his commandments. Thus, the Holy Spirit says in chapter 35 of Ecclesiasticus: “Whoever keeps the law multiplies prayers. It is a wholesome sacrifice to take heed of the commandments, and to depart from all iniquity.”¹³⁵ David says in Psalm 36: “Be subject to God and pray to him”.¹³⁶ In chapter 17 of his work *On the Work of Monks* Augustine wrote: “The prayers of those who are obedient are answered more readily than ten thousand prayers of those who despise God’s precepts”.¹³⁷ In his commentary on chapter 7 of St Matthew St John Chrysostom wrote: “Prayer is nothing without good works, since the strength of prayer is upright works. Whoever wishes to obtain what he asks for in prayer should be always prepared to be obedient to the Lord”.¹³⁸

4198 The third result that one looks for following prayer is compassion for the poor because cruelty towards one’s neighbour does not deserve mercy from God and the person who does not come to the assistance of those in need through the things which the Lord has given him will not be helped by the Lord in what he needs [...]¹³⁹.

The fourth and final result is moderation and propriety in lifestyle because prayer would be infantile¹⁴⁰ and a useless thing if after having repeatedly offered yourself to the Lord

¹³⁴ Prov 28, 9.

¹³⁵ Sir 35, 1-2.

¹³⁶ Ps 36, 7 (*Vulg*) In the present translation the meaning is quite different Cf Ps 37, 7.

¹³⁷ St Augustine, *The Work of Monks* chapter 17 n. 20 (*PL* 40, 565).

¹³⁸ St John Chrysostom *In Math hom.* 23, n. 5 (*PG* 57-58, 314, the thought expressed there only partly corresponds to what is expressed here).

¹³⁹ In the text we read *quelle cose l’ha dato il Signore (the things which the Lord has given)*. Compassion for those who are in need is a characteristic of Capuchin spirituality.

¹⁴⁰ That is child’s play. In later edition we read: *giuoco da putti (a game of little boys)*.

as prepared to run away from sin, as being willing to serve him without delay and to conform to his way of living, and to endure adversity, you did not truly show this by action. Because of this it is appropriate that after praying we be seen to be restrained in speech, by becoming well-adjusted in conduct, exemplary in lifestyle, having custody of the eyes, being self-controlled in eating, modest in dress and circumspect in conduct, kind to your neighbour, reverent towards superiors, affable towards your equals, generous towards your subjects and amiable towards all, guarded and well-behaved towards ourselves and everyone in our family, living in a religious manner according to God [...].¹⁴¹

The meaning of the mysteries and their order. Chapter 25

4199 Wonder is born when we do not know the meaning of something. Performance is perfected when we know its meaning. Since we wish to discuss the mysteries of Christ's life we shall firstly state their meaning in order to create greater resolve in the mind.

We have said¹⁴² that prayer is the raising of the mind to God through devout feelings which generate the desired acts which are of three kinds: oblation, petition and thanksgiving.¹⁴³ In all of these acts nothing is as useful and necessary as contemplating the mysteries of the Lord.

In order to raise our mind to God we need to know first of all where he is, otherwise we shall not know where to direct our mind. For this reason, during the time of the natural law,¹⁴⁴ the Lord ordered the construction of altars so that the faithful would know how to raise their minds to him. Subsequently, during the period under the law,¹⁴⁵ he had them make tabernacles or pavilions in the desert in which he spoke, and they listened. Later he commanded the construction of the holy Temple in Jerusalem, and he did all this so that his people might more easily raise their mind to God. Although they could not see him with their bodily eyes, because he is spirit, still they understood with their minds that in that place the God of majesty was ready to listen to them and actually hear them and they came there with respect like people who went into the hall of a king, where he lived in a pavilion even though they did not see him with their eyes in the pavilion, they saw him with their soul and they paid reverence.

¹⁴¹ Here the author has written useful pages against the lust and vanity of men and women as exemplified in these remarks: "It would be a very profane thing and against the Christian religion for you to possess many ostentatious things and comfortable ornaments while leaving Christ's body poor, naked and trembling with the cold... It is necessary that a person not only despise the present world, but chastise the flesh itself and bring it under subjection..." At the end the chapter this is summarised in the usual way: "So that a person may be prepared for prayer, four things are required as being present with prayer, namely. Listening to the word of God with humility, observing faithfully what is read and understood, being compassionate to the needs of others and living a disciplined life in one's conduct."

¹⁴² *Dissemo* in the text = *dicemmo*.

¹⁴³ See above.

¹⁴⁴ *Tempo della natura* in the text = the period of natural law before Moses.

¹⁴⁵ That is during the period of the Mosaic Law.

4200 However, Christ, who possesses the fullness of the divine nature because he is true God and perfect man, was given to us who live during the period of grace,¹⁴⁶ and he has raised our minds to God. As a person sees with the eyes of his body and by means of the senses takes what has been perceived into his soul, so when he has gathered thoughts on the mysteries of the Lord Jesus Christ he is moved by what is divine to hear Christ himself.

Thus, there is no better way to focus one's thoughts on God than by means of these mysteries because through these mysteries we take Christ, who possesses the divine nature, into our mind. Because of this whoever takes these mysteries to heart possesses Christ who brings this about. Whoever possesses Christ possesses God because Christ is God. This is easy because not only is he God, but he is also perfect man, like us, except for sin.¹⁴⁷ The Lord says this in chapter 14 of St John: "Have I been so long a time with you and have you not known me? Philip he who sees me sees the Father also".¹⁴⁸

4201 Secondly, also with regard to the acts of prayer, nothing is as profitable as these mysteries are. With respect to oblation, they provide a most excellent example for you. If you undertake the first step in the prayer of oblation, which is readiness to avoid evil, you will recognise what displeases God by means of these mysteries, because evil really consists in choosing what Christ shunned and turning away from what he chose. You can understand all this clearly by means of the acts of his holy life as demonstrated in these mysteries.

With respect to the second step, that is, the prayer of oblation, which is offering ourselves to serve him and to do his divine will, Christ himself was the rule and example of this in his mysteries which; if one imitates, he will do God's will and be certain of salvation.¹⁴⁹ With regard to the third step, which is the prayer of oblation, where one is prepared to endure adversity, the mysteries of Christ and his wonderful patience will not only be a useful teaching but also afford inner comfort in enduring such things with joy. All torment and suffering will be joyful to him who contemplates Christ's great affliction with living faith.¹⁵⁰ Thus for the first kind of prayer, which is offering oneself to God, the mysteries of Christ are most suitable.¹⁵¹

4202 With regard to the second step, which involves asking to be set free from what is evil, to gain support¹⁵² for our spiritual and bodily needs and for victory in heaven, the most effective help comes from considering the mysteries of Christ while praying to

¹⁴⁶ In the New Testament.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Heb 4, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Jn 14, 9.

¹⁴⁹ He could not have stated the principle of conformity to Christ more forcefully or practically which is the fundamental programme of a Christian.

¹⁵⁰ This thought was already present in Ochino and was further developed by Mattia da Salò in his sermons *Dei dolori di Cristo*.

¹⁵¹ The meaning is: For the initial act of prayer, which is oblation, Christ's mysteries are the most useful method of oblation.

¹⁵² *Suvenuto* in the text = *suvvenuto*.

receive support. This is because everything which the eternal Father has given to us, gives to us or will give to us comes through Christ and the mysteries of Christ.

If we wish to take the third step, which is that of thanksgiving, contemplation of the mysteries of Christ is the best way of realising what we owe to God, because in them we take to heart all the graces and gifts that he has given us and will give us as we shall see below.

In addition to this, just as a ship at sea uses her anchor to remain safe and sound, so too our mind, if it is not to wander will need something to hold its attention and concentration, and in order to achieve this there is nothing better than the mysteries of the Lord Jesus because they can be observed and are so controversial and give the mind plenty to think about.¹⁵³

4203 Therefore, let us pass from one mystery to another in order not to become tiresome. We shall highlight thirty three mysteries in memory of the thirty three years that the loving Jesus, our Lord and our God, spent with us here on earth so that a person who is devout may dwell thoughtfully on one or other mystery.¹⁵⁴ So that by means of constant practise and divine favour you may obtain the facility and the grace to become able not only to hold these mysteries solidly in your mind but also that they become very strongly rooted in your heart with so much love that in every part of your mind, even when you are occupied with other things, they will reside in your heart like a bundle of myrrh,¹⁵⁵ and make the soul feel like what the Lord said in the Lamentations¹⁵⁶ “Remember my poverty, affliction and gall” and respond quoting what follows: “I shall remember these things in my heart and my soul shall languish within me.”

Concerning the number and the order of the mysteries. Chapter 26

4204 Knowing the road makes the traveller more secure, knowing how many miles there are to walk makes the journey happier. Knowledge of the mysteries will make the devout soul’s prayer sweeter and more consoling. Therefore, I shall briefly gather in an orderly manner all that is involved in what follows.

[1] The profound mystery of eternal election, when the omnipotent Father, having loved us with perpetual charity,¹⁵⁷ *ad aeterno*, decided to free us from sin and make us justified, and in the end glorified all of those who wanted to believe, love and follow his Only Son and our Lord Jesus Christ and to obey Him. He did this by no other means than through Jesus Christ Himself and His merits.

¹⁵³ This thought is also well developed by Bellintani in his sermons on *Dei dolori di Cristo* (On the Sufferings of Christ).

¹⁵⁴ This thought is very common in spiritual literature and is present in Girolomo da Molfetta, Bernardino Ochino and Paolo Manassie and others.

¹⁵⁵ A very important point that comes from St Bernard and St Bonaventure.

¹⁵⁶ *Treni* in the text = *Lamintations*. Cf. Lam. 3, 19-20.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Gen. 31, 3.

[2] The miraculous mystery of the divine Incarnation, which took place in the fullness of time,¹⁵⁸ when through the work of the Holy Spirit the eternal Word took human flesh in the womb of the most holy Virgin and remained there for nine months.

[3] The joyful mystery of the happy birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, when by order of Caesar Augustus,¹⁵⁹ the Roman Emperor, who was taking a census¹⁶⁰ of the entire world, to count all the people in the world, beginning with the day when Mary, who gave birth to the Lord Jesus in Bethlehem while remaining immaculate and always a virgin, gave birth to Christ. Not finding a place she gave birth in a stable placing him on the hay wrapped in cloth.¹⁶¹ While, out of love for us and to set an example, the King of glory was lying there in such poverty, shepherds visited him that night. The Angel, in wonderful splendour, while all were standing in amazement, exclaimed: “Do not be afraid, behold I announce good news and great joy to all people on this night, the Saviour has been born to you today”. Immediately, along with the Angel, the voice of the heavenly hosts offered praise and said: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to men of goodwill on earth.”¹⁶² Little Jesus was visited by shepherds and embraced gently by Mary.

4205 [4] The pitiable mystery of Christ’s legal circumcision, when on the eighth day, in order to set us a perfect example of obedience and to make sure that he was not lacking in legitimacy, he was circumcised in accord with the law and in accord with what God had decreed and with what the Angel had announced, and he was given the sweet, wonderful and adorable name of Jesus.¹⁶³

[5] The august mystery of the adoration of the Magi, when by means of a marvellous prodigy in the sky, the Magi were led by a miraculous star to where the child Jesus lay. When they entered they found him with Mary his mother and falling to their knees on the ground they adored him and offered him gold because he was a great king, incense because he was high priest and myrrh as a prototype of his burial because he was to die later. The Magi were warned by an Angel in a dream to take another return route.¹⁶⁴

[6] The hallowed mystery of the devout presentation in the Temple when, in accordance with the law of purification, after forty days his most holy Mother, together with some poor people, in order to observe the law and out of love for us, offered the Lord Jesus in the Temple, where the just man Simeon was waiting and took Jesus into his arms, telling his Mother that the sword of passion would pierce her Son’s heart as well as her own heart. The prophetess Anna was also in the Temple and she proclaimed publically that he was the saviour¹⁶⁵ of Israel.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Gen. 4, 4.

¹⁵⁹ In the text *Agosto!*

¹⁶⁰ In the text *dsicretione*.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Lk. 2, 1-9.

¹⁶² Lk 2, 8-14.

¹⁶³ Lk 2, 21.

¹⁶⁴ Mt 2, 1-12.

¹⁶⁵ In the text, *Risctto*. Cf. Lk 2, 22-38.

4206 [7] The alarming mystery of the terrifying flight into Egypt, when Herod the Emperor, thinking that he had been taken for a fool by the Magi and being ambitious with respect to his Kingdom, ordered all children under two years of age to be killed. Having been warned by an Angel, most holy Joseph took flight and took them to Egypt.¹⁶⁶

[8] The distressing mystery of the sorrowful return to the Temple, when, after Herod had died, and following the advice of an Angel, they had returned to Nazareth from Egypt, in accordance with the law, Jesus together with Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem for the Feast Day and while they were returning they lost him and went in search of him in sorrow. On the third day they found him sitting in the Temple in the company of the doctors asking them questions and replying very wisely even though Jesus was a child of twelve year of age.¹⁶⁷

[9] The humble mystery of the exemplary subjection to Joseph and Mary when he returned with them to Nazareth and was subject to them until the age of thirty and the glorious life that Jesus had with Joseph and Mary and the prompt obedience that he gave them.¹⁶⁸

4207 [10] The salutary mystery of holy Baptism in the Jordan when at the age of thirty the Lord Jesus was baptised¹⁶⁹ in the Jordan by John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit was seen above the Lord in the Jordan in the shape of a dove, and the Father's voice was heard: "This is my beloved Son", and John pointed his finger at him: "Behold the Angel of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world."¹⁷⁰

[11] The exemplary mystery of the miraculous fast in the desert, when, having departed from the Jordan, filled by the Holy Spirit, he went into the desert where he stayed alone for forty days and forty nights, during which time he ate nothing, drank nothing and where there was nothing but desert and where he gave himself up to prayer continually night and day.¹⁷¹

[12] The generous mystery of the cruel temptation and powerful victory of the Lord when after fulfilling the sacred fast of forty days he was attacked¹⁷² by temerarious by Satan who told him to turn stones into bread if he was the Son of God in order to make him fall into the sin of gluttony and distrust of God. He also told him to throw himself from the pinnacle of the Temple so that he would be overcome with vainglory. He told him that he would give him the whole world if, bowing to the ground, he would adore him thinking that he would perform idolatry out of greed. However, the generous Lord dealt with this in a noble manner saying that human life did not consist of bread alone but of the word of God. Since one can descend by means of a ladder it is not necessary to tempt God. He said to Satan, who was so proud, to go away because it has been written: "You shall

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Mt 2,13-18

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Lk 2, 51-52.

¹⁶⁸ Cf Lk 2, 51-52

¹⁶⁹ *Battigisto* in the text = *Battessato*

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Jn 1, 29; Mt 5, 13-17; Mk 1, 9=11; Lk 3, 21-22.

¹⁷¹ Cf Mk 4, 1-2; Mk 1, 12. See also *Cost. 1536*, n. 26. *Vacando* in the text = *attendendo*.

¹⁷² *Assaggiato* in the text = *assaltato*.

adore the Lord your God and serve him alone.”¹⁷³ In doing so he set us a noble example and showed us a righteous way to conquer temptations.

4208 [13] The breathtaking mystery of choosing apostles after the best Mediator had begged the Father with sighs and prayer, after he had overcome the battle with the fierce enemy, and when he wanted to summon the world to penance and share divine grace with people, he chose twelve Apostles as witnesses,¹⁷⁴ Later he had to give them (except the traitor) the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and commission them as most faithful ambassadors to proclaim forgiveness and penance to every nation.¹⁷⁵

[14] The most trustworthy mystery of the doctrine of salvation when the doctor from heaven and the supreme teacher who became our guide taught us clearly everything that his Father¹⁷⁶ wanted as a requirement for our salvation, the gravity of sin and how precious is grace. He also proclaimed the bitterness of hell, the happiness of heaven, the effectiveness of divine love, the way to serve God, the way to conquer temptations, the love we ought to show towards our neighbour, how to control ourselves, how to tolerate adversity, temperance in prosperity, the effectiveness of faith, the excellence of charity, the value of hope, the glory of humility, and, in summary, everything that is constructive, necessary, useful and beneficial for our salvation.

4209 [15] The stupendous mystery of marvellous miracles when, for our salvation and as a witness to the truth, he worked miracles, as he was perfectly both God and man. He provided proof of his identity and his teaching¹⁷⁷ so that the entire world might receive salvation by means of these stupendous miracles and marvellous signs. He cast out devils, gave sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, made the cripple walk, restored health to those who were sick, raised the dead, cleansed lepers,¹⁷⁸ changed water into wine, multiplied loaves, walked on the waves of the sea, rebuked wind, stilled the storm.¹⁷⁹ At the time of his death he made the earth quake, the sun darken, rocks split and opened graves so that the dead came out and proclaimed God.¹⁸⁰ He did all this so that the world might inherit eternity by believing in him and obeying him.

[16] The glorious mystery of the admirable transfiguration when in order to rid us of the fear of death and give us the courage to leave this life, our loving Lord, by showing the hidden glory that the elect would possess, transfigured himself on the mountain in the presence of Peter, James and John, and as he prayed his face appeared to shine more than the sun and his clothes became whiter than snow. He was seen speaking with Moses and Elias about heavenly matters. Peter was so aroused that he asked if he could make three tabernacles though not understanding what he said. The Holy Spirit appeared in a glowing cloud from which the Father’s voice was heard. “This is my beloved Son with

¹⁷³ Cf. Mt 4, 3-11; Lk 4, 3-13.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Lk 6, 12-13; Mt 3, 13-15; Mk 3, 13-15.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Mt 28, 19-20; Mk 16, 15-16.

¹⁷⁶ Jn 8, 26; 14, 24; 15, 15.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Jn 10, 25. Acts 2,22.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Mt 11, 4-6; Lk 4, 16-21.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. respectively Jn 2, 1-11; 6, 1-13; 16-21; Mk 4, 17-21 etc.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Mt 27, 51-54.

whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” The Apostles were struck with great amazement but were comforted by the Lord and as they came down from the mountain he commanded them not to tell anyone about the great mystery until after his death.¹⁸¹

4210 [17] The royal mystery of the imperial entry into Jerusalem with palms, when the humble Lord, despising ambitious pomp and the pageantry of the world, entered Jerusalem on a poor donkey with much solemnity and triumph. He was greeted with palms by the people who cried out in festive mood: “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel.”¹⁸² In this city the merciful Lord cried bitterly over their sin and over the great devastation which the city would suffer at the hands of the Romans, because of his death and their starvation, when during the siege¹⁸³ a mother would eat her own child out of hunger,¹⁸⁴ after not a stone had been left on a stone. He entered the Temple with this glory casting out those who were doing business with scourges and preaching until nightfall.¹⁸⁵

[18] The tearful mystery of the unpleasant permission granted by his Mother when the hour of his bitter passion approached, and when he had to leave her and he humbly fell to his knees (according to pious belief)¹⁸⁶ and tearfully asked her permission and begged her pardon, the Lord thanking his Mother for the many pains, privations and anxieties which she had endured for him, the flight into Egypt, her sorrowful searching in the Temple, her life of extreme poverty, comforting her about what as Lord he had to suffer, how he had to be scourged at the pillar, crowned with thorns, unjustly condemned, nailed to the cross, and taken down from it, how she would hold him in her hands marked with five wounds and would place him in his grave. On the other hand, the tearful Mother asked his pardon for not having served him as he deserved and thanked him for having accepted her service and offered, out of love for him, to be ready to endure any suffering. Following many sighs and tears they embraced each other and she granted him permission to die for us even though we are ungrateful.

4211 [19] The mystery of the Last Supper, which he longed to eat, when the Lord Jesus the night before his bitter passion because he earnestly yearned to give himself as food had his last supper with his disciples where he ordained the Apostle as priests and gave them his most holy body and precious blood, humbly washed their feet with his own hands and kissed them with his sacred lips kneeling down before them. He also told them that one of them would betray him and gave them a dynamic sermon, giving thanks to the Father and then went to the garden to pray.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Cf. Lk 9, 28-36; Mt 17, 1-9; Mk 9, 2-10.

¹⁸² Cf. Mt 21, 4-9; Mk 11, 1-11; Lk 19, 35-38.

¹⁸³ In the text: *assegio*.

¹⁸⁴ A macabre detail narrated by Giuseppe Flavio. Cf. *De bello judaico*, lib. VI, c. 3, n. 4. (*Flavii Josephi operum*, t. II, Lugdoni, 1726, 382). With regard to Jesus weeping over Jerusalem cf. Lk. 19, 41-44.

¹⁸⁵ Mt 21, 12-13; Mk 11, 11, 15-19; Lk 19, 45-46.

¹⁸⁶ In effect the episode comes from the devout imagination of popular Christian meditation. It is not mentioned in the Gospels. See above note 54. Verucchino also dedicated a meditation to this subject. This is meditation 44, *Sei punti per meditare l'umiltàlicenza che Cristo Salvatore tolse dalla sua benedetta Madre per andar alla morte*. Cf. *Compendio di cento meditazioni sacre*. Venezia, 1602, 313-321.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Jn 13, 1-38; Mt 26, 17-39; Mk 14, 12-25; Lk 22, 7-22.

[20] The devout mystery of the gory and fervent prayer in the garden, when the Lord, in anguish, having said grace after the supper, while Judas the traitor had dealings with the High Priest and the Pharisees about how to arrest him, and while he accompanied the soldiers and the servants of the Jews with lanterns, batons and weapons to arrest him, the humble Lord waited for them where he had spent three hours in very fervent prayer. Having comforted his Apostles and taken Peter, James and John aside, he told them of his great sorrow, saying that his soul was afflicted to the point of death and that they should keep watch with him and pray so that they would not enter into temptation. In order to be alone, he went a stone's throw away from them, and prayed three times, for the space of three hours, asking if it was possible for the chalice of the passion to be taken away. Placing himself at his Father's good pleasure, setting us an example, he said: "My Father let it not be as I wish, but as you wish." The prayer and sorrowful anguish was so strong that he sweat drops of blood profusely, bathing the ground. He rebuked Peter for not being able to spend an hour with him. Therefore, as he was in such agony an Angel comforted him.¹⁸⁸

4212 [21] The horrific mystery of the most cruel arrest and tethering of Christ when Judas the traitor came to the garden to fetch him, and the Apostles had woken up, the intrepid Lord met the traitor and received a kiss from him. He asked them who they were looking for and they replied: "Jesus of Nazareth." He responded immediately: "I am he." They all fell to the ground three times. Finally, he said: "If you are looking for me, let my disciples go". They bound him immediately and led him to Annas and Caiphas the high priest who questioned him concerning his disciples and teaching and he replied: "I have spoken to the world publically, ask those who heard me". With a sacrilegious fist a wretched servant struck him very brutally in the face and before the cock had crowed Peter had denied him three times. When he was questioned he confessed that he was the Son of God. They spat in his face. The high priest and all the people who were standing around condemned him to death and he suffered severe punishment throughout the night until the morning.¹⁸⁹

[22] The very patient mystery of shameful deception and mockery when, in the morning, the priests presented the meek Jesus to Pilate who recognised that he was just, but because he was disturbed by the agitation of the people, he sent him to Herod. Because he was curious, Herod questioned him about many things and when the kind Jesus was silent Herod, despising him, considered him to be insane and out of great wickedness and disdain clothed him in a white garment and sent him back to Pilate. This is how Pilate and Herod became friends whereas they had previously been enemies. This gave rise to Christ's patient tolerance.¹⁹⁰

4213 [23] The painful mystery of the harsh scourging when the most innocent Lord, at Pilot's command and to appease the perfidious and angry Jews, was stripped of his clothes, bound to a pillar and scourged in public to the point where his precious blood

¹⁸⁸ Cf Lk, 22,39-46; Mt 26, 36-46; Mk 14, 32-42.

¹⁸⁹ Cf Mt 26, 47-67; Mk 14, 43-52; Lk 22, 47-53; Jn 18, 2-11.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Lk 23, 1-12; Mt 27, 1-2; Mk 15, 1.

issues from all his limbs and bathed the earth setting us a most important example of patience.¹⁹¹

[24] The abrasive mystery of the crowning with thorns when, on the occasion of the serious uproar of the people, the iniquitous Pilate believing that he could placate the furious anger of the Jews allowed a crown of sharp thorns to be placed on the head of Jesus and a purple saffron¹⁹² cloth to be draped on him and a reed placed in his hand. After the soldiers had blindfolded him, spat in his face and struck it with their hands, they showed their disrespect by greeting him: “Let God save you, King of the Jews”, and they all exclaimed in a loud voice: “If you are a prophet guess who hit you.” Appearing like this they showed him to the people, saying: “Behold the man”, and all loudly cried out: “Take him away and crucify him. He certainly deserves to die.”¹⁹³

4214 [25] The irksome mystery of the iniquitous sentence of the carrying of the cross when out of fear of Caesar, the wicked Pilate, wishing to satisfy the cruel mob, and being frightened of losing his position, after freeing Barabbas, who was guilty of murder and sedition, at the request of the people in accord with a privilege granted to the Jews that they could set a prisoner free during the Paschal Solemnity, passed the wicked sentence from the tribunal seat where he passed the unjust sentence, that contradicted what the most holy Jesus has said as a witness, and ordered that after carrying his cross on his shoulder he was to ascend Mount Calvary and be placed on that cross between the crosses of two thieves one on the right and the other on the left of Jesus. While carrying his cross on his shoulder, he replied to the women who were crying from compassion: “Do not weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children. If they do this in the green wood, how much greater will your suffering be?” As he left the city he met his sorrowful Mother, and because of their intense sorrow both of them fell to the ground and because the Lord was worn out because of so many afflictions, tears and scourges he could not lift the cross. Simon from Cyrene was soon employed, and, in that way, Jesus was led to Mount Calvary, the site of justice.¹⁹⁴

4215 [26] The dreadful mystery of the ruthless crucifixion when he arrived on the mountain the suffering Lord was stripped naked in view of the wicked people and fixed to the cross with large nails piercing his sacred hands and feet by means of a rough hammer. When his whole body was racked with very great pain he was lifted up on the cross on the top of which there hung a sign written by Pilate in Greek and Latin: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” As he hung on the cross and could hear his Mother and all the other people who were standing around he said seven words to teach us: against anger: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”; against greed, speaking to the thief: “today you will be with me in paradise;” to his Mother: “Woman behold your son;” against lust, because of his great suffering; “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” against gluttony: “I thirst,” against sloth, “It is consummated,” that is

¹⁹¹ Cf. Mt 21, 26; Mk 15, 15; Jn 19, 1.

¹⁹² This detail was removed from subsequent editions perhaps because the colour of saffron (yellow) does not go with purple.

¹⁹³ Cf. Mt 27, 27-31; Mk 15, 16-20; Jn 19, 1-36.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Mt 27, 20-26; 31-32, 38; Mk 15, 6-15, 21-22, 27; Lk 25, 13-19, 26-32; Jn 19, 17.

everything has been done, against pride, “Father into your hands I commend my spirit”. When he had said these words, after many torments, pain and suffering he gave his most holy spirit to his Father and his dead body remained on the cross.¹⁹⁵

4216 [27] The pitiful mystery of the bitter weeping when, after the Lord had died, and the crowd had dispersed, Maria, John, Maria Salome and Maria Madeleine with some other devout persons remained at the foot of the cross very tearfully contemplating the pallid lacerated limbs that hung so compassionately upon the cross. After the noble Joseph had obtained the body of Jesus from Plate, he came with Nicodemus and took the body down from the cross and placed it on the ground on a white sheet. The Mother was near the head, Madeleine near the feet and the others stood about. Bitter and sorrowful sighs fell on the body and all shed abundant and copious tears.¹⁹⁶ This completed what had been written: “That day there shall be great lamentation in Jerusalem;” and “what are these wounds in your feet and hands?”¹⁹⁷

[28] The dark mystery of the darkened tomb when after many tears and doleful sighs, after they had anointed the body with myrrh (following the custom of the Jews), they carried it to the tomb and closed the monument after much weeping, with his Mother stricken by love having left her soul buried with the body of her Son. As she returned to her home she passed the place where the blood-soaked cross was. She began to feel sad again and shedding copious tears she kissed the ground that was bathed in the precious blood and then, accompanied by others she went on home.¹⁹⁸

4217 [27] The joyful mystery of the happy resurrection when, on the third day, at dawn on Sunday, the glorious soul of the Lord Jesus, destroyed the gates of hell, bound Lucifer the proud prince of the kingdom of darkness, emptied Limbo, and accompanied by hosts of Angels, and taking with him the souls of the ancient Fathers, the happy soul went into the tomb and by means of divine authority gathered the sacred blood into his precious veins. The body was immediately resurrected in victory and by the glorious gift of its delicacy, without in fact touching the tomb; it came out in view of all the saintly Fathers. It appeared all aglow and beautiful, with the glorious standard of triumphant victory wishing them peace. At the same time many of the dead bodies of the saints rose. The citizens of the higher world, that is the holy Angels, came down suddenly and there was a great earthquake that amazed those who saw it. Angels stood in the tomb dressed in white as a symbol of rejoicing and said in a clear voice: “You are seeking Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, he has risen; come and see the place.”¹⁹⁹ After the Lord had consoled his Mother and his disciples, showing himself to them over forty days in many happy and sweet apparitions, conversing with them and often appearing to them, eating and drinking

¹⁹⁵ Cf Mt 27, 33-50; Mk 15, 23-37; Lk 23, 33-46; Jn 19, 23-30. Christ’s seven words on the cross have been dealt with by a vast amount of devotional literature.

¹⁹⁶ Cf Mt 27, 55-59; Mk 15, 40-45; Lk 25, 47-52; Jh 19, 38-40. Note how pious imagination has added to the scene and this may have inspired subsequent works of art.

¹⁹⁷ Cf Zac. 12, 11; 13, 6.

¹⁹⁸ Once more we note how compassion has stirred devout imagery which was inspired without doubt by the usual *Meditationes vitae Christi*, cap. 83.

¹⁹⁹ Cf Mt 28, 1-6; Kk 16, 1-6.

with them he had clearly and effectively demonstrated to them the truth of his resurrection.²⁰⁰

4218 [30] The triumphal mystery of the jubilant ascension when forty days after his resurrection when his disciples and his most blessed Mother were together on Mount Olivet, after he had eaten with them and spoken about many marvellous things, looking joyfully on all of them, he ascended from them triumphantly into heaven. After he had ascended they all stood there in amazement while two Angels appearing near them in human form exclaimed in a joyful voice: “Men from Galilee why are you looking up to heaven? The Lord Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him ascend now with glory.²⁰¹ Having obtained royal glory, having become our advocate, being adored by the Angels and seated forever at the right hand of the Father the Lord pierced the heavens with the highest triumph and in supreme majesty.

[31] The very rich mystery of the promised sending of the Holy Spirit when, fifty days after the resurrection, when Mary was with the Apostles and the other disciples in the house in devout prayer, suddenly a great sound came from heaven and the Holy Spirit was sent and remained above them in the form of tongues of flame filling them and the whole house. The Holy Spirit revealed great mysteries and teachings to them (even though they were simple people), giving them knowledge of all languages. Because of this extraordinary fact a large number of people came to them and they preached marvellous things to them and all were converted in amazement. In this way, now that they had been made ambassadors of the eternal King, filled with the Holy Spirit, they travelled everywhere, with the Lord working with them, carrying his cross (as we have already seen) to the entire world.²⁰²

4219 [42] The awe-inspiring mystery of the universal judgement, when at the end of the world the universal judge will come down with glory and majesty, accompanied by hosts of Angels that are carrying his glorious banner before him. Everyone will be summoned to this frightening judgment by the voice of Archangels and the sound of a fearful trumpet. Tombs shall open, and the dead shall appear in their own bodies to reveal the motives of our thoughts words and actions. When the good have been separated from the evil, like sheep from goats, he will call the elect to himself, consigning them to just happiness and glory since that had avoided evil, obeyed him and performed works of charity. When he has condemned the reprobate with the devil and his angels to everlasting flames because they had²⁰³ rebelled against the divine Majesty and had been cruel, the judgement will be finished, and the just Judge will have dealt with each one according what he deserved and given each one the reward he had earned.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Cf Acts 1, 3; 10, 40-41. Certain apocryphal details reflect the way in which popular devotion spread and this is also evident in the meditations of Verucchino. Cf. *Compendio di cento meditazioni sacre*: meditations 72-74.

²⁰¹ Cf. Lk 24, 50-51; Acts 1, 6-12.

²⁰² Cf. Acts 2, 1=41.

²⁰³ In the text *per aver stati*.

²⁰⁴ Cf Mt 25, 31-46; Apoc. 8, 6; 20, 12-13. Note the influence of the Hymn *Dies irae*.

[33] The very happy mystery of the immediate and long-for restitution of the kingdom, that had been won, to the Father and the joyful procession of all those who, after judgement had been passed, the Lord Jesus takes with him, in the sight of the eternal Father in great triumph and most excellent glory, restoring to the Father the kingdom of the elect which has not been conquered. With great jubilation and solemn festivity, he says: “Here, father I have completer the work that you gave me *ab aeterno*. By means of the blood that I shed on the cross I have restored everything, Accept, my Father, the noble people that I have acquired so that they may be happily united with me for eternity as your saints. You in me and I in them, and all united in perpetual joy and happiness eternally.”²⁰⁵ After the Father has accepted all of this, God will be with us and we shall be with God happy for ever. O eternal happiness, blessed will they be who can possess you forever! O supreme Father, grant us all the grace that, by means of Jesus Christ our Lord, together with the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may be your faithful servants and later come together in such great circumstances with jubilation and joy world without end. *Amen*.

In chapters 27-28, having explained how we need to commit all these mysteries to heart and having proposed “a short method” for meditating on them according to the rules that were set down previously, Bernardino da Balvano lists the spiritual fruits of these mysteries.

Concerning the twelve fruits that can be acquired by those who use Christ’s mysteries while praying. Chapter 22

4220 You show a child an apple and you show a lamb green grass so that you can entice them more easily. You talk to greedy persons about profit so as to enthuse them to do something. Show devout persons and those who pray sweet fruits and unseen riches that are hidden in the mysteries of Christ and the riches that they will gain if they act as described above,²⁰⁶ and novices will be attracted²⁰⁷ more sweetly and those who have more taste for greater things will be filled with all kinds of grace. Although the fruits of these actions are many and the treasures almost infinite even in this life, nevertheless among the great number of these that would be useful to devout persons, we will point out a few in addition to what was said in the chapter on the usefulness of prayer.²⁰⁸ These are the following.

4221 [1] The first fruit that is produced in those who diligently cultivate the mysteries is that they become, brothers, sisters and mothers of Christ, this is what the Lord Jesus says in the Gospel of St Matthew chapter 12: “Whoever shall do the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.”²⁰⁹ Because the supreme Father’s will is that we become conformed to the image of his Son, as the Apostle wrote

²⁰⁵ This is a summary of Christ’s priestly prayer. Cf Jn 17, 1-26.

²⁰⁶ CF above ch 13, 22-23.

²⁰⁷ In the text *attragano = vengano attirati*.

²⁰⁸ Chapter 21: *Della utinità del’orazione* (ff, 108v) where the author sets out the reasons why prayer is useful and is “profitable to the soul and the body and all the other senses”.

²⁰⁹ Mt 12, 50.

to the Romans: “he also predestined us to be made conformable to the image of his Son.”²¹⁰ Whoever wishes to be conformed to him must know him, and the way to know him and become conformed to him requires that we contemplate the mysteries mentioned above by means of which we recognise and see his immaculate life which, to the person who follows it, fulfils the Father’s will and makes him a brother, mother and sister of the Lord Jesus Christ.

4222 [2] The second fruit is that by doing this, more than any other procedure, the devout person is enlightened about everything that contributes to salvation. The Lord Jesus is the wisdom of the Father, the spotless mirror and the image of God.²¹¹ Therefore, by contemplating his mysteries he will be enlightened by that wisdom. He will contemplate in that mirror and see in that image how outstanding the divine goodness is, because he gave his own Son for you.²¹² How outrageous sin is since to cancel it he shed his blood! How bitter are the pains of hell, since to free us he had to suffer so many afflictions! The importance of the happiness of heaven is so great when we consider the price that it cost! How could you set a price on the salvation of your neighbour and on your salvation seeing he endured so much suffering in shedding his own blood to redeem you! And, in summary, nothing can make you become competent in matters pertaining to salvation²¹³ more quickly than frequent meditation on the above-mentioned mysteries and the life of the Saviour in the manner set out above.

Thus, the Holy Spirit said in Psalm 35: “Lord, with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we shall see light. Lord, extend your mercy to them who know you and your justice to them that are right in heart.”²¹⁴ In chapter one of the First Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle said: “I give thanks to my God always for the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus. That in all things you are made rich in him, in all utterance and in all knowledge.”²¹⁵ In the Letter to the Colossians he said: “All the riches of fullness of understanding consist in knowing the mysteries of God the Father and Jesus Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”²¹⁶

Whoever wants to know all that is necessary for his salvation must quickly come to know and cultivate the mysteries of Christ.

4223 [3] The third fruit is that by means of these mysteries one can easily overcome temptation and put evil spirits to flight. Just as wax turns to liquid near a fire, at the sight of what is divine all the battles are overcome, and the enemy loses strength as the Holy Spirit says in Psalm 36: “The enemies of the Lord shall vanish like smoke”.²¹⁷ Psalm 67 says: “Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered and let them that hate him flee from

²¹⁰ Rom, 8, 29.

²¹¹ Cf Wis 7, 26. See also *Const 1536*, nn. 81 and 152.

²¹² This image has a long history. It was already used by St Clare and in *Const. 1536*, n. 113, and was used frequently by Bernardino Ochino.

²¹³ A favourite point in Ochino’s preaching. Cf. further ahead sermon 11, nn. 3625-3628.

²¹⁴ Ps 35, 10 (*Vulg.*)

²¹⁵ 1 Cor, 1, 4-5.

²¹⁶ Cf Col. 2, 2-3.

²¹⁷ Ps 36, 20 (*Vulg.*)

before his face. As smoke vanishes so let them vanish away, as wax melts before fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.”²¹⁸ Because God becomes present to us through concentrating on his mysteries, he who wishes to escape from all dangers and gain glorious triumph over his enemies let him meditate on these mysteries continuously.

4224 [4] The fourth fruit is for those who can readily despise everything vain and corruptible in the present false life, those things that impede the soul gaining salvation. They willingly cast aside vile metal so that they may acquire precious gold. Once the faithful soul has developed a taste for the sweetness of divine mysteries, it becomes concerned to acquire rich treasures, as the wise Apostle himself confesses: “But the things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ. Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but as dung that I may gain Christ.”²¹⁹ If you want to profitably despise the mortal things that you have to leave behind when you die, keep the mysteries of Christ fresh in your mind.

4225 [5] The fifth fruit is that in them and by means of them one acquires great peace of mind, peace with God and peace of conscience in as much as by considering the mysteries we come to understand how sweet is the Lord. For, to confer life on you, the Son of God took death upon himself in the person of Christ. One will then readily become contrite regarding sin and weep over their lack of gratitude as they consider the countless gifts that they have received for their soul because of these mysteries. One will be sweetly attracted to take the yoke of the Lord upon himself. This will bring him infinite rest as the Lord said in chapter 12 of St Matthew’s Gospel: “Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls.”²²⁰

4226 [6] The sixth fruit is that in order to bring all the virtues into our life the mysteries provide the perfect rule and the best example, because they not only show us what the divine will wishes, but also how to put it into practise by doing what is acceptable and pleasing to the Lord God, as the Holy Spirit said in Exodus chapter 25: “Look, and make it according to the pattern that was shown on the mountain,”²²¹ that is in Christ who is the height of virtue and summit of perfection, who is also a safe and trustworthy guide for going by the heavenly road and arriving at the ultimate Kingdom. By contemplating these mysteries, we come to know the path that he took to lead us to heaven. Thus, St John says in chapter 8: “I am the light of the world. He that follows me walks not in darkness.”²²² One cannot follow him without understanding his life and this shines out in his mysteries. Therefore, whoever wishes to come out of darkness and become perfect quickly, should use they mysteries as a mirror and be prepared to conduct his whole life according to what he can see.

²¹⁸ Ps. 67, 2-3 (*Vulg.*)

²¹⁹ Cf. Phil, 3, 7-8.

²²⁰ This is actually Mt 11, 28-29.

²²¹ Ex 25, 40.

²²² Jn 8, 12.

4227 [7] The seventh fruit is the abundance and culmination of merit, because all of the Lord's mysteries are filled with the richest treasures, the more of which you acquire the greater is the amount of sincere charity they bring to you. Fervent and warm meditation on the mysteries will ignite this in us. This is what the Lord said in Proverbs chapter 8: "I love them that love me: and they that in the early morning watch for me shall find me. With me are riches and glory, glorious riches and justice. For my fruit is better than gold and the precious stone, and my blossoms than choice silver."²²³ St John says in chapter 15: "He that abides in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit."²²⁴ If you want to become rich with eternal goods, warm yourself well with divine love by means of continual recalling the divine mysteries.

4228 [8] The fourth mystery is to constantly have great patience in tolerating willingly and with magnificent gratitude to God the adversities that are crucial since by means of them the soul possesses and obtains what the Lord said in the Gospel of St Luke chapter 21: "In your patience you shall possess your souls,"²²⁵ and what St Paul said in chapter 10 of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Patience is required of you so that by following God's will you will gain what he has promised." You will not find a better or more excellent way to endure all this happily than sincere consideration and vivid recollection of the mysteries and life of the Saviour.

When the deer is being perused by hounds it looks for streams when it wishes to refresh itself. When a devour person is beset with adversity he runs to the Lord's mysteries by means of fervent meditation and devout prayer and finds peace and quiet. Thus, when the Apostle wanted to comfort the faithful, he wrote in chapter 12 of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us. Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sits on the right hand of the throne of God. Think diligently upon him that endured such opposition from sinners against himself so that you would not be wearied, fainting in your minds. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the consolation which comes to you as to a child, saying, my son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord neither be wearied while you are rebuked by him."²²⁶ In St Luke's Gospel chapter 24 we find: "Why are you troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?" See my hands and feet, that it is I myself.²²⁷ This means that I have the power to accomplish what I promised to you and what I achieved in the mysteries of my life that is steadfast patience and tranquil rest.

4229 [9] The ninth fruit is an ardent blaze and rekindling of divine love. Jesus Christ came down from the heavenly realm to enflame human hearts with heavenly charity, and he prepared plenty of kindling wood which consisted in the many gifts that came to us in all the acts and gestures of his most holy life which were full of the sparkle of divine love

²²³ Prov. 8, 17-19.

²²⁴ Jn 15, 5.

²²⁵ Lk 21. 19.

²²⁶ Heb. 12, 1-5.

²²⁷ Lk 24, 38.

for those who frequently ponder over them with emotion.²²⁸ Thus, speaking about this ardour Paul writes to the Romans in chapter 8: “I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”²²⁹ In chapter 24 of the Gospel according to St Luke the disciples say: “Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke on the way and opened to us the Scriptures?”²³⁰ How could your heart not boil over with pure devotion if you heard Christ Jesus speak to your soul during meditation? Allow the mysteries to work on you with fervour, and you will experience everything.

4230 [10] The tenth fruit is a degree of trust when asking for what you need from the supreme God. When you ask something of the eternal Father through Jesus Christ our Lord, he will grant it without doubt. Thus, Holy Church concludes all her prayers through Christ and all his mysteries, his birth, baptism, fasting, cross, passion, death, resurrection and all the others. Therefore, whoever wishes to be certain of obtaining grace from God, should ask for it through the mysteries of Christ which allows us to ask with well-founded trust. This is what the Apostle said to the Romans: “Being therefore justified by faith, let us have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom we have access by faith into the grace.” Speaking in the name of Christ, David said in Psalm 90: “Since he hoped in me I will deliver him. I will protect him because he has known my name. He shall cry to me, and I will hear him.”²³¹

4231 [11] The eleventh fruit is a great security concerning death. Because when we have recalled Christ frequently, we shall not be very upset about leaving this life but will feel great consolation. He who constantly thinks about the mysteries of the Saviour, and conforms himself to them, cannot but feel sorrow at certain times, especially when considering his suffering and scourging, but assured of soul will come from this according to what is said in Psalm 125: “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”²³² In the first chapter of his Second Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle says: “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ does our comfort abound.”²³³ Therefore, if you want to leave this life without fear, have the mysteries of Jesus Christ well engraved on your heart.

4232 [12] The twelfth and last fruit is the joy of the glory and excellence of the reward. The more we resemble Christ in his suffering here, the greater we shall resemble him in glory above. This is what the Apostle says in chapter 8 of his Letter to the Romans: “And if sons, heirs also, heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him.”²³⁴ St John says in chapter 12: “If any man minister to me, let him follow me, and where I am there also shall my minister be. If

²²⁸ This thought brings to mind many of the sayings of Bernardino Ochino.

²²⁹ Rom 8, 38-39.

²³⁰ Lk. 24, 32.

²³¹ He two Biblical quotes are: Rom. 5,1-2; Ps. 90, 14 (*Vulg.*)

²³² Ps 125, 5. (*Vulg.*)

²³³ 2 Cor. 1, 5.

²³⁴ Rom. 8, 17.

any man ministers to me, him shall my Father honour.”²³⁵ For anyone who wishes to minister to Christ, to suffer with him and to behave like him, the only way is to always keep his mysteries in mind, so the soul may see them continually as in a mirror, and act accordingly and act out his own salvation, set an example for his neighbour and do what is acceptable and pleasing to God.

In chapter 2 of his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul said publically: “For I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”²³⁶ In the sixth chapter of his Letter to the Galatians he said: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom this world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” He concludes: “From henceforth let no man be troublesome to me, for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body” that is the wounds of the Lord Jesus.²³⁷ This is for continual meditation and fervent imitation.

Paul knew well that our salvation and all that is good depended on this. He always carried Christ and his mysteries engraved on his heart by means of ardent charity and behaved according to this to the very end.²³⁸ So that no one will be negligent in this regard I have stated these twelve fruits. They will be acquired by those who undertake this exercise with fervour. They are symbolised by the twelve fruits that St John the Evangelist saw appear every month on the tree of life which was planted in the garden of paradise, that is blessed Christ by whom devout souls, who think with their mind, love with their will and imitate his mysteries in their conduct, will be made beautiful and sweet fruit worthy to be seated with his Father, the Holy Spirit and Christ our Lord himself.²³⁹

The method of offering prayers to the saints. Chapter 30

4233 Pray to the saints to procure their friendship and service and to do what is pleasing to the Lord God and what shows him respect. We pray as well as we can on earth, so that by their merits and prayers, those who are regarded with so much love in heaven will help in having our prayers heard.

Although this is applicable to all the saints, especially those to whom you are devoted, nonetheless it applies more specially to the most holy Mother, who is the queen of heaven, princess of the angels, hope of sinners, strength of the just, joy of paradise, tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, spouse of the eternal Father, most loving mother of Jesus and proficient advocate of all mankind.²⁴⁰ Therefore each day each one of the faithful ought to offer her a special gift and send her what they are concerned about so that she may ask the Blessed Trinity to send them what they need and so that the Lord may answer their many prayers.

²³⁵ Jn 12, 26.

²³⁶ 1 Cor. 2, 2.

²³⁷ Gal. 6, 14-17.

²³⁸ Note the emphasis on St Paul as a model of meditation and imitation of the mysteries of Christ.

²³⁹ This image is taken from Ap. 22, 2.

²⁴⁰ These Marian titles echo the litanies, prayers and liturgical antiphons such as the *Ave Regina Coelorum*, *Savle Regina*, etc.

Since devout persons usually recite the rosary,²⁴¹ we shall say a few words about how it should be recited. When the rosary is recited ten *Ave Maria* following a *Pater noster* are recited.

The *Ave Maria* is offered in thanksgiving and as a present and gift to the Madonna. The *Pater noster* is said in memory of what our Lord Jesus Christ composed, which contained all of our needs and requests. By offering them to the most glorious Mother we beg that she deign to present them to the divine Majesty, and by virtue of her merits, that she obtain from the divine goodness what we ask and what is contained in our prayers.

4234 In order to life up your mind and hold its attention, also consider some of the mysteries that involve the Madonna and treat them in the same way as we described with respect to the mysteries of the Lord. Thus, you will be offering to the Madonna your rosary or other prayers associated with her seven solemnities, which are made up of her most holy conception, the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, the Annunciation, the Visitation to Elizabeth, the Purification forty days after giving birth to Christ and the Assumption into heaven.²⁴²

As you deal with each of these, offer prayers in the same way as above, and when you pray in this manner, you can break down the mystery, for example the conception, by thinking of how, by divine intervention, she was preserved from every stain of sin, miraculously conceived like Anna who was sterile, how her soul was endowed with grace, how her free will was preserved, how in Mary's womb there was received what God made with Mary being *ab aeterno praeordinata* Mother of God's Son, Queen of the Kingdom of God and advocate of sinners. By thinking in this way, you will make your gifts and grace increase.²⁴³

4235 With devotion, honour and respect, say the *Ave* to her who is much more happy and excellent than any other creature. I rejoice because of her gifts and grace. Even though it is unbecoming to offer anything to such a great Lady, nevertheless because you are the Mother of mercy and worthy of all honour and praise I ask you to graciously accept this poor gift which I offer with all of my heart." Then say the *Pater noster*, offering it like this: "O most clement advocate of the world, who is so pleasing to the eternal Father through whom, through the working of the Holy Spirit, was conceived and brought forth his Son, deign to offer this prayer to the most holy Trinity, so by means of your clemency and merits, they would grant me what I ask in this prayer, according to the intentions of your Son and my Lord Jesus Christ. When he composed this prayer he passed it on to his Apostles so that when they often repeated it they would receive grace. I ask that you do this out of your kindness and the love that you have for your only

²⁴¹ This page has its place in the history of Marian devotion especially in connection with the recitation of the Rosary with its mysteries. However, at this time they were not the traditional joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries.

²⁴² Thus, the seven solemnities of Mary spell out, as do many other mysteries that pertain to Mary, the mysteries of the Rosary as proposed by Bernardino da Balvaro.

²⁴³ In the Franciscan tradition, the Immaculate Conception was also defended by the Capuchins and subsequently it became the principal title of the Patroness of the Order.

The Mirror of Prayer by Bernardino Da Balvano

begotten and dear Son.” Do this for the mystery of his birth, presentation and other mysteries until you have finished your rosary.²⁴⁴

4236 If at times, for a change and to eliminate boredom, you wish to meditate on Wednesday or Friday²⁴⁵ on the eight sorrows of the Madonna, you can do so in the manner set down for solemnities. The sorrows are as follows.

The first sorrow, at Christ’s circumcision when she saw the child Jesus shed his precious blood and she cried from sorrow because he was still so small.

The second sorrow occurred at the presentation of the Lord Jesus in the Temple when Simeon prophesised that the sword of Christ’s Passion would pierce her heart because of her compassion.

The third sorrow occurred when in fear they fled to Egypt because of Herod’s persecution.

The fourth sorrow occurred when he was lost in the Temple.

The fifth sorrow occurred when she met him while carrying his cross on his shoulder outside Jerusalem.

The sixth sorrow occurred when she saw him most cruelly crucified on the cross between two thieves.

The seventh sorrow occurred when she held him in her arms after he had been taken down from the cross covered in lacerations and together with the other women she cried over his beloved body.

The eighth sorrow occurred when he was carried to the tomb and left inside and she was separated from him.²⁴⁶

4327 At another time you could practice the exercise of the seven joys, which are as follows: The first joy occurred when the Angel proclaimed the Annunciation. The second joy occurred when she gave birth and saw Christ had been born. The third joy occurred when the Magi adored her Son. The fourth joy occurred when Jesus was found in the Temple. The fifth joy occurred when Christ rose from the dead. The seventh joy occurred when she saw him ascend into heaven. The seventh joy occurred when she was assumed body and soul into paradise.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Note the affective tone of the prayers which are presented in simple terms and popular idiom. The beginning of the first prayer echoes a famous expression of Dante “Virgin mother, daughter of your son, more humble yet more exalted than any creature.”

²⁴⁵ In the text *mercori* and *il venere*.

²⁴⁶ Another devotion that was widespread among the Capuchins was the rosary of the Sorrowful Mother which consisted of eight sorrowful mysteries.

²⁴⁷ This is the Franciscan Crown.

If while you are saying the rosary you occupy yourself with these mysteries of the Madonna in the way that is set down above, you will derive great benefit and be pleasing to her and serve the Lord.

Chapter 31 deals with another characteristic form of prayer which the author suggests could be practiced every day. This implies praying for “nine categories” of people which make up the whole human race. These people are: sinners, the just, those with troubles, the dead, those who do good works or those who are under their care, prelates and rectors of Churches, parents and friends, and all enemies. These “nine categories” run parallel to the “nine times” Christ shed his blood as explained in the following chapter.

Concerning the parallel between these nine categories and the nine times that Christ Jesus shed blood. Chapter 32

4238 We should pray for the nine categories of persons mentioned above since this is not only the correct thing to do but also an obligation because it invokes the price paid for the world, that is the precious blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ and such a prayer will always be heard. So that this may be made easier for you we will set down a few comparisons between these categories and the sacred blood that was shed.²⁴⁸

[1] The first time that the Lord shed blood was at his circumcision, which, for the Jews, was similar to what Baptism is to us. It was for the remission of sins. The Lord underwent circumcision according to the law not for his sins but for our misdeeds, and the first category of people for whom we should pray is the category of sinners. Thus, we pray that out of love for the most precious blood that was shed he would deign to ask that the entire world would be set free from sin and lead it back to the state of grace. In honour of the blood that was shed, pray a *Pater noster* and an *Ave Maria* for each category.

[2] The second time that the Lord shed blood was in the garden, where because of his great sorrow and the strong visualisation of his passion and death that he had to endure, he broke out in a sweat and drops of blood fell to the ground and having great strength of soul he was comforted by the prospect of fulfilling the will of his Father. So, we ought to pray for those who are just so that the Lord who perspired blood with great constancy of soul may free them from all anxiety and grant them great strength to suffer while carrying out God's will courageously.

4239 [3] The third time that the Lord shed blood was at the scourging at the pillar when all of his sacred limbs were struck and tormented. Therefore, we ask him that through the merits of the scourging he would he would deign to give assistance and grace to those

²⁴⁸ The ancient Capuchin bibliographers maintain that Bernardino da Balvano wrote a work entitled: *De novem effusionibus sanguinis Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*, Venetis 1559, Paris 1601 (cf. ACI, 154, Ber, Paris 1601 (cf. ACI, 154, Bernardus a Bologna, *Biblioteca Scritorum*, Venetiis 1742n 43; *Lexicon cap.* 201). This work has not been found but in all probability these pages of *The Mirror* contain the substance and most important topics of this lost work.

who are in trouble in this life which is filled with many tribulations, anxieties and travail so that they may endure them all patiently for the honour and praise of the Lord and for their salvation.

[4] The fourth time that the Lord shed blood was when a crown of thorns was placed on his sacred head. Just as the Saviour's head was the most exposed part of his body and the most vulnerable, so we pray for the souls of the dead who are in Purgatory, who are the suffering members of the Mystical Body of the suffering Christ, but who are living in a better place than we are. Although they suffer as we do, they are in a better situation since they can no longer fall and when they have paid their debt they will be in glory. We ought to pray that by the merits of the painful crown and of the blood shed from the sacred head he would deign to reduce their pain and grant peace of soul to the dead who are in Purgatory.

[5] The fifth time the Lord shed blood was when his right hand was nailed. We ought to pray to the Lord to grant, by the merits of that precious blood, to completely forgive those who in this life or the next have done good deeds with the right hand that is with good will.

4240 [6] The sixth time the Lord shed blood it was because of the nail in his left hand. Since it is usually said that the heart is on that side of the body we pray to the clement Lord to hear us and grant grace to those whom, from our hearts, we have promised to help. May he grant this through the merits of the blood that was shed from his left hand.

[7] The seventh time that blood flowed it was from the right foot. Since this foot supports the body, the right foot being stronger than the left, we ask the Lord through the merits of his precious blood to favour and grant assistance to all prelates, spiritual and temporal leaders so that they may govern well and maintain peace and holiness in the whole of the body of the Church militant.

[8] The eighth time blood was shed was because of the nail in the left foot, which assists the right foot to support the body so that if one or the other is injured we cannot walk properly. We humbly pray to our Good Father that through the strength and effectiveness of his precious blood he grant assistance to our parents who have given us life and made us Christians by means of the Sacraments, and to grant to us to obey them and carry out the good precepts of our prelates so that the body of the Church may not fall to the ground through schism or disobedience.

4241 [9] The ninth and last time blood flowed it was from the side because of the wound made by the lance, when blood and water flowed from the wound in the sacred side. We ask our most loving Saviour to deign to pardon from his heart all those who have offended²⁴⁹ him. We ask that through the merits of the sacred blood that flowed from his side that we forgive from the bottom of our hearts, for love of this blood, those who have offended us.

²⁴⁹ In the text *n'hanno = che ci hanno*.

Every day, morning and evening, pray in this way recalling the nine times that the Saviour shed blood for you. Recall each of the categories in the manner in which they are set out above. Think about the categories of persons and which category you belong to, that is think of the situation of sinners, the prayers of those who just. Thus, go through all the categories and after each one say a *Pater noster* and an *Ave Maria* in thanksgiving for the blood that was shed and to obtain the grace appropriate for that category.

4242 So that you may recall them easily I shall list the times that blood was shed and the persons who you should pray for in this order.

At the circumcision, pray for sinners

At the agony in the garden, pray for those who are just.

At the scourging, pray for those having troubles.

At the crowning, pray for the souls of the dead.

At the nailing of the right hand, pray for those who treat us well.

The left hand, pray for who depend on us and who we have promised to help.

The right foot, pray for prelates and rectors.

The left foot, pray for our patents.

The side, pray for our enemies.

It would be of great benefit to priests to do this by way of preparation before saying Mass.²⁵⁰

Concerning the preparation that a Christian needs to do every day and how he should use these mysteries during the day. Chapter 33

4243 The young man who goes to class everyday even though he does not know anything will learn by attending continually. By falling incessantly, drops of water, no matter how small, will leave an indent on solid rock. In the same way a spiritual person who continually exercises himself in prayer using these mysteries, even though at first this requires effort and he is not an expert, if he perseveres cheerfully, will become, with the grace of the Lord, competent in them and a master. If his heart was harder than a stone, nevertheless it will easily become sensitive and quickly melt and even turn into liquid like wax before a fire.²⁵¹ Therefore we shall now describe an easy method. If you wish to undertake this devout exercise and this way of Christian life, first make a good and complete Confession preferably a General Confession.²⁵² Do this in the following manner. In your mind think that the Lord has summoned you and because of that you will have to appear before his tribunal in ten to fifteen days to render a strict account of your whole life and that he will pass a sentence that accords with what you deserve. Because of this he has now given priests the power to hear and forgive sins in his name. Therefore, as if you were going to die (in ten or fifteen days, as I said) carefully

²⁵⁰ This practice which the author recommends as a preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist is similar to what Silvestro da Rossano suggests. Cf. further on, *nn.* 4620-4632.

²⁵¹ The image is taken from the well-known Latin proverb: *Gutta cavat lapidem.* (Constant dripping wears the stone)

²⁵² Capuchin spiritual writers often laid down this condition and, so to speak, made it obligatory for Capuchin novices. Cf. *Const.* 1536, n. 20, 3 and the ceremonial of Bartolomeo Vecchi, [in Vol I *nn.* 180 and 1199ff).

examine your conscience and your whole life, according to the category of people you belong to, the action that you have committed, the office that you have held, the situation in which you lived and the people that you have dealt with, and so on.

4244 Once you have found a good confessor, a person of good repute and who is educated,²⁵³ and who possesses the fear of God, confess everything to him as if you were speaking to God and make a firm proposal of not wishing to commit these sins again. If there is anything that you have to do by way of satisfaction do it promptly or else everything will be null as the Church teaches in the Chapter entitled *Si res aliena causa XIII, q. VI.*²⁵⁴ “If the sin involves something that belongs to someone else which can be returned to them and it is not returned, the act of penance has not been performed and the sin has not been forgiven for the debt has not been paid.”

Be on guard not to leave any sin out of Confession out of shame. Confess everything simply since if you leave any sin out either because of ill-will or shame it is another sin and at the time of your death it will cause more shame and punishment. All sins that are not confessed either out of malice or shame will cause the sinner embarrassment when they are made manifest to every creature at the last judgement. Since confession must be integral with respect to all sins it cannot be divided over many confessors but must be made to one priest. Therefore in the chapter entitled *Consideret de Poenit, dist. V* it says; “The penitent should be aware that, influenced by shame, he should not divide his confession, wishing to confess one sin to one confessor and another to another confessor, that is one thing to one and another to another, so as to hide something from one that he manifests to another, in avoiding his own embarrassment he becomes a hypocrite and will never obtain pardon as though he has been forgiven for everything. He thinks that by dividing his confession between various priests he thinks that he has been partly forgiven by one and partly by the other. This cannot be done.”²⁵⁵

4245 Therefore to obtain God’s forgiveness go to the best confessor make your confession of all your sins and receive absolution from him and restore to your neighbour whatever is due to him, cleanse and put your own house and that of your family in order and adjust all your affairs so that you do not know of anything that is contrary to God’s grace. It would also be good to make a will and dispose of your things while you are in good health, so that, when sickness arrives you will not be suffocated by business concerns and the cares of this world which are often the cause of a person dying before his time and perhaps sometimes while separated from God’s grace and thinking about God when death is approaching and he does not have sufficient health to put his affairs in order. This will also mean that if death comes suddenly you will be at peace with God and with the world.²⁵⁶ When you have done this, which provides the soul with a safe path, peace of conscience and tranquillity of mind and which serves as a splendid preparation for the exercise of the mysteries, you may proceed in the following manner.

²⁵³ St Theresa of Avila desired the same type of confessor.

²⁵⁴ Cf. *Decreti secunda pars*, Causa 14, q. 6, c. 1. *Si res aliqua* (CIC, I, 742).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Case 32, q. 3. *De poenitentia*, dist. 5: *Consideret* §, 7 (CIC I 1230s)

²⁵⁶ This suggestion is the result of much experience.

4246 Every day set aside one or two hours before you go to your place of work. Go to the place where you pray, in the oratory or a private room. When you have knelt down, devoutly invoke the name of the most holy Trinity, make the sign of the cross three times, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and after reciting the Creed as a profession of faith, consider briefly what you have to do today, think about whether it is good or bad, and if it is bad tell the Lord immediately that you will leave it aside and say: “My Lord, in no way whatsoever do I want to do this nor anything that will bring dishonour on you, ruin my salvation or be detrimental to my life, reputation or to my neighbour’s possessions or good name because you have forbidden this and I know that it is displeasing to you. Give me the grace, O my most sweet Father, to never do anything that is contrary to your divine will through the merits of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, and the intercession of the Virgin Mary and all the saints”.

If it is something that is good, say with all your heart: “O my most clement and omnipotent Lord, I intend to perform this exercise and activity as a service to you, for my salvation and the edification of my neighbour since you have commanded me to live by my sweat, to exercise mercy towards my neighbour, control my family, rule my subjects, obey my superiors, and other similar good works. However, without you, O most loving Lord, I cannot do this. Grant me the graces that through the merits of my Saviour, Jesus Christ, and for the love of him who promised to grant salvation and eternal life, I may do it all to praise you and to glorify you. Let me believe all what you wish me to believe, love and obey.” Now ask the saints to whom you are devoted, to pray to God for you. Then pray for a little while about the mysteries following the order and method laid down above and when you have finished go about your work.²⁵⁷

4247 When you do this frequently it will seem to you that you can see the Lord present in this or that mystery. At times he will be carrying on a discussion with you, at other times you will be addressing him with beautiful words, and engaging in acts of mental prayer, in which you sometimes offer homage, sometimes ask for what you need and sometimes offer thanksgiving for the gifts that you have received. If you lift your mind up to the mysteries frequently while you are eating, walking, or are at work you will gain much fruit.²⁵⁸ *For example*, if you apply your mind to the mystery of Christ’s Nativity, say from the heart: “O my Lord, I thank you for being born for me in such poor circumstances. O my God, through the merits of such charity, grant me the grace to always do what pleases you and grant me the favour of doing work in your service. O my dear little Jesus so gracious and beautiful, when shall I love you with my whole heart? O most happy Mother of the Lord, who kissed and fed the Son of God so sweetly, pray for me to him so that he will forgive my sins.” You may use words like these as the spirit moves you.²⁵⁹ Frequently connecting your mind to the mysteries in this way you will very easily acquire the spirit of prayer.

²⁵⁷ Once again note the simplicity and practicality of the instructions which are very suitable for simple people.

²⁵⁸ Here we see the way to apply in practice his method of contemplating the mysteries which, in the end, is nothing else but the exercise of the presence of God by using the mysteries of Christ.

²⁵⁹ This phrase is customarily used to emphasise the primacy of the freedom of the spirit at work in the soul that goes beyond any rule or method.

4248 When some occasion for sinning or opportunity to sin comes your way, lift your mind up immediately to some mystery, especially the mysteries of the Passion.²⁶⁰ For example consider as you would do for the mystery associated with the hour Before Noon, when Christ was presented to Pilate and endured insults and scourging. For the hour of Noon think of him being crowned with thorns, of him being dressed in purple to be mocked and embarrassed and disrespectfully paraded before the people with a rod in his hand, the iniquitous sentence, departure from Jerusalem with the cross on his shoulder and being led to Mount Calvary in sorrow. At the time for the hour of Afternoon Prayer, think about Christ being placed on the cross, drinking vinegar and gall, ridiculed by the Priests, and the seven words that he spoke. At the Sixth Hour think of how he died and his body remained on the cross with limbs lacerated and pale. At Evening Prayer, think of how he was taken down from the cross, how his Mother and the other women cried with sorrow. At Night Prayer think of how he was placed in the tomb, where he had been at prayer the previous night and sweat blood, been arrested, bound and injured.

When the opportunity to sin and the chance of doing evil comes to you say to yourself: “The Lord Jesus endured so much pain for me at this time so am I going to offend him? He shed blood and am I going to experience pleasure? It would be better to have never been born that for me to make such a mistake. I will not do that, my Lord! Because of your love grant me grace and strength.” Like this enter into some of the mysteries and temptation will easily vanish. However, should temptation persist, remain steadfast; because the Lord wishes to test your fidelity and when you have conquered he will give you a greater crown. If you spend the day like this everything will work towards your salvation.

4249 When that night you have come back home to your usual place of prayer, after you have settled your affairs, before you go to sleep, diligently examine all that you have done during the day, your thoughts, your words and anything else.²⁶¹ If you find that you have done everything for the honour of God, for your salvation and set a good example for your neighbour, thank the Lord God who has granted you such a gift. Ask him to keep you in his grace until the morning and to accept what you have done in his service, and say: “O Lord, my most good and best Father, for an infinite number of times I thank you for mercifully keeping me in the service of your divine Majesty. Deign to accept all that I have done. Help me to always please you and defend me from my visible and invisible enemies out of the love I have for my Saviour, your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns in perfect unity with You and the Holy Spirit.”

4250 However if you find that you have committed an error or a sin by way of thought, word or action that impinges on the reputation, possessions, person or salvation of your neighbour, bitterly admit your fault and say from the depths of your heart: “I am sorry, my Lord, that I have offended you and not preserved the trust that you placed in me this morning. O most sweet Saviour, forgive me so that I may resolve never to offend you again, propose to make satisfaction for what I have failed to do and to confess it to a

²⁶⁰ This is the same principle as the devotion in the *Orologio della Passione (The Clock of the Passion)* even though here the sequence of time is applied to the Liturgical Hours.

²⁶¹ This is the examination of conscience.

priest according to what you have commanded, and having humbly confessing to a priest, according to your precept, readily accept penance from him. May it please you, out of your infinite clemency and great mercy, to safeguard me this night". Then after making the sign of the cross and having thought about the mysteries in your mind say your prayers and ask the Lord and his saints to allow you to rest. When you wake during the night, think over a mystery in your mind in order to banish temptation because the devil is frightened by Christ's mysteries and will take flight. So that sin will not take control of you, when (may God protect you!) you have committed a sin, repent that night and ask pardon resolving not to do it again and to confess to a priest. On Sunday find a good confessor, and having previously made a general integral confession, confess following the sin that occurred and get on with your life.²⁶² Receive communion at times during the major solemnities to receive more grace.

If you act like this, you will receive the Lord's grace as well as acquiring merit and if you met with some sudden danger or with death you would be saved and certain of salvation. With much sweetness you will taste how gentle the Lord is.²⁶³

4251 When you are ill, perform the exercise in the following manner depending on how sick you feel. Before anything else go to confession and communion. Then devoutly kneeling on the ground, placing yourself completely in the Lord's hands, say: "O most holy and omnipotent Father, Lord of heaven and earth, who have absolute control of life and death, who strike and heal, kill and revive, I commit my body and soul to you. Out of your mercy deign to make me do what is for your greater service and my salvation and place me completely in your paternal and kind hands. I wish to be strong in faith, unwavering in hope, and united to you always in perfect charity. If temptation comes to me, may it please you, most clement Lord, to defend me so that I do not fall into sin since I desire never to offend you in any way. I commit my soul, my life and everything else to you. Grant me life or death as it pleases you and I will accept it all as a special grace, rejoicing in it as a favour from you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*".

Having done this go to bed and seek consolation from some spiritual persons, talking about the things of God, and salvation, or read some devout books and accept the illness and all that comes with it from God's hands with happiness while continually recommending yourself to the Lord. If a sin that you have not confessed comes to mind humbly confess it and with your whole heart by means of his grace, stay close to God whether life or death comes. You will live again happily with him in eternal glory. *Amen.*²⁶⁴

²⁶² It is evident that this applies above all to lay people because it is evident that religious would not have to wait until Sunday to go to confession.

²⁶³ Cf. Ps. 33, 9 (*Vulg.*)

²⁶⁴ This certainly requires a strong spirit for a sick person to put these suggestions into practice. How serious and beautiful they are!

The Mirror of Prayer by Bernardino Da Balvano

4252 What I have said or what more I might have said I submit to the judgement of the Holy Roman Church. I accept the result of your requests²⁶⁵ to the praise, honour and glory of Christ who lives and reigns together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

THANKS BE TO GOD

²⁶⁵ The people of Messina asked Bernardino da Balvino to write this little booklet putting together his discourses and teachings on prayer.