

English translation of “A Bundle of Myrrh”

by Michelangelo Da Venezia.

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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.1264-1355. 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, (1999) for an English version of quotations from the Writings or Biographies of St Francis.

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Introduction by Constanzo Cargoni O.F.M.Cap.

Father Michaelangelo da Venezia (+ 1611) was a famous popular preacher of unmistakable charm in propagating devotion to the most blessed Virgin and founder of the Confraternity of the Chastity of the Virgin Mary who arranged for the crowning on many statues.

A collection of meditations on Christ's Passion and a series of exercises for prayer that fostered the spiritual life grew out of his preaching. These were two pocket booklets which had a title that resembled the author's character: A Bundle of Myrrh that reminds us of Bernardino. In these works, the Capuchin preacher became a guide and master of piety for the people. He wanted to inject the spirit and practice of prayer, especially mental prayer and meditation into the faithful. Together with other brothers he transformed the three days of the Forty Hours of Eucharistic Adoration into three sessions that featured initiation into meditation on Christ's Passion that were divided into forty topics, within which one does not know whether to admire the clarity of thought and the simplicity of development, or the theological and scriptural wisdom that accompanied with a wealth of emotion and moving affection.

The way that these meditations are developed is something like Bellintani's style of a triple partition into reading, meditation and action (cf. nn. 1-2) After reading the text the person who is following the Forty Hours devoutly is encouraged to relive the mystery "in his heart" and make it dynamic "more in his emotions than in his intellect" (cf. n. 5). He is very insistent on remote and proximate preparation (n. 3), on the situation and position of the body (cf. n. 4), on the determination to effect spiritual renewal (n. 6). Then as in the depth of his priestly heart he is smitten with sadness at seeing that the world is "immersed and submerged in sensual sins", he becomes the evangelist of chastity and love and finds the strongest incentive for

change in the “devout remembrance of the Passion.” In this way he adds to an instruction concerning meditation and its rules, a specific very concrete lesson on the way to meditate on Christ’s Passion (n. 7) as an indescribable martyrdom, as showing the gravity of sin which caused it, as being of great benefit to us, as promoting the imitation of the virtues of Christ (n. 8), especially patience (n. 9), and the incomprehensible love of God (n. 10).

The subjects of Christ’s Passion and the love of God cf. (n. 12) continue also in the second book which proposes many exercises (cf. n. 11) so that we encounter and meditate on the five wounds of the Crucified in order to consider sin and various practices of daily prayer that are suitable for both the laity and religious. To this end we have selected certain significant texts that become an authentic “vademecum” of spirituality and a kind of set of rules for the interior life for the entire day. This may remind novices and professed religious that the substance of consecrated life does not consist in the observance of a Rule but, according to St Francis, “in being received into obedience.” From this perspective he proposes a “reappraisal of the person who is a religious” (n. 13) that will take effect in some of his main daily activities, both in the choir and in the church and every other activity, especially “the most important exercise of the presence of God” (n. 14) This last little tract is very practical. It deals with a variety of kinds of affective or ejaculatory expressions and expands the method that is attributed to St Bonaventure. It shows how to rise to the prayer of praise by recalling the mysteries of Christ using contemplative feelings, even the most insignificant circumstances of daily life, work, and responses of the internal and external senses to arouse affection “go beyond the Our Father” (9n. 15) To make this possible certainly requires a great mental effort which will become easier with repetition.

Because of the difficulty contemporary people find with concentration these pages are very surprising and incredible. Such a person may not be able to feel the strong challenge for a deeper interior life, or even for the sweetness that pervades it. However, the surprise comes at the end when the Author, for whom all these exercises are but a suggestion, and a means “of arriving” at a real spiritual life, proposes that the spiritual life does not consist in merely carrying a cross and dying with Christ. It is here, that for a moment, like a bolt from heaven, the language changes in to a mystical prayer. It shows the highest point for a spiritual person which consists in “the annihilation of everything that is not God” and “withdrawal into God himself by means of ardent unitive love.” In such a person “all desire and longing “has been extinguished “to the point where they are away from all men, deprived of all interior or exterior consolation and conformed to his Lord”. The Author says: The idea that St Francis longed for was ‘spiritual death, happy death, holy death, life-giving death’”. (cf. 16).

A Bundle of Myrrh

1. A method of praying and meditating fruitfully on the most holy Passion

5063 If, while she went through the fields of Booz after the reapers, the wise and very prudent Ruth gathered what they had left behind following the harvest,¹ should someone not criticise me if as I was going through the fertile field of divine Scripture behind the saints and holy fathers of the Catholic Church, I did not gather the many spiritual thoughts and insights that had been of service to me in making a bundle of myrrh out of the forty-four meditations on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, which I had been working on for some time, and which had brought delight to my spirit in the special exercise and recreation of the Passion that I had composed.

However, since it is part of the nature of goodness that it reach out and part of the nature of charity to share what it possesses with others, I must not deny producing this book for those who sought it impetuously, with the expectation that that it will be of spiritual advantage to Christ's faithful. So here it is! It should be read with a humble heart and put into practice in full over the period of a few days including the exercises in the second part. We should have to admit that because there is so much involved in the mystery of the Lord's Passion and that it contains so much that moved the heart, no matter how much has been written down there is still more for those who follow us.

5064 As he said in chapter five of the Apocalypse,² St John saw the Lamb open the seven seals of a book. What was the book? It was the book of the holy Gospel. How many seals or sacred mysteries does it contain? Not seven exactly, but very many. In Sacred Scripture the mysterious number of seven stands for a large all-embracing number. Who is it that opens these seals and discovers the mysteries of the Gospel, especially the mysteries of the Passion and death of the Son of God? He himself, the spotless Lamb, who appeared to John as if he had been slain,³ since he still had his five glorious wounds on his most beautiful body.

May infinite thanksgiving be paid to him whose divine goodness still condescends to us worms on earth to introduce us to the taste and delight of grasping the exalted mystery of his most holy Passion, by means of which, everything promised in the Gospel came to fulfilment! St Francis, St Bonaventure and St Clare, St James and St Bernard and St Domenic, St Catherine of Siena and St Romuald and others; and before them the martyrs and the Apostle, were one with St Paul, who said that he wanted to know nothing but that Jesus Christ was crucified.⁴

5065 There are forty meditations so that not only may they be used throughout the year but also so that they may be used in the prayers during the forty hours devotion in honour of his most holy Passion.

With respect to such hours one should note that the practice began in the ancient past of the Church of God and as those recently converted Christians offered prayers for five hours, seven hours, thirty-three hours and the like, for various mysteries, the most famous were the devotions for forty hours, in memory of the forty hours that

¹ Ruth 2, 3.

² Cf. Apoc. 5, 1.

³ Cf. Apoc 5, 6.

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 2, 2

Christ our Lord remained dead. This was usually carried out for the whole of Holy Week (only in our days the prelates ordered it to stop at night to avoid any scandal especially where the people were unfriendly).

However, in Venice, and in other cities of the region, this was carried out throughout Lent for one hour each night, with some Churches being draped in black, with the Blessed Sacrament exposed amid many lights during which a devout refrain was sung with the words: *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you* etc., or the like, which was followed by a short sermon so that there was time to pray. At the end of the hour the *Miserere* was sung sadly and devoutly following which the blessing with the Blessed Sacrament was given to the people. This did much good and served a great purpose. The uniting of this kind of common prayer with the Lenten fast seemed to imitate what Moses had done when he prayed and fasted for forty days on Mount Zion, and what Christ our Lord did when, in a more excellent way than Moses, prayed and performed bitter penance for forty nights in the desert.⁵ I beg the Lord that this practice will be taken up in other places to the benefit of other Christian souls.⁶

Thus here are the suggestions for anyone who wants to spend Holy Week, or the entire Lent or any other period in forty hours of meditation on the Passion of our Lord. I have prefaced these with devotions to patron saints,⁷ so that this may help whoever finds this exercise of prayer to be onerous, will also find that such exercises protect him against diabolical temptations which are more troublesome at the time of prayer than at any other time, and provide assistance in presenting our prayers to God and asking his Majesty to grant us holy thoughts and an excess of fervour.

5066 Apart from the meditations there are certain spiritual activities⁸ that involve the will, which when they are done well will stir up fervour in addition to what is described in the suggested activities. It is sufficient for me to mention these in order to teach a person who has not yet heard about them. I have found that there are many who do not want to use them. If such people experience difficulty they can set them aside, especially when they are trying to pray frequently, because often immediately such people find difficulty, because of our corrupt nature and the devil they stop praying. However, I wish such people would chew this over when they find prayer tiresome and let them fall in love with prayer. If they keep going they may experience new thoughts, and develop other practices.

I have not omitted some of the passages from Sacred Scripture that I offered in the meditations as it seemed to me that this was pleasing to the Lord and that one could also meditate on Sacred Scripture and derive as much benefit as St Bonaventure did so well. I also thought that this might nourish those who have an inquiring mind. The truth is that I have always tried as much as I could to provoke the soul to become one with Christ in his sorrows, to abhor sin and vice and to especially stimulate imitation of the most illustrious virtues of Christ himself, which should motivate every Christian since as St Peter said this is his duty: *Christ also suffered for us.*⁹ If a person who is under the influence of the flesh should say that although Christ died for everyone, in his Passion he only intended to set a unique example for the Apostles and

⁵ Cf. Ez. 24, 18; Mt. 4, 2 ;Mk. 1, 12-13; Lk. 4, 1-2.

⁶ Concerning this passage see C. Cargnoni, *Le quarantore ieri e oggi* in *IF* 61 (1986) 385s.

⁷ This means that each of the meditations is dedicated to angels or saints whom the person making the meditation should invoke.

⁸ This shows the influence of *Protica dell'orazione mentale*, by Mattia da Salò

⁹ Cf 1 Pet. 2, 21.

their followers, he should read what St Peter added: *leaving you an example*. (In that letter he was writing to all the faithful and he did not write *so that they should follow* but *that you should follow his steps*).

5067 In the end I adapted the prayers to suit the various states of the person which had to be done if the work was to be an act of charity and worthwhile. In doing so I took my lead from the holy Church which although at Mass it prays for everybody, makes mention of certain states of particular persons.

I beg every servant of God who makes use of this book to burn with the love of God and when he performs a devout and fervent act to remember poor me, a grave sinner, and ask the Lord, that just as I have taught others, I may put what I have taught into action even more astutely than others would do, by imitating the Lord who *knew how to do and to teach*, so that I may not become one of those who *speak but do not act*, in which case I would be seriously culpable, whereas I ought to be blessed for teaching since *whoever acts and teaches is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*.¹⁰

2. Concerning prayer and its parts

5968 Prayer (according to some) is a leap of the mind into God, while others say that it is a pious feeling in the mind that is focused on God. Others say that it is a conversation with God that involves pious and humble emotions in our spirit, while others say that it consists in asking God for the things which we need. Others say that it is an investigation of things that we cannot see. Finally, others say that it is a song that is not made up of words but of loving sighs that come from a contrite and repentant heart. However, all of these show a great respect for St Augustine,¹¹ who says that prayer is a conversation between the soul and God, whether it is mental prayer or vocal prayer, since we speak to God in both of these, either thinking things over or meditating on God, the Angels in heaven or hell, the Passion, or something else that is related to the glory of God and our salvation. Because we are made up of body and soul, we pray in two ways, mentally and orally, even though mental prayer does not exclude some vocal expression of devotion. I am not dealing with vocal prayer since everyone knows how it is to be performed without much bother. I shall deal with mental prayer which some call meditation or the contemplation of God or of his divine mysteries which expert authors have divided into reading, meditation and action.¹² I shall say briefly something about these three parts of prayer.

Concerning reading and meditation

5069 The fathers and doctors note a difference between thinking and meditating. They say that thinking is made up of thoughts that wonder from one thing to another and to whatever comes into a person's mind. The person freely accepts this without any trouble to such an extent that the heart is like a hotel that is open to all who are passing by. This is quite dangerous, and the Holy Spirit has advised us to *maintain watchfulness over the heart*.¹³ This is especially the case for those who do not think about God and leave their hearts open to any kind of thought.

Meditation is productive thinking, a judicious desire of the heart which quietly and diligently goes searching for everything, no matter how small, that pertains to the subject. Just as in the Old Testament the grains that produced perfume had to be

¹⁰ Cf. Acta 1, 1; Mt 23,3; 5,19.

¹¹ Cf. S. Augustinus, *Enaratioin ps. n. 7* (PL 37, 1086), see also *De magistro*, ch. 1, n. 2 (PL 32. 1195).

¹² Cf. above note 8.

¹³ Cf. Prov. 1, 23.

ground into the finest dust,¹⁴ so too a Christian ought to grind and compound the mysteries of the Catholic faith into the mortar of his heart using the hammer of diligent and productive considerations, not being content with just general thoughts but seeking for details of their deep and secret causes. Whoever practices such meditation will become wise, humble, and patient, despise the world and be filled with Christian virtues.

5070 From this kind of meditation a person progresses to contemplation which consists in the acquisition of a taste for and awareness of God, by means of which the soul is united, by means of very ardent feelings of love, to her Lord and, as far as possible, becomes familiar with him with great relish. I shall not deal with this now but shall rather treat of meditation in which a person experiences some fatigue, (particularly at the beginning). He should not lose heart, or stop playing his part, since the Lord who recognises diligence will open the door and introduce him to sweet understanding and experience of his divine mysteries. In chapter 25 of Solomon's Proverbs it says: *Argue your case with your neighbour directly, and do not disclose another's secret.*¹⁵ This is similar to what the eternal Father said to his Son when he told him that the mysteries of the faith, especially those regarding the Passion, were to be revealed to his friends, but hidden from the worldly-wise. They will be revealed to those who are committed to turning their minds to holy meditation.

5071 However a devout and pious Christian still make the effort by knocking on the door of the divine mercy saying (even though he does not feel sweetness and it is an effort to continue): "Lord I am not here because of my own personal feelings, but only out of love for you. If it pleases you that I experience dryness, may what you wish, be done because what I gain from this prayer is that I love your divine Majesty and everything that you love, loathe myself, and all that you hate with the sacred hatred that is expressed in the saying: *Whoever does not hate his father and mother and his own soul cannot be my disciple.*"¹⁶ I surrender everything and commit everything into your divine hands. Do whatever you wish with me since I value this more than any treasure. I wish that your most holy will be fulfilled in me." If the devout Christian does not feel anything when saying these prayers, let him still believe that if he prays with the sentiments that have just been described he will gain very great happiness for his soul.

Especially when a beginner wants to meditate well and fruitfully, let him pick up a devout book and read about whatever mystery that he wishes, and continue meditating in the manner that is set out in the book. (If he makes good progress I hope that the Lord will lift him up to the point where he can meditate on his own). I suggest that the most well-known mysteries are those concerning the Lord's Passion in which the soul, by considering it from the viewpoint of a lamb being led to the slaughter, can mull over the love with which Jesus condescended to suffer for us. If the Lord did not stop suffering for us during his entire life wherever he was, why is it so hard for us to think about this for a brief period of time? Indeed, we ought to think about it wherever we are, at home, among friends, as we start or end work, turning within into ourselves

¹⁴ Cf. Ex 30, 35-36.

¹⁵ Cf. Prov. 25, 9.

¹⁶ Cf. Lk. 14, 26.

and by going over one of Christ's mysteries begin to imitate the ardent affection of the loving spouse who said: *I will go through the streets and the broad ways and see him whom my soul loves.*¹⁷ The noble Roman lady, Cecelia was excellent at this. It was said of her that *she always carried Christ's Gospel astound in her breast.*¹⁸

Concerning action

5072 The meditation will produce a great variety of material to act upon that include thanking the Lord, sorrow for our sins, embarrassment over the small amount of our spiritual progress, purpose of amendment with respect to this, a desire to imitate our Saviour's very honourable virtues, the offering of the pains and sufferings of his most sweet Son, through the merits of which we may confidently ask forgiveness for our sins from our heavenly Father, the grace of amendment, the grace to resist all sin and vice, the grace to rid our soul of all vicious inclinations and the infusion of divine grace and other temporal and spiritual good things. We ask this for ourselves and our neighbours, who like ourselves and everyone else, need such things for their salvation. We do this without ever doubting that this will be granted by means of the infinite merits of the most holy Passion of our Saviour.

This is represented symbolically in the figure of Daniel the Prophet who while he was a captive in Babylon and wanted to pray looked out his window towards where the holy temple of God had been in Jerusalem.¹⁹ He knew that the temple was no longer there because it had been destroyed. All that remained was the site where it had been. Daniel knew that the temple represented the most sacred humanity of the Lord, which like the temple, was built and constructed in the most holy womb of the Virgin Mary by the action of the Holy Spirit so quietly and silently without the assistance of human intervention in that sacred mystery. However, that most sacred humanity was to be ravished and broken by the blows of hammers, nails, thorns, whips and lacerations. It was through the merits of all this that God would hear all our prayers. Is it not wonderful that holy Daniel provided such a symbol by turning towards the destroyed temple when he was praying?

5073 Likewise we should turn to the Redeemer who is suffering and crucified, and who said with regard to his body: *destroy this temple,*²⁰ and with faith and love in our heart and through him ask God for every legitimate grace, because we have no doubt that we shall be answered. Should we not express out confident joy to the eternal Father, to the Son himself and to the Holy Spirit, to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to all the saints concerning Christ's Passion, since it had the power to move Pilate's heart, who repeatedly tried to find excuses to free the Lord, moved the heart of Judas who proclaimed the Jesus was innocent and gave back the money, (ever when he was treated miserably and lost hope as well as pardon), moved the heart of one of the thieves who, setting aside his own sufferings sympathised with his Saviour, moved the hearts of some of his own enemies who returned to their homes beating their breasts, that it might be possible that it would also move the heart of God to grant us the grace of pardon and the hearts of the saints to intercede for us?

¹⁷ Song 3, 2.

¹⁸ This is reminiscent of what is said in *Const. 1536* n. 1, 10. (Cf. for the source of this quotation vol. 1 n. 151, note 1,10)

¹⁹ Dan. 6, 11.

²⁰ Cf. Jn 2, 19.

God was looking for a man to set up as a hedge between himself and the world,²¹ so that his Majesty would not exterminate mankind from the face of the earth. Behold Christ, who was both God and man, who could be the hedge (by means of the very sharp thorns on his head), by setting himself up between God and the human race and who begged and supplicated the eternal Father, with arms extended upon the cross, to forgive and excuse sinners because they did not know what they were doing: *Father forgive them for they know not what they do*²² by crying out *Eli, Eli, lamma sabarthami?*: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?²³ It seems to say that when the Father abandoned him without him deserving it, he did not want to abandon sinners (even though they did deserve it) when they made light of his venerable name and his most holy Passion and death, which he had endured out of obedience to his Father, for the redemption of miserable sinners. Thus I maintain that if the eternal Father wanted all that to happen so that he could forgive sinners and grant them grace through the merits of the Passion and death of his Son, may we then doubt that when we pray we will not be heard if we say: *through Christ our Lord?* Certainly not!

Finally, I shall give a necessary piece of advice. The devil who is envious of what is good for us, at the time when we are praying, schemes to have our mind filled with all kinds of vague thoughts so that the precious time for prayer passes without us experiencing any fruit or relish. Therefore, let everyone be warned to have on hand all the material connected with the mystery that is the subject of the meditation as I have said about and shall repeat below.

3. Concerning preparation for prayer

5074 Suppose that a Christian person resolves to dedicate himself to this exercise for a hour in the day and the night because his spiritual father has advised that this would be a good thing, then he ought to know how he should prepare himself, just as he will not be able to take up the method unless the appropriate material has been set out and prepared, so too the benefits to be derived from prayer will not be realised if the soul has not been well prepared.

The fathers divide such preparation into two parts: they call one remote or prior and the other proximate or immediate. The former consists in living a good life and having a clear conscience. This is what David meant when he said: *If I have looked at iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*²⁴ When I know that I have sin on my soul the Lord will not listen to me. God says to the soul in the Cantic: *Show me your face, let my voice sound in my ears.*²⁵ He wants to see his spouses' face first and then listen to her voice. If her face is ugly, dark and worn-out, how could her song make him happy? Commenting on the Song in Sermon 62 St Bernard put it well: *That the voice does not please when the face is unpleasant is explained by what is said later: your voice is sweet and your face comely.*²⁶ Thus the soul must be purified from mortal sin if the person wishes to approach God in a state of complete purity and forceful holiness. However if it is stained by mortal sin this needs to be confessed, or at least an act of contrition with a firm resolve to confess needs to be said, together with a resolute purpose of amendment.

²¹ Ex 22, 30.

²² Lk. 23 34.

²³ Mt. 27, 46.

²⁴ Ps. 65, 18 (*Vulg.*)

²⁵ Song 2, 14

²⁶ S. Bernardus, *Sermo. 62 in Cant.* N. 8. (PL 183, 1079)

5075 In addition to this remote preparation for prayer, the soul needs to be free from excessive earthly activity. Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, exemplified this. When the Hebrews requested to go into the desert to offer sacrifices to God, he together with his advisers, forced them to be over-worked with handling stones.²⁷ To some degree the devil imitates the industrious Pharaoh by arranging for a person to be completely occupied with worldly affairs so that he does not have the time to pray, or when he does pray, it is not fruitful because of the crowd of thoughts that overcome him at that time.

Unruly emotions are also a very great impediment to prayer. Thus our Saviour said to the Apostles that the Holy Spirit would not come to them unless he left them. *If I do not go, the Paraclete will not come to you.*²⁸ If too much affection for the most holy humanity of the Lord could impede the coming of the Holy Spirit to them, what will be the situation of some spiritual people who have inordinate affection for creatures? God wants to give them true interior enlightenment. So that, as we have said, they might be always prepared for prayer with hearts detached from inordinate affections. This is what that saint intended who, when he had undertaken some manual work and it came into his mind at the time of prayer, got up with fervour and went and destroyed the work and ruined it because he realised that his heart was irrationally preoccupied with the work.²⁹

5076 Bodily mortification and the practice of other holy virtues also serve as remote preparation for prayer. Should a person not feel ready for mortification of the body or the practice of the holy virtue, especially holy purity of heart, (which is an incredible help to prayer), he should not put mental prayer aside because of this, because (as a certain doctor said), just as snow turns to water and vaporises into the air and comes back as snow, so purity of heart, mortification and the other virtues give birth to good prayer and prayer gives birth to purity of heart, the virtues and mortification. Prayer always takes precedence because it is the most effective means of making the soul set sin aside and help with mortification of the body, and its passions and bad inclinations. Whoever knows how to pray well will ordinarily undertake greater mortification and engage in the Christian virtues in a livelier manner!

Concerning proximate preparation

5077 The wise man says: *Prepare your soul before prayer.*³⁰ St Chrysostom³¹ asked what preparation is better than almsgiving? Is that not the reason why at the door of the Church we always find either poor people or places to put alms? This is so that before we go to pray and ask for God's mercy we may give alms to his poor little ones, indeed through them, to God himself so that we may confidently say later: "Lord, you have already passed sentence that whoever shows mercy shall receive mercy. I have already done that to those who asked me to do it for love of you. I now await your most generous alms and copious mercy for my great wretchedness."

Blessed is he who knows how to prepare himself for holy prayer in this way which is easy for each of us to do in the churches that we visit. Then we can say to the Lord: *Lord be merciful to your servant since you have said give and it shall be given*

²⁷ Ex 5, 6-14.

²⁸ Jn. 16, 7.

²⁹ St Francis was also like this. Cf. 2 Cel. 79; LM 10, 6 (FAED II, p. 311; p. 609)

³⁰ Sirici. 18, 23.

³¹ Cf. S. Joannes Chrysostomus (attrib.) *Opus imperfectum in Matthaem*, hom. (PG 56, 715s)

to you; and blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ³² My Lord, could there be a needier beggar than I am? I knock at the door of your infinite mercy and ask for three loaves: one to know how great you are, and how vile I am; another to obtain your grace and another to attain your glory. Perhaps the three loaves may also be: to love everything that your Majesty loves, to hate everything that your Majesty hates and that to the end I should prefer to do everything that is most pleasing to your Majesty.

But what more beautiful alms could a person find than to go around Venice visiting the poor sick people who are struck down and unhappy and who are in one of the famous hospitals, (which are chapels for offering prayer), to offer these average men and women comfort in their suffering, giving them support, serving them at mealtime, and so on? O what extraordinary acts of charity that are fitting for noble and great people! There have been many who have experienced that they received more relish for the Lord in performing one of these acts out of love for God than in spending time on their knees in prayer.

3078 Finally by way of proximate preparation let me say practice what the Lord taught: *When you pray, enter into your chamber, and having shut the door, pray to your Father.* ³³ Where could you find a more secret chamber than in the heart of the person who wants to pray? It is here, then, that he closes the door to the senses, withdrawing himself from all activities and concern about anything. Being free from fantasies and anything pertaining to creatures he becomes recollected and detached. He becomes entirely focused upon God alone, not seeking praise for himself, but simply praising God, not seeking his own pleasure but only the will of God. In this frame of mind you come to pray. In this way, even if you are in a church full of people your prayer will be secret, abstaining from all movement, gesture or words. By restricting yourself from these things when you are alone at prayer, you should appear before God with a profoundly humble heart and ask for forgiveness of your failings. Admit to being unworthy to come before the divine Majesty, indeed to being on the face of the earth, and say that you do not know how to pray, and yet pray along with the holy Apostles: *Lord teach me how to pray.* ³⁴ Ask immediately that as God has called you to holy prayer through his infinite goodness, that he condescend to teach you the divine mysteries and to ask for what is pleasing to his Majesty for the entire world. To have this achieved have recourse to Mary, the Queen of the world and Mother of God, the Angels and the other saints in heaven who are your protectors in such a laborious and important work as holy prayer.

4. Concerning the place and posture for prayer and the time

5079 All places are suitable for praying to God just as the Lord said to the Samaritan woman.³⁵ We know that Joshua prayed to the Lord while riding his horse in the middle of the army and that his prayer was so effective that the sun stood still.³⁶

In any case there ought to be a place for prayer, especially for noble people, where the whole family at a set time may say their prayers. However, it is undeniable that

³² Cf. Lk. 6, 38; Mt. 5, 7.

³³ Mt 6, 6

³⁴ Lk. 11, 1.

³⁵ Jn. 4, 21-24.

³⁶ Jos. 10, 12-14.

there is something special about prayer said in a church, because the church was built for this purpose as God's house where one learns what to ask, as the Lord said: *My eyes shall be open, and my ears attentive to the prayer of him who shall pray in this place.*³⁷ This is particularly true because of the presence of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ in the most holy Sacrament. This is just as if he were here to listen to our supplications and to grant the grace for which we are asking and this is especially true when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. This makes people more devout, more attentive, more fervent and more composed (this is another thing that I want you to note), because a devout exterior posture, such as being on one's knees, contributes to raising the mind to God and having greater devotion in a wonderful way.

In your room or in a private place of prayer you may stand or sit when you are not on your knees or you might prostrate with your face on the ground which was the posture that our Saviour adopted in the garden.³⁸ To avoid being distracted it is useful that the place be dark. Even though any time is a good time for prayer, morning appears to be the best time and therefore it has been written: *they that watch for me early in the morning shall find me.*³⁹ However, if you cannot do this, at least perform your examination of conscience and mental prayer before you go to bed at night.

An important affirmation

5080 Holy Scripture says that the end of a speech is better than the beginning.⁴⁰ Therefore we ought to consider what the outcome of our prayer ought to be. Because the objective of the exercise is giving glory to God and gaining some advantage for our soul, (which mainly consists in loving God, denying our own will, mortifying our senses and passions, so that the principle outcome of prayer is that it is one of the main tools that God has left to the Church), it follows that our prayer will be good and useful when after praying we would abhor sin, experience intense sorrow for ever having offended God, experience fervour in loving his divine goodness, develop new and strong resolutions to profit from serving God and the wish to die a thousand times rather than to offend his divine Majesty, possess an ardent desire to please God alone, and finally, to leave prayer completely mortified, composed and recollected to the extent that when we have to speak or carry out business we will do so carefully and for the edification of our neighbour. We ought to be just the same as a person who has eaten cloves or something else that is spicy, and exhales a strong breath when speaking. In the same way following prayer our words should be holy and devout and filled with spiritual edification.⁴¹

These are the signs that identify how to pray well and with profit for our soul. One could cry over the misfortunes of many who depart from prayer (this also applies to Mass and Communion), and utter all kinds of flippant, vane and idle words, (not to mention detractive and spiteful words). Wretched people have you not acquired any internal fervour or has everything been lost? But who knows if they were praying, while they were at prayer time and the place of prayer?

³⁷ 2 Chron. 7, 15.

³⁸ Cf. Mt 26, 39.

³⁹ Prov. 8, 17.

⁴⁰ Qo. 7, 8. Eccl. 7, 9 Vulg.)

⁴¹ This is a most beautiful image that underlines one of the main criteria for identifying authentic prayer from prayer that is superficial and ritualistic.

5. A method of praying well and calmly

5081 Up till now, my brother, you prepared by arousing your will to act resolutely when you said your prayers because this was important for your salvation. You awakened your soul by saying to it: “My soul we ought to pray: let us go and pray to the Lord God. My soul you should meditate on this mystery, on that article of faith, on these points.”

When you had done that, my brother, you had to confess your faults by saying the Confiteor, or something similar, with internal sorrow with regard to your sins. Next you turned your attention to not wanting to pray for your own intentions, even those that were of a spiritual nature, but purely because God wanted you to adore and serve him and pray to him. While standing with your eyes fixed on heaven you began to say: *I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help will come to me. My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. O God come to my assistance. O Lord make haste to help me.*⁴² Then with your hands joined you said these prayers:

Actiones nostras Domine, aspirando praevent et adiuvando prossequere, ut cuncta nostra oratio et operatio a te semper incipiat, et per te coepta finiat.

*Quaesimus Domine, Creator coeli et terrae, ut per gratiam tuam semper sis in nobis, liberans nos ab insidiis et deceptionibus daemonum, laques peccatorum contemnendo, ut qui de nostra virtute diffidimus nominis tui adiutorio muniamur. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.*⁴³

On another occasion you may say the following prayer:

*Clentissime Deus, humilium serverorum tuorum inspector et benignus exauditor, oculus tuae pietatis ad me benignus converte, et me aule maiestatem tuam prostratum, ad tuum colloquium recipe delictioneque meorum indulgentium mihio concede; et praesta, ut terrenis cogitationibus expurgatus, te pura mente quaeramac veraciter dilligam. Qui vivis et regnain saecula saeculorum. Amen.*⁴⁴

After this turn to the Queen of heaven and to the saints to whom you are devoted so that they may assist you to finally carry out this exercise.

5082 Second, begin to read the episode in a relaxed way. After this begin your meditation using one of the three following methods. First use your imagination to go to Jerusalem or the Holy Land to see, piece by piece, the places where the Lord was suffering or what he was doing there. By doing this you can even enter into heaven, hell or purgatory and see what they are doing or suffering.

The second step is more devotional as you imagine all that you are doing where you are. This is also easier to do. The third step might prove to be sweeter for you since it involves placing the mystery in your heart, as, for example, if you are meditation on the scourging of the Lord, imagine that your heart is the pillar where he

⁴² Ps 120, 1-2; 69, 2 (*Vulg.*)

⁴³ English translation: “With your love, O God, inspire and accompany all that we do, in such a way that all our prayers and actions may begin and end in you. We pray, O God, Creator of heaven and earth, that you will always dwell in us by your grace, freeing us from the snares and deceptions of the devils and breaking the bonds of sin, so that, not trusting in our own strength, we shall be protected by the power of your name. Through Christ our Lord.”

⁴⁴ English translation: “O most clement God, who see your humble servants, and come to their help with your goodness, turn the kind eyes of your mercy to me who am lying prostrate before your Majesty and listen to me and forgive my sins. Grant that having been freed from every earthly thought, I may seek you with a pure heart and truly love you. Who live and reign etc.”

is being flogged and that some of the lashes strike your heart and much of the precious blood flows onto you. If you imagine this how can your heart remain unaffected by the strong blows?

If you imagine the crowning with thorns imagine that your heart is the bench where he sat, or the purple cloak that he was wearing and that the blood flowed from his divine head and covered your heart. If you are meditating on the mystery of the Lord's crucifixion, imagine that your heart is the rock in which the sacred wood has been secured. O what loving, fervent and sweet thoughts the Holy Spirit has sent to you! ⁴⁵

5083 In the third and final step you should consider the mystery more with your emotions than with your intellect,⁴⁶ while making acts of thanksgiving, sorrow, purpose of amendment, desire to imitate Christ's virtues, praise, adoration, invocation, salutation, petition, dismay over your sins, request of medicine, imploring God to allow you to progress from what you have imagined to what is in heaven saying something like this:

“My Jesus, why do I not cry more now that I feel struck by your suffering humanity? O my adorable God, when I see your head covered with thorns, bowed beneath the inscription on the cross, how ashamed I feel about my excessive pride that always makes me want to occupy the first place and receive honour and titles. How your eyes, that are filled with blood so that you are unable to see, are a reproach for the curious gazing and impure glances of my eyes! How your mouth that stung from the vinegar and gall challenges my intemperance and my loose tongue that utters vain lustful and defamatory words! How your unaccustomed nudity and extreme poverty challenges my avarice since not only do I not give what is left over to the poor, but am so eager to accumulate things! How your virginal flesh which was all pierced with thorns, scourges, nails, and the lance challenges the cravings of my own flesh that make me afraid of eternal death if I do not keep it under control by means of discrete mortification! ⁴⁷

How can the sacred hands that were nailed to the holy cross not condemn my anger and impatience that stops me controlling my own hands that draw me to giving offence and taking vengeance? How can the sacred feet which walked so many miles for my salvation not dissuade me from being lazy and negligent in your holy service while I am overzealous and diligent in the service of the devil who is my deadly enemy?

5084 My Lord and my God this is how I think of you from head to foot and from every point of view I feel very bitter about my grave, enormous sins. O suffering Christ, I am a person who has dishonoured you by means of the nails of my sins. I have offended and crucified you as many times as I have committed mortal sins. However, now I can see everything differently and feel that I must cry and do penance. If my eyes cannot shed tears my contrite heart ought to shed copious tears. My Lord, I am sorry, I regret and I deeply repent of not having always attended to your holy service as I should have. (O wretched person that I am) I have spent so much time in the service of the world, the flesh and vice rather than in serving you and your kingdom to which I am infinitely obligated! However, loving Jesus, forgive

⁴⁵ This exercise is aimed at bringing Christ's Mysteries home to us and making them a reality.

⁴⁶ This is the method that is preferred by the Capuchins and Franciscans.

⁴⁷ Cf. 2 Cor. 4, 10; 1 Cor, 9, 27.

me through the infinite merits of your holy death, and through the sorrows of you most sorrowful Mother.

Now for my part and by means of what lies within me I place my heart at your service with the firm intent of leaving aside all perverse practises and of avoiding all the circumstance which for some time have been leading me into sin, and to fly from all vicious and dangerous practises that have enticed me to have impurity of conscience. I propose with your help to carry out your divine will always.

I recognise the divine virtues that I have learnt from your most holy Passion: how they invite me to practice patience, very prompt obedience, very strict poverty, deepest humility, most ardent charity, to strongly despise the world and to practise the many other types of virtue that you, Lord, have taught us in the Gospel, and which I have accepted as commands but have not practised by regarding what is on earth rather than what is in heaven, worldly life rather than religious life, vice above virtue, the flesh above the spirit, by loving myself and my interests in a disorderly fashion. In short can you think of a vice that I (ever wretched me) have not succumbed to?

5085 However, I now firmly resolve to practise your holy and divine virtues and conform to your very holy life and Passion so that you will not withhold your divine assistance from me, Lord, which I humbly ask of you through the merits of your Passion.

O loving God, in regard to the infinite love that your immense goodness has for me, in spite of my many demerits, I will offer the most amount of thanks that I could ever offer. I shall also ask all creatures in heaven, on earth and under the earth to offer you endless praise. In a special way I ask you, most holy patrons, to offer whatever praise you can, to your Lord and mine, on my behalf for all eternity, requesting that I be heard when I ask for grace for myself and my neighbour, if what I ask for is in accord with your divine will.”

At this point, brother, you may turn to the eternal Father and with sentiments of devotion speak to his most innocent Son saying:

“O heavenly Father, behold, in order no to appear empty handed before your exalted Majesty, I offer you the most precious host of the body and blood of you most beloved Son. Behold him, Father, at prayer, with sweat and blood, in agony. Look upon him betrayed, arrested, bound, brought before the seat of judgement, accused, flogged, crowned with thorns, burdened with the cross, extending his hands and feet for the nails, hanging between thieves, drinking vinegar and gall and finally dying. Most sweet Father, gaze at how many wounds he suffered on his most pure body, how much blood he lost out of his great love for us and how much obedience he paid to you as he died.

I offer all of this to your eternal glory in remembrance of this sacrosanct mystery, in thanksgiving for such great benefits, to supply for what is lacking in me and my neighbours, N. N, in satisfaction for all of my sins and those of N.N, for my salvation and their salvation and to ask for the graces that I need and that they need, and finally for the salvation of everybody in the holy Catholic Church. I offer this for the union of Christian princes, the defeat of heresy, the conversion of all sinners and heretics, schismatics and infidels and for the liberation of all the faithful souls in Purgatory. Amen.” Where N.N appears recall someone special.

Important notice

5086 However, before you rise from prayer make a new firm proposal to make amendment for your sins especially those concerning which you are often tempted,⁴⁸ and offer the Lord all that you are to do that day praying that he will give you the grace for everything to turn out according to his holy will, glory and honour, and the salvation of your soul.

With regard to the resolutions that you make, my brother, there is a very important rule that I wish to teach you. For example, if you are inclined to be impatient and in prayer you have asked for the strength to overcome this vice, what you ought to do all day is keep alert internally for the occasions when you become impatient, trying to perform many acts of patience throughout the day by enduring with sensitivity the encounters that you may have or at least with fortitude. To do this is a better way, in the morning imagine that this may be your last day (which is quite possible) and as a consequence try to live as patiently as if you were to be called to judgement by Christ at night.

Most of all this will serve you for every other kind of good work because you will be imaging that you are walking, living, speaking and doing everything in the presence of our Lord God and I promise you that by performing this exercise you will attain great perfection in a short period of time.

Brother, when you are in the Church do you not enjoy the presence of God in the most Blessed Sacrament? When you have received Communion do you not have the real presence of your Lord within the Sacramental species? At that time do you not perhaps sense the spiritual presence of God within you? You certainly do. How can you forget this? How can you not hold on to this? How can you sin; either then or later after consuming the sacred Sacramental species if you remember that you are under God's eye?

In order not to forget this enter into an agreement with your soul, so that each time the clock strikes, it will feel like your Guardian Angel is reminding you of the resolution that you made in the morning and that he is saying to you: "Where are you? Pull yourself together, little one, and remember that God can see you." Then (in case your thoughts are wandering about) secretly strike your breast so that no one may see you, and repent of your fault, arouse your heart and return to the exercise.⁴⁹ If you say the Hail Mary when the clock strikes, in addition to invoking the help of the Virgin Mary, each time you will be gaining an indulgence of a thousand days.

6. Conclusion

5087 I do not want to say anything more on this subject except that one of the reasons that I yielded to the importunate requests of my friends was the realisation that the world was full of sensual sins because of which I seemed to see the greater part of mankind bound for hell. St Remigius said: "*Apart from children only a few people will be saved on account of sensual sins.*"⁵⁰ What he meant was that of those who outlived childhood only a few would be saved because of sins of the flesh and dishonesty. Who would not cry day and night on seeing where the world was headed because it was unclean, filthy and wicked? Looking to the future in spirit St Paul said

⁴⁸ As was taught in the ascetical walk and in the noviciate, this is most important in fighting against the predominate passion.

⁴⁹ These practices should also be taught during the Noviciate year.

⁵⁰ This quote cannot be identified.

when he wrote to Timothy, a holy bishop who was his disciple, that he was to pray and have prayers said for princes and for people of every other status, so that they might all live in the condition of purity and chastity. *I beg you to offer prayers etc.... for kings and all that are in high stations that we may live a quiet life in all piety and chastity.* ⁵¹

Therefore, when I went to Rome and kissed the feet of the Supreme Pontiff I was moved to ask him that, as the visible head of the universal church militant and the successor of St Pater and on earth the true vicar of Jesus Christ, to give me permission when I was preaching to the faithful to teach them to greet the most holy Virgin frequently offering her twelve Ave Marie, and a *Pater* before or together with the following verse:

*O unique Virgin,
Meek above all others,
Make us, set us free from (our) sins,
Meek and chaste.* ⁵²

She is asking her most beloved Son to grant the grace that we all may live in chastity, according to our various states, hating and perpetually distancing ourselves and all our neighbours from all vice and sins of dishonesty that infinitely displease God and his most holy Mother. Because of such sins punishment has rightly come from heaven, for example, the universal flood, the fire that destroyed Sodom and the other wicked cities in addition to the other chastisements narrated in Scripture.

5088 His Holiness agreed to this request, and also granted me an indulgence. I cannot say how happy that made me or how it consoled me. However I was not satisfied with this because I recognised the strength of these vices and of other kinds of vice and how worthwhile was the recollection of the Saviour's Passion for the acquisition of these virtues and for every kind of Christian virtue. I took up these meditations and devout exercises and arranged them to my satisfaction and I publish them to help many spiritual people so that they all may derive more strength from meditating on and imitating the heroic virtues of his most holy Passion since these are the two ways of arriving at the glory of heaven.⁵³

In Ezekiel⁵⁴ the four animals symbolise this. These mysterious animals have their four hands under their wings to represent that what we gain from meditation we have to put into practice. Thus by meditating and living according to what the Lord teaches us and insistently praying to the most pure Virgin Mother for ourselves and for our neighbours I am sure that with the help of divine grace we shall encounter such striking improvement in our lives and activities that we shall experience in ourselves what St Paul said of himself and the early faithful: *Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.* He meant to say that they carry around, wherever they go, the mortification of

⁵¹ Cf. 1 Tim. 2, 1-2.

⁵² This verse has been taken from the hymn *Ave Maris Stella*.

⁵³ This beautiful autobiographical statement gives a clearer explanation of what the Provincial chroniclers wrote about his love for the Madonna and the virtue of chastity.

⁵⁴ Ez. 1, 8.

Jesus in their bodies so that the life that those faithful people lived was a living illustration of the life and deeds of Jesus Christ.⁵⁵

I humbly pray to the Lord Jesus that this will also apply to us. May he be blessed forever and ever! Amen.

7. Valuable discourse about meditating and drawing fruit from the Passion of the Lord

5089 *A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; he shall abide between my breasts.*⁵⁶ This is what a soul says at the beginning of the Cantic which conveys an idea and a resolution to never willingly forget the Passion of her dear spouse Jesus Christ but to always carry it in her intellect and in her heart. It is to be retained in the intellect so that the person may contemplate it to provoke interior sentiments of awe, contrition, hatred for sin, proposals of amendment and acts of virtue especially most fervent love for God. Among those who were most devoted to Christ's Passion and death, (with the exception of the glorious Mother of God and the most holy Apostles), none were ahead of our Seraphic Father St Francis, who cried so much over the sacred Passion that he lost the sight of his eyes. So deep was the recollection of the sorrowful Passion, and so strong was his loving and grateful embrace of the Crucified that his side actually remained open, his hands wounded, and his feet pierced, and he promised to always clasp the most sorrowful one who had been crucified, as if he were the most fragrant flower, the most striking rose that could ever be found in the midst of his thoughts and in the most gracious part of his heart. This devout and holy exercise was so profitable to the Saint that, through grace and love, it turned him into an angel on earth, a seraph in the flesh.

Now I briefly exhort and encourage you to undertake such meditation and contemplation where you are able to explore the Passion.

First, think about the Lord's sorrows, which were more than all the martyrs could have suffered in this life. This will put you in a great position to understand the following considerations when you come to consider the amount and ardour of the excess of charity that he had for us since he not only wanted to redeem us, but also to pay back what we owed by suffering for what remained of the debt.

Whereas his saints would have derived some comfort and relief the example of the martyrs, he was the door to whatever small consolation could mitigate our sorrow even slightly.

5090 His sufferings were even more bitter because of his most noble and delicate skin since his most holy body had been conceived and made by the Holy Spirit out of the most pure blood of a very worthy damsel. Because of this each little stab in one of his feet hurt Christ causing more distress than if it had been inflicted on the eye of a farm hand.

In addition to this he endured the insolence of the soldiers, the ferocity of his enemies, the cruelty of his executioners, the anger of the demons, who erupted against the Lord, choirs of Jews and Gentiles who rose up to hurt him more than any other man has ever had been hurt.

⁵⁵ Cf. 2 Cor. 4. 10.

⁵⁶ Song 1, 12.

This does not say anything concerning what is indescribable, namely the internal cross that remained closed within his most holy soul. O what a cross, the first arm of which was zeal for the honour of the Father which devoured his heart when he saw the infinite offenses and injuries that were being offered to the infinite and colossal God!

The second arm was the ingratitude of so many for whom he was suffering who would derive no benefit from the fruit of his most holy Passion> What sorrow overcame his heart when he saw that, even though he had suffered enough for everyone, it would not suffice for all who would die. Thus after so much precious blood had been shed that would suffice for a thousand worlds, never the less so very many would still be damned! He might well have said the words that appear in Isaiah chapter 49: *I have laboured in vain.*⁵⁷

The third arm was seeing the very grave sin of the Jews and their imminent ruin. Finally, the fourth was seeing the incredible sorrow of his most holy Mother. O what an inner cross! O how heavy and torturous was this to the Lord's soul!

5091 The circumstances made the Lord's Passion very bitter to his soul and his flesh. He was sorrowful at the beginning of the Passion when he beheld his death sentence in the Paschal Lamb. He was upset and protested when one of his disciples betrayed him, when he saw Judas Iscariot come up for Communion in the state of mortal sin, and when he departed. Later he endured the agony in the garden and sweat blood, when he was sold for such a low price and betrayed by one of his own. O what shame for a person of honour! He was abandoned by those who were most dear to him and when the first ones to deny him were his favourites.

Place ourselves in the position of having our hands tied behind your back for such a long time in chains with a rope around our neck, being dragged before everyone naked through the town like this while being struck by five, (as many piously think),⁵⁸ irritable soldiers, tied to a post, which was something very shameful, crowned with very sharp thorns that pierced his head, mocked as a king who had been mistreated for a long time, paraded before the people with the words *Behold the man* when he could hear his enemies shout "Let him die. Let his die on a cross!" O how this would have wounded his heart!

While he was listening to such calumnies, false accusations and wicked things said against him, he received blows, shoves, punches, spittle on his face and in his eyes and he heard them saying: "Guess who hit you?" He was cursed, maltreated, with unheard of insults. He was preferred to Barabbas, mocked as if he was mad as he was being led through the streets. He was forced to carry his own hard and ignominious wooden cross, the instrument of his death, on his fragile shoulders. He was fixed to the cross with nails that pierced the most susceptible and sensitive parts of his body. His poor clothes were made the prize of sport. This showed how nobody felt enough compassion for him to offer him anything. He was denied a drop of water in his last moments and given vinegar and gall on a sponge. Even while he was hanging on the cross he was ridiculed and mocked by all. In the end he saw his dear, holy Mother whose heart had been afflicted by just as many thorns and nails as was her Son's body.

⁵⁷ Is 49, 4.

⁵⁸ See above *n. 4009*, note 58.

5092 All of these circumstances caused indescribable sorrow to the sweetest Redeemer himself so that he could truly say: *O all of you that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like my sorrow.* ⁵⁹ O Christian soul, you may dwell on any one of these details, because in each one of them you will find motives for compassion, for tears and for performing various interior exercises.

The great hatred you should feel towards sin

In the events that are mentioned below we may see very clearly the gravity of sin. By considering these things I beg you, who are a Christian person, to dwell on them carefully considering how the Son of God came down from heaven and mounted the cross as ransom. When the eternal Father saw that his Incarnate Son offered to pay for us sinners he punished him by means of the Passion on the cross which you have all observed.

Thus it is very easy to draw the conclusion that *if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?*⁶⁰ If the hand of divine justice came down in this manner upon Christ and on his most holy shoulders while he was without personal sin but only carrying our sins, what would it have done to you, a sinner, who was drought-stricken of grace? Abhor and cry over every sin and perform worthy penance and make genuine amendment!

5093 Make out a balance sheet entering your sins on one side and, on the other side, enter Christ who was persecuted and struck and send it to the bank of divine justice. You will then see the value of these things because to pay the mortgage the Son of God had to suffer so much pain. Just as when, on God's orders, Ezekiel dug through the wall of the temple and saw horrible and undignified idolatry and nauseating abomination⁶¹ you too will be able to see how hideous, how abominable, how hateful your sins are. Come and see all the mystical openings in the mystical temple of the most holy humanity of Christ that were caused by the wounds to his head, the opening of his side and the wounds in his hands and feet. Gaze and you will see how abominable is the idolatry of your disobedience and vicious love of the flesh, of possessions and of the world's honours. To avoid losing such things you are prepared to offend the excellent Majesty of your Lord and to willingly deprive yourself of his holy and divine grace.

O, sinful one, may it not be like this any longer, but like the Jews, who when they looked at the serpent that had been raised on a pole and had their poison wounds cured, you too, if you meditate frequently on your Lord on the cross with a devout and pious heart, I hope will gain a holy fear of God, that by the power of his precious blood, you will be healed of your past sins and become strong in resisting temptations and prudent in avoiding the occasion of sin in future.

How beneficial this is

5094 Now we go on to consider how more beneficial than anything else is such divine assistance. It is certain that whatever evil Adam caused by sinning Christ took away by dying. He made us God's blessed children from being the cursed enemies that we were. He made death something precious whereas before it had been most horrible to even mention it and he won us a heavenly inheritance in place of us having been excluded from it and condemned to hell. I leave the other infinite benefits that

⁵⁹ Lam 1, 12.

⁶⁰ Lk. 32, 31.

⁶¹ Cf. Ez. 8, 8-13.

can be derived from the Passion up to you to consider. If Adam's sin brought incredible evil upon us, it is certain that through the cross God's grace is superabundant, so much so that the Church is not afraid to say: "*O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the death of Christ! O happy fault that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!*"⁶²

8. Concerning the imitation of the virtues of Christ's Passion

5095 When Christ suffered he exercised so many virtues as an example for us. Therefore fix the light of your mind's eye on the noblest example of all the honourable virtues and consider the profound humility that he displayed by dying between two thieves as if he had been their leader; his strength of soul while meeting his enemies in the garden; his mercy in offering God the satisfaction due for the debts of the entire world; his most perfect obedience in preferring to obey his Father; the various aspects of his meekness and patience in the midst of so much suffering that it even made the wicked judge wonder; the manner in which he despised the whims and delicacy of his body as he refused the slightest relief while he endured the lashes; the thorns, the nails, the ropes and the cross upon his virginal flesh; his poverty when he had nowhere to lay his head; his perseverance and his love to the point of death when he not only forgave, but prayed for those who were crucifying him and died for the whole of humanity that was his enemy.

O what outstanding examples, by imitating which, we become true Christians and truthfully noble and genuine friends of God! It is time now to remind ourselves of the words of our Saviour: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*⁶³ One needs to suppose that such devout imitation of the virtues of the Crucified Christ is just as acceptable and pleasing to his divine Majesty as if we had been his companions during his Passion. My brother, this is the way to carry the cross behind Christ. This is imitating him according to the grace and strength which his infinite mercy has given to us.

5096 Thus you always attempt to observe the divine commandments with all your strength, even when those around you deride you and speak ill of you, not recognising whether you are performing virtue or vice, and though you remain silent and patient they regard this as villainous, accusing you of wanting to be bold, while not having either the strength or ability to do so. I maintain that in such a case if you still conduct yourself with patience and are content to go ahead for the love of God, you will rejoice for imitating Christ in his tribulation. Pray warmly for your adversaries for them to be forgiven by the divine mercy, presenting them to the Lord. Know, my brother, that this is a very noble way for you to carry the cross yourself behind the Lord.

When you perform good works and live a simple and innocent life, and are walking in the way of the holy counsels of the Lord you will still be criticised by your enemies and the enemies of Christ's cross who will say evil things about you and attribute to you things that are untrue, making it appear that people should not trust you. Nevertheless, do not come to hate them because of this, rather be happy and remain peaceful, ever prepared to do good things to them when you can. You ought to love them with a pure and sincere heart so that you never feel bitter towards them as if they had never offended you. Indeed show them reverence and signs of true friendship

⁶² From the canticle *Exultet* which is sung during the Paschal Vigil.

⁶³ Mt. 16, 24; Lk. 9, 23.

all out of imitation of and love fore the Crucified Jesus, who did not resent those who crucified him, but forgave them and tried to win them over by praying to the eternal Father for them. Know that with every sigh with which you conquer yourself, in the matters that I have just been speaking about, you will be performing a dear service to the Lord just as much as if he were actually involved with him. St John said⁶⁴ that this is being beside his cross.

5097 Once again, every time, (according to what is prudently possible for you), you deprive yourself of human consolation for the love of Jesus, you will be following the Lord who, during his Passion, lacked and was deprived of every kind of consolation As often as you deprive yourself of the company and of the pleasure of interacting with friends and family for the love of Christ you will be like Christ who was left and abandoned in his Passion.

When the Lord takes away your spiritual consolation, you should, following the example of the beloved Christ, not seek other consolation or recreation, but patiently await a new gift of consolation from him. This will come about when it pleases his divine providence. The closer that your will is aligned with God's will, even at a time when your spirit lacks all spiritual consolation, the closer you will be conformed to the Crucified and be more acceptable in the eyes of the eternal Father, since this truly is the moment of detecting who are the real soldiers in the spiritual army of Christ.

When you manfully break and mortify the cravings of your throat then you will be like beloved Jesus and you will drink vinegar and gall. When you valiantly strip yourself of your own will, then you will have been stripped naked with Christ. Every time that, for the love of God, you obey everyone in what is not sinful you bow your head with the Crucified Christ, who preferred to lose his life rather than be disobedient. With the same resignation, commit yourself and everything that you possess and everything that might happen to you for better or worse into the hands of the divine will, as a person who is always close to abandoning this life, loving nothing that the false world loves, but loving only heavenly things and aspiring to what is pleasing to God and often have these words in your mouth: *Father into your hands I commend my spirit.*⁶⁵ You will always be well conformed Jesus who was humble and resigned and who was in the hands of his eternal Father.

5098 So, happy Christian, if you do this contentedly, like a simple dove, you may seek continual refuge in mystical piety in Christ's open side,⁶⁶ where you will always find copious forgiveness of sin, the fullness of grace and secure protection from all evil.

Then, spiritual brother, show that you are a true disciple of the Crucified and come and run swiftly towards spiritual death for Christ and with Christ. O, how happy the eternal Father would be to have such a disciple! How joyful the most holy Master would be in heaven to be honoured by such a disciple on earth! How much honour would be given in heaven to a person who had imitated Christ like this on earth! In accord with the words of St Paul it is certainly true that whoever shares in the Passion will also share in the consolation.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Cf. Jn. 19, 25-27.

⁶⁵ Lk. 23, 46.

⁶⁶ This spiritual image was popular among spiritual writers and St Bonaventure. However, it had been already used in the holy fathers of the Church. See *nn. 4102, 4127, 4139, 4947-49* etc.

⁶⁷ Cf 2 Cor. 1, 7.

9. Concerning patience which is taught in a special way in the Passion

5099 St Paul's words to the Hebrews are both beautiful and filled with the spirit. They are fitting for prompting you to meditate on the Lord's Passion especially for teaching you how to suffer with patience following the example of Christ who practiced patience in adversity. *Think diligently about him who endured such opposition from sinners against himself so that you are not wearied, fainting in your minds.* ⁶⁸ Fix, not just once but several times, your mind's eye on Christ and this will not appear to be heavy or bitter but even sweet and light, so that the thought of it will make the cross blissful and sweeten the bitterness of tribulations, as this is the overall remedy for all evil, nor is there a trial that can be found which would not have its antidote in the Lord's Passion.

Are you confused? Gaze on Christ on the cross and you will find it sweet. *I remembered God, and was delighted.* ⁶⁹ Are you fog-bound in the frail ship of the present life among the waves of diabolical temptations? Behold the cross that will act as your anchor so that you will not go under. Have you lost your patience when surrounded by those who are persecuting you, those who are doing you an injury, those who are calumniating you, those who are taking what belongs to you, those who have got the better of you, those who have tricked you? Behold the sword to defend yourself so that any such evils could ever touch your heart. Do you know which sword? Christ's Passion! When speaking in spirit with Christ Jeremiah said: *Thou shall give them a buckler of heart, thy labour.* ⁷⁰ Lord you will bestow your sorrows and your Passion as a sword for the heart to those whom you have chosen.

God's servants do not use offensive weapons, but only defensive weapons. They do not use spears or lances or the like, but simply a sword or shield to defend themselves, not to attach another person. What part of their person are they defending? Is it their body? Certainly not, since one of the faithful is not allowed to defend himself from anything but persecution and tribulations.⁷¹ What are they defending? They are defending the heart. This is to be defended so that it may not be disturbed, or changed, or corrupted, or saddened, or resentful, or made to grieve. For this reason, *you have placed a sword in the hearts of your servants* so that the servant may be contented not only to suffer, to be persecuted, to have calumnies spoken against him, to be stripped and ever killed when he sees how his Lord suffered similar and greater things for him! Is it not true that *the disciple is not greater than his master?* ⁷²

5100 Therefore, O faithful follower, *think about things* many, many times, set yourself to meditate.⁷³ Meditate on whom? On *him* that is the Son of God, who is innocent, sinless, was betrayed for us sinners, persecuted and crucified. For whom did he suffer? *For sinners* among whom there were sinners for whom he was dying. We endure injustices for the sake of God who has done so many good things for us, for God who gives us more than a hundred percent, for God for whose sake to suffer is

⁶⁸ Heb, 12, 3.

⁶⁹ Ps. 76, 4 (*Vulg.*)

⁷⁰ Lam. 3, 65, (*Vulg.*)

⁷¹ Cf. Jn. 15, 18-21.

⁷² Mt. 10, 24; Lk. 6, 40.

⁷³ There follows a most beautiful practical example of how to "ponder", during affective meditation, on the words of holy scripture which have just been quoted.

entirely honourable, brilliant and glorious. However, he suffered for the very ones who tormented him, for his executioners, who put him to death on the cross. There is no one that is more exalted, nobler, more illustrious or more glorious than God. Now there is nothing great about us who are sinners suffering, since we are sinners, but for God to fall into the hands of sinners, who spit on him, vilify him, who irritate him, crucify him cannot even be thought of without thinking that this goes far beyond all reason.

St Paul goes further by saying that he had offended God personally and not only God's elect when he persecuted them. (Saul says that God asked him: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*)⁷⁴ He says that this was his own doing. He suffered confusion as it appeared that the whole world was suspicious of him.

5101 What fruit should we derive from such meditations and considerations *So that they will not exhaust your feeble souls?* The fruit will be that in our hearts it will not seem to be a burden to suffer, or to be some kind of contradiction to find persecution and injustice in the world. The fruit will be that we shall not turn our backs on suffering as the Lord's friends did when they fled at the time of his Passion. To tell the truth we would be very blameworthy if we only wanted to accompany Christ to Mount Tabor on the occasion of his glorious Transfiguration and then abandon him when he went to Calvary to die shamefully on the cross.

Meditating on his Passion (as the Apostle says) will be of incredible assistance in this. *What could appear to be difficult to endure with a peaceful soul if we recall Christ's Passion?*⁷⁵ This warms the fearful breast, animates the timid heart and gives courage to every frightened soul. If a captain's example can generate so much courage in any difficult attack that it animates the soldiers to advance among the lances, why can we not see our Christ advancing with the standard of the cross?

Do the thorns of persecution not look like roses when seen on the head of our Lord? Do we not kiss the wounds caused by the nails when they go through the hands and feet of our Lord? Do we not thank those who scourged, spat upon, cursed and insulted him when we see the glorious virginal body of the Lord which has been maltreated by his creatures from head to foot?

Do we not go to meet the cross as did the loving St Andrew who longed for it so ardently, greeted it so devoutly, embraced it so affectionately, preached about it with such spirit and breathed his last on it? Was his flesh different from our flesh or was it another God that helped us carry out the exercise of meditation, whom we begged for his infinite mercy, who made us feel part of what our most sweet Redeemer felt, to whom be honour and glory forever.

10. Concerning the love that is experienced in the soul during meditation

5102 *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son* are the precious words that came from Jesus' sweet lips which are sweeter than honey, more sweet-smelling than moss, more pleasant than ambrosia, more precious than any rich treasure, more penetrating than any sharp sword, and they are intended to describe how God loves the world to such an extent that he gave his only begotten Son for the

⁷⁴ Acts 9. 4.

⁷⁵ This was said by St Gregory the Great, *seen. 4133 note 30.*

world.⁷⁶ O what divine words, capable of piercing any impenetrable heart, enlightening and darkened mind, igniting any frozen chest! If at God's command, the priests in the old law could take coals from the altar of the Lord when they wanted to light the sacrificial fires,⁷⁷ I maintain very clearly, that likewise whoever wants to enflame his heart with divine love so that he can offer himself to the Lord as an acceptable spiritual sacrifice, can use these divine words of Christ as so many burning coals. Therefore, O my soul, this is what David said in Psalm 38: *My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out.*⁷⁸ The fire of the love of God shall burn in my meditation and this fire can be ignited by Christ's loving words. These words, as well as others, are all fire and love. Come, meditate with concentration and do not cease, until you are burning with love!

See, my soul, you can build yourself a ladder that has a few rungs and climb up to a certain point towards understanding the ineffable and incomprehensible love of God. Take the first step by recognising that God does not need us worms of this earth, since he himself is rich and full of all goodness, beatitude and glory and that if the entire world were damned he would not have any less glory, and if the entire world were to be saved it would not add any happiness of grandeur to his Majesty. He could have justifiably put aside his goodness, but he endured much evil for years. Go on considering how his thoughts were of peace and not of punishment and how he gave up his only Son to the horrible and ignominious death of the cross and sent him to carry this out by clothing himself in our frail mortal flesh.

5103 Advance up the next step thinking about this. God loves. He loves himself. He cannot help but love himself. This love is a necessity that is even more necessary than that the sun should shine, or fire should burn. Men and Angels should know this. However, it is really wonderful that he should love the world, that is men and women, men who sin and women who sin, and that he finds them to be lovable even though there are many reasons why they deserve infinite hatred. This is especially true as sinners are just the same and worse than many devils. The devils fear God more than they believe in him.⁷⁹ Sinners believe in God but not only have no fear of him but despise and offend him. In spite of this God loves them more than we can understand!

My soul, go up another step and consider how up to now you can see that one person may love another even if that person does not deserve it only because he is living in the hope that the person will recognise the love and return it so that loving will be repaid with love. However, in this case, God foresaw and knew for certain that his great love would not be recognised or appreciated by so many people, and that because they did not recognise it, it would be repaid with the coin of ingratitude, and that they would despise him, offend him, curse him, and in spite of everything not return his love or see the signs of his perfect and fundamental love. The more ungrateful he foreknew them to be; the more he wanted to win them over with clemency, forgiveness and love. The Canticle put this so correctly: *Many waters cannot quench charity.*⁸⁰ This means that the great ingratitude and many sins of the world cannot stop God from loving the world with infinite and incomprehensible love for ever.

⁷⁶ Jn 3, 16.

⁷⁷ Cf, Lv 6, 10-13.

⁷⁸ Ps 38, 4 (*Vulg.*).

⁷⁹ Cf. Jn 2, 29.

⁸⁰ Song 8, 7.

5104 Tell me. O soul, would you ever be able to understand this secret, since, what is more, this infinite love is always accompanied by God's infinite wisdom, to such an extent that he loves the world that he does not need. What is he doing in doing this? If he loves what has nothing lovable about it, where is the infinite wisdom in this? If he loves something that could arouse hatred for a thousand reasons is he not making a mistake? If he can foresee that the object of his love will not recognise him but will offend him, is he rewarding what is unholy? If you cannot explain such exalted things, humble yourself and rejoice that you have been overcome by God's excessive love which cannot be fully comprehended by men, by all the Angels or even by Christ's created intellect. Although as God he knew and knows about this, nevertheless as man he is struck with wonder and says: *Let God love the world*. O how meaningful is the word *let* because it is full of faith and truth, has no boundary, or measure, no end, and is so expressive, incomprehensible and indescribable.

It is no wonder that God loves the Angels, since they are his most faithful, obedient and perpetual servants. That he loves creatures is illogical and foolhardy. It even goes beyond something that is amazing, since in the past mankind has not obeyed even a few of the commands that his Majesty gave them. However, that he loved the sad, sinful, rebellious world so much when he did not need it, when the world did not deserve it, and had abused the Master's charity and gifts, and that nevertheless he loved the world with such excessive, infinite and incomprehensible love so as to give up his only Son to death to save that same world, goes beyond all marvel and wonder. O Love! O charity of God!

5105 That the Romans competed with one another to give their lives for the preservation of their republic can be explained because in the end they were idolaters and died for other causes, for friends, for the fatherland, for which they received honours and celebrations and for which they expected recognition in the form of statues and monuments to preserve their memory forever. However, here the incarnate God is dying for humanity, the Son for the slaves, the just one for sinners, the Creator for creatures, the completely holy Christ for the sad, wicked and ungrateful world. From any point of view this is incomprehensible to our lowly minds. Only God himself can understand such divine love.

O my soul, how you ought to rejoice when you see that you have been loved by your God with such infinite, gentle and sweet love and that this led him to give his only child for us! Then see how much you ought to rejoice and, in a certain way, take advantage of the fact that your most sweet spouse did not want to take up an angelic nature, but human nature as he did when he assumed flesh, feeling, experiencing and suffering from the frailty, miseries and discomfort of our nature as he received it from the eternal Father so that he would be one of us body and blood with a share in our merits, our debt and our redemption, bring us our inheritance from heaven so that all that was his might be ours. Arouse yourself, my soul, to praise your Lord, and beg all visible and invisible creatures to offer him perpetual praise and blessing through you. Turn to him and devoutly repeat:

5106 "O my love and my God, how many reasons do I have for loving you! O how justly do you command me to love so that I would love you! O how many hells do I deserve if ever I deny you my love! May I never fall into such a great blunder as not to love you with all my might, O my God! Indeed, I will now always sing to you: *I will love you Lord Jesus with all my strength, my firmament, my refuge, my deliverer, my helper, my protector, my saving power, my horn of salvation and my support.*

What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he has given to me? What? I shall love you, my God, my Creator, my Saviour, my Redeemer and my Crucified Love. ⁸¹

Lord, do you want me to love you, to love you even more because you loved me first? Here I am very ready to do so: *I will love you, I will love you.* But who am I that you would consider to be worthy to love you, O my Jesus? However, I know that you want me to love you in order to make me honourable and glorious. I thank you Lord, even though I am vile because of my many sins, that have made me a fool in front of the entire world, but in spite of all that, I am prepared to love you, Lord. *I will love you Lord Jesus, my Saviour, my Love.*

I acknowledge, Lord, that nobody can love you unless you grant the love. Because of this, Lord, I beg you to grant me your love, infuse your charity into me and then I can die if I do not love you with all that love. Enrich me with this precious treasure. Nourish me with this heavenly manna. Feed me with this divine milk *for thy breasts are better than wine.* ⁸² I wish to say that the milk of spiritual and divine love is more tasty to the human heart than any kind of sensual and worldly love, therefore, my Lord, *give what you command, and command what you wish.* ⁸³ Lord, warm me, ignite me, set me alight and consume with this divine fire.

5107 O divine love, precious love, admirable love, loving God, all love! Drive away from me all other foreign love and self-love (which is the root of all evil) lascivious and carnal love and worldly love and let honest love, divine love, chaste love, strong love, true love, love that transforms into God be mine. My love, how late have I come to know you!⁸⁴ Therefore I repent and ask pardon. Help me, Jesus king of love, you who love me so strongly, you who want me to put my life on the cross. Lord, let me into the storeroom of your love, into the wound in your divine side where I may rest, drunk with love which will never cease to cry out in spiritual inebriation *Christ my love has been crucified*, and going out of myself I shall find rest in you alone who are my only good. This is what I ask of you, Lord. This is what I desire. This is what I long for, and if you do not grant it I shall die. *I will love you; I will love you, Jesus!*

Whom shall I love? Shall I love worldly friends who will quickly abandon and betray me when I am in the greatest need? Shall I love my family who can only bequeath me earthly goods? I say, shall I love them so inordinately as to place my hope on them and break some of God's commandments because of them? Are we to love creatures with sinful love because of their apparent beauty which will be changed to ashes in a short time, or out of sensual love which in a short space of time will make the body sordid and stain the soul and cloud the intellect and cause torment from the worm of conscience when a brief moment of pleasure has to be paid for in hell's eternal fire if adequate penance has not been performed? Are we to love wealth or honours that are generally procured by means of trouble, annoyance and incredible upset? Certainly not! Lord, I do not want this kind of love. I reject all of this and any other evil and want you alone who came to save me, was born in a stable, allowed yourself to be circumcised on the eighth day, fled to Egypt because of Herod's

⁸¹ Ps. 17, 2-3; 115, 12 (*Vulg.*). The author has added the final words.

⁸² Song 1, 1.

⁸³ Cf. S. Augustine, *Confess.* 10, c, 29 (*PJ* 12, 796).

⁸⁴ This reminds us of Augustine. Cf. *ibid.* c. 27, n. 38 (*PL* 32, 795)

persecution and remained subject to your Virgin Mother Mary and to your Foster Father most faithful Joseph?

5108 I wish to love you who have fasted for me, prayed, walked, sweat, preached, performed miracles and instituted the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the altar. You were united with us to help us, to visit us, to nourish us, to restore us, sanctify us, deify us. I wish to love you who went into the garden for me, prayed for me three times, offered to drink the chalice of the Passion for me, roused the Apostles for me and were covered in sweat and blood for me.

I wish to love you who faced your enemies for me, received the kiss of Judas for me, permitted yourself to be arrested, bound, jostled, buffeted, spat on, and condemned. I wish to love you who were content to be led to various tribunals for me, falsely accused, mocked as a madman, stripped and scourged at a pillar, made fun of and mocked with a crown of thorns on your head, while draped in purple, with an empty reed in your hand.

I wish to love you who willingly accepted the harsh wood of the cross on your pain-ridden shoulders for me, to which you were later fixed with large nails and raised up between two thieves where you were mocked and cursed in front of all your friends, where you were denied a drop of water, and given vinegar and gall wrapped in hyssop on a rod.

5109 I wish to love you, my Lord, who in the midst of incredible torment remained on the cross for three hours, committed your most holy soul into the hands of your eternal Father, allowed Longinus to pierce your side with a lance which enabled us to be covered plentifully with your precious blood, you who the very wealthy spouse of St Clare. Finally, I will love you, my Jesus, who made me capable of receiving your divine grace and by means of your precious death to inherit Paradise.

My Lord, grant that it could never be true that I would ever forget such excessive love. Is it not true that *a person who receives a valuable gift is obliged to return something similar?*⁸⁵ Are not the mysteries of your most holy life, Passion and death and manacles, bonds and chains that bind me? Yes, yes, Lord. These are the kind of chains that bound the very chaste Joseph, the son of the Patriarch Jacob, (when his lustful mistress wanted to tempt him to sin), and he said in all honesty: *how then can I do this wicked thing?*⁸⁶ There were gifts that his master had bestowed on him very generously. O my Jesus, Lord, I too am bound by so many chains and the tight bonds of the favours of your most holy Passion and death. In future how could I ever allow my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands, my limbs, my feet, my body, my heart to sin or offend your divine Majesty? My Jesus, my love, my sole delight, my Lord, my God, my Crucified one!

Lord, gather me into your most sacred wounds repair me by means of your divine Spirit, wash me with your most precious blood, pierce me with your sacred lance and glorious nails and transform me entirely into you by the strength of your divine love. Let my heart, or thoughts, or intellect, or will, or the love of anything but you never separate me from you! Let my wisdom consist in not knowing anything but the Crucified Jesus!⁸⁷

⁸⁵ He who receives a favour also receives a manacle around his foot. This is a proverb that describes how someone who receives a favour feels an obligation towards his benefactor.

⁸⁶ Gen. 39, 9.

⁸⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 2, 2.

5110 Jesus may you be all mine and I all yours! Jesus, let me sacrifice myself to you now and always; I who am a repentant soul in memory, intellect, will, irascible reactions, instincts of desire and reasoning, mind and spirit, together with my flesh, blood and life, all that I have and that I possess, including what is temporal. I give this all to you Jesus as absolute Lord to do with and to dispose of as you wish according to what gives you the most pleasure, and accords with your will. This is the best way for me to be in your hands, of pleasing you and preserving my freedom.

In this way I do not want to love anyone but you, my God, and whoever you command me to love, so as to love in you and for you alone. I will mortify my flesh for you and place and maintain it in the service of what is spiritual. I shall lift up my spirit to you more frequently by continually remaining in your divine presence. With you I shall crucify the senses. I shall shed my blood for you (should this become necessary). I shall stretch my hands out to works of mercy. I shall happily stretch out my arms to joyfully receive any cross of adversity. Following you I shall toil night and day with my feet in the service of your poor ones. My tongue will never cease praising you and your name will be always on my lips and my heart full of love for my most sweet Crucified Jesus.

Therefore, you, who are the fountain of love, the life of those who love you and love itself infuse into me and increase your sweet and holy love so that loving you together with the Father and the Holy Spirit you will all visit and replenish my spirit always and live in me forever, at the present by your grace and in the future in your glory. Amen.

11. An exhortation to practice these exercises frequently, containing many examples, revelations and quotes from saints

5111 In my opinion we know just how much God honoured the Order of my seraphic Father and indeed St Francis himself by the fact that he conferred upon him the very special favour of sharing his most important and most precious treasures with him.

He shared his childhood with St Anthony of Padua. Thus the Saint was painted with a book in his hand and the Baby Jesus close to him.⁸⁸ When the Saint was staying in the house of one of his benefactors in order to see what the Saint did at night the curious host put him in a room that had a light and at midnight he peeped through a crack and saw that the Saint was on his knees saying his Office and that a Baby of inestimable magnificence was near him playing and caressing him.

He gave St Bernadine of Siena the most holy name of Jesus because of which the Saint suffered many tribulations and worked many wonders as the whole world

⁸⁸ Concerning this popular painting of St Anthony of Padua cf. A. Mistrorigo, *S. Antonio e il giglio, il libro, Gesù*, in *S. Antonio di Padova predigatore di Vangelo*, a cura di A. Peppi, Padova 1981 113-116. Remember that the passages from n. 11 onwards are taken from the second part (or vol 2) of *Facetto di mirra*.

knows.⁸⁹ He gave St James, a lay brother, his holy cross so that he might have a special devotion to it, and that is why he has been painted with a cross in his hand.⁹⁰

It seems that he would give the most holy Sacrament of his glorious Body to St Clare. Thus the Saint has been painted with the monstrance of the most holy Sacrament in her hand as if when she was praying before it and when she was in great need she heard a voice that said: "I have defended you and will always defend you".

When the Mors attacked that they were suddenly overcome by fear and they left the monastery immediately leaving the nuns and the glorious Saint unhurt and free.⁹¹

5112 Our whole Order was placed under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception of his purest Mother⁹². He gave the richest and most illustrious gift of the holy stigmata to the seraphic Father: concerning which we sing: *Lord You signed your servant Francis with the sign of our redemption.*⁹³

O glorious Saint who was marked by God so there might be a chair of mortification, a university of heavenly science, a royal flag-bearer for God because of his victory in heaven, a major general for the crusade (the great leader of which is Christ), a captain in the army that combats all vices of the flesh, a light in the world, someone to confound the proud and the rich of this world, a seal of God, an altar for the visible kingdom of the Church, a image of Jesus Christ crucified!

In St Francis Christ wanted provide the world with an example of holy Christian virtues, a lesson in Gospel perfection, a model and a concept in the light of which we would reshape our conduct. He engraved this on his hands to prove that whatever the Saint did, his poverty, the beatings, his restraint, manual work, almsgiving and whatever passed through his hands, all of which was performed exclusively for the honour and glory of God and the good of his neighbour. He engraved this on his feet granting him such faith that his every step, voyage, pilgrimage and excursion were undertaken purely for the honour of God and the benefit of redeemed souls. He engraved it on his heart so that the Saint would always bear in his heart a fiery furnace of desires to suffer for his beloved Christ and a kiln of seraphic ardour that would incite us to do the things that were akin to the Passion of his Saviour.

5113 This is why he wore a habit shaped like a cross, with a cord around his waist, walked in bare feet, slept on a bed made of uncovered timber or even on the bare earth, fasting for almost the entire year, suffering from the cold and every other bodily discomfort, accompanied by continuous meditation and the compassionate recall of the Passion of the most sweet Jesus Christ over which he wept day and night. To experience this at greater depth he stayed in remote places, on mountains, in woods or abandoned churches where he filled the air with sighs and groans, consumed with

⁸⁹ Cf. Eric Doyle, *St Bernardine of Siena and the Devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus*, in *Franciscan Cgristology, Selected texts, Translations and Introductory Essay*, Edited by Damian McElrath, St Bonaventure [1980] 202-226. See also *Enciclopedia bernardiana. IV Biografia a cura di Silvio Alois*, L'Aquila, 1985,

⁹⁰ St James of Alcalà (+1463) OFM; canonised in 1588 by Sixtus V. Regarding this painting cf. Ferrando Riog Juan *Iconografia de lossantos*, Barcelona [1950].

⁹¹ Regarding this incident cf. *Leggenda di di S. Chiara*; n. 21-22: *Processo di canoniizzazione*; test. . III, 18; IX, 2; XIII, 9.

⁹² Cf. *Regina Immaculata. Studia a sodalibus capiccinis scripta occasione primi centenarii a proclamazione dogmatica Immaculae Conceptionis B. M. Virginis, celebrate et edita a Melchiorre a Pobladura*, Romae 1955.

⁹³ From the liturgy of St Francis that is celebrated on 17 September.

sorrow because love was not being returned with love,⁹⁴ and because the benefits of the Lord's Passion were neither recalled or recognised by everyone,⁹⁵ and he cried about this night and day.

By means of such exalted meditation on the Passion he developed a high degree of sanctity so that he set little value on the world in comparison to the Lord's Passion, for, as it is written, the glorious Christ now resides in heaven: *Christ now dies no more. Death shall no more have dominion over him.*⁹⁶ St Francis preferred Christ to the world. His sacred hands were marked with the stigmata. Miraculously Christ imprinted his five main wounds on his body, so that when we looked at St Francis we could not fail to remember the one who on the holy cross had been wounded in his hands, feet and side for us miserable sinners. Therefore, the most holy Patriarch exhorted everyone to meditate on the Crucified Jesus. He repeated nothing else to his professed brothers and novices as frequently as he did this meditation. He said that this was holier, more useful and sweeter for the spirit than anything else.⁹⁷

5114 At the beginning of her vocation St Francis introduced St Clare, his first spiritual daughter, to this practice. She regularly taught her daughters and novices little else than to cry over the Lord's Passion. *Clare taught the novices to cry over the Passion of the one who was crucified.*⁹⁸ It was by doing this that another blessed lady; Clare of Montefalco reached great perfection. This is attested by the fact that the mysteries of the Passion were miraculously imbedded in the heart of this most devout spouse of Christ.

We should not be surprised because these saints were following the same road as did the Apostles, as those who came after them also did. St Paul followed their example and when speaking about himself he said that he wanted to demonstrate nothing but what Christ had done for him. He did not live but Christ lived in him. He did not want to know anything except Christ crucified.⁹⁹ His college was Jerusalem, his school Calvary, his chair the cross, his book the humanity of Christ Crucified, the print in the book the scourges, the periods the nails, the commas the wounds, the large letters the five wounds in his pierced flesh, the small letters the lesions, the crown the spittle, shame, gash, cuts, cavities in his hands, his feet and in his sacred holy side.

Tell me all you who are faithful to Jesus Crucified, do you wish to gain all wisdom? Then you should approach the Lord's cross and study within the wounds especially the wound in his most sweet heart. Do you wish to taste the sweetness of the Spirit? Then you should taste the very sweet nectar that comes from the side of Jesus. Do you want to refresh yourself with the water of divine grace? Then you should come to the inexhaustible well in the side of Jesus which was opened by a lance. Do you want to be safe from the savage birds that are the infernal demons? Then you should withdraw into the shelter of the spiritual rock in the cave of the open heart of Jesus. Do you wish God to protect you with his divine hand in the same way

⁹⁴ In the text *non fosse* appears immediately after this.

⁹⁵ This aspect of the Saint's spiritual life is emphasised in all the Franciscan sources, e.g. 2 Cel 203; 3 Cel. 2; AC 37-38; SP 91-93; (FAED III, p. 376; III, p 401; III, p. 178; III, p. 339).

⁹⁶ Rom 6, 9.

⁹⁷ *Admonition* 5; 1 Cel. 45. (FAED I, p.131; I, p. 222).

⁹⁸ From the hymn in the Office for the Feast of St Clare.

⁹⁹ Cf. Rom. 15, 18; Gal. 2, 20; 1 Cor. 2,2. For Clare of Montefalco see Silvestro Nessi, *I processi per la canonizzazione di sabta Chiara di Montefalco*, in *Boll. Dep. Stor. Patria Umbria* 65, (1968) n. 2, 103-160, E. Menestrò, *Il porcesso di canonizzazione di Chiara di Montefalco*, [Todi]1988. cf. CF (1985) 179s.

that he protected Moses to whom he said: *Behold there is a place with me, and you shall stand upon the rock. And when my glory shall pass, I will set you in a hole of the rock, and protect you with my right hand?* ¹⁰⁰ You too ought to remain in the hole in the rock. *The rock was Christ.* ¹⁰¹ The main hole is the wound in his heart.

5115 Are you frightened of the flood of God's anger? You should enter through this door into the mystical ark of Christ's humanity and you will be safe. Do you wish to enter into the *Holy of Holies* ¹⁰² of Christ's divinity? You should pass through the door of Christ's open side. Do you wish to enter the Lord's pastures to taste how gentle God's will is? You should enter through the open door of the Passion of Jesus who says: *I am the door. By me, if any man enters in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pastures.* ¹⁰³

Like birds you have been flying from branch to branch, from thought to thought, from one emotion about creatures to another, loving them in an inordinate way. Stop on this sacred tree of the cross making your nest in it out of the five wounds and then say with David: *My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. For the sparrow has found herself a house and the turtle a nest for herself where she may lay her young ones.* ¹⁰⁴ Happy and fortunate shall you be, when, having made your nest in the Lord's holy wounds, you produce sentiments of embarrassment and shame for having offended your Redeemer, of fear of his divine judgement, of hope for his mercy, of repentance for your past life, of the promise of a holy life in future, in conformity to the life of the crucified Christ, of thanksgiving for the infinite favours received from God, and, most of all, of very ardent love for him who suffered death for love of us.

5116 Let us recall the words of the Saviour: *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.* ¹⁰⁵ Commenting on these words, (in addition to their literal meaning which states that Christ's poverty was so extreme that whereas wolves had holes and birds nests he had nowhere to lay his head) the father of the Church St Ambrose said that their spiritual meaning was a reproach to us for allowing demons to build nests in our hearts when we permit the wicked, vicious and evil thoughts which they suggest to live in our hearts while paying little or no attention to Jesus Christ and his divine mysteries, especially his Passion.

12. The advantage we derive from meditating on the Passion of the Lord

5117 What grace could you desire that you could not find in the Passion? Do you want to feel contrite for your sins? If you contemplate the Passion will it not break your heart just the same as stones were split at the time of the Passion? They split even if they were made of marble.

Are you ashamed to go to Confession and open your heart to your spiritual fathers? Hurry to the Passion and just as the mountains were split so will your hearts be split even though they reek like tombs.

¹⁰⁰ Ex 33, 21-22.

¹⁰¹ 1 Cor. 10, 4.

¹⁰² Cf. Heb. 9, 3.

¹⁰³ Jn. 10, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Ps. 83, 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ LK. 9, 58.

Has your intellect been darkened? The Passion will enlighten you just like the veil in the *Holy of Holies* was torn and you will recognise both yourself and God. This is what St Augustine asked for: *Lord let me know you, so that I may know myself.*¹⁰⁶

What could bring your sins before your mind more effectively than the Passion as we see how severely God punished our sins in the flesh of his most innocent Son?

5118 What could stimulate you more to exercise the holy virtues than the Lord's Passion? Do you want the gift of prayer? Contemplate Christ in the garden. Do you want complete resignation to what is pleasing to God? Listen to this: *Not my will but your will be done.*¹⁰⁷

Do you want to be meek? Watch Christ when he is speaking to those who arrested him as if he were a thief.

Do you want to be resolute? Watch him tell Peter to put his sword away. Do you want to have patience? Do you want to practice obedience, humility, silence, prudence, honesty, abstinence, generosity, charity? You will certainly find these things and many more in the Passion.

This is what gave the martyrs strength when they were suffering, what made the virgins steadfast when under attack, made confessors persevere in penance, rulers govern, made the Apostles, who had great love but were defenceless, go throughout the world establishing Christ's Church. The same Passion will also give you strength in tribulation and victory over temptation. It will lighten the burden of the law of the Lord, fill you with spiritual consolation and arouse you to praise God.

Because of this it will feel sweet to be called fools for Christ's sake,¹⁰⁸ when you see him dressed in white, regarded as mad and mocked as he went through the streets. Can you be as hard as marble when you see Christ facing such insults, wickedness and outrage, yet so patient in tolerating lashes, thorns and nails as not to open his mouth but acting like *a lamb before his shearer and not opening his mouth.*¹⁰⁹ You will bow your head to every command given by your superiors once you have meditated on the obedience of Christ who gave no reply to his executioners and those who crucified him. Rejoice at suffering the lack of even that which is necessary when you see Christ naked on the cross. May you be on fire with charity when you see Christ on the cross praying for those who are crucifying him. Fasting will seem sweet when you look at the thirst of Christ on the cross. You will rejoice when you are put in the last place and are of no repute in the eyes of the world when you see Christ regarded as worse than Barabbas, and less worthy to live, and, indeed, of less worth than the two thieves who were crucified beside him. O Passion, O vision, O model for every Christian! *Look therefore and follow the example of what was shown to you on the mountain.*¹¹⁰

5119 Just as the pupil takes the image given to him by the artist and sets it before him, looks at it and takes up his brush, so a Christian ought to transform himself into the image of Jesus Christ. He needs to keep before the eyes of his mind the image of the holy virtues, namely Christ's sacred Passion. At different times he needs to take from it one kind of virtue or another until by imitating this we achieve what St Paul

¹⁰⁶ S. Augustinus, *Soliloquia*, lib. 11, 1 (PL 12, 885).

¹⁰⁷ Lk. 22, 42.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 4, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Is. 53, 7.

¹¹⁰ Ex. 25, 40; Heb. 8, 5; Acts 7, 44.

said: *Beholding the glory of Christ we are transformed from glory to glory.*¹¹¹ For this is what the eternal Father predestined: *He predestined us to be made conformable to the image of his Son.*¹¹²

What is the image of his Son? Listen to Isaiah: *We see him as having no beauty, nor comeliness, as one who had been struck by God, a leper and humiliated.*¹¹³ Thus the image to which we are predestined and to which we ought to conform, and which we should copy as good artists, is Christ's suffering and crucified humanity. However, if we cannot remember it how can we reproduce this divine portrait?

Why Christianity shows such little spirit at present

5120 From what has been said already I think that we may easily conclude that just as there were many faithful people in the early Church who filled with virtue, despised the world, lived humble lives, were very honest, were aglow with fraternal charity and who rushed to be martyred as if they had been invited to sumptuous banquets; on the contrary we are now so enamoured of the world and its vanities, so greedy, ambitious, individualistic and such enemies of the cross of Christ,¹¹⁴ for no other reason than that we have lost sight of the most holy Passion that the early Christians always carried in their hearts.

If they do ponder over this mystery they do so in a superficial manner and this will not allow them to amend their lives or to achieve conformity to Christ. As food has to be well seasoned for us to put on weight, so too, it is not enough for us to simply look at it, we have to decide to put it into our mouth, and to chew and digest it. This also applies to Christ's Passion and to any other of God's mysteries. It is not enough to think about it or meditate on it. We have to want to acquire a taste for it, to have it move our feelings to sympathise with the Lord, to detest our sins, to fear and love his divine Majesty, to thank him and especially form resolutions not to sin any more and to imitate our Lord's virtues. However, St Augustine says¹¹⁵ that it often happens that after the consideration has taken place, it is followed by very little fruit not because the divine tree of life is not fruitful, but because we do not want to pick it by putting our mind to it.

5121 Rejoice, my dearest in Christ, arouse yourself by following the example of St Bernard, who when first he entered religious life, embarked on his very first exercise (which made him the great saint that the entire world acknowledges) which he describes himself in a Sermon on the Canticle. *At the beginning of my conversion, from among the very few merits that I had accumulated, I collected a small bunch which I held to my breast. It consisted of all the bitter things from which Lord had suffered. In the first place, indeed, what he needed during his infancy, next the labour that he went through when preaching, his exhaustion when fasting, his thirst when contemplating, the ambushes he encountered when he was speaking, the shame when he was arrested, convicted, spat upon, mocked, stripped scourged, pierced with nails and crowned with thorns and so on. What we read in the Gospel fills our mind with abundant sweetness. Let these things never be forgotten since there is much merit in this. My perfection came about because of the justice that was achieved here. This*

¹¹¹ @ Cor, 3, 18.

¹¹² Rom. 8, 29.

¹¹³ Cf. Is. 53, 2. 4.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Phil. 3, 18.

¹¹⁵ Cf, for example, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae*, lib. 1, c. 21, n. 38. (PL 32, 1327s.) Etc.

*supports me in adversity and prosperity, in sad and happy days. This triumphs over all and leads me everywhere.*¹¹⁶

This (so he says) was the sacred exercise that he practised. He made up a bundle of myrrh out of the entire life of the Lord, especially the Passion, and never forgot it and measured his perfection against it. It was the royal road on which he travelled for his entire life. There he mourned safely until he came to his final end.

13. An exercise for the novices in the Order which is also useful for those who are professed

5122 The objective of all religious orders is to tend towards perfection. Such perfection consists in charity. This objective is attained by means of sacred virtues that make it a reality; obedience and, most significantly, charity.¹¹⁷

God tested Adam's virtue, when he forbade him to touch just one tree which was easy. Adam left alone the many other trees and took from the forbidden tree. This is how he disobeyed, bringing disgrace on others and was stripped of original justice.

He then rested Moses by ordering him to leave his own land and so he departed and was circumcised. However, the most serious command was to sacrifice his son.

O how many things did this involve: being the son of Abraham, the child of the free woman, miraculous birth; being the subject of many promises; being the good son and offspring of his mother; loving God who would execute and punish him; not demanding that this happen immediately but that he wait for three days, so that the trial might last longer. Abraham's knew that such a trial was not necessary and that, as there were no witnesses to such a command, it would not be easy for people to believe him and people would abhor his cruelty towards his own son as there was no precedent for such a thing in the world. All of these points are very significant circumstances. In spite of all these unprecedented things the Saint obeyed God not asking himself *why God has commanded you* to do this, as the serpent asked Eve.¹¹⁸

5123 Sine the Saint was awarded merit just as if he had sacrificed his son, we may conclude that someone who offers to perform a work and is ready to perform it and would perform it if he had not been impeded would obey in other circumstances. The Angelic Doctor says:¹¹⁹ *An obedient person, who wants to obey promptly, pleases God in everything, even in the infinite number of things that he has not performed.*

Thus we may see the exalted spirit of our father St Francis when he said in the Rule that when the novices had completed their formation that they be received into obedience,¹²⁰ as if someone who is obedient is a true brother, true religious and a true servant of God. and that a person who is truly obedient is observing all that is promised in the Rule.

This was the case with Christ, who was descended from Abraham according to the flesh and through obedience came from the Father into this world, where he remained under obedience for thirty-three years and died out of obedience: *becoming*

¹¹⁶ Cf. S. Bernardus, *Sermo, 43 super Cant.* N. 3. (PL 183, 994).

¹¹⁷ We see here the Franciscan concept of loving obedience.

¹¹⁸ Gen. 3, 1.

¹¹⁹ This quotation cannot be identified. In any case see M. M. Labourdette, *La vertu d'obédience selon saint Thomas.* In *Revue Thomiste* 57 (1957) 626-656.

¹²⁰ Cf. LR, 2, 11 (FAED I, p. 101)

*obedient even unto death.*¹²¹ Such obedience was his constant food. Therefore, he used to say: *My meat is to do the will of him who sent me.*¹²² St Bernard said: *He lost his life so that he would not perish.* He lost his life so as not to default from obeying to prove which *he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*¹²³

This is the noblest and most necessary exercise for religious and a test for novices.

Portrait of a religious person

5124 There are the conditions for being a person in a religious who is dear to God within a religious order. These include that you keep such good custody of the eyes and ears that you neither see nor hear anything that would satiate your heart and that you would prevent your tongue from murmuring and any harmful or idle talk.

When you see or hear anything unexpectedly do not let it affect you especially when it is something worldly or temporal, but let the dead bury their dead, and take flight from the world as you would from fire.

Above all protect your heart and do not allow it to wander all over the world, especially into vile and evil thoughts. Do not let them give you spontaneous pleasure but keep God at the centre of your heart, always going along and working in God's presence just as if you could see him with your bodily eyes.

Review and examine your actions every day and if you see that they have been defective do not rest until you have asked God's pardon and confessed them and promised to amend.

Make provision for your hours of mental prayer as well as making time for your exercises and never omit them. Do not be afraid of this, indeed let your heart always burn with the fire of devotion.¹²⁴

Be zealous about silence, which is the key to preserving the spirit.¹²⁵

5125 Develop a taste for being in choir and for the divine praises by night and by day. Receive the most holy Sacraments, being well prepared before and recollected and devout afterwards.

It is certain that until God finds in his religious humble and simple submission to their prelates and until they preserve the glow of pure chastity in themselves, while having ardent zeal in their love for others, and sincerely thank God for his generosity in dispensing grace even when they are not worthy, and preserve true and sincere love for one another for the sake of God and in God, and as proof of this love serve one another coming together in charity, pardoning any offence from the heart, calming all anger or bitterness of heart, while being satisfied with the little that they have (which is sufficient to cater for what is necessary)¹²⁶ and refusing what is superfluous for the sake of God, seeking everything in God with the pure eye of the mind,¹²⁷ as long as they do so with wonder and praise they may be assured that, once God sees them doing this, his majesty will never take his divine and merciful eyes off them, or ever abandon them in their need, but will look upon them as the apple of his eye.

¹²¹ Phil. 2, 8.

¹²² Jn 4, 34.

¹²³ Jn 19, 20.

¹²⁴ This is reminiscent of *Const. 1536* n. 41 (n. 215)

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* n. 44 (n. 219)

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* n. 51 (n. 231)

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid.* n. 137 and also n. 63 (n. 406, 245)

Exercises concerning the divine office and other things

5126 When you hear the call for midnight office imagine that you are listening to the dreadful trumpet of the last judgement and a voice that says: *I shall arise and seek the one that my spirit likes.*¹²⁸ See that you are prepared and have recourse to the Mother of God from the depths of your heart.

When they come to call you for Matins, think that it is your Angel Guardian that is calling you, so that you may rise to praise God.

If you are bothered by laziness, consider that if the damned had been given a quarter of an hour to do penance they would do indescribable things. Then say very ardently: *I will seek whom my soul loves.*¹²⁹

After you have made the sign of the cross say: *Make me a token for good, that those who hate me may see that you have comforted me.*¹³⁰ Kneel on your bed and say: *O God come to my aid etc.*¹³¹ While you are getting dressed or putting on the habit think of the soul's garments which are Christ's humility, patience, charity, obedience, and other things that he has taught you concerning which St Paul said: *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.*¹³²

When you get off the bed onto the floor, offer God the first fruits of parts of your body; the heart, by recalling your Lord and sighing; turning your eyes onto an image or up to heaven; going down on your knees in humility; lifting up your arms in thanksgiving for the gifts that God has given you up to now, saying: *We give you thanks. Etc.*

On the way to the choir

5127 Cast out of your heart every care or thought that might distract you from prayer. To obtain such peace and such thoughts, consider how important the work of speaking and conversing with God is and how, because of your sins, you are unworthy to appear before him. Then say with Abraham: *I will speak to the Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes.*¹³³ Having admitted that you are a sinner and unworthy to appear in the divine presence, still place your hope in the fatherly mercy of God and say: *I will arise and go to my father and say to him: Father I have sinned against heaven, and before you. I am not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants.*¹³⁴

As you enter the church say: *In the multitude of your mercy I will come into your house, I will worship towards your holy temple and profess your name.*¹³⁵ Take holy water saying: *Sprinkle me Lord with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed, wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow.*¹³⁶

¹²⁸ This phrase is based on the Bible. It was composed by the author who did not take it literally from Scripture. Cf. Mt. 25, 34; Jn 5, 25 etc.

¹²⁹ Cf. Song 3, 2.

¹³⁰ Ps. 85, 17. (*Vulg.*)

¹³¹ Ps 69, 2 (*Vulg.*)

¹³² Rom. 13, 14.

¹³³ Gen. 18, 27.

¹³⁴ Lk. 15, 18-19.

¹³⁵ Ps 5, 8; 53, 8 (*Vulg.*)

¹³⁶ Ps 50, 9 (*Vulg.*)

Adore the most holy Sacrament and say with hands joined: *We adore you, O Christ, here and in all your churches throughout the world, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.* ¹³⁷

Kiss the ground and go to your stall or to your place and consider how you are performing an angelic duty in praising God, who is one and three.¹³⁸ During this the angels and the entire heavenly choir will be present, and you should also be present there with all reverence thinking of something relevant to each canonical hour.

Prayer before the Office

5128 Lord Jesus Christ, for your glory, I wish to humbly obey you, to serve you faithfully, and praise you perfectly with the same most perfect attention with which you prayed to your eternal Father when you were on earth. Help me, Lord, by means of your great grace because I can achieve nothing without you. Then say: *Direct all our actions, O Lord...*¹³⁹

Prayer after the Office

5129 My Lord God, have mercy on me, as you did for the publican in the temple and the thief on the cross. I offer this tepid service to your most gentle heart so that your Majesty may improve and perfect it. I offer it to your heavenly Father for my salvation and that of the entire world. I beg of your infinite love to forgive my infinite defects and to save me through your most holy Passion. Amen.

14. A very important exercise regarding the presence of God in all our actions

5130 One could never say enough about how important it is for a Christian to remember¹⁴⁰ that God can see him, and that God is closer to a person than the person is to himself. Since this is true, how is it then that a person is not at peace and well behaved both in word and action as well as in thought given that God is just as present in our hearts and in our bodies?

This kind of remembering was very strong in Dositero,¹⁴¹ who after being a young soldier became a monk in the Congregation of St Dorothy. She instructed him to perform the exercise of being mindful of the presence of God. He made such progress in perfection that he became a great servant of God in five years.

It is certain that if a moral philosopher taught young people who wanted to act well to imagine that they were always being censored by their elders or by Socrates or Cato, it is even more certain that the saints who kept the eyes of their mind fixed on their true Lord and God who was watching their every act, word and thought, for which they would have to give an account at the time of their death, would be assisted more profoundly. Their God is everywhere by his essence, presence and power so that, as did the prophets, we can always say: *Long lives the Lord, in whose sight I stand.* ¹⁴² May the Lord live as I stand in his presence! How can a person not change

¹³⁷ This antiphon was always used by the Capuchins when prostrating before the Blessed Sacrament in imitation of St Francis said in his Testament. Test, 5 (FAED I p. 124-5)

¹³⁸ Once again this is reminiscent of *Const. 1536*, n. 35, (n 209).

¹³⁹ This is a liturgical prayer.

¹⁴⁰ *Raccordarsi* in the text = *ricordarsi*.

¹⁴¹ Cf. D. Stirnon, *Dositero, Monaco di Oalestina, santo*. In *Bibl. Sanctorum IX*. Roma, 1964, 831s (con bibliog.)

¹⁴² 1 Kgs. 17, 2.

his thoughts and the reactions of his heart, his reasoning and his actions, when he recognises and is constantly aware that God, his judge, can see him?

Was not the famous prostitute Taide converted when the Abbott Pamphelius simply convinced her that God could see her sinning? Was there not another women, at the time of Efrahem, who stopped sinning only because the saint made her recognise and understand the truth that God could see all the abominable and wicked things that she was doing?¹⁴³

5131 O you, my Christian person, when you go into the church are you not in the presence of God in the most holy Sacrament? When you have received the sacrament of Communion do you not have within you the real body of our Lord and God? Does the most sacred body remain in you while the species of the host lasts which can be for about half an hour? After that is the Lord not in you spiritually? Do you not remember this? How is that? How, before God, can you commit sin either before or after Communion or at any other time? The prophet Jeremiah was amazed at this and said: *Behold you have spoken like this but have done every kind of evil.* ¹⁴⁴ You have said and done as many bad things as you could. How amazing it is that you could have offended God under his very eyes! I know only too well that you were so frightened of men that you waited for night time and sought out secret places. You should have had just as much respect and fear for God wherever you were, whatever you saw, whatever you said or did and changed your heart. God saw everything. He is watching all that you do, and writes it all in the book which awaits you at the end of your life when *the written book will be brought forth, in which all is contained.* ¹⁴⁵ Will all of what has been written be judged? Do you not believe the truth that he is observing your entire life? Listen to the testimony of Job: *You have numbered my steps, and observed all my paths, and considered the steps of my feet.* ¹⁴⁶

Now, brother, begin this holy exercise and practice it within yourself, and be sure that it will provide indescribable fruit for your salvation.

5132 So that the moment does not slip away, make a pact with your soul that when the clock strikes it will seem to you that your Angel Guardian is reminding you of the presence of God as if he were saying: “What are you doing? Where is your heart? Be vigilant because God is watching.”

Then if you see that your heart is wandering off into some evil thought, or is about to wander off, placing your hand under your clothes, secretly make the sign of the cross on your heart saying: *Our God free us from our enemies by this sign of the cross. O God come to my aid!* Or else say: *Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ!* Or else say: *Jesus my crucified love!* Or else say: *My Jesus in my heart!* Or say something similar.

When the clock strikes if you also say an *Ave Maria* and invoke the assistance of the glorious Mother, you will also acquire an indulgence of a thousand days every hour.

¹⁴³ Cf. A. Amore, *Tarcia (Tais, Taide), penetents santa (?)* in *Bibl. Sanctorum XII*, Roma, 1969, 97-98 (con bibliog.) Regarding the episode with St Efrahem see *Vita S. Ephraem Syri*, cap. V (PL 73, 322).

¹⁴⁴ Jer. 3, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Two verses from the Hymn *Dies irae*.

¹⁴⁶ Job 14, 16; 13, 27.

You will profit greatly from this exercise and so do not be afraid, be fervent. Keep ejaculatory prayers close at hand and make use of them and your soul (so to speak) will reach God, or better still he will touch your soul with his divine charity,

5133 If you continue to do these things as if you were having a soliloquy you will be following the practice of St Augustine and St Bernard. *Lord let me know you as I am known, judge so that I may love you. Judge me as you wish* and so on.¹⁴⁷

How many sayings are in the Psalms! *Show us, O Lord, your mercy. Let your mercy come upon me. What have I in heaven? Besides you what do I desire on earth? God of my heart and the God that is my portion forever! My portion in the land of the living! When shall I come and appear before the face of God? Save me, O God, by your name. Create a clean heart in me, O God, etc. Not to us, not to us, but to your name give glory!*¹⁴⁸ There are thousands more all of which are important.

The Gospel says: *O God be merciful to me a sinner. Lord save us, we perish. I believe that you are the Son of the living God. Lord, teach us to pray. Have mercy on me, Lord, my soul is troubled by a devil.*¹⁴⁹

Such ejaculatory may be composed in different ways, such as:

As a statement

5134 My soul, behold your God, your Jesus, your Lord, your Spouse, your joy, your good!

As a command

5135 Bow down, my poor little soul, lower yourself, humble yourself wretched one, go back to your heart, and go back into yourself. Where are you wandering about amongst creatures? Open your eyes, gaze at your Lord, prostrate yourself at his feet, ask for his forgiveness.

As a petition

5136 O my Jesus, may it please you that I may become holy! O most holy and merciful Lady, Mother of God, may it please you that I may become your true, pure and immaculate servant! My Lord God, may it please you that I may be filled with your holy virtues and that I live my life according to what your heart desires! O My God!

As the proclamation of a title

5137 O good Jesus, O sweet Saviour, O loving Redeemer, O gentlest Master, O most high King of glory, O Bliss of my soul, O Delight of my heart and Joy of my heart! O most gentle, most sweet, amiable and loving Crucified One, my Jesus!

As a question

5138 When shall I ever see you, O my delight? When shall I be entirely yours, O my Jesus? When ever shall I follow you with footsteps of perfect love without becoming weary or fearful? When shall I really conquer myself? When, O Lord, shall I be with your forever without being even slightly separated? When will what you

¹⁴⁷ Cf. S, Augustinus, *Soliloquia*, lib. 11, c. 1, n.1; *Confess.* Lib. 19 c. 19, (PL32, 885, 796).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Ps. 84, 8; 118, 41; 41, 22; 25-26; 141, 6; 41, 3; 53, 3; 50,12. (*Vulg.*).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. respectively, Lk. 18,13; Mt. 8, 25; (Lk. 8, 24); Jn. 11, 27; Mt. 16, 16; Lk. 11, 1; Mt. 15, 22.

want and do, not want be also what I want? When shall I not be so fascinated by this world? When shall I be *in peace, asleep in you and at rest, my Lord God?*¹⁵⁰

As a plan

5139 O my soul, do not be always so blind, so tepid, so ungrateful. I shall tire myself for you so much so that you may rest in paradise. I shall not sleep, so that you will not fall into eternal sleep. I shall remain awake so that you will not have to stay away and worry for eternity. I shall fast so that you do not have to ask for food in hell, or, like the rich man, have to ask for a drink and not be able to get even a drop of water.

O my soul, arouse yourself therefore, and banish laziness, since you still have to travel a long way if you are to follow the saints to enjoy a clear vision of God with your heart on your sleeve. Rise up quickly and progress from virtue to virtue without ever stopping sine to halt on this road is to go backwards.

As a comfort

5140 Do not fear, my soul, instead hope in the Lord! The pain and difficulty will soon come to an end and joy and repose will last for eternity. O the moment that lasts for eternity! Penance and mortification last but a moment, whereas pleasure and glory shall last forever. If it seems to you that great things are being expected of you, consider how he has promised you much greater things.¹⁵¹ Rouse yourself, look up to heaven, behold Christ who is watching your fervour, observing your penance, noting your virtues, contemplating your struggles and recording your victories and triumphs.

Arouse yourself, be firm, and credibly look forward to an imperishable crown. Do not despair, O my dearest soul, you will soon depart from this vale of tears. Be firm *act manfully and your heart will be comforted, and hope in the Lord, and perform good deeds, be subject to him and pray to him and he will raise you up and crown you forever and ever. Let it be so, let it be so!*¹⁵²

5141 We must make everything that we see, hear, taste, touch or smell become steps in a ladder that we climb to consider God, who is present in everything, since this is what our father St Francis did. *Whatever delighted him in creatures he attributed to the glory of the Creator.*¹⁵³ All that he found in creatures that delighted him he saw as reflecting the glory of the Creator. In chapter ten of *Stimulus Amoris (The Goad of Love)* St Bonaventure wrote: *O soul you should attribute everything to the praise of the Creator. You can do this properly in this way; or do it even better if God condescends to tell you how.*¹⁵⁴ This means that you ought to turn everything into praise of the Creator. You could do this well by following a certain pattern of action, but in an even better way if God granted you to know how. He gives examples to make this clearer.

When you see other lecturers, who are learned and competent, think that this has come about as a manifestation of divine wisdom that you ought to praise in them.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Ps. 4, 9. (*Vulg.*).

¹⁵¹ This is reminiscent of the famous sermon that was preached by St Francis and referred to in *Const. 1536*, n 150 (n. 427).

¹⁵² Fr. Julianus de Spira, *Vita S. Francisci*, 44. (FAED I, p. 406).

¹⁵³ Cf. Julianus de Spira, *Vita S. Francisci*, 44, (AF X, 356).

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Stimulus amoris*, pars III, c. VIII (S. Bonaventurae ... *Operum*, t. VII, Romae 1596, 237).

When you see those, who are taking affairs seriously, praise the divine prudence in them which, by this is making provision for those who do not work.

When you see others, who are making judgements and passing judgement, fear God's judgement and justice. When you see those, who are harsh in their judgements, fear the rigor of the final judgement.

5142 When you see other pious people, tell them about God's mercy. When you see people, who are performing works of mercy, praise the divine goodness that is working through them, since it is being widely dispensed to all and in all.

When you are feeling the heat, think about the charity of God the Father in sending his Son to become man and to die for us.

When you are feeling the cold desire the warmth of the Holy Spirit and by talking to yourself in this way (according to the holy Doctor) everything will turn into praising and magnifying the Creator. Indeed, there is not a single creature, no matter how vile it appears to you, because of whom you may not offer worthy praise your Creator, because it was created by God and is being preserved by God. If you always keep its Creator in mind you can acknowledge that the creature belongs to God and was created by God.

I have given you these few, imperfect examples so that you may go onto greater things implementing what St Paul taught when he said that a spiritual person makes an assessment of everything: *the spiritual man judges all things*.¹⁵⁵ This does not mean that a spiritual person ought to judge rashly and judge someone else for this would contradict what he said in chapter 4 of the letter to the Romans. *Who are you to judge another man's servant?*¹⁵⁶ It means that just as a worldly person neither understands nor knows the secrets of God's wisdom, so the spiritual person judges everything; that is, he can discern the secrets of the wisdom, power and goodness of God in each creature.

Therefore, O man, discern everything in this way, that is gaze upon and honour the secrets of the wisdom, goodness, justice and power of the Creator in everything and thus offer him continuous, perpetual praise.

5143 Suppose you saw a person who was probably a sinner and did not condemn him or praise him, but though you were displeased by his sin, you felt as much compassion as possible for him and praised the Lord God for preventing him from falling into something worse and for granting you the grace of not doing something similar, though it was not beyond doubt that you might still commit serious and worse sins had God not guarded you by means of his infinite clemency. Thus, you ought to beg of the Lord that his divine Majesty would help and protect your neighbour from sin and do this for you and everyone. If you do not know how to be compassionate God will permit you to fall into a similar kind of error. This is what St Bonaventure said.¹⁵⁷ We ought to make a ladder from such teachings as these whether we see, hear or experience them, to rise up to contemplate the Creator. To achieve this, we have given a few examples of how to contemplate the Lord God in things.

If you look up to heaven sigh with desire to reach your homeland soon and say: *How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs and faints for the*

¹⁵⁵ 1 Cor, 2, 15.

¹⁵⁶ Rom. 14, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. note 154.

courts of the Lord. ¹⁵⁸ If you look down to earth say with humility: *I was formed from earth and to earth I shall return. Why is earth and ashes proud?* ¹⁵⁹

If you are looking at water, think of the waters of the tribulations of this life and say: *Save me, O God, for the waters have come in even unto my soul.* ¹⁶⁰ When it is windy say: What is my life but wind! *Remember my life is but wind.* ¹⁶¹

When you see how smoke blows away say: “This is how the glory of the world passes”. When you see trees (like our Father St Francis) remember the Saviour’s cross. *Faithful cross! Above all other, one and only noble tree!* ¹⁶² Think also about the tree in the Gospel concerning which, when he found that it was not bearing fruit the landlord said: “Why would I keep it as it is only taking up ground! Cut it down!”¹⁶³ Brother, be on guard, that you are not like that,

5144 Think of the fig tree on which Christ found no figs but only leaves. He put a curse on it.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, brother, do not be satisfied with the leaves of external conduct but rather with the fruit of grace.

When you see birds making their nests, be ashamed that you do not know when to do good works which is during the whole of the present life while little birds know all about timing. When you hear them sing in the morning, think of how they know how to praise God in their own way and you are lazy.

When you see doves building nests outside recall that Christ, the spouse of your soul, is calling to you to make your nest in his sacred wounds. *Come my dove in the clefts of the rock.* ¹⁶⁵

When you see worms think of Christ, who when he was despised, seemed more like a worm than a man.¹⁶⁶ When you see stones, think of Christ. *That rock was Christ.* ¹⁶⁷

When you see lambs think of Christ who, like a lamb, did not open his mouth,¹⁶⁸ when he was undergoing a cruel death. Think of how you should imitate the patience and meekness of a lamb if you want a place at Christ’s right hand.

When you see flowers, remember that Christ is like a blossoming flower which you come across in a field at your leisure. The flower’s perfume makes you sense the qualities of Christ which makes you want to live a life that exudes the perfume of a Christian life to the entire world. Can you hear what St Paul is saying? *We are the good odour of God everywhere.* ¹⁶⁹

5145 When you see violets remember the humility of the Mother of God and imitate her. When you see a pomegranate see how it opens for the benefit of the seeds, how it collects them all in the shape of a crown, you should display your heart to

¹⁵⁸ Ps. 83, 2 (*Vulg.*)

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Sir. 10, 9; Job 33, 6.

¹⁶⁰ Ps. 68, 2 (*Vulg.*).

¹⁶¹ Job 7, 7.

¹⁶² From the liturgy of the Cross.

¹⁶³ Cf. Lk 13, 7.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Mt. 21, 19.

¹⁶⁵ Song 2, 14.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Ps. 21, 7 (*Vulg.*).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. note 104.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Is. 53, 7; Acta 8, 32.

¹⁶⁹ 2 Cor. 2, 15.

everyone. Never be two-faced to any one. Hold everyone equally in your heart with true Christian charity, wearing charity as a Queen wears her crown.

When you see a lily that you admire, think how you ought to like the child of purity even more. He has the verdure of the stem,¹⁷⁰ the white of the flower and the yellow of its centre as you can see. May the prospect of always remaining chaste always be green within you, and your life, speech, senses and heart always stay fresh and bright with a beautiful glow. I call this the flush and embossment of chastity and its strong defence.

When you see a rose touch it and smell it and think about this. When the flower is plucked from the bush it loses its beauty just from being held in your hand, so too purity suffers gravely if not kept in the cloister but if it is allowed to be seen and touched it will be in great danger.

If you would rather not look at a rose, look at how the leaves form a crown around any flower. Contemplate God in this flower who makes a glorious crown for the saints in heaven in so many different ways so that you might say that the rose resembles heaven. However, if you wish to smell it with devotion see in the rose your Lady and the Mother of God: *as a rose plant in Jericho*.¹⁷¹

5146 Poets imply that in the beginning the rose would have been white. However, when Venus punctured her foot the blood that came out coloured the rose and it became red. It is certain that the Virgin Mary was always bright red, never experiencing concupiscence of the flesh, and was never trodden on by the thoughts or emotions of Venus and never lost the bright colour of her virginity.

You, in whom the bright colour of honesty has just been restored (by God's grace) should make sure that you never permit Venus to tread on you since then you would turn very red and once you turned that colour your beauty would be replaced by shame.

If you are a prince remember what holy King David said: *Who can understand sins? Cleanse me from the sins of others, O Lord*.¹⁷² Note "the sins of others" which is asking forgiveness for the sins his vassals have committed for which he was to blame.

If you are a judge, think of what God has said: *I will judge justices*,¹⁷³ as even your judgements will be judged by Christ. If you are a lawyer, remember that you too have to present your case before God's tribunal where your accuser will be your conscience, your opponent the devil and the witness your Angel Guardian and your soul the one on trial.

If you are a notary think how the Angels write down the good works which you perform in detail and the devils write down all your sins, and on the day that you die both of them will open these books and you will be judged according to what they contain.

¹⁷⁰ That is the stem of the lily.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Sir, 24, 18 (*Vulg.*)

¹⁷² Ps. 18, 13 (*Vulg.*)

¹⁷³ Ps. 74, 3 (*Vulg.*)

5147 If you are a merchant make a good income for heaven by gaining a hundred percent in giving to the poor and receiving the sacred Sacraments frequently which will put you in a better place than selling many things to gain a small piece of land.

If you have been entrusted with carrying for gold remember the words of God in chapter three of the Apocalypse: *I counsel you to buy gold from me,* ¹⁷⁴ which is the gold of charity and God's grace.

When you admire paintings think that if a painting created in oil can please you so much, how much more pleasing will be a soul that is virtuous and in the state of grace will please God.

If you are a worker who lives by his labour think of how bad sin must be if when Adam committed only one sin you have to sweat so much to earn your keep.

If you are a doctor call to mind St Vitalis who said to St Ursicinus: *You are a doctor who is accustomed to curing others, be careful not to fall into eternal death.* ¹⁷⁵ If you are a surgeon think that it takes a long time and a fire to cure large wounds then you will not be able to cure your soul without making an effort with many good works, especially mortification.

If you are a lay person or a teacher think about what St Bernard said: ¹⁷⁶ to study just for the sake of learning is only curiosity, to study to acquire fame is vanity, to study in order to become wealthy is avarice, to study for the benefit of others is charity; but to study for the benefit of your soul is wisdom and prudence. Also think how true it is what the wise man said: *Those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.* ¹⁷⁷ This is because you have more to account for before God than those who are ignorant since you received one more talent, woe to you if you have used it to offend the one who gave it to you.

5148 If you are noble or are a knight then with respect to your soul think that you are no more than a farm hand. What makes the difference is a holy life. A Roman Senator only wanted his son to be seen wearing a ring that bore the image of the great Scipione Africano to show that his son had inherited his father's virtues. Now apply this to yourself. You are descended from noble stock, noble people who are very catholic, very religious and very fervent in their worship of the highest God. Being noble and knighted, you are like what Christ said of the Jews: *if you are the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham.* ¹⁷⁸ You too should behave like this as did holy knights, the Centurion, St Gregory, St Theodorus and others.

If you are a man or a woman who makes clothes you know that if you do not look after them they will not be clean, so without mortification your soul will not be clean. If you handle ashes you will have ashes on you. If you handle water think of the great grace that the Lord gave in holy Baptism, that many did not receive. Also think of the tears of St Magdalene.

¹⁷⁴ Apoc. 3, 18.

¹⁷⁵ St Ursicinus is a martyr who is venerated in Ravenna. According to the Legend by St Gervasius and St Protasius he was a doctor. Cf. AA. SS, nov. II/II 1931,646, H. Delehay, *Les origines des cultes des martyrs*, Bruxelles 1927, 258ss, 324ss.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. S. Bernardus, *Sermo*, 36, 124 ssin cant., n. 3 (PL 183, 968).

¹⁷⁷ Eccles. 1, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Jn. 1, 39.

When you are before the fire think about being in the fire of hell. When you cannot cook without a fire think how nobody can please God without the fire of charity.

When you are making bread, when separating the bran from the flower, think how God wants you to remove even venial sins from your soul and not only mortal sins in order to serve him better.

When you are washing dishes when you cannot stand them being dirty think how God would suffer at seeing the pollution of your soul. Have you never considered that nothing this dirty can enter the kingdom of heaven?

5149 When you are working with flax remember that in the last chapter of Proverbs Solomon praised the spiritual person saying: *Her fingers have taken hold of the spindle.* ¹⁷⁹ Her fingers worked the spindle. The yarn would have been in the spindle. This means that whatever good they achieve for the love of God both men and women should attribute to God rather than to the flax, or to the spindle and not say that they have done well. Thus, each one should set about doing good works while asking God's forgiveness for what has been neglected and not put off till tomorrow what can be done today.

When you are sowing consider how the needle is like the fear of God which should puncture the heart and little by little introduce the thread of the love of God. Now remember to make the sign of the cross on your forehead frequently so that the devil might not have space to enter with evil thoughts. This is what St Jerome taught St Eustachia ¹⁸⁰ Just as you draw the thread and work, so you first have to take the imperfections from your soul if you want to introduce sacred virtues. If you are embroidering using silk and gold think of the beauty and charm of a soul in the state of grace and is even more beautiful when in glory.

When you are weaving consider how your life is being woven. Things pass whether you see them or not. These are the days and nights in which you work during your life. What has been woven is the fabric and what remains is unravelled. This is like your life. You can see what has been accomplished but not what is still to come. When you cut the thread remember that when you least expect it God will cut the thread using the scissors of the sentence of inevitable death.

Because I believe that you, O servant of God, will do it I suggest that you perform an exercise that a servant of God used to perform. She had dedicated her room to the Blessed Virgin and every time that she entered the room she knelt down and greeted Our Lady saying an Ave Maria. She profited (so I heard) from her mind remaining recollected and by being free of any kind of defect while she was in the room.

5150 I shall return to the exercises and say:

When you go to bed at night, while you are undressing consider what St Paul said in chapter three of his Letter to the Colossians: *strip yourselves of the old man.* ¹⁸¹ If you do not strip yourself of the old man of vice and bad habits your soul will not be pleasing to God.

As you are getting into bed think how often the bare earth and ultimately the rough cross was his bed and of how many of God's servants had nowhere to lay their

¹⁷⁹ Pr. 31, 19.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. S. Hieronymus, *Ep. 130*, n. 9. (*PL* 22, 1115).

¹⁸¹ Col. 3, 9.

suffering bodies. Think grace too and say: “O Lord what will become of my soul when I am in my coffin?” Lie there for a while, (saying an Our Father), with your hands crossed, just as if you were dead, and pray that the Lord will grant you a happy death.

If you wake up during the night, recall the grave in which you placed yourself last night and consider things that will be of benefit to your soul making a devout act of will, an act of contrition for your sins and an act of love of God and express the desire to serve his divine Majesty or something similar.

If you cannot sleep think of what a dreadful thing it is to be deprived of light and how unbearable the palpable darkness of hell will be and of how harsh that permanent place will be, since for the short amount of time that you are unable to sleep your bed feels hard and the darkness disconcerting.

5151 When you wake up in the morning think about how one day you will be taken out of the grave by an Angel to witness the judgement. When you are getting dressed, think about Christ’s virtues: humility, patience, mercy and sanctity which are the soul’s garments according to St Paul: *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.*¹⁸² Also think about the wedding garment without which the hapless guest was thrown out into exterior darkness.¹⁸³ What will happen to you if you are not clothed in God’s grace and holy charity?

Think how you were clothed in this garment when the priest said at your Baptism: *Receive this white garment which you are to bring unstained to the tribunal of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*¹⁸⁴ However, what have you done with that garment? What does it look like now? Amongst the bodily necessities (O wretched creature) do you not see how vile your body is, which like something that is fetid exudes what is foul and filthy from every component? Are you not quite disgusting because of filthy things, so proud and vane?

When washing your hands and combing your hair why do you not bother to clear your conscience or remove the sordid inflammation of your soul? When you look into the mirror if only you could see there the virtues of Christ and of his saints your image would resemble that of a beast. Renew the pristine beauty of the image and likeness of God by means of the holy Sacraments. When putting on your shoes which have been made out of the skin of dead animals think of how you have to die and consider it carefully.

When you cover your head think how you have to be just as careful about the Catholic faith which is the main thing in the entire Christian life. When putting a ring on your finger think of David who said: *My soul is always in my hands.*¹⁸⁵ Thus, in this precious moment of joy you will be thinking of the priceless value of your soul, and be protecting it more than you would the entire world.

5152 In your home or in your room consider how your real home is the grave, as holy Job said: *Hell is my home and all that remains for me is the grave.*¹⁸⁶ O pilgrim, then, why build such great palaces for the three days that you will stay here?

¹⁸² Cf. Note 132.

¹⁸³ Cf Mt 22, 13.

¹⁸⁴ From the ancient Baptismal ritual.

¹⁸⁵ Ps. 118, 109. (*Vulg.*)

¹⁸⁶ Job 17, 13.

When you see poor little people consider why you cannot see that Christ is in them. *What you did to one of these least of my brethren you did to me.*¹⁸⁷ If you see people who are nude and give them clothes. Do you not remember that when St Martin showed Christ the small garment that that he had given to a poor man how he said to his Angels: “Martin, though you are a Catechumen, you have clothed me with this garment?”¹⁸⁸

When you go to sea think of the miracles that the Lord worked at sea so that people said: “Who is this that both the wind and the sea obey him?”¹⁸⁹ How can you, O rational creature, dare to disobey him? Also consider how the present life runs like water to the sea and ends up in the salty ocean, or death. Does this not make you stop and think?

When you are on land and you fall consider how quickly you are still brought down to earth and fall. When you are on your feet, lift your heart up to God and say: “O my Lord, how tired you became when you were standing on your feet, especially on Good Friday!” When you are seated lift your heart up to God and say: “O Lord, I remember when you were seated on Good Friday and the soldiers took away the seat and allowed you to fall on the ground.”¹⁹⁰

When you are on a journey say: “O my Lord, I offer myself to you in union with the journeys that you made for the salvation of souls.” When you are tired say: “How many times were you tired, my Lord, especially at the well in Samaria, and with the cross on your shoulder? O if only I could have helped you then, my Jesus!” When you are riding a horse say: “O my Lord, you only rode once during your ministry, and that was on a beast of burden.”

5133 When you are visiting the sick say: “O my Lord, how willingly your Majesty visited the sick who were in bed even the poor little ones such as St Peter’s mother-in-law and others.”

When you are contradicted in what you are saying, or people murmur about your good actions say: “My Lord, let this be in union with the curses and the murmurs that were uttered concerning your divine actions and grant me sacred patience.”

When people reply to you with contempt and evil words say: “My Lord, somebody said to you in anger: *Is this the way you answer the high priest?*”¹⁹¹ He gave you a blow.

When you feel hungry say: “O my Lord, how much hunger did you endure for me in the desert and in other places?” When you are suffering from thirst, say: “O my Lord, you were given gall and vinegar when you were very thirsty on the cross.” When you feel cold say: “O my Lord, I want to endure this cold in union with the cold that you felt in the stable immediately after you were born.” If someone wakes you while you are asleep instead of being disturbed have patience by recalling when the Apostles woke Our Lord on the boat. When you are in need and friends and family desert you say: “O my Lord, I am content about this for love of you, since the Apostles abandoned you during your Passion.

¹⁸⁷ Mt. 25, 40.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Sulpicius Sererus, Vita S. Martinus*, c. 3 (CSEL, 1, 113).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Mk. 4, 40.

¹⁹⁰ This is an apocryphal detail that originated among medieval mystics.

¹⁹¹ Jn 18, 22.

When you leave those whom you love with all your heart, recall how the Lord left his most sweet Mother to go to his Passion.

5154 When you are shamed in public say: “O my Lord, I offer you this trial in union with when you were put on public display with the words *Behold the man.*” When you are falsely accused or judged by someone say: “O Lord, I recall the false accusations and wicked charges that were laid against you, and I too willingly endure these things.”

When you have to suffer some kind of injustice or bias, think about Pilate’s unjust sentence against the Saviour. When you are upset by sorrow or sickness, think of the Saviour’s sufferings at the pillar, under the thorns, and on the cross and offer him what you are suffering in union with what he suffered.

When you see that you have come to the moment of death offer him your spirit, begging him to offer you to the Father as he offered himself on the cross. If your neighbour does not listen to your advice, consider the sorrows that the Lord endured when so many of his divine admonishments were not accepted.

When you see that in certain things you have offended God but do not feel sorry, offer this to God in memory of Christ’s sorrow when he expelled those who were profaning the temple. When a spiritual person departs from the narrow path of virtue feel the same as the Lord felt when Judas left him.

When you think that there are only a few servants of God, think of what the Lord said: “The harvest is great but the labourers are few,”¹⁹² and think of how he felt when he said it.

When you have been given the grace of being sorry for your sins, consider how they were the cause of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and how he was the first one to do penance.

5155 When you are tempted, think of the temptations of the Lord in the desert. When you become aware that your conversation is displeasing to bad people, say: “O my Lord, you were also cast out by some people to whom you had granted many favours out of love.”

When someone refuses you lodgings say: “O my Lord, at one time the Samaritans refused you lodging, O my true God, whereas I, a poor sinner, beg for forgiveness of my sins.”

When you call to mind the sins of a city or a country, remember the Lord’s tears and grief for the city of Jerusalem.

When you lose the spirit of prayer, recall what the Lord said: “*My God, My God why have you forsaken me?*”¹⁹³

When you are out in the countryside, recall the creation of the world, and contemplate its beauty, its variety, the grandeur of its creatures and how they are governed with the greatest providence so that we may come to know God.

5156 When an important person enters the city or land where you live and is received with pomp and ceremony, think about when the Lord entered Jerusalem and was received with such ceremony, song and solemnity.

¹⁹² Mt. 9, 37; Lk. 10, 2.

¹⁹³ Mt. 27, 46; Ps. 22, 2.

When you catch the smell of the fragrance of the flowers and the trees that grow so high, think about it and say: “O my Lord, why do I not try to imitate these plants by flinging my heart to the sky when, indeed, I am bound down by vile and abject things. I have no excuse on the day of rejoicing as all the creatures are inviting me to do this.

When you hear music with a feeling of holy envy for the citizens of heaven say: *Blessed are they that live in your house, O Lord, they shall praise you forever and ever.*¹⁹⁴

When you see the animals of the earth consider how they were placed there for your benefit and because of sin you became one of them: *like the horse and the mule, who have no understanding.*¹⁹⁵ When you see an ant preparing food for the winter, think of your own laziness since you do not stock up good works for when you die.

When you gaze at the stars think of their order and movement in the sky and be ashamed at how you lack order in your own life. When you see the sun, consider how the stars are clothed with its light while you, who are a man made out of dust and ashes, refuse to be clad in the virtues of Christ, the sun of justice.

When you see money think of the price Christ paid for our redemption while you are not accumulating good works to spend in heaven.

When you are called to take food

5157 Think about what you are about to do. Indeed, it is something that you have in common with animals. Therefore, make up your mind not to do it in the same way that animals do it.

You do not eat food just because it is pleasing and enjoyable or just to satisfy your hunger, but because it is a basic need of nature and is a kind of medicine that will preserve your body to serve God.

As you are washing your hands remember that Pilate also washed his hands saying that he no longer wanted to be involved in the Lord’s trial.¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless he condemned him. You too allow a slight breeze of temptation blow your good resolutions away without them being fulfilled.

Say grace in a humble and devout voice, imagining that you can see Christ at the time that he wanted to multiply the loaves to feed the crowd and imparted his most sacred blessing, or when he raised his eyes to heaven to his eternal Father when he wanted to consecrate bread and wine and turn it into his body and blood.¹⁹⁷ When you have said grace like this seat yourself humbly at the table.

5158 Once you have been seated do not touch the food immediately but compose yourself a little and say an *Our Father*, or say: “My most sweet Lord Jesus Christ make me take this food and drink in a sober manner for the glory of your most holy name in union with the love with which you, my God, became man for me, taking food and drink amongst us for the glory of your eternal Father and the salvation of the human race. Amen.”

¹⁹⁴ Ps 83, 5. (*Vulg.*).

¹⁹⁵ Ps. 31, 9 (*Vulg.*).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Mt 27, 24.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Mt 14, 19; 26, 26-27 etc.

Occasionally eat some bland food especially on the days of penance, recalling that Christ tasted vinegar and gall. While you are eating keep in mind how great is God's providence in supplying what is necessary for your body. Think about the eyes, the feet, the hands and the thoughts of the many people who have prepared what you are eating and the diligence and care with which they have toiled for you in what they have been doing while you relish the taste and build up your bodily strength and enjoy life. They have done so much for you while you have done little and are so negligent in serving God. Think seriously about this.

Cultivate the habit of sometimes leaving something that you like in order to do a little bit of penance and if you can send a portion to some poor person.

See to it that you are not the last person to finish, but hurry along as best you can. Make every effort to preserve modesty, honesty and decorum, not eating or drinking greedily or in gulps because this will impede your mental processes and disgust those who are with you.

5159 While you are eating imagine that you can see the Angels who are going around as ministers defending you from temptations and see how they are moving about. As you take a bite you can imagine two things. Firstly, imaging that God is present, as he is everywhere, and that when you are taking the bite and when you are having a drink that you are imbibing God since he is our sustenance, our meal and in everything he becomes everything for us. Secondly, you could dip that morsel into Christ's blood, which you should always have before your eyes as there is much that is tasteless in a meal where Jesus is not present.

In short, whether you eat alone or in company, do not be concerned entirely with the flavour of the food, but go beyond this by exercising your mind.

Occasionally you might think about Christ at the feast of Cana, in Galilee, in the Pharisee's home, when he converted Magdalene; when he worked the miracle of the loaves and fishes in the desert; or when he celebrated the Last Supper, and you will find that in all of these places there were always teachings and miracles as well as bodily food.¹⁹⁸ In imitation of Christ and for the love of Christ make sure that you always mortify your own will and your five senses, especially the sense of taste. Do this also as some kind of recompense to God for Adam having eaten the forbidden fruit which was the cause of so much of the daily misery that we experience. Thus you should not be satisfied with refurbishing the body without deriving some benefit for the spirit.

5160 When you have finished the meal rise from the table and with your whole heart thank the Lord with Christian modesty for strengthening you with his many gifts, and withdrawing to a remote place say three *Our Fathers* and three *Hail Marys* to beg for the grace that neither you nor those who were at table with you will offend the Lord in thought, word or action.

Those especially who have children or people in their care should keep this in mind, this is what holy Job did when he offered a sacrifice to God and said: *Lest perhaps my sons have sinned and have blessed God in their hearts.*¹⁹⁹ This means (as the saintly father said) that he was praying so that his sons might not sin and blaspheme God in thought when they dine and eat together as they do every day.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. respectively Lk 2, 36-50; 9, 12-17; 22, 14-18, etc.

¹⁹⁹ Job 1, 5.

5161 These exercises may also be practised by those who live in the world. This is why St Paul exhorted all the faithful to do whatever they did (eating or anything else) in the name of Jesus Christ for this is a most beautiful way of doing it.

Religious persons are bound even more to take this lesson to heart. They should sit with their legs stretched out and their knees crossed, or with their arms on the table. Rather their hands should make a pact with their eyes not to gaze at the tablecloth, or to look secretly at those who are eating with them, or to be careful not to take food twice but to be content with the same amount as was served to the others. In short let them remember that they are in the presence of God and that they have to render an account to God for everything, especially for what they eat, since those who have been dedicated to the service of God and of the Church are eating the sins of the world and what they have eaten was donated, for the love of God, by God's faithful, who have died. They should offer fervent prayers for their souls to the divine mercy so the he will show them mercy and grant them eternal rest,²⁰⁰

When under obedience you are in the kitchen or serving at table

5162 Remember the Lord's words: *I have come not to be served, but to serve.*

²⁰¹This means that he has not come to be waited on but to wait on others. O how you should regard yourself as not being worthy of the grace that God has given you of being of service to those who are in the service of the most high King of heaven and earth for the love of whom they work for the salvation of souls! But when does this happen? Certainly what you perform under obedience is not a fraction of what the saints have done both in your Order and in other Orders.

During recreation

5163 Even saints spent some time in recreation. O, what a providential gift from God, how tenderly he arranges everything and how we please God when we obey him in this! See how even honey is nourishing when taken in moderation and too much salt will not season the food but make it bitter. Therefore, do not have too much recreation or allow it to overcome you by having more than your spirit needs, so that it blots out what the Lord said to his disciples when he said: *It is enough.*²⁰² Enough is enough. This ought to help in matters of recreation and in all other bodily needs.

If Christ took sufficient food to live and to work for you, do you not know that you are obliged to gain strength from eating and recreating only so that you may better serve his divine Majesty? Do you not know that your eyes gain strength from food and recreation so that they may undertake mortification much more than before? I maintain that the same can be said of the other senses, the tongue, the feet, the hands

²⁰⁰ These final reflections re-echo various statements in the *Const. 1536* n. 34,5, and above all n. 67,4. (cf. vol. I, nn.208 and 251). The phrase "eating the sins of the world" is taken from St Bernard as quoted by Domenico Cavalca in *I Frati dellalingua. Trattato dell'orazione e contemplazione*, in *Mistici del Duecento e Trecento*, a cura di A. Levasti, Milano 1960, 552 "San Bernardovedendo alquanti monaci goder d'aver le ricchezze e le vivande grasse date loro per le limosine, si dice così: "Oimè, oimè, in dono apre avere a questi frati quel che mangiano: ma sappiano, per verità ch'elli mangiano li peccati del popolo, cioè le limosine date loro per li peccati altrui, per li quail deono pregare e piangere, e però sapiano che al giudicio udiranno contra sé lo duro lamento dr'popolo, li cui bocconi mangiano, e i cui peccato non pianscono."

²⁰¹ Mt 20, 28.

²⁰² Mk. 14, 41.

and the heart and all the other members of the body and faculties of your soul. The same can be said about sleeping until midday.

During prayer

5164 Tell me please if the Pope called you into his room once a day would you think that this was too much? Even more, what if His Holiness commanded you to stay before him for an hour or two to discuss something during one or two hours of prayer during the day or night?²⁰³ What a great grace you ought to consider this to be! Can you not hear that this is saying: *Watch and pray?*²⁰⁴ Have you not heard: *Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you?*²⁰⁵ If so how humbly and quickly you ought to run to prayer and how you ought to thank the Lord for this grace!

In the evening

5165 Having finished your exercises they will serve you the evening meal. You might think or imagine that you can see the Apostles seated at the table with Christ in their midst celebrating the Last Supper on Holy Thursday. You know that when St Catherine of Siena was cooking in her father's house, she imagined that her father was Christ, her mother was the most holy Virgin and the others were the holy Apostles and she was serving them with charity and humility just as if she were serving Christ, the Virgin and the saints²⁰⁶

When saying grace

5166 Imagine seeing the Lord with the Apostles, after the Last Supper, singing the hymn to the eternal Father and going out to begin the mystery of his Passion. My you too be prepared to endure every kind of contradiction that might come your way with patience and strengthened by grace for the love of God.

The nightly examination of conscience

5167 O how you need to examine every thought, word or action of the past day, and to seek out all the secrets of your heart that are not evident at the moment! However, the Lord is so kind that he allows us to judge ourselves even if we do not judge accurately. He does not allow us to be deceived by self-love, but permits us to diligently examine our passions and failings. We know that we are guilty and wrongdoers who are worthy of every punishment and of hell and we have recourse to him asking pardon with a firm purpose of amendment and the proposal of doing penance and making worthy satisfaction to God. If we do not judge ourselves properly now he will not call us to account since his Majesty does not judge the same matter twice when it has been properly judged once.²⁰⁷

Therefore, imagine that you are standing before the judge seated on the tribunal who already knows all your faults and evil inclinations and try to examine yourself carefully concerning your passions and failings which the devil will scrutinise more than you have and try to make a more subtle assessment of your nature than in your self-examination. Thus you should not be negligent in your examination since the devil is most diligent in accusing you and deceiving you.

²⁰³ This is a reference to the two hours of prayer set down for Capuchins. Cf. *Const. 1536n. 41.*

²⁰⁴ Mt. 26, 41.

²⁰⁵ Mt. 11, 28.

²⁰⁶ Raimundo de capua, *Vita S. Catharinae Senensis*, n. 50, (AA, SS, Apr. 30, t. III, Patss et Romae, 1866 875a).

²⁰⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 11, 37.

Make a note of five points for making a good examination

5168 1. Collect your thoughts and raise your mind to God and thank him for the blessings which you have received, both in general and in particular circumstances, such as, creation, redemption, preservation, vocation and for what you have received from time to time during your life, especially on this day.

2. Ask for the grace and true light to know all of your sins and, once you have acknowledged them, to confess them with sincere contrition.

3. Accuse you soul of everything that you have done to offend God that day, carefully considering all your interior and exterior behaviour in thought word, deed and omission, paying particular attention to your habitual faults.

4. Ask most humbly for pardon for every fault that you have found that you have committed and if you recall something that you have done well thank his divine Majesty from whom all good comes.

5. Make a firm proposal, that, with God's help, you will be on guard in future, to walk more fervently along the road which you began of a life in the service of God.

5169 Then recite the prayer that can be found in the Office of the Madonna, in the daily secret and others that have been composed in this fashion. For what to do as you undress and go to bed see above.²⁰⁸ Having gone to bed with Christian modesty, think about what was said above or about what I am about to say.

How many people who are better than you are obliged, because of poverty, to sleep peacefully on the street! How often did the Lord have to sleep on the hard earth instead of in a bed,²⁰⁹ and use a rough stone in place of a pillow!

What was the bed that he had on Mount Calvary? It was the bed of the cross which was so rough that they had to nail his feet one on top of the other so that he could stay there. What kind of rest could he ever find on the cross! What was the pillow since his venerable head was surrounded with thorns that pierced his skin reaching his skull? Fall asleep with these or similar thoughts!

When waking during the night

5170 Immediately recall your Lord, being especially sorrow for your sins like St Peter who woke up when the cock crowed to weep bitterly for his sins.²¹⁰

What religious should do when they rise in the morning is dealt with above.²¹¹

During the Ave Maria

5171 At dawn, at midnight and in the evening this prayer is said in the following manner.

In the evening you should say three Hail Marys with the usual short verses. You should call to mind the Incarnation of the Son of God. When saying the first Hail Mary, thank the eternal Father for sending his Son. Say the second Hail Mary in thanksgiving to the eternal Son for coming. Say the third Hail Mary thanking the Holy Spirit through whose power the Virgin conceived while you imagine the Angel speaking to the Madonna.

²⁰⁸ Cf. above n. 5155.

²⁰⁹ This is reminiscent of *Const. 1536*, n. 25 (n 185)

²¹⁰ This is how it is told in the legend of St Peter. Cf. A. Rimoldi, *San Pietro nella letteratura apocrifia*.

²¹¹ Cf. above, n, 5156.

Domine Iesu Christe, per illam amaritudinem per quam per me sistinuisti, quando anima tua egressa est de corpore tuo, praecor te, Miserere animae meae in egressu suo et perduc eam ad vitam aeternam. Amen. ²¹²

In the morning say the Hail Marys rejoicing with the most holy Mother whose Son visited her after his resurrection filling her with indescribable joy and pray like this:

O Virgo Maria dulcissima, per illud magnum gaudium quo concolataes, quando cognovisti filium tuum a mortuis resurrexisse, praecor tu ut illa die, quando a mortuis reurgens de singulis meis factis ero rationem redditurus, me digneris intrare ut per te damnationis sententiam valeam evadere et cum electis ad aeternam gloriam pervenire. Amen. ²¹³

Concerning the prayer that is to be said at night for the dead

5172 There are three kinds of dead people that you can recommend to the Lord:

1, People who are in spiritual mortal sin. You may say the names of these people at the beginning of the Hail Mary: *Convert us, O God our Saviour and turn away your anger from us, Hail Mary.* ²¹⁴

2. People who are in agony being more dead than alive. You may say on their behalf: *Into your hands I commend my spirit.* ²¹⁵ *Hail Mary...*

3. Persons who are in Purgatory. For these people you may say: *Eternal rest grant to them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them. Hail Mary.*

15. Meditation on the Our Father

Father

5173 Most sweet Father, who continually generate adoptive children on earth by means of life-giving spiritual seed, that you generated your only natural Son from your substance, as your true child, I want to love you incessantly and to never be separated from you for a moment. If all good comes from you, grant that I may love you, and clasp you in the arms of my soul so that you may be all mine and I may be all yours. May this be accomplished for love of you: *that I will love you, O Lord my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and my Father,* ²¹⁶

Our

5174 All-pervasive Father, who created everything and repaired everything, you are the one who without withholding anything distributes goodness and your gifts to rational creatures as long as they do not place obstacles in the way of your actions. O my blessed One, when will you refine the gift of your love in me so that I will love you with deep affection and burn with seraphic love? See how because of this I open my heart to you so that you can pour this wonderful gift into me or else I shall wither

²¹² English: Lord Jesus Christ because of the sorrow that you endured for me when your soul left your body, I beg of you to have mercy on my soul when it leaves my body and to lead it to eternal life. Amen.

²¹³ English: O most sweet Virgin, on account of the great joy that consoled you when you saw you Son risen from the dead, I beg of you to deign to help me on the day that I rise from the dead to give an account of all my actions, to avoid the death sentence and attain glory with those who have been chosen. Amen.

²¹⁴ Ps. 84, 5. (*Vulg.*).

²¹⁵ Lk. 23, 46.

²¹⁶ Ps. 17, 2-3 (*Vulg.*).

and die. *I shall love you Father, my strength, my foundation, my refuge, my God and Father.*

Who art in heaven

5175 Heavenly Father, you are the one who delights in living in the souls of the just who are like the sky when it is resplendent with the sun, the moon and the stars, when they remain firm and persevering in your filial awe, and shine like stars of Gospel virtues and, like the moon, shed the light of doctrine and example and radiate warmth to others, like the sun does, to kindle love. Grant, O Brother, O Lord, that once my soul has been purified of all the dregs of secret, lawless love, she may deserve to be your worthy resting place, in which, just as in heaven, you will deign to remain forever. Therefore come, O my Love, O my holy Love, come! *I shall love you Father, my strength, my foundation, my refuge, my God and Father.*

Hallowed by your name

5175 Most Holy Father, source of holiness and holiness itself, you deserve to have adoptive children who are very holy. That person is holy who is detached from all that is earthly, and yearns for you alone, who desires to possess you alone, and places all his love in you alone because you are worthy to be loved above everything. He who is loved is happy, that is *agios, sine terra*.²¹⁷ May it please you, Most Holy Father, that I never have any earthly attachments, but, by your grace, be attached to you alone, and not be influenced by false love, but love you alone as long as I live. *I shall love you Father, my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and Father.*

May your kingdom come

5177 Sovereign Father, you are the one who wishes to reign in the faithful souls of those who love chastely, truly and ardently in the realm of delight. When will the time come that not only sin, but vainglory concerning virtue, affection for vice and the cruel tyranny of self-love will rule in me no more? O When? When shall you alone rule in me, O my God, one and three? When, Father, shall you reign in my memory? When Word of God shall you reign in my intellect? When Holy Spirit shall you reign in me will? When shall you Three reign in me so that I have strong faith, stable hope through the divine love that dwells in my soul? Therefore, see to it that I become your peaceful realm, and woe to me if anything but your love reappears in me. *I shall love you Father, my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and Father.*

May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

5178 Most high Father whose will is always carried out in heaven by heavenly spirits who are your servants, everything shows that you wish us worms to do the same on earth. It is also true that if you did not constrain my will with gentle force it would never know how or be able to obey your wishes perfectly. Therefore, O my God, I beg of you, seize all my desires and emotions and bind them to you alone with the strong chains of love so that neither in life or in death I may do nothing else but what you hold dear. *I shall love you Father, my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and Father.*

Give us this day our daily bread

5179 Gentle Father, you are the only bread of the holy Angels, whom you always satisfy as they always reverence you in heaven with very loving affection, where you put every mind at rest, soothe every desire, and gratify every hunger. When I am

²¹⁷ This expression is odd.

miserable and not able to feed myself at such a sumptuous and rich table at least let me have a crumb that falls from that table. I say that I shall perish were you not make me worthy of at least a fragment²¹⁸ of your love during my pilgrimage through this miserable world. If not, it will be more than true that I will die for want of your love. However, should you promise to satisfy whoever hungers and thirsts for justice, which is your love, how could I then die? *I shall love you Father, my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and Father.*

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

5180 Most merciful Father, my sins have kept me apart from you and only love can reunite me to you. My errors and vices have detached me from you and only love can make me dear to you. O love's omnipotent power! What could make me love you so ardently that what you said about Magdalene I could also hear me saying to my heart: *Your many sins have been forgiven, because you have loved much.*²¹⁹ It is certain that if I were more indebted to you than all the sinners in the world, I would love you more than any of your lovers.

With respect to loving others, I do not know that anyone has ever offended me, since I regard everyone as my dear brothers and friendly benefactors. If anyone should say that they have offended me I forgive them from my heart and cancel every memory of having been offended from my mind. I do not deny anyone a charitable greeting and I open my heart to whoever they are. O my Lord, they are your children and my brothers and so all are at rest in the arms of your love. I beg you that you would treat them like you have been treating me making me feel from now on the fire of Zion and to go on into the furnace of Jerusalem. *I shall love you Father, my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and Father.*

Lead us not into temptation

5181 O strongest and greatly feared Father, the mere mention of whose name reduces those in hell to speaking under their breathy, your name is so powerful and the perfume of your love so strong that whoever (even from a distance) experiences it only once will very easily be drawn to you out of love. If a person is captivated by your goodness and is united with you then you will bind him with tight bands which will overcome temptation because you have said that no one can steal your sheep from your hand. Yes, yes, your elect will overcome all opposition, casting the rebellious flesh underfoot, despising the false world and they will make fools of the proud demons in hell. Therefore, O my God and my Father, grant me the grace to adore you alone so that I may run after you, tied by love to you alone, not being afraid of temptation. *I shall love you Father, my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and Father.*

But deliver us from evil. Amen

5182 O most happy Father, since no evil can come close to your tabernacle, I know that your love is so strong that like a blazing fire it consumes all the rust of sin so the soul may be set free from the requirement of physical purgation so that it may freely take flight to the heavenly court. O Father of mercy, O God of compassion, I beg of you and beseech you, not because I wish to flee from atrocious punishment, but for the sake of your love and so that the pleasure of seeing your divine presence may not be delayed for too long, to grant me uninterrupted and very fervent love

²¹⁸ *Mivola* in the text is the dialect for *briciola*.

²¹⁹ Lk 7, 47.

which will both cleanse my soul of all imperfection and free it from physical flames and make it worthy to come to you when it departs from the body and comes to the sweet embrace of your most divine love.

I shall love you Father, my strength, my support, my refuge, my God and Father, my Sanctity, my Mercy, my Strength, my Happiness, my Love and my All!

16. The culmination of everything that has been taught in this book

5183 One cannot deny that it is not a good, holy and praiseworthy thing to meditate on the Lord's Passion, to kiss his sacred wounds, to recite the Our Father and the Hail Mary frequently, to always remember the Lord and all his deeds and to constantly have the exercises of mental prayer on hand. However, dearest reader, I admonish you that this is nothing more or less than a means to reaching the objective of living an authentic spiritual life.

If you were to ask me what the objective of an authentic spiritual life is, I would reply that it is what our Saviour pointed out in these words: *Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* ²²⁰ Such people as these will say that our spiritual life consists in dying to ourselves, to the world and everything in the world.

Just as in the beginning Christ the Lord was put on a cross and died there, it is necessary for us to mount the cross, not just to stay there, but to die with Christ. *For Christ became obedient.* How far did he go? He remained until *death on a cross.* ²²¹ O how many are those who carry the cross and remain on the cross of adversity and bodily mortification even though they have not died yet but are still alive to desire for honours, for praise, renown, worldly pomp and glory, wealth and pleasure? You are alive and not dead. Why carry crosses unless to die? However, you are still alive to your opinions, judgements, passions and emotions! You need to die if you wish to live and be in glory with Christ. Can you not hear what St Paul said: *For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God! When Christ shall appear, who is your life, and then you also shall appear with him in glory.* ²²²

5184 I hear that you are asking: What is this death like? You should note three things about this death. Firstly, this kind of death places you under the earth. Secondly, this permits everyone to walk on you until judgement day without this upsetting you. Thirdly, it reduces you to ashes.

Therefore, whoever dies a spiritual death is firstly buried and placed beneath all worldly people since he has never raised his thoughts above thinking about any of them but looked up to them in temporal concerns as being better than himself and as being far above him in spiritual matters. You will bury yourself so low that in the end you will think that all will be saved while only you will deserve to be in hell. You will situate yourself there in accord with what the Lord said: *Go down to the lowest place.* ²²³ O glorious burial! This should be your first reaction.

²²⁰ Jn. 1, 24-25.2

²²¹ Phil. 2, 8.

²²² Col. 3, 3.

²²³ Cf. Lk. 14, 10; Prov. 25, 7.

With respect to your second reaction: when we are spiritually dead we accept with complete resignation that we ought to be trodden on by everyone, and are prepared to remain like that until judgement day (should God want us to be like that for that long), and with the help of grace will endure every perplexity, shame, ignominy, punishment and torment, no matter where it comes from whether immediately from God, or from creatures, or whether it is reasonable or not. You will not excuse or defend yourself even while crying and vindicating yourself, but like someone who has been placed in a grave, (for the love of God and in imitation of Jesus your Lord) you will allow yourself to be placed beneath everybody and trodden on by everybody, by everything that God sends whether good or bad, whether praise or blame, not being puffed by the one or depressed by the other, neither seeking justification nor, satisfaction or revenge.

With respect to your third reaction, once you have put aside all that is not God, you will ardently withdraw into unitive love, having extinguished all desire and concupiscence for everything that belongs to this world. This means that either you will surrender to God or reject him, set aside your human needs either completely or at least be satisfied to thank God and accept what pleases his divine Majesty to the point of being abandoned by all and separated from every internal or external consolation in conformity with your Lord who was deprived of all human or divine consolation on the cross.

5185 This is spiritual death concerning which our Father St Francis using the image of a lifeless corpse²²⁴ told his brothers that they ought to be like a dead body, that is, not exalted by praise, nor made to feel disgraced by abuse, nor offended by rejection, nor upset when suffering or embraced by joy. O spiritual death, happy death, holy death, life-giving death!

Now you should consider the exercises mentioned above and any others that you know of. This is the most that can be said or recorded concerning the spiritual life. This is the safe, certain and short way to reach the eternal Father by following Christ. These are the paths by means of which the Apostles and all the other friends of God have travelled. It is not sufficient to carry the cross of tribulation and penance unless you carry it until death, as I have said, since this is the objective. If you do otherwise listen to what St Isadora had to say: *Whoever carries the cross must also be dead to the world. To carry the cross and not be dead to the world is being a hypocrite.*²²⁵ You who say that you carry the cross of tribulation and bodily mortification must die to the world that you neither desire nor seek honours, pomp, pleasure and what the world has to offer. Whoever carries the cross but if not dead to the world, as we have said, is a hypocrite.

This is enough. I recommend that you have recourse to devout prayer.

Soon, immediately, always

You will die soon. You will be judged immediately. You will remain always with God in heaven or with Lucifer in hell, which will be without end. Frequently recall these three words.

²²⁴ Cf. 2 Cel. 152; LM 6,4; SP 48. (FAED II, p. 345; II, p. 571; III, p. 293).

²²⁵ Cf. S. Isidorus, *Sententiarum lib. II* c. 2 n. 9 (PL 83, 602).