

“INTERIOR PARADISE” by PAOLO DA TERNI
(Selected Exercises)
Translated by Patrick Colbourne O.F.M.Cap

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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.1356-1381. The only additions to the notes made by the translator are references to Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents, edited by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. and William J. Short O.F.M. Conv., New York City Press, New York, London, Manila, for an English version of quotations from the Writings or Biographies of St Francis.

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

Born in Terni in 1587, Paolo Manassei became a Capuchin at the age of 20 while Girolomo Mautini da Narni (+ 1632) was Provincial and completed his religious formation during the time that St Joseph of Leonessa (+1612) was an itinerant preacher. An excessive love for studies and humanist literature led him into a certain amount of laxity. However after 1616, while living in the friary of S. Onofrio at Spello he was brought back to a radical spiritual life on the Feast of Pentecost by the aged secretary of Joseph of Leonessa, Giuseppe di Bevagna. He gave himself over to great penance, with all the enthusiasm of a convert. He himself wrote: “I decided most resolutely not to have any consideration for myself unless it was extremely necessary, not to afford myself the slightest consolation, including bringing ghastly and painful experiences upon myself, such as crosses, vigils and fasts that would give me discomfort. In future I want to eat very sparingly and usually drink water or wine that had a lot of water added, stay awake at night for very long periods of time, take the discipline a number of times a day, be bound with iron chains, scrape my tongue

on the ground, hold something bitter in my mouth, walk with a heavy burden on my shoulder, walk barefoot on sharp stones, endure great heat and cold and to live my life in continual martyrdom since that is what a traitor deserves.”

He lived in a very narrow cell. He slept on the ground. He prayed for twelve hours a day. He made a vow to torment his senses as much as possible. He carried a solitary crucifix when preaching and his biographers record the story of the good points of many conversions in Ascoli Piceno, Rimini, Messina and many other cities. He allowed them to set up a good bed in the preacher's room on which he placed the crucifix while he lay down beside the bed on the ground. He continued to invent new tortures. He made a vow to obey even a lay brother who reduced his ardour for doing penance. It was probably this brother who encouraged him to write a book about the spiritual life. Girolamo di Narni also urged him to do this and later Francesco da Bevagna, the Provincial, gave him an explicit command to do so. This is how he came to write the Interior Paradise, which is collection of exercises of piety and penance which he was accustomed to carry out each night when he remained awake following midnight office.

He was so enflamed with the love of God that because he desired martyrdom he obtained a letter of obedience from Paul V to go to Rezia to preach to the heretics. In order to do this he went to the Province of Brescia and with the visionary Angelo Tavoldini Vestone (+ 1630), with whom he formed a deep friendship, he carried out this missionary apostolate uninterruptedly while continuing his austere way of life. These were the first attempts at an organised mission in the Canton of Grisons. They were launched after 1621 at the time of Ignazio da Casnigo (+1632). However, he soon became ill at Manassei and was forced to return to the Province of Brescia. He returned to good health in Vestone and began preaching again. In Venice he preached during the Lent of 1620. He became ill once more and had to be carried to Desenzano where he died on 18th May 1620. He lived a most intense spiritual life for five years which was just as intense as the life he described in the Interior Paradise.

The teaching that is contained in this writing and which is proclaimed in these important pages, is a description of a concrete experience of the spiritual life as it was lived over a long period of time and it is set down in a succession of practical exercises consisting of prayers, devout emotions and severe ascetical proposals. There are 33 exercises that match the thirty three years of the earthly life of Jesus Christ, with each being developed in twelve points as if this was rosary. It begins with a profound act of faith in being willing to undergo martyrdom (I) and with an act of contrition for sins (II). These acts create a state of humility (III) and teach us to be submissive to everyone “like a stable rag”. Hope and trust in God is borne out of lack of self-confidence (IV) while generosity of spirit in serving him completely with the desire to equal and outdo the best of the saints (V) and with being most diligent and persevering (VI). Following these points which serve as something like a preparation or general introduction the exercise concerning the life of Christ begins by passing in review the mysteries pertaining to Christ. “ more in the emotions than in the intellect”, from his Nativity to his death and burial (VII). Christ's life and Passion reveal the great love God has for us and, also the opposite, human ingratitude which carries with it the loathing of self and the feeling of deserving to be hated (VIII). However the mediation of Christ's mysteries comes in to assist in the practice of virtue particularly meekness (IX) and in the struggle against the lustful passions (love, hatred, joy, sadness) in uniting us completely to the will of God (X) and in the struggle against the irascible passions (overconfidence, despair, fear, anger) and not trusting in ourselves (XI). In a special way Christ's life teaches us mortification of the

eyes and the tongue (XII), abstinence and sobriety in eating (XIII), obedience (XIV), poverty (XV), chastity (XVI). The last virtues remind us of religious profession (XVII). The practice of the virtues and of the vows bring us to living the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and the eight beatitudes (XVIII), the works of mercy (XIX), love of neighbour (XX). All of this is a prayer offering up oneself and everything that is good and becomes a prayer of emotional thanksgiving for benefits received (XXI).

From here on the prayer becomes a universal petition to obtain the gift of pure and perfect love (XXII). This is the most important step which cannot be taken without firstly having perfectly completed the foregoing steps. In order to achieve this Paolo da Terni offers a piece of "advice for acquiring the love of God" in which he describes the process instead of stating it in his usual manner in the form of a prayer.

Here begins what amounts to a treatise of the love of God. The exercise of charity towards God (XXIII) is rejoicing, celebrating the goodness and grandeur of God. It is a "sigh, a breath" (XXIV) It means gathering Christ into the heart (XXV). From this high point the soul gains all the shades of meaning of love and puts them into practice as "the love of Christ when he has been "shamed and saddened" (XXVI) and "disinterested love of God (XXVII). From this comes the real "offering that should be made to God" (XXVIII).which is recognising the presence of God in the humanity of Christ and all humanity and creation. In this flame the soul also recognises "parched and wicked love for those who have fallen" (XXIX) and achieves self-annihilation to the will of God (XXX). However, the love of God possesses other aspects that are deeply human. It is "afflicted and parched (XXXI) embraced and favoured" (XXXII) and completely taken up with "ardent emotion towards the Most Holy Sacrament" (XXXIII). The intense unadorned tone and the ardent mystical phrases gave the work the slight appearance of being quietistic and thus on 26th April 1689 a decree of the Holy Office placed the booklet on the Index We are presenting eighteen of the thirty three exercises including especially the last which deal with the love of God which are the best expression of the concrete penance and crucifixion concepts of affective, seraphic Capuchin spirituality

Exercise I: Concerning Faith

5186 1. Blessed be the holy and undivided Trinity now and always and for infinite ages. Amen. *Benediction and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, honour and power, strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen.*¹

2. My omnipotent Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I praise you, I acknowledge you, I adore you as my God with the affection, humility, recognition, abandonment and self-annihilation² that is due to your infinite, immense and incomprehensible Majesty, in the more perfect manner (as far as my strength will allow) that your intellect thinks is due to it.

3. O my most worthy Lord, Creator and the unique good of my heart I offer you, in this present act and at every moment of my life, all the acts of adoration and acknowledgement that have been or will be offered to you by all your creatures and

¹ Rev. 7, 17

² This word belongs to the mystical language that is often used by the author and which can give rise to ambiguous interpretations which is the reason why the booklet was placed on the Index.

especially those offered by the Most Blessed Virgin and the most holy soul of the Incarnate Word.

4. My most sweet and beloved God, in acknowledgement of your infinite Majesty, and of our faith, could I not learn to find the opportunity, and the strength to suffer all the torments that have happened from the beginning of the world to its end? Why can I not appear before all the infidels and pagans to make them admit their foolishness and accept our truth even if it meant most a cruel death?

5. I maintain firmly in my heart, confess with my lips and protest with all my might to the entire world, before all the angels and saints in heaven, to Mary, to Jesus and to all the Most Holy Trinity, that I believe all that holy mother Church believes, in whose womb, as a most faithful son, I wish to live and die being most ready to give my life an infinite number of times for the honour of my God and his holy faith.

5187 6. O how I envy the most glorious martyrs who because they confessed your name were found worthy to shed their blood and to give their bodies up to hot irons, and chains and a thousand torments! O Lord, grant me a favour, *increase my faith*,³ so that I can imitate the faith, the love and courage of those people.

7. O my God, when will my heart break because of those who do not adore or recognise you! By enduring all the torments in the world, could I not make them adore and recognise you as most faithful Christians? Behold, I adore you, I praise you, I exalt you and I proclaim you on behalf of the wretched people who are so blind and unworthy of such a grace.

8. My Lord, each time that I take an outward breath I give my whole self to believing in you and giving you honour, and when I take an inward breath I wish to take in all that the faith teaches and all that the Scriptures tell us about your Majesty, so that I really want to die having faith like that.⁴

9. Lord, I believe so firmly what you have revealed and the Church teaches, I would rather doubt that I had been born than doubt those things.

10. Whatever thought, word or deed that I perform I want it to confirm, stabilise and increase my faith in you who are the first and ineffable Truth.

Exercise IV: Concerning hope and confidence in God

5188 1. My most clement God, *woe is me, for I have sinned during my life. What can I do as I am wretched? Where can I flee?*⁵ Poor me, what shall I do about my great wickedness? Where can I run as I have offended you, O my Lord? Can I perhaps hide myself from you in order to be sure of life? I could do that had I offended an earthly prince, but as I have offended you, who are so merciful, who are not as anxious to burn as to forgive, *where shall I flee but to you, my God?*⁶ I shall retreat

³ Cf. Lk. 17, 5.

⁴ Note here how breathing in and breathing out become an exercise in prayer which is an ancient monastic and oriental method of praying that is greatly appreciated today.

⁵ Cf. Ps. 40, 7. However the reference comes rather from the liturgy.

⁶ Cf. Ps. 138, 7.

under your mantle and hide myself; into your hands I shall entrust my life, place all my hope in you,⁷ and hope to receive from you more favours than from a very close friend.

2. O God, my heart's refuge, my hope is well founded in you. I would rather doubt about the sun shining, or fire burning, than doubt about you forgiving me and giving me the grace to serve you.

3. O infinite Good, I think so highly of you that although I had offended you more seriously than all the sinners in the world, and I knew for certain that you were disgusted with me and ready to condemn me for eternity, that if you allowed me to choose a judge of my own choice, to be sure of my salvation I still would not entrust my cause and life to even to my father who really loved me, nor to a most ardent and faithful friend, but only to you. O my dear Lord I would I choose you as my judge, and trust no one else only you, and dare to commit my life to you with greater certainty than to any very dear friend.

Even if I saw that I had been condemned by you and that I was approaching hell, but there was still a flicker of life left in me, I would still firmly hope that you would save me. Although others promised me a thousand lifetimes, I would place more hope in you saving me rather than killing and condemning me. You are my soul, my hope, my heart, and you love me more than I love myself and you have put up with my offences for much longer than a friend or a father would have done for a most beloved son. My offenses were so great that I could not have tolerated them any longer myself, but become so sick of living that I would have wished to die a thousand times. Yet, my sweet Love, you put up with me. I was just a rag to have offended you and you need never have forgiven me. How, then, could I not hope in you? How could I then not trust you? How could I not leave everything up to you? Behold I surrender to you, I hope in you, I live and trust in you forever, even if you were to damn me.⁸

5189 4. O my most sweet God, true and living hope, I now understand what previously my intellect did not grasp, namely, that the worse my sin was the better for me as a sinner. The worst part was that I offended you yet this was the best thing that happened to me. Had I offended a human being as much as I offended you, even if it had been my own mother, I would have despaired of being ever forgiven. However, since I offended you, who are consummate goodness and mercy, while on the one hand my heart shrank, on the other hand I jumped with joy a thousand times because I was completely sure that you would forgive me, and being so sure of this I begged your forgiveness. Even if I had committed infinitely more sins than I have committed, I would hope that your mercy would not only forgive me but that you would grant me the greatest of favours, if I did not resist, because it comes naturally to you to do good to those who hurt you and to grant infinite favours to those who offend you.

5. O my dear Love, my endless, everlasting hope, I do not want to hope in you only for ordinary things, but in situations that are very difficult and desperate, and which seem to be beyond what I could hope for. As proof of my faith would I do what Abraham did when while he was going along to kill his son and he believed your

⁷ This is like a verse in the *Te Deum*: "In you, Lord, we put our trust."

⁸ The mystical expressions continue to appear in paradoxes and hyperbole.

promise that you would give him a countless number of sons: *Against hope he believed in hope?*⁹ Would I be able to do like Job who when he found that when he was near death because of his serious suffering and felt sick of living, as he was stretched out in the dust like a log, rotten with sores, crawling with worms, stripped of clothes, children and anything that was good and goaded by his wife to not believe any more, seeing that he was spent he said: “How long before my God will kill me? I can already see my grave in hell. Still my hope in him remains firm. I hope to come back and enjoy more happiness than before.”¹⁰ My Lord, place me in a situation like that to demonstrate how much I am still steadfast in my hope in your infinite goodness.

5190 6. My most sweet Creator, although I often thought that I did was not acquiring virtues while I was serving you, and everyone was telling me that my labour was in vain, and I seemed to be falling into a thousand faults each day, and you even told me that you did not want to help me, yet, in spite of this, O supreme Truth, I did not stop believing and leave you out of desperation, but remained most certain hoping with your help to attain the highest perfection, because it is impossible that your goodness will not help whoever believes in you as is clear from what happened to the people of Nineveh. *He who trusts in him, shall fare never the worse.*¹¹

7. O even when I find myself in the greatest difficulties of the spiritual life, with passion boiling, and I fall into all the sins in the world, I will nevertheless hope that *you will bring me out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs,*¹² and by means of your grace to overcome all the difficulties with which I am faced since you know well how to provide strength when someone is frail and amounts to nothing.

8. If I can see that I am approaching the gates of hell, I shall hope in your mercy. If the entire world was against me, all the angels and devils and I was in the depth of the abyss, I would not fear by confiding in your mercy.

5191 9. My loving Father, what should I or what can I hope in if not in you who are so good and kind and who shed blood for me? Who gave your body up to so many torments and insults? Who died such a shameful death for love of me? Who better should I hope in than you who are omnipotent, wise and good and who are able, know how and are willing to help me? How unhappy are those who do not hop in such a loving Father in comparison to whom the love of all other fathers is like solid ice! For my part I hope in you and live in the certainty that I shall not be confounded. *In you Lord I have placed my trust; I shall not be put to shame.*¹³

10. One could not find a mother who was as tender and loving of her only son as you, O my heavenly Father, are towards me even though I am a sinner and traitor. You have a greater desire to give me grace than I have to receive it; greater wish to lift me up to the greatest glory than I have to enjoy it. Therefore, how could I despair and doubt you? Why do I not burn to accomplish great things in your service when I have you who are so powerful and loving on my side? Therefore I have no self-

⁹ Cf. Rom. 4, 18.

¹⁰ Job 19, 13; 15 etc.

¹¹ Sir. 32, 28.

¹² Ps. 39, 3.

¹³ End of the *Te Deum*.

confidence but always place my hope in you being sure that I shall obtain more gifts and graces than I ask for or expect in my mind. *You, O Lord, are my hope since my youth. You have been my protector from my mother's womb.*¹⁴ Therefore this shall be my maxim: *Of thee I shall sing continuously. I have become a wonder to many, but you are a strong helper.*¹⁵

Exercise VII: Regarding sympathy for Jesus Christ

5192 My Lord, because of the instability of my imagination I am unable to concentrate on one mystery unless I employ my will. Because I recognise that the exercise concerning the life of Christ is essential to cultivating gratitude and advancement in virtue I adore you more with my emotions than with my intellect, going over these divine mysteries where devotion and emotion leads me and helps me to feel sympathy, love and intimacy with you.¹⁶

1. My Lord, the first mystery is the Nativity when you wanted to be born at night in the middle of winter, not in your own home, but in an strange country, in a stable, without help, between two beasts. O Mother, O Son, I find myself being present emotionally and having companion, thinking of how the King of heaven could be reduced to such wretchedness. Why? For whom did you do this? I am enraptured with love. Moved by great emotion I light a fire, heat the clothes, wrap the Baby, clasp him to my breast, and when he begins to tremble because of the cold I warm him with my breath. I collect his tears most reverently. I kiss him, wash him with my tears and I caress him as much as I can with very great tenderness as needed at such a time.

2. The second mystery of the flight into Egypt. I join them as a slave and take care of the little donkey. I lead him with my hands and I help the Virgin to mount touching her feet. I take the Baby in my arms, kiss him, and hold him against my breast and ask where they will stay in a foreign country. I stay with them that night to be of service to them. I show them all the concern possible so that they will not have to leave. I make the bed for them. I sleep at their feet. I hear the Baby crying. And moved with compassion I rise to light the lamp. I was most contented to serve him for seven years in Egypt, give him food, teach him to walk, and take him out to play. I defended him when other children annoyed him. I accompanied him on my own to certain lonely places and talked to him there. At these times I talked about his flight, about suffering, about my love for him and I asked for grace and favours. I did the same when we came back.

5193 3. The third mystery is when he was lost in the Temple. I never left him during that time. I went begging with him. When we came back to the family house I did everything for him that love dictated.

4. The fourth mystery is his stay in the desert along with all the rest of his life. During this time I always went about with him. I slept at his feet. I served him. I ate

¹⁴ Ps. 70, 5-6 (*Vulg.*)

¹⁵ Ps. 70, 6-7 (*Vulg.*)

¹⁶ This is one of the characteristics of Franciscan affective prayer when meditating on the mysteries of Christ's life. This method means meditating using vivid imagination.

what he left over. I carefully gathered the crumbs that fell and kept them as relics. I was present at all his works, sermons and miracles.

5. The fifth mystery is the prayer in the garden, where I saw him on his own with his face bent towards the ground, all fearful and trembling. I asked him why he was so upset. He answered that it was because of the sufferings that he foresaw when what he stood for would be questioned, logic dishonoured, his Father offended, he would be personally affronted, his Mother would be grief stricken, his friends scandalised, mankind ungrateful, including me in particular, as well as the sins of the entire world. As I saw him so anxious I embraced him and consoled him. I begged the Father to help him. I saw him sweat blood. I wanted to gather all the drops on my tongue as I saw him fall to the ground out of anguish and I lowered my head to touch his cheek. I placed him to rest on my breast. I tenderly embraced and kissed him as my Father, I died of anguish as my heart broke at seeing him suffer so much.

5194 6. The sixth mystery is the arrest. I see him bound very painfully and very scornfully struck. I try to stop the soldiers. I cast myself among a hundred armed men without the slightest fear. I shout at them. I am sneered at, kicked and beaten to make me draw back. I stand firm. I want to follow my Father to set him free from his numerous enemies. As I go along I see that one of them wants to hit him and I place myself in front of him and willingly accept the blows and do what I can to help him. That night I find that I am with him in an underground prison. I undress him to let him rest. I see that his whole body is covered in bruises because of the kicks, his face is swollen from the slaps and covered in spittle, his hands are cuffed, his feet restrained. I faint with grief, hold back tears and restrain myself so as not to cause him more sorrow. I take care of him as much as I can and comfort him and while he rested I remained awake in distress throughout the night.

7. The seventh mystery took place as we were being led to Caiaphas and were upset because of Peter's denial. I said to my Lord that I wanted to follow in place of Peter, and that I would accompany him the whole way. Some struck him with truncheons, others kicked and punched him, some cut him, and others mocked him. I placed myself in front of him to take these blows and defended him when others spoke ill of him. I heard the accusations and the charges that were brought before Pilate. When I saw what was happening I collapsed on the ground with grief as if dead, but love brought me back to life.

I entered into it all and received many wounds. I entered while he was in prison and saw him covered with wounds, and congealed blood. His face was covered with spit, blood and bruises. His clothing was torn like the clothing of poor people. As soon as I recognised him I kissed him, washed his wounds with tears and cleaned him with my tongue, sucking up all the blood as love dictated that I should do. I healed his wounds and pain imperfectly. There was little that I could do as Pilate sentenced him to death and we were called to suffer with him.

5195 8. The eighth mystery is the sentence that was passed aloud. Gazing at the face of my God, I saw that he was embarrassed and that he did not raise his eyes but his heart jumped out of his breast as he cast a loving glance at me from time to time as if to say: "See, my son, the shame and affront offered to your Father." When I saw those glances I was torn with love and compassion. I caught sight of the cross. I asked the judge to carry it. As I spoke everyone recognised me to be your son and they all stared

at me and ridiculed me. They kicked me and hit me with clubs. They threw me out of the palace. However I felt nothing except concern for my Father who remained alone without a friend.

I came to the square and there I met Mary. No one spoke to me because of their anxiety. I went up to Mary and she asked me what had happened to her Son. I replied with deep sighs that he would soon pass that way. While I was still speaking, here he came. People flocked to see the extraordinary spectacle. They gossiped about the evil event. Mary heard the uproar and the noise. On seeing Jesus his Mother saw that he had the cross on his shoulder, a rope around his neck, being dragged like an animal, covered in blood, and reduced to such a state that he was not recognisable any more. In front of Mary he fell down with his cross and his wounds were opened once again. Mary saw him and wanted to help him. The rascals chased her with kicks and she called out, "Son!". Without responding, he raised his bloodshot eyes and looked at her. At the time of that look, pierced with incredible sorrow, she fell into my arms as if dead. Finding myself between the Mother and the Son I recognised love and great sorrow came into my heart. As we stood like this the crowd passed by and Maria pulling herself together a little said: "What has happened to my Son?" The answer (although I did not have the heart to say anything) was that we had arrived at Calvary.

5196 9. When we arrived at Calvary they lifted up the cross and we were not able to get close. Mary turned and said: "What is going to happen to my Son?" While we were talking about this we heard the first blow on the nail in his right hand and on hearing this Maria immediately felt sorrow in her heart and said: "Are they now going to crucify him?" While she was saying this we heard another blow to the other hand. When Mary heard this she became sad all over again. While we were experiencing this anxiety we heard another blow to the feet and because of our great sadness Mary and I were about to faint and although I wanted to console her I was not able. When I wanted to move her forward so that she could see him, they lifted him up on the cross.

Consider her sorrow as Mary looked at him. She appeared to be dead. We remained like this with Mary for a long time and coming round a little she fixed her eyes on her Son and he looked at her and said those words: "*Woman behold your son.*"¹⁷ He did not call her mother so as not to increase her sorrow. Think of how I felt and of how Mary felt, seeing him suffering so much and asking for a drink. When Mary heard this she could do nothing to help him, and she saw them give him a sponge filled with vinegar and gall. O what distress! O what sorrow! Such pain cannot be described!

5197 10. The tenth mystery is that I am imaging taking him off the cross before he dies and with great sorrow carrying him to a room in my breast where I have prepared my heart to be his bed. I clean him. I make him comfortable and place him on the bed to rest. I draw up a bath from my own tears. I look at him from head to foot and carry him weak and wounded into my heart and, like a grateful son, I will never be separated from him in future, and I say to him: "My dear Father, who has treated you so badly?" He answers me: "Behold, my son, look at the end to which I have been reduced out of love for you, to search for you in this world, I called out to you so many times and you never replied."

When I heard this I consecrated myself as a perpetual holocaust and told him that I wanted to always remain in his service although I may be involved in things and

¹⁷ Jn. 19, 26.

weak I now accuse myself of my sins which have been the cause of so much evil. Now I am consoled by the happiness and glory that I now enjoy, and I beg you now for grace for my friends. I now have recourse to you for help against my spiritual enemies. I ask you to heal their wounds and give them all to me because they are mine. As above I go to sleep with you to be crucified with you. Now I embrace you like a son and I kiss you with extreme reverence. Now as a slave and traitor I cast myself at your feet to ask forgiveness.

Thus by living with exercises like this, by keeping the memory of my Father in my heart always, I will counsel myself concerning what I have to do, thinking of the attitude and consolation that this will give me. I will do what I can so that men will serve and love him. If I see someone who does not love him I shall be stricken with anxiety and sorrow and seek every means for them to return to his friendship, when they see how much he suffered for the great love that he had. Finally I can think of or desire nothing but having them delight in loving and serving him.¹⁸

Exercise XVII: Concerning the renewal of profession

5198 1. Lord, here am close to death. I am the calf that desires to be led to a most happy death in order to die to myself and live for you, consumed as a perfect holocaust.

2. I want to be conformed to your will, to serve the commands of obedience even in small things so that in the practice of this vow I may sacrifice my intellect and will.

3. I want to deprive myself of all the pleasures of the flesh and to lead a most austere life so that by means of charity I may sacrifice my body to you.

4. I renounce all worldly wealth and goods so that by embracing holy poverty I may offer you all the wealth that I could wish for.

5. I want all the heavenly choirs to kindle the fire of this sacrifice. I want to have in my heart all the love that all creatures had, have or will have for you, as well as the love that you have for yourself so that my heart may be burnt and incinerated in that fire.

5199 6. My God, to whom for many reasons I am indebted for my existence, for love of you I detest all the ugliness of my past life and I make a firm resolution to serve you willingly in everything.

7. O Lord, accept this victim who is filled with an infinite number of desires to offer you his intellect and his will in order to be upright and governed by you. Take my flesh so that it is controlled with austerity. Take my wealth by means of poverty so that I may obtain the freedom of heart that experiences you so strongly.

¹⁸ This exercise is one of the most splendid in the entire book and probably inspired the art work, pictures the “sacred cards” etc. Note how Jesus is always called “Father”. The inspiration for this most probably came from “Meditations on the Life of Christ”, but the lively sentiments expressed here are much more personal.

8. I do not want to think about or wish for anything but you in order to be obedient. I do not want to love anyone but you so that I may be pure. I do not want to possess anything but you so that I may observe poverty.

9. My Lord and Master of my heart, I want you to make use of me in future as one of your slaves. Do not allow me to stray from the perfection of your fear and faithful servants.

10. Finally, as you know I am making my second profession by which I bind myself indissolubly and most perfectly to your most sweet self.

*Amen.*¹⁹

Exercise XVIII: Concerning the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and the eight beatitudes

5200 1. My most great and powerful Lord, in whose presence the heavenly Seraphim tremble, make me fear and tremble in your sight, and advise me concerning love. Grant that I would go to hell more readily that displease you, my dear father and Lord: *He who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*²⁰ Grant that I may be more afraid of the slightest fault than of all the torments that your omnipotence could create.

2. O my Lord, you know how many small and tentative steps I take in your service. Grant me the gift of knowledge and wisdom and a clear mind so that I can run undisturbed on the way of your divine precepts.

3. O how weak I am in serving you, my God, because of which I fall and fall again a thousand times! I beg of you to grant me the gift of fortitude, O my Lord, so that I can come to you with all constancy.

4. Grant me the gift of counsel that you gave to all your servants who, though regarded as foolish by the world, were guided by the maximum counsel of your grace..

5. Grant me the gift of piety so that I can love you with the greatest of love and praise you as your child because you are my most dear and loving Father.

6. O heavenly Spirit, grant me your holy fruits so that by the practice of the acts of all the virtues experiencing happiness and sweetness I can please you more by serving you.

7. O Lord, grant me real poverty of spirit and great humility and abnegation so that I will see nothing in the things of this world or admire them.

¹⁹ This “second profession” is the heroic vow that Paolo da Terni pronounced as a sign of his conversion to the spiritual life and it consists in seeking the most perfect observance of the Rule and the three Gospel counsel in contrast to his pride in observing the Rule.

²⁰ Mt. 10, 28.

8. Grant me modesty of heart so that in this life I can contemplate your most exalted attributes.

9. Grant that I may ceaselessly weep over what offends you and over all the sins that have been committed against you, with an insatiable hunger for your grace.

10. Grant me the grace to suffer the greatest persecutions, for your Name, while thinking of nothing but pleasing you.

Exercise XIX: Concerning the works of mercy

5201 1. My most loving God, I want to possess all the wealth in the world to dispense it to the poor out of love for you. When I see someone who is in need I want to open my heart to him since whatever you do to a neighbour you regard as being done to you.²¹

2. I would like to be in a hospital full of sick people that I would like to cure, medicate and console with the same love that a tender mother would show towards her child.²²

3. O my God, grant me the skill and strength that when I see a poor naked person to take off my clothes to cover him and take his clothes as mine. How happy I would be to consider those rags more valuable than all the lumps of gold in the world.

4. If I see a poor person who is hungry and thirsty and I have nothing to give him, I resolve to deprive myself and to take what I have in my mouth and place it on his lips to satisfy his need.

5. If I had my way I would like to spend my entire life in visiting hospitals, laying the dead to rest, and visiting the poor people in prison.

6. Lord, grant me the grace to know when I can be of assistance to a poor neighbour since I want to be available to them for the rest of my life out of love for you.

7. How jealous I am of those very happy preachers who are fully occupied in converting sinners, in correcting those who err and in leading their neighbours to the glory of heaven.

8. Even if my neighbour were to offend me seriously, grant that I would want to forgive him willingly with the same love, my Lord, that you forgive sinners who offend you many times.

9. O my Lord, grant that I may be sensitive to the needs of those who are miserable and show me how to help them in word and deed.

²¹ Cf. Mt, 25, 40. Opening one's heart to a person who is in need is the most beautiful definition of mercy.

²² Cf. LR 6, 10; FAED, I, p. 103.

10. Lord, I now offer myself to you to suffer all that those who are heartbroken suffer as I would not be suffering for them but for you alone who I would see in my neighbour.

Exercise XX: Concerning charity towards my neighbour

5202 1. My most sweet Love, I want to love my neighbour more perfectly in the way that you wish. I want to endure very great torment for their salvation.

2. Lord, (if it is pleasing to you) I want you to punish me for all my neighbour's sins. They are your dear beloved children, since (in regard to them) I am a slave and ought to suffer for their salvation.

3. Lord, grant that I may recognise if there is anything in which I displease my brother so that I can make amends immediately and treat him with real charity. Grant me the grace to transform myself into them, laughing with their joys, weeping with their afflictions,²³ getting close to them all to draw them towards loving you.

4. When all the works and pains that I suffer that I undertake are joined with your Passion they merit your grace and a reward from you, my dear Father, as I beg you to grant everyone the grace to know and love you.

5. O my God, can I not make the hearts of all men subject to you, so that they would love your infinite beauty?

5203 6. O my Love, grant that all sinners become aware of their sins and only seek your divine goodness. Turn their eyes, O my God, so that they see their foolishness and the contempt they are showing for your infinite beauty.

7. O my Lord, grant that those who oppose your Church would prostrate themselves at the feet of your Vicar.

8. I beg of you, through the bowels of your mercy,²⁴ that those who seek earthly honour and wealth, who want sensual delight and pleasure, might turn to you, be converted to you, love you and seek the treasures of your charity, the brilliance of your glory and the delight of your embrace.

9. I want to suffer all the torments in the world so that everyone might love you with ardent love.

10. Lord, transfer the pains of the poor dead who are suffering in Purgatory to me (if this pleases you), and grant that they may catch sight of you as soon as possible, to love and adore you for eternity as you so greatly desire. Whatever good I do let it be applied to them and to other living persons and grant that I may languish at last with love for my neighbours in the manner in which you have always demanded because they are your dear children. Thus I intend to do this when I feel most cold towards them.

²³ Cf. Rom. 12, 15.

²⁴ Cf. Lk. 1, 78 (*Vulg.*)

Warning about acquiring the love of God.

5204 To love a person is nothing more than wishing them well. Loving God is an activity of the will in which it desires and takes pleasure in the goodness of God. This is real love. It is known as love of friendship, when without any other objective we rejoice and are happy about his infinite goodness, being very happy that he is who he is, and that he possesses so much glory and suzerainty over everything, in himself and for himself, and that everyone loves and serves him only because of his goodness and infinite dignity, praising and exalting him with all their might, because of his divine essence, and nature which is infinite, permanent, most simple, immutable, necessary and eternal' He possesses infinite power by means of which he created everything out of nothing, preserves everything and in a wink could destroy everything. He possesses infinite wisdom by means of which he knows the details of each individual object such as how many hairs, how many leaves on a tree, how many grains of wheat there are in the entire universe. He possesses infinite goodness and is the cause of all that is good, and is opposed to all that is evil. He possesses infinite mercy ready to forgive any sin of someone who turns to him from the heart. He exercises infinite justice by means of which *ius suum unicuique solvit* (*he deals out justice to everyone*) to both the good and the bad. He dispenses infinite providence by means of which he governs and arranges everything with the utmost order.

Who then is this God, this father, this friend who is so rich and perfect that we are required to love because of his goodness? The situation is the same as when a son becomes a parent and fills his father, who is old and about to die, with great joy. Even though the father has nothing to rejoice in concerning himself he rejoices over the happiness of his son simply because he loves his son perfectly. Thus the person who is in love with God ought to rejoice with all his might over the happiness of his God even more that if God were his natural son. He can do this by wanting every creature to love, serve and care about him with all their might. What is more he should turn over in his mind a thousand ways of glorifying and serving him so that everyone would turn to him and desire him, not for what they might come to know about him, or for what reward they might win, but because he is a father who loves his child because he is his child. This is how he ought to love God because he is more than a intimate child. He should love him because of his infinite goodness and glory. This is real love and charity towards God. This is the meaning of loving God for all time, without expecting anything but loving God alone for himself.

5205 What is more whenever we wish to love God and arrange for all our neighbours love him we are practising real love of neighbour and loving our neighbour as much as we love ourselves, because we are wishing ourselves and others to experience the greatest love that can be found, that is to love God himself. This is love in charity and through charity, which was so renowned in Scripture: the kind of love that God so ardently desired to have from his creatures, in comparison to which all love for neighbour becomes common and ordinary.

O inestimable treasures, O priceless riches! Blessed is the one who ceaselessly perseveres until death in this divine exercise in which the step that takes him forward is matched by the amount of glory he will enjoy in heaven. The insatiable desire of the saints to give glory to God in everything is born of this love as well as the wish to make all mankind love God. What acute sorrow we experience when God is offended and revolted by so many sins! It is from this that the loving concern to be adorned

with virtues and be pleasing to the eyes of the divine Spouse arises: the desire to castigate the flesh and whatever is contrary to this very severely.

Finally, seeing as this is the reason for performing the present rosary of exercises. At this point we need to state its real foundation²⁵ and leaving aside transitory and lower things, while being recollected in the spirit of humility within oneself, perform the following acts with more emotion, which the divine Spirit will provide.

Exercise XXIII: Concerning charity towards God

5206 1. O my most perfect God, I rejoice over your grandeur and happiness, over all of your divine attributes! I rejoice especially that you are so great that nothing could be greater. It could not happen that the created intellect, that possesses all the perfection of our mind, could produce anything infinitely greater than you are. If someone gathered an infinite series of numbers in order to calculate your greatness, neither the Empyrean sky nor the entire universe would be enough to contain the numbers that would be required to calculate or express your greatness.

I rejoice because all creatures praise you, bless you and magnify you and that you are so great that even though all creatures revere and praise you with all their might in order to love and serve you more, this would amount to nothing if compared to what you deserve.²⁶ Because I recognise your Majesty, I want to have all the choirs and bodies that have been created or will be created by your omnipotence, as well as those who can offer infinite love to love you with all their infinite might. I want everyone to be involved. I wish, every moment in my mind, to suffer the most cruel and atrocious martyrdoms imaginable.

However, all of that would not be enough and I could do nothing that you would deserve. I enclose myself in your loving Heart. There I annihilate myself. I transform myself into being like a drop of water in an ocean of the purest wine, so that there would be no sign or shadow of me. I would be completely transformed into you and deified so that whatever I thought or did will be clad in your heart. Clad in your heart I intend and propose to love infinitely by hastening with desire and resolve to put into practise what you have done infinitely and eternally by loving yourself, with gratitude for having found myself in as much as I no longer want to do my own will.

I give you all the riches and treasures of the world, which, if I had them, I would surrender for love of you. I am also prepared to suffer all the insults and martyrdoms that your divine intelligence could imagine and to do whatever you want me to do or put into practise. I am especially prepared for every misery, anxiety and despondency of body or soul that is in any way pleasing to your will in union with all the suffering of your life and death and the merits of all your saints and your chosen ones.

3. With respect to the second coin that I pay you I wish that your most holy Name be blessed, praised and glorified. I wish that you forgive all the sins in the world together with the grace of never more offending. I wish that you would

²⁵ Compare this page with the *Circolo del divino amore* by Francesco da Jesi. As with Ripanti, so too for Manassei the objective of the exercise is to achieve perfect love of God. Note also what makes the love of neighbour authentic.

²⁶ Cf. St Francis *The Canticle of the Creatures* FAED, I, p. 113.

enlighten all the infidels and heretics to know you perfectly. I wish that you would help all of our neighbours, living and dead, concerning what you justly want for them.

4. The third coin that I offer you is thanksgiving for the gift of creation and preservation that you have conferred on all creatures. I thank you for redemption which was brought about by your life and death. I thank you for the charity with which you love us, for the gift you gave me by repeatedly calling me to receive your love and granting me inspirations an infinite number of times and also for the many graces that you gave to the most blessed Virgin and all the saints in heaven, to the creatures on earth and to the damned in hell.