



**Christ
Renews
his parish**

CONTINUATION HANDBOOK
Church of the Ascension
Overland Park, Kansas

A Disciple's Prayer

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself.
And the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this
you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust you always.
Though I may seem to be lost and in trouble,
I will not fear.
For you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face perils alone.
Amen.

Thomas Merton

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SEGMENT 1 – COMMITMENT

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Joshua 24:14-15; Psalms 31:1-9; Psalms 37:3-9;
Sirach 15:11-20; Luke 16:9-15; 1 Corinthians 10:31
"Serving One Master", p.16

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time: _____

NOTES

SEGMENT 2 – SHARED MINISTRY

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (25 minutes)

Readings: John 13:34-34; Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:3-16;
1 Corinthians 12:4-27; Colossians 3:15-17
"Christian Solidarity", p.18

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (10 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASCENSION MINISTRY OVERVIEW (30 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

NOTES

SEGMENT 3 – EVANGELIZATION

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Psalms 30:13; Psalms 37:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:13-14;
Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 3:12-14
"The Harvest is Plentiful", p.20

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time: _____

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SEGMENT 4 — NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Ezekiel 36:26; Isaiah 55:8-9; John 3:30; 2 Corinthians 4:16;
Colossians 3:5,8-10
"The Good Ground", p.22

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____
Location: _____
Time: _____

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SEGMENT 5 — PRAYER AS RELATIONSHIP

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Psalms 4:2; Psalms 46:11; Jeremiah 7:23; Matthew 6:5-15
"The Our Father", p.24

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time: _____

NOTES

SEGMENT 6 – PARISH AS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Tobit 12:6; John 13:34-35; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:15-17
“Helping Others to Carry Their Burdens”, p.27

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time: _____

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SEGMENT 8 – RECONCILIATION

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Sirach 28:2-4; Mark 11:25; Romans 5:6-11
"Our Sins and Confession", p.33

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

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SEGMENT 9 – EUCHARIST

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Luke 22:14-20; John 6:22-71
"The Living Bread", p.36

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

Location: _____

Time: _____

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SEGMENT 10 – SCRIPTURE

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Deuteronomy 11:18-21; John 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 3:14-17
“Words That Will Not Pass Away”, p.37

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (20 minutes)

ASSIGNMENTS (5 minutes)

NEXT MEETING

Date: _____

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SEGMENT 12 – SPIRITUAL GROWTH

SCRIPTURE & THEME REFLECTION (30 minutes)

Readings: Luke 14:25-33; John 8:12
"Growth in Interior Life", p.42

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (35 minutes)

PRAYER (25 minutes)

NOTES

"Serving One Master"

Being wholly committed to God.

It was custom in ancient times that the servant belonged entirely to his master. This dedication would brook no other occupation or allegiance to any other lord. It is in this context that we may better understand the words of Jesus in today's Gospel: *No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*¹

Our commitment to follow Christ ought to encompass all our actions. We should not live a double life with one part of it allocated to God and another part to our own separate concerns. Everything in our life should be oriented to God — our studies, our professional work, our ordinary affairs ... This is because we belong wholly to God. It follows that we should direct all our activity and love to our heavenly Father. *Spirituality can never be understood as a collection of pious and ascetical practices set alongside a collection of rights and duties appropriate to one's circumstances; on the contrary, to the extent that they respond to God's will, these have to be taken up and vitalized supernaturally through some particular form of developing a spiritual life — this development has to be achieved precisely in and through those circumstances of life.*²

Our desire to love and serve the Lord should be a unifying theme in everything we do. When we make our morning offering we give the Lord possession over all the joys and sorrows of the coming day. Nothing lies outside of this gift or should be held back from it. *In our ordinary behavior we need a power far greater than that of the legendary King Midas, who changed all he touched to gold. We have to change, through love, the human work of our usual working day into the work of God: something that will last forever.*³

What is the material we are to offer up? It is the little concerns of daily life, the care we show for the implements and equipment we use at work, our serenity in the face of unexpected setbacks, our punctuality, the effort we put into fulfilling our duties ... All of this ought to be ordered to the Lord and offered to him. He will give these tiny offerings a great and lasting value.

Unity of life.

Our determination to live as children of God should be realized in ordinary life: at work, in the home and among our friends. At every hour of the day we should be striving to be men and women of faith, that is to say, to be full-time Christians. We cannot confine our relationship with God to those few moments we spend inside a church. We have to live out our friendship with God in the middle of the world, in our workplace, in our recreation, in social gatherings. We should reflect Christ's love in everything we do. This was St. Paul's counsel to the first Christians: *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*⁴ St. Basil has commented on this passage: *When you sit down at table, pray. When you eat your bread, give thanks to God who is so generous. If you have some wine, remember that he has created it to bring us merriment and comfort in affliction. When you are getting dressed, give thanks to the one who gave you these clothes. When you look up at the firmament and behold the beauty of the stars above, fall down at the feet of God and adore his infinite Wisdom that is manifest in all Creation. Do the same at sunrise and sunset, when you are asleep and when you are awake. Give thanks to the God who created all this wonder for your benefit, so that you might know, love and praise his name.*⁵ All noble realities should serve to bring us to the Lord.

When someone is in love he thinks of his beloved twenty-four hours a day. This is the kind of love we should have for Jesus Christ. It should constitute the essence of our being, the driving force behind all our actions. He is our one and only Lord. He is the one we want to glorify through our work well done. Jesus is our inspiration when we try to practice the social doctrine of the Church, when we strive to protect the environment ... This all-embracing outlook leads a Christian to make an effort to be cordial and optimistic, to be punctual at work, to make good use of time, to overcome temptations to laziness ...

If our love of God is authentic, it will shine out from and be appreciable in every aspect of our existence. We know and respect the legitimate autonomy of temporal affairs with respect to religion. There are no *Catholic answers* to society's problems *per se*. That having been said, we also recognize that Christians and Christianity belong in all facets of society as a leavening influence.⁶ This explains why the apostolate is a spontaneous activity which emanates from Christians in every imaginable kind of circumstances. Apostolate is nothing more than the outpouring of one's love for God.

Rectitude of intention.

St. Luke tells us that Jesus preached these words not only to his disciples but also to his

bitterest critics: *The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed at him. We may observe this phenomenon even in our own day. The Pharisees jeered at what Jesus was saying, in order to justify their own attachment to material things; sometimes people make fun of total commitment to God and detachment from material things because they themselves are not ready to practice virtue: they cannot even imagine other people really having this generosity: they think they must have ulterior motives.*⁷

Jesus does not hesitate to denounce the hypocrisy of the Pharisees: *You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The Lord uses a very strong term to describe the conduct of the Pharisees: abomination. The original Greek word means worship of idols, and, by derivation, the horror this provoked in a true worshipper of God. So the expression conveys God's disgust with the attitude of the Pharisees who, by wanting to be exalted, are putting themselves, like idols, in the place of God.*⁸ Jesus warns his followers about 'false shepherds' *who like to go about in long robes, and love salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widow's houses and for a pretence make long prayers ...*⁹ Such people have no love for God.

God can read men's hearts. We should strive to rectify our intention many times each day. We need to reject any temptation to vanity and vain-glory which might cheapen our total dedication to God's service. All our actions should be oriented to the glory of God. To illustrate this idea, Pope John Paul I when he was still Patriarch of Venice recalled a little story about a cook (It was from Tolstoy): *Outside the kitchen door the dogs were lying. John (the cook) slaughtered a calf and threw the entrails into the yard. The dogs fell on them, ate them, and said: 'He's a good cook; he cooks well'. Some time after that, John was shelling peas, peeling onions; he threw the husks into the yard. The dogs rushed over, sniffing scornfully, they said: 'The cook is spoiled; he's worthless now'. John, however, was not upset by this opinion; he said, 'It is the master who must eat and enjoy my meals, not the dogs. The master's appreciation is enough for me'.*¹⁰

If we are completely dedicated to God's service we will not pay the slightest attention to idle criticism of what we do. We want to please God more than anyone else. With the passing of time we will see that this selfless behavior is one of the best contributions we can make to the welfare of other people.

Our Mother Mary will teach us how to live entirely for God's glory. *Don't ever lose the supernatural point of view. Correct your intention as the course of a ship is corrected on the high seas — by looking at the star, by looking at Mary. Then you will always be sure of reaching harbor.*¹¹

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1. Luke 16:13-14
 2. del Portillo, *On Priesthood*, p.68
 3. J. Escriva, *The Forge*, 742
 4. 1 Corinthians 10:31
 5. St. Basil, *Homilia in Julittam martirem*
 6. cf I. Celaya, *Unity of Life and Christian fullness*, Pamplona 1985
 7. *The Navarre Bible*, note to Luke 16:13-14
 8. Ibid, note to Luke 16:15
 9. Luke 20:45-47
 10. Luciani, *Illustrissimi*, p.12
 11. J. Escriva, *The Forge*, 749

“Christian Solidarity”

Members of one Body.

The Lord has wanted us to be united to him as members of one living body. St. Paul teaches us in the *First Reading: All of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other.*¹ Every Christian is bonded to the Church by the most intimate of ties. The Mystical Body of Christ is much more united than any individual or social being. The very Life of Christ flows through the Body. Each part vitally depends on the others. The smallest injury or pain affects the entire organism. The whole Church labors to heal its every wound. *In the words of St. Paul we find again the faithful echo of the teaching of Jesus himself, which reveals the mystical unity of Christ with his disciples and the disciples with each other, presenting it as an image and extension of that mystical communion that binds the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father in the bond of love, the Holy Spirit (cf John 17:21). Jesus refers to this same unity in the image of the vine and the branches. ‘I am the vine, you the branches’ (John 15:5), an image that sheds light not only on the deep intimacy of the disciples with Jesus but on the necessity of a vital communion of the disciples with each other: all are branches of a single vine.*²

Each and every faithful Christian enriches the entire Church through the practice of good works and the pursuit of holiness. At the same time, the individual Christian is enriched in a personal way. *This is the ‘Communion of Saints’ which we profess in the Creed. The good of all becomes the good of each one and the good of each one becomes the good of all.*³

Through our pursuit of sanctity we contribute in a mysterious but real way to the supernatural life of all the members of the Church. We win a continuous stream of supernatural merit for others through our faithful fulfillment of daily duties, through our prayer, through sickness borne with a Christian spirit ... *If you pray for the entire community, then the prayer of the community will come back to you. This is because you form a part of the whole. So you can thus obtain great benefits. The prayer of each member of the People of God is enriched by the prayer of the rest.*⁴ Does our meditation on this truth move us to be more generous today? Now?

Unity in charity.

Every single one of us should feel the duty to contribute to the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ and of human society, of all mankind. We can accomplish this by our determined effort to improve personally, by the active practice of the virtues. *Each one sustains the rest and the rest sustain each one.*⁵ This explains why there really is a close connection between the so-called ‘personal’ and ‘social’ virtues. *No virtue worthy of its name can foster selfishness. Every virtue necessarily works to the good both of our own soul and to the good of those around us. We are all of us men and all likewise children of God, and we cannot think that life consists in building up a brilliant ‘curriculum vitae’ or an outstanding career. Ties of solidarity should bind us all and, besides, in the order of grace we are united by the supernatural bond of the Communion of Saints.*⁶

St. Paul lists the different gifts and charisms that God has granted us for the service of others. The greatest gift of them all is charity. Through the exercise of charity we can sow good all around us. *Love each other as much as brothers should, and have a profound respect for each other. Work for the Lord with untiring effort and with great earnestness of spirit. If you have hope, this will make you cheerful. Do not give up if trials come; and keep on praying. If any of the saints are in need, you must share with them; and you should make hospitality your special care.*

We may wonder whether we have anything to offer our brothers and sisters in the Faith. Yet the practice of charity for the love of Christ is within reach for everyone who follows the Master. Every single day we give a great deal and we receive a great deal in return. Our life is a continual human and supernatural exchange, a process of giving and taking. How happy the Lord is to see us respond to difficulties in his Church by making acts of loving reparation! How pleased Jesus is to see us make the *needs of the saints* our own! There is no such thing as a weakness or strength in isolation. Both good and evil have important consequences. When we sow a grain of wheat in the earth, it will later bear its full-eared-contribution to the crop. The crop will be good if the seed was good. The crop will be bad if the seed was bad. If we seek the Lord with confidence, then our friends too will draw close to him. If we weaken in our struggle, then our friends may fail to advance. The Catechism of the Council of Trent teaches us: *Whatever good and holy works are undertaken by an individual benefit everyone. Charity is the virtue that makes this possible, since it does not seek its own reward.*⁷ We cannot fail to sow good seed. Our life is a great act of sowing where nothing is lost. We have before us countless opportunities to do good, to enrich others, to build up the Mystical Body of Christ. Let us not let slip these opportunities. We cannot wait for better opportunities which may never materialize.

Unity in the Faith. Apostolate.

When God created us, He made us brothers and sisters of one another. We were created with both familial and social needs. God also ordered the supernatural world in a complementary fashion. The Holy Trinity has desired to save all men by means of human instruments. The divine plan is accomplished when we carry on a lively personal apostolate in the middle of the world, in the course of our normal occupations — in the home, the barber shop, the office, the bank, the Parliament ... *In the apostolate exercised by the individual, great riches are waiting to be discovered through an intensification of the missionary effort of each of the lay faithful. Such an individual form of apostolate can contribute greatly to a more extensive spreading of the Gospel, indeed it can reach as many places as there are daily lives of individual members of the lay faithful. Furthermore, the spread of the Gospel will be continual, since a person's life and faith will be one. Likewise the spread of the Gospel will be particularly incisive, because in sharing fully in the unique conditions of the life, work, difficulties and hopes of their sisters and brothers, the lay faithful will be able to reach the hearts of their neighbors, friends, and colleagues, opening them to a full sense of human existence, that is, to communion with God and with all people.*⁸ Each member of the body works for the good of the rest of the body. We should seek to keep alive the light of faith in others. This is the greatest good we can offer. St. Teresa of Avila has written: *Whenever I read in the lives of saints of how they converted souls, I seem to feel much more devout, more tender, and more envious of them than when I read of all the martyrdoms that they suffered. This is an inclination given me by Our Lord, and I think He prizes one soul, which by his mercy, and through our diligence and prayer, we may have gained for him, more than all the other services we can render him.*⁹

In the course of our apostolate of bringing people to Christ we will surely develop a sincere concern for their temporal needs. How much ignorance, misery and loneliness there is in the world! Our persevering friendship with the Lord will serve to fill our hearts with his mercy. We will be inspired to share whatever we have — talents, time, material goods, joy ... If certain problems are beyond our power to change, at least we can contribute the warmth of our friendship. Let us not abandon the sick, the handicapped, the downhearted, the overwhelmed ... Let us join together with other Christians and people of good will for the sake of the common good. We have to put aside any causes of separation or conflict, thereby imitating the first Christians. They astounded the pagan world with the testimony of their mutual love and solidarity. Even in the face of stark poverty, they practiced the *New Commandment: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*¹⁰ True love can overcome any obstacle.

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1. *First Reading*, Year I, Romans 12:5-16
 2. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, 30 December 1988, 12
 3. *ibid*, 28
 4. St. Ambrose, *Treatise on Cain and Abel*, 1
 5. St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel*, 2, 1, 5
 6. J. Escriva, *Friends of God*, 76
 7. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, I, 10, 23
 8. John Paul II, *loc cit*, 28
 9. St. Teresa, *Foundations*, 1, 7
 10. John 13:34-35

“The Harvest is Plentiful”

The urgent need for new apostles to re-evangelize the world.

Among the crowds that followed Jesus there was a large number of disciples.¹ They included many who accompanied Our Lord from the time of the baptism of John to the Ascension. The *Acts of the Apostles* gives us further news about some of these people, especially Joseph called Barsabbas, and Matthias.² Christ appeared to two of these disciples, Cleopas and his companion, on the road to Emmaus.³ None of these disciples was called to be one of the original twelve Apostles, but they were nevertheless an important and highly dedicated group of followers.⁴ They formed the nucleus of the primitive Church after Pentecost. The Gospel of today's Mass tells of the time when Jesus appointed seventy-two of these disciples to prepare the people for his arrival. *The harvest is plentiful*, he told them, *but the laborers are few.*⁵

In our day the apostolic panorama is equally immense — traditionally Christian countries which need to be re-evangelized, nations which have suffered many years of religious persecution, entire peoples thirsting for doctrine ... We need only look about us at our surroundings — our place of work or study, the means of communication — in order to grasp the dimensions of what needs to be done. *The harvest is plentiful ... Whole countries and nations where religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and capable of fostering a viable and working community of faith are now put to a hard test, and in some cases are even undergoing a radical transformation as a result of a constant spreading of an indifference to religion, of secularism and atheism. This particularly concerns countries and nations of the so-called First World in which economic well-being and consumerism, even if coexistent with a tragic situation of poverty and misery, inspires and sustains a life lived 'as if God did not exist.' This indifference to religion and the practice of religion devoid of true meaning in the face of life's very serious problems are not less worrying and upsetting when compared with declared atheism. Sometimes the Christian faith as well, while maintaining some of the externals of its tradition and rituals, tends to be separated from those moments of human existence which have the most significance, such as birth, suffering and death. In such cases, the questions and formidable enigmas posted by these situations, if remaining without responses, expose contemporary people to an inconsolable delusion or to the temptation of eliminating the truly humanizing dimension of life implicit in these problems.*⁶ Now is the time to spread the divine seed and to harvest as well. There are places where it is difficult to sow the seed for lack of means. There are harvests which are being lost because there are not enough laborers. *The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*

Early Christianity grew up in a world which seems very much like our own. It boasted abundant material means but suffered from great spiritual poverty. The early Church had the necessary vigor to protect itself from paganizing influences. It was also vibrant enough to transform a worldly civilization from within. The world today seems no more difficult to evangelize. At first sight it may appear to be closed to Christ. Yet if we are firmly united to the Lord as the first Christians were, we can be sure that the transformation will take place once again. How well are we succeeding in our efforts to transform the people around us, the members of our family, our friends, our colleagues at work?

The world is in need of many things. But there is no doubt that it is in great need of apostles who are holy, cheerful, loyal to the Church and eager to make Christ known. The Lord is calling for us to work in his fields: Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Prayer is the most effective means of winning new apostles.⁷ Our apostolic zeal has to be manifested, first of all, in a continuous prayer of petitions for new apostles. Prayer always comes first.

*That cry of the Son of God, lamenting that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few, is always relevant. How it tears at our heartstrings. That cry came from Christ's mouth for you to hear too. How have you responded to it up to now? Do you pray at least daily for that intention of his?*⁸

Charity, the foundation of the apostolate.

The harvest is plentiful ... St. Gregory the Great has commented on this passage: *It is indeed regrettable that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. There is no shortage of people to hear the Good News. What is missing are people to spread it.*⁹ Our Lord wants us now to join with his disciples in the work of evangelization.

Before sending out his disciples into the world the Master revealed to them the Father and his wonderful love for them. *As the Father loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.*¹⁰ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends ... I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.*¹¹ With this clear vision we should go to all the corners of the earth *to reveal and communicate the love of God to all men and to*

*all peoples.*¹² The Christian will be an apostle insofar as he or she is a friend of God. This friendship with God needs to be a daily affair. This attitude will stand in marked contrast to the pervasive distrust and aggressiveness of our environment. When those around us see that we are trustworthy, that we are ready to be of service, that we do not harbor resentment, that we do not speak ill of anyone ... They should find that Christians are different because we follow Christ. We may have different opinions one from another, but we do not attach other people personally. When no one is excluded from our apostolate and assistance, then we are giving true testimony to Christ.

Joy ought to accompany the message of Christ.

Alongside our charity we have to also show the world our joy. This is the joy the Lord promised us at the Last Supper.¹³ It springs from our effort to put aside personal worries and enter into friendship with God. Joy is essential to the apostolate. Who will be attracted by a sad and negative critic or a gloomy complainer? The apostolic fruitfulness of the first Christians was the result, in good part, of their joy at being the heralds of the Good News. They were the messengers of the One who had brought salvation to the world. They shone forth as a happy people in the middle of a world in anguish. Their happiness spread abroad their faith in Christ. It was a special gift that they shared in their families and among their friends ... at every moment, since it was their very reason for living.

Christian joy has a solid foundation in the reality of divine filiation. This is the recognition that one is a son or daughter of God at all times. *As Chesterton suggests, it is joy not because we are in the right place, but because we are in the wrong place. We were lost, but Someone has found us and is leading us home. It is joy not because we are alright — we are not — but because Someone can put us right. Christian joy comes from facing up to the one really sad fact of life, which is sin; and countering it with a joyful fact that is even realer and stronger than sin: God's love and mercy.*¹⁴

Let us ask ourselves whether we reflect Christian joy in our ordinary life. We have so many reasons for being happy: the wonder of our divine filiation, the comfort of divine mercy, the knowledge that we are on the road to heaven ..., the joy of being able to receive communion so often! *The first step towards bringing others to the ways of Christ is for them to see you happy and serene, sure in your advance towards God.*¹⁵

In combination with the joy and charity of Christ, we have to be able to express the truths of the faith which will make others happy. *Only convinced Christians have any chance of convincing others. Half-convinced Christians won't even half-convince anybody. They won't convince at all.*¹⁶

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1. cf Mark 2:15
 2. cf Acts 1:21-26
 3. cf Luke 24:13-35
 4. cf P.R. Bernard, *The Mystery of Jesus*, Barcelona 1965
 5. Luke 10:1-12
 6. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, 30 December 1988, 34
 7. J. Escriva, *The Way*, 800
 8. idem, *The Forge*, 906
 9. St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 17, 3
 10. John 15:9
 11. John 15:16
 12. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes*, 10
 13. cf John 16:22
 14. C. Burke, *Authority and Freedom in the Church*, p. 143
 15. J. Escriva, *The Forge*, 858
 16. C. Burke, *op cit*, p. 141

"The Good Ground"

Hearts which have become hardened due to a lack of contrition are incapable of receiving the divine word.

*A great crowd came together and people from town after town came to him.*¹ Jesus took advantage of this opportunity to teach people about the mysterious action of grace on souls. Since his audience was made up largely of farmers, Jesus used an agricultural parable. *A sower went out to sow his seed ... The sower is Christ himself. He works all the time to extend his kingdom of peace and love in souls. In this effort, he depends on the freedom and personal response of each person. God can be found in souls in the most diverse circumstances, as diverse as the types of soil on a farm. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it. The seed was completely lost without having given any fruit. Later on, Jesus explained to his disciples the parable and the reason for this loss: The devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts. Hearts which have become hardened through a lack of contrition are incapable of receiving the divine word. This bad ground represents the heart which has become accustomed to unclean thoughts, so 'parched' as it were that it cannot receive and sustain the seed.*² The devil finds in souls of this kind a source of resistance to God's saving grace.

On the other hand, a soul which reacts to imperfections and transgressions by sincere repentance actually attracts divine mercy. True humility allows God to sow his seed and have it bear abundant fruit. This is why we should use this parable to examine our spirit of reparation for the falls of every day, even in the least serious things. Do we go to Confession frequently and with a sincere yearning for divine assistance?

Let us ask Jesus to help us to avoid any and all sin, to keep away from whatever might separate us from his friendship. *You have reached a level of real intimacy with this God of ours, who is so close to you, so deeply lodged in your soul. But what are you doing to increase and deepen this intimacy? Are you careful not to allow silly little hindrances to creep in which would upset this friendship? Show courage! Don't refuse to break with every single thing, no matter how small, which would cause suffering to the One who loves you so much.*³

Our need for prayer and sacrifice if grace is to bear fruit in the soul.

*And some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. This signifies those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. At 'the moment of truth' they succumb because their allegiance to Christ has been rooted solely in feeling and not in prayer. They have therefore been unable to endure difficult moments unscathed, or take in their stride the trials of life and periods of spiritual dryness. Many people are pleased by what they hear, and sincerely resolve to pursue the good. Yet when adversity and suffering come, they soon abandon their good works.*⁴ How many good resolutions have come to nought when the spiritual life has become a struggle! These souls were seeking themselves rather than God. As St. Augustine pointed out, *Some act for one reason. Others act for another. The fact is that few look for Jesus for the sake of Jesus.*⁵ To look for Jesus is to follow his footsteps wherever they may lead, no matter if the trail is smooth and easy or uphill and arduous. The key thing is to have the firm desire to reach Christ, to *look for Jesus for the sake of Jesus*. We can accomplish this only if we are faithful to our daily prayer, whether it comes to us easily or is more of a sacrifice.

And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. This represents those people who, having heard the word of God, *are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life*. It is impossible to follow Christ unless we lead a life of mortification. If we don't, little by little the attractions of the world will overcome the things of God. In the end, the soul abandons the spiritual struggle for the sake of the worldly things. St. Basil has written: *Do not be surprised that Jesus calls the pleasures of the world 'thorns'. No matter where thorns catch us, they always bloody our hands. So too the pleasures of the world harm the feet, hands, head and eyes ... When a person has his heart set on temporal things, he deadens the acuteness of his sensitivity and weakens reason ...*⁶

Prayer and mortification prepare the soul to receive the divine seed and then give fruit. Without these means, life remains sterile. *The system, the method, the procedure, the only way to have a life abundant and fertile in supernatural fruits, is to follow the Holy Spirit's advice, which comes to us via the Acts of the Apostles: 'omnes erant perseverantes unanimiter in oratione' — all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer. Nothing can be done without prayer!*⁷ All roads that lead to God have to pass through prayer and sacrifice.

Prayer and perseverance: beginning again with humility.

Jesus first describes the circumstances that will result in failure before going on to the promise of the good ground. He does not allow himself to be disappointed, however, but fosters the hope that everyone might eventually become good ground.⁸ And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold ... They are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.

All are capable of giving abundance fruits to the Lord, regardless of their past history. God is always sowing the seed of his grace. *The most important thing is not to become like a much-trodden path, like outcrop rock, like thistles ... We have to become good ground ... The heart cannot be fair game for birds and passers-by. It has to provide enough ground for the seed to take root. The sun of human passions and a dissolute life should not scorch the seedlings of divine promise.⁹*

There are three prerequisites for our becoming good ground: to listen with a contrite and humble heart, to be earnest in prayer and mortification, and, finally, to be disposed to begin and begin again in the interior struggle. We cannot let ourselves become discouraged if the fruits of our struggle are not readily apparent, even after many years of effort.

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.¹⁰ This passage comes from today's reading in the *Liturgy of the Hours*. If we are willing to change our ways, the Lord is more than willing to transform us into 'good ground'. He will bring this about in the deepest recesses of our being. The grace of God is all-powerful. The crucial thing is to return again and again to his side. St. Augustine teaches: *God is a farmer, and if he abandons man, man becomes a desert. Man is also a farmer and if he leaves God, he turns himself into a desert as well.¹¹* Let us resolve never to become separated from the Lord. We have to go to his merciful Heart many times during the day.

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1. Luke 8:4-15
 2. St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, in loc.
 3. J. Escriva, *The Forge*, 417
 4. St. Gregory the Great, *op cit*, 15, 2
 5. St. Augustine, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, 25, 10
 6. St. Basil, *Homily on St. Luke*, 3, 12
 7. J. Escriva, *op cit*, 297
 8. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. Matthew's Gospel*, 44
 9. St. Augustine, *Sermon 101*, 3
 10. *Liturgy of the Hours, Lauds*, Ezekiel 36:26
 11. St. Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm 145*, 11

“The Our Father”

The Lord’s prayer.

There were many occasions when the disciples saw Jesus retire in order to pray. Sometimes He would pray throughout the night. As we read in today’s Gospel,¹ the disciples approached Jesus one day when he had finished his prayer. They asked him with all simplicity: *Lord, teach us to pray.*

Jesus taught them the *Our Father*, a prayer which millions of people of every language have repeated for twenty centuries. It is a prayer that unites various petitions which the Lord had taught them at different times. Perhaps this is the reason why the prayer is not exactly the same in the Gospels of St. Luke and St. Matthew.² What is the same, however, is the prayer’s entirely new way of dealing with God. The seven requests have *such a simplicity in them that even a child can learn them, but at the same time such a depth that a whole life can be spent meditating on their meaning.*³

The first words of the Lord’s prayer are *Abba, Father*. The early Christians did their best to preserve the Aramaic word which Jesus used: *Abba*. It is very likely that this word was used in the liturgies of the nascent Church.⁴ This word sets the tone for the rest of the prayer. We find ourselves immediately in a relationship of trust and filiation. The Catechism of the Council of Trent teaches that the Lord omitted other words *which might have induced awe or fear in us. He wanted to use a word which would inspire love and confidence in those who were praying. What word could be more agreeable than ‘father’, so full is it of tenderness and affection?*⁵ Jesus chose the word Jewish children used to address their fathers. This was the word He found most suitable for invoking the Creator of the entire Universe. *Abba! Father!*

It is not easy to take this in. The same God who transcends all things is a Father wholly interested in the lives of his children! Even though we are often weak and ungrateful, the Father wants us to spend eternity with him. We have been born so as to attain Heaven. St. Thomas teaches that *God granted other creatures little gifts; to us men and women He has given his entire patrimony. We are his heirs because we are his sons and daughters. By the fact of our being children, we are the beneficiaries of his Will. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery only to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, Abba! Father! It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...’* (Romans 8:15).⁶

When we pray the Our Father we should take care to savor those sweet words, *Abba, Father, my Father ...* This prayer will then have a decisive influence on our daily life *because if we really mean that God is our father, we will struggle to behave as his worthy children.*⁷

Divine filiation and prayer.

A good many people look for God in a hesitant and blindly groping manner, as if they were in a dense fog. We Christians know with confidence that God is our Father and that He watches over us. *The expression ‘our Father-God’ had never been revealed to anyone. When he asked God to identify himself, the name Moses was given was different from this. This completely new name has been revealed to us by none other than God’s Son.*⁸ Every time we approach God, He tells us: *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.*⁹ He is interested in every one of our needs and problems. Should we happen to fall, He is there to support us and help us get back on our feet. *Everything comes to us from God. If at first something should happen to us that seems either good or bad, we have only to recall that it has been sent to us, or permitted, by a loving Father who is wiser than any physician. God knows what is good for us.*¹⁰

The spirit of divine filiation gives life a whole new meaning. It is not an impossible riddle. It is a participation in the building up of the house of the Father which is Creation itself. God calls to each one of us: *My son, you go into my vineyard too.*¹¹ Life is no longer filled with anxiety. Death can be faced with serenity and peace since it leads to our long-awaited encounter with Christ. If we can live every moment of our lives as sons and daughters of God we will be souls of prayer. This attitude of piety disposes us *promptly to give and spend ourselves generously in whatever relates to the service of the Lord.*¹² Since children ought to give respect, veneration and love to their parents, our lives will give praise and honor to God Almighty. *The piety which is born of divine filiation is a profound attitude of the soul which eventually permeates one’s entire existence. It is there in every thought, every desire, every affection.*¹³

Through the course of his earthly life Our Lord taught us how to deal with our Father God. In Jesus we find the highest expression of filial love for the Father. The Gospels recount how on many occasions Jesus would withdraw from the multitude to unite himself in prayer with the Father.¹⁴ Jesus teaches us the importance of spending some time in daily prayer with God in the midst of our ordinary activities. There are times when the Lord prays for his own intentions. This is the prayer of filial

abandonment to the Will of his Father which we witness at Gethsemane¹⁵ and on Calvary¹⁶. Many times too Jesus prays for others, particularly for the Apostles and his future disciples, including ourselves.¹⁷ Jesus advises us that filial prayer is necessary if we are to resist temptation,¹⁸ to obtain material goods¹⁹ and final perseverance.²⁰

This filial conversation has to be personal. *When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.*²¹ This prayer ought to be discreet.²² It needs to be a humble petition like that of the publican.²³ Our prayer should be constant and unflagging like that of the importunate friend or the stubborn widow.²⁴ It should be filled with trust in God's goodness.²⁵ Surely God the Father knows the needs of his children. He provides spiritual goods as well as material goods for them.²⁶ *My Father — talk to him like that, confidently — who art in heaven, look upon me with compassionate Love, and make me respond to thy love. Melt and enkindle my hardened heart, burn and purify my unmortified flesh, fill my mind with supernatural light, make my tongue proclaim the Love and Glory of Christ.*²⁷ *Our Father ... teach us, teach me to deal with you with filial trust.*

Prayer and fraternity.

Prayer is certainly a personal act, but it also involves other people. Recollection and interior peace are not an obstacle to including others in our prayer life. The Lord teaches us to say *Our Father* because we share the dignity of children of God with all our brothers and sisters.

Our Father. The Lord has told us²⁸ that before we begin our prayer we should be sure that no one has an outstanding complaint against us. Once we have been reconciled with our brethren, then the Lord will accept our offering.

We have a right to call God our Father if we treat other people as our brothers and sisters, especially those who are closest to us and those who are most in need. St. John points out: *If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.*²⁹ St. John Chrysostom has written along the same lines: *We cannot call God our Father in all sincerity if we harbor in ourselves a hardened heart. If this is the case, we do not share in the spirit of goodness of our celestial Father.*³⁰

When we say to God, *Our Father*, we do not restrict ourselves to solely personal concerns. We should be presenting him with the adoration of all peoples. A never-ending prayer rises up to God through the action of the *Communion of Saints*. We pray for all men and women, for those who never learned to pray and for those who knew how to, but failed to practice prayer. We lend our voice to that of those who have forgotten the existence of their Father in Heaven. We give thanks in place of those who have neglected to give thanks. We ask for the needs of those who do not realize how close they are to the source of graces. In our prayer we should be so bold as to make petition for the needs of the entire world. We have to develop the sense of being advocates to God for those who are in need, especially those whom God has put by our side.

It should serve as some consolation to us that we have a place in the prayers of our brethren. In Heaven we will have the joy of meeting all of our intercessors. We will meet those Christians who have taken our place whenever we have neglected to pray as we should. How many services to be thankful for!

The prayer of a Christian is personal, but it should not be isolated. Whenever we pray the *Our Father* we immediately increase and amplify the *Communion of the Saints*. Our prayer is united with that of all the just: with the mother of a sick child, with the student struggling to pass an exam, with that girl helping her friend to make a good Confession, with that laborer who offers up his work, with that person who offers his unemployment.

During the Holy Mass the priest prays with the faithful the *Our Father*. If we take into account the different timetables of different countries, we can be aware that the Holy Mass is being celebrated virtually continuously all around the world. Without ceasing, the Church prays this prayer for her children and for all mankind. The world takes on the appearance then of a great altar from which goes up unending praise to God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

1. Luke 11:1-4

2. cf Matt 6:9 ff

3. John Paul II, *Address*, 14 March 1979

4. cf W. Marchel, *Abba! Father. The prayer of Christ and Christians*, Rome 1963

5. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, IV, 9, 1

6. St. Thomas, *Commentary on the Lord's Prayer*

7. St. Cyprian, *Treatise on the 'Our Father'*, 11

8. Tertullian, *Treatise on prayer*, 3

9. Luke 15:31

10. Cassian, *Conferences*, 7, 28

11. Matthew 20:1
12. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2, q. 8, a. 1, c
13. J. Escriva, *Friends of God*, 146
14. Matthew 14:23; Luke 6:12
15. cf Mark 14:35-36
16. cf Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34-36
17. cf Luke 22:32; John 17
18. cf Matthew 26:41
19. cf John 4:10; 6:27
20. cf Luke 21:36
21. Matthew 6:5-6
22. cf Matthew 6:7-8
23. cf Luke 18:9-14
24. cf Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8
25. cf Mark 11:23
26. cf Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:9-13
27. J. Escriva, *The Forge*, 3
28. Cf Matthew 5:23
29. 1 John 4:20
30. St. John Chrysostom, Homily on the narrow gate

“Helping Others to Carry Their Burdens”

Christ’s example.

Jesus behaved towards people in a way very different from the way many of the Pharisees behaved towards them. He came to free men from the heaviest of their burdens by taking them upon himself. *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*¹

Close to Christ, all our efforts and indeed all those things we find most difficult to bear if we are to fulfill God’s Will become even pleasant. Sacrifice offered with Christ does not bring with it a feeling of harsh rebelliousness, but rather one of joyful giving. He bore upon himself our sorrows and our weightiest burdens. The Gospels give us a constant example of his concern for all men. Saint Gregory the Great writes that *everywhere He left examples of his mercy.*² He raises the dead, cures the blind, the lepers, the dumb, and frees those possessed by the devil ... There are occasions when He does not even wait for the sick person to be brought to him, but says: *I will come and heal him.*³ Even at the moment of his own death He shows his concern for the people around him. He gives himself up to death lovingly; *He is the expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*⁴

We must imitate Our Lord not only by avoiding causing unnecessary worries to others, but by helping people to bear the worries they already have. Whenever possible we will help others to fulfill their human task. We will help them to carry the burdens that life itself imposes on them: *When you have finished your work, do your brother’s, helping him, for Christ’s sake, so tactfully and so naturally that no one — not even he — will realize that you are doing more than what in justice you ought.*

*This, indeed, is virtue befitting a son of God!*⁵

We should never think that any act of self-denial or sacrifice offered for the good of another is more than we should do. Charity should stimulate us to show our regard for others in very specific ways. It should lead us to look for opportunities of making ourselves useful, of lightening the burdens of others and of giving joy to all those we are able to help in any way, even though we know what we will never do as much as we should.

We should always try to relieve others from whatever seems to weigh them down, just as Christ would have done in our place. Sometimes this will mean our doing some small act of service. At times it will mean giving a word of encouragement or of hope. At others we will help someone to glance up at the Master so that he comes to see his situation in a more positive light; it may be a situation which had seemed to overwhelm him simply because up till then he had felt he must face it alone. We should think too of those aspects of our behavior with which sometimes, without really meaning to, we make life a little harder for others ... our whims and fancies, our rash judgments, negative criticism, a lack of consideration for others, an unkind word ...

We should be compassionate and merciful. The burden of sin and of ignorance.

Love enables us to discover in others the divine image in whose likeness we have all been made. We should recognize in everyone the tremendous price paid for his ransom — the pricelessness of his redemption — the very Blood of Christ.⁶ The greater our love, the more we are able to appreciate our neighbor and, as a consequence, show concern for his needs and sorrows. Then we see not only another human being who is suffering or having a hard time, we see Christ in that person, Christ, who identified himself with all men: *Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.*⁷ Christ makes himself present to us through charity. He acts in the world at every moment through the members of his Mystical Body. It is for this reason that our constant union with Jesus enables us also to say: *Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Charity is the full realization of the Kingdom of God in the world.

If we are to be faithful followers of Christ we have to ask him unceasingly to give us a heart like his, capable of feeling sorrow for all the evil that man drags along behind him. We should be particularly sorry about the evil that is sin, which, more than any other evil, drags man down and overwhelms him. Jesus always responded with compassion when He saw all the limitations and the weaknesses of men: *I have compassion on the crowd ...*⁸ the evangelists record in their different ways. Christ was moved by all the kinds of misfortune He encountered during his time on this earth. We know that He always looks with mercy on the mass of human wretchedness that has been accumulated throughout the centuries. If we are to call ourselves followers of Christ we must bear in our hearts the same feelings of mercy as the Master had.

In our personal prayer, let us ask Our Lord to help us with his grace to feel true compassion,

above all for those who suffer the immeasurable evil of sin, for those who are far from God. Then we will be able to understand how it is that the apostolate of Confession is the greatest of the works of mercy. It is by doing this apostolate that we give God the opportunity to pour out his generous forgiveness on that prodigal son who has left his father's house. Of what a great burden do we relieve the person who was burdened by sin and now goes to Confession! What a true relief! Today could be a good time to ask ourselves: how many people have I helped to make a good Confession. Who else can I help?

We should try especially to lighten the burdens of people more closely connected to us because they share the same faith, the same spirit, the same ties of blood, the same work ... Saint Leo the Great said emphatically: *Certainly look on everyone who suffers with a general benevolence, but be especially concerned about those who are members of Christ's Body and are united to us through the Catholic Faith. For we owe more to those who belong to us through the union of grace than to strangers through the community of nature.*⁹

As far as we can, let us relieve all those who carry the heavy burden of ignorance, especially ignorance of their religion, which *today reaches levels never before descended to in certain countries of Christian tradition. Perhaps because of the impositions of a secular state or because of lamentable disorientation and negligence, crowds of children who have been baptized are reaching adolescence with a total lack of the most elementary notions of the Faith and morals and even of the rudiments of piety. Today, to teach the unlearned means above all to teach those who know nothing about Religion; it means 'to evangelize them' — that is to say, to speak to them about God and about the Christian life.*¹⁰ What a great weight has to be borne by those who do not know Christ, by those who have been deprived of Christian doctrine or who are imbued with error!

We should turn to Christ when life becomes difficult for us, and learn from Our Lady how to forget ourselves.

We will find that no way leads more certainly to Christ and happiness than that of a sincere concern to free those who are weary and heavy-laden from whatever weighs them down. God has disposed things in such a way that *we should learn to bear one another's burdens: because there is nobody without any defect; nobody who is sufficient unto himself; indeed nobody who is sufficiently wise unto himself.*¹¹ We all need one another. Living with other people requires that mutual help without which we would find it difficult to keep going.

If at some time we should find ourselves wrestling with a burden that is beyond our strength, we should not fail to listen to Our Lord's words: *Come to me.* Only He can restore our strength, only He can quench our thirst. *Jesus says now and always: 'Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. We can be sure that Jesus constantly invites us to come to him, sees our difficulties and has compassion on us. Still more does He offer us his promises, his friendship, the hope of goodness, of a healing remedy for our ills, of comfort; and still more does He offer us nourishment, bread, the very source of energy and life.*¹² Christ is our repose.

Our continuous conversation with Our Mother Mary teaches us to be understanding with our neighbor in his time of need. There was nothing that she failed to notice, because even the smallest of cares were important to the love that always filled her Heart. She will help us to follow the way that leads to Christ at those very times when our need to unburden ourselves on him is even greater: *You will draw strength from it to put the Will of God fully into practice, and you will be filled with desires of serving all men. You will be the Christian you have sometimes dreamed of being: full of works of charity and justice, happy and strong, understanding towards others and demanding on yourself.*¹³

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1. Matthew 11:28-30
 2. St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 25, 6
 3. Matthew 7:7
 4. 1 John 2:2
 5. J. Escriva, *The Way*, 440
 6. cf 1 Peter 1:18
 7. Matthew 25:40
 8. Mark 8:2
 9. St. Leo the Great, *Sermon 89*
 10. J. Orlandis, *The Eight Beatitudes*
 11. Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, I, 16, 4
 12. Paul VI, Homily, 12 June 1977
 13. J. Escriva, *Friends of God*, 293

“The Way of the Beatitudes”

The beatitudes; a way of sanctity and happiness.

A huge crowd of people from many different places has gathered around Our Lord. They are hoping to hear from him his saving doctrine which will give meaning to their lives. *Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down his disciples came to him. And He opened his mouth and taught them.*¹

It is an opportunity Our Lord uses to give an in-depth picture of the true disciple. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who mourn ...*

It is not difficult for us to imagine the impression Our Lord's words must have made on his hearers. Many of them would have been disconcerted and some of them even disappointed. Jesus had just expressed in precise terms the new spirit He had come to bring on earth. It was in the most real sense a revolutionary spirit, a spirit which involved a complete change from the usual and generally accepted human values, such as those of the Pharisees who saw earthly happiness as God's blessing and reward, and who looked on unhappiness and misfortune as God's punishment.² *In general, ancient man, even among the People of Israel, had sought as his chief good wealth, pleasure and power, and being held in high regard by others. He considered all these things as the acme of well-being, the fount of all happiness. Jesus here proposes a totally different way. He exalts and blesses poverty, meekness, mercy, purity and humility.*³

As we meditate again in our prayer on these words of Our Lord, we see that even in our day people tend to be disconcerted by this admittedly startling contrast. They see on the one hand the tribulation that the way of the Beatitudes must necessarily bring with it, and on the other hand the genuine happiness that Jesus promises. *The essential idea that Jesus wanted to impress on his listeners was this: only serving God brings happiness to man. In the midst of poverty, of pain and a sense of having been forsaken, the true servant of God can say with Saint Paul My joy overflows in the midst of all my tribulations.* And on the other hand a man can be desperately unhappy even though he lives surrounded by opulence and possesses all earthly goods.⁴ There is a reason too for those exclamations of Our Lord's appearing immediately after the Beatitudes in Saint Luke's Gospel: *Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now ... Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.*⁵

The people who listened to Our Lord well understood that those *Beatitudes* were not intended to establish different categories of people, that they did not promise salvation to particular groups of society, but that they unequivocally laid down the religious dispositions and moral conduct that Jesus demands of all those who want to follow him. *That is to say, the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn ... do not point to headings that differentiate people from each other, but ... are like different aspects of the demands for sanctity directed to everyone who wants to be Christ's disciple.*⁶

The *Beatitudes*, taken as a whole, point to the same ideal — sanctity. Today, as we listen again to our Lord's words calling for such far-reaching reform, let us revive our desire for holiness as the axis around which our whole life revolves. Because *Our Lord Jesus Christ preached the good news to all without distinction. One cooking pot and only one kind of food: 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work' (John 4:34). He calls each and every one to holiness. He asks each and every one — young and old, single and married, healthy and sick, learned and unlearned, no matter where they work or where they are — to love him.*⁷ Whatever the circumstances of our life, we must know that we are invited to live the Christian life in all its fullness. We cannot make excuses, we cannot say to Our Lord: 'Wait until I have solved this problem!' or 'Give me until I have recovered from this illness!' or 'Hold on until I am no longer suffering calumny or persecution, then I will really begin to seek holiness!' We would be sadly mistaken not to make best use of these *difficult* circumstances to unite ourselves more closely to God.

Our happiness comes from God.

We do not displease God by trying to find ways of overcoming pain, illness, poverty, injustice ... but the *Beatitudes* teach us that the real success of our lives is to love and fulfill God's Will for us. They show us, as well, the only path that can lead us to live with the fullness of dignity which is due to our condition as human beings. In an age when so many things lead to personal debasement and degradation, the *Beatitudes* are an invitation to an upright and worthy life.⁸ On the other hand, trying at all costs to throw off the weight of pain and of tribulation, as though they were absolute evils, or to seek human success as an end in itself, are ways that God cannot bless, and which do not lead to happiness.

*Blessed means happy, fortunate, and in each one of the Beatitudes Jesus begins by promising happiness and pointing out the ways of achieving it. Why should Our Lord start by speaking of happiness? Because there is in all men an irresistible longing to be happy: its achievement is the end that all their actions propose to them; but they often seek happiness where it is not to be found, where they will only find wretchedness.*⁹

Our Lord points here to the ways that can lead to limitless and endless happiness in eternal life, and also to happiness in this life, if we live worthily as is appropriate to our condition as human beings. These ways are very different from those all too frequently chosen by men.

*Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands ... For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord,*¹⁰ we read in the First Reading of today's Mass.

Poverty of spirit, a hunger for justice, for mercy, for cleanness of heart, and bearing rejection for the sake of the Gospel — all are manifestations of the same attitude of soul: abandonment in God. And this is the attitude that impels us to trust God in an absolute and unconditional way. It is the attitude of the person who is not going to be satisfied with the benefits and consolations afforded by the things of this world. Such a person has placed his ultimate hope beyond these goods, which can seem poor and small contents for a capacity as great as that of the human heart.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit ... And in the Magnificat pronounced by Our Lady we hear He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.*¹¹ How many men become hollow men filled with emptiness because they make do with what they already have and grasp at more of the same! Our Lord invites us not to be satisfied with the happiness that mere transitory goods can give us, and encourages us to long for those good things which He has prepared for us.

We will not lose our joy if we seek for God in everything.

Jesus says to those who follow him (He said so whilst He was on earth and He says it now), that it will be no obstacle to happiness that men *revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, He tells us, for your reward is great in Heaven.*¹² Just as nothing on earth can give us the happiness that every man seeks, so, if we are united to God nothing can rob us of it. Our happiness and our fulfillment come from God. *Oh you who feel the weight of the Cross bear more heavily on you! You who are poor and forsaken, you who mourn, who are persecuted for the cause of justice, you who pass silently by, who suffer pain unknown to others, take heart. You are the best loved in God's kingdom, the kingdom of hope, of goodness and of life. You are the brothers of the suffering Christ, and together with him, if you wish, you can save the world.*¹³

We should ask for this even in a situation where other people seem to be amassing all the goods that can be acquired in this short life. Saint Basil says we should not consider the rich man fortunate solely because of his riches, the powerful man because of his authority and dignity, the strong man because of his great eloquence. All these things can be instruments of virtue for those who use them rightly, but in themselves they do not hold the secret of happiness.¹⁴ We know that very often these same goods can become the cause of misfortune or disaster for the person who possesses them, and for other people, if wealth or power or physique or intellect are not ordered according to God's Will. Without God the heart will always feel dissatisfied and unhappy.

When in our search for happiness we men attempt to follow other ways, other than those willed by God, those marked out by the Master, we will find at the end of our journey only loneliness and sadness. The experience of all those who have chosen not to listen to God when He has spoken to them in their hearts has always been the same. They have learnt the bitter truth that apart from God there is no form and lasting happiness. Far from God we can only gather Dead Sea fruit, bitter in one way or another, and end up like the prodigal son, far from his father's house, *eating the husks and feeding the swine.*¹⁵

Those who seek Christ, who ask for and foster a desire for holiness, are fortunate in their quest. All the good things that constitute true felicity are present in Christ.

'Laetetur cor quaerentium Dominum.' *Let the hearts that seek Yahweh rejoice. There you have light, to help you discover the reasons for your gloominess.*¹⁶

When joy is lacking, may it not be because at that moment we are not really looking for Our Lord in our work, in the people around us, in the vicissitudes of our day. May it not be that we are not yet detached from everything? *Let the hearts that seek Yahweh rejoice!*

1. Matthew 5:1-2

2. cf *The Navarre Bible*, note to Matthew 5:2

3. Fray Justo Perez de Urbel, *Life of Christ*

4. *Ibidem*
5. Luke 6:24-26
6. *The Navarre Bible*, note to Matthew 5:2
7. J. Escrivà, *Friends of God*, 294
8. cf J. Orlandis, *The Eight Beatitudes*
9. R. Carrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol I
10. Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13
11. Luke 1:53
12. Matthew 5:11-12
13. Second Vatican Council, *Message to humanity. To the poor, the sick, to all those who suffer*, 6
14. cf St. Basil, *Homily on envy* in *How to read pagan literature*
15. cf Luke 15:11 *et seq*
16. J. Escrivà, *The Way*, 666

“Our Sins and Confession”

Confession of our sins and purpose of amendment. It must be complete, individual and to a priest.

*A voice cries: Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain.*¹

The best way of getting our souls ready to receive Our Lord at his coming is to make a really well-prepared Confession. This Sacrament is a source of grace and mercy throughout our entire life, but its necessity is especially obvious in this season, when through her liturgy the Church urges and encourages us to prepare to commemorate the birth of Our Lord at Christmas.

She puts on our lips the prayerful petition: *O God, you sent your Son into the world to free the human race from its former sinfulness. As we faithfully wait for his coming, fill our hearts with your grace so that we may live in true freedom and attain its reward.*²

Confession is also the sacrament which, together with the Holy Eucharist, prepares us for that all-important meeting with Christ at the end of our earthly life. Our whole life is, in this sense, a continual Advent, a preparation for that final moment for which we are unceasingly, day by day, getting ourselves ready. How comforting it is to realize that it is this same Lord who ardently desires to have us with Him *in the new heaven and the new earth*³ which He has prepared for us.

Every well-made Confession is an impulse which Our Lord gives us to go ahead, freed from our miseries, with new courage and joy. Christ says to us once more: *Take heart, your sins are forgiven*⁴ my child, begin again ... It is He Himself who forgives us when we have humbly told Him our faults. We confess our sins to God Himself, although in the confessional it is a man — the priest — who listens to us. *That man is the humble and faithful servant of this great mystery which has been enacted between the son who returns and the Father.*⁵

*The causes of evil are not to be found outside man, but, above all, in the depth of his heart. Its cure also comes from the heart. Consequently Christians must rebel against the debasing of man, through a sincere determination to be truly converted themselves, and must show forth in their own lives the joy of being truly freed from sin ... by means of their sincere repentance, their firm resolution of amendment and the courageous confession of their faults.*⁶

For those who have fallen into mortal sin after they have been baptized, this Sacrament of Penance is as necessary for their salvation as is Baptism for those who have not yet been re-born into supernatural life: *It is the means to satisfy man with the righteousness that comes from the Redeemer Himself.*⁷ And the Church holds its importance to be so great that *lack of time may oblige priests to postpone or even to omit other activities, but never that of hearing Confessions.*⁸

All mortal sins committed after Baptism, together with any circumstances which may affect their nature, must be brought to the tribunal of Penance in an individual confession made privately to a priest, followed by individual absolution.

The Holy Father asks us all to do everything that we can to *help the ecclesial community to appreciate fully 'the value of individual Confession' as a personal encounter with the merciful and loving Savior, and to be faithful to the directives of the Church in a matter of such importance.*⁹

*We cannot forget that conversion is a particularly profound inward act in which the individual cannot be replaced by others and cannot make the community be a substitute for him.*¹⁰

Confession is to Our Lord Himself; frequent Confession.

As well as being *complete* in regard to serious sins, Confession must be *supernatural*: we have to remember that we are coming to implore forgiveness from the same Lord whom we have offended, because all sins, including those committed against our fellow man, are direct offenses to God.

A confession made with consciousness of its supernatural nature is a real act of love for God. In the depth of our soul we hear Christ say, as he said to Peter: *Simon, son of John, do you love me? And we too can answer, in the very words of the Apostle, Comine, tu omnia nosti, tu scis quia amote.*¹¹ Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you ... in spite of everything.

Next to mortal sin, venial sin is the soul's greatest misery, because it prevents us from receiving many actual graces. Each small unfaithfulness is the loss of a great treasure: it decreases the warmth of our love; it increases our difficulty in practicing the virtues, which seems harder and harder all the time. And it makes it easier for us to end up committing mortal sin, unless we react promptly.

Our greatest help in the struggle to avoid venial sins comes from Holy Communion and frequent Confession. What is more, in Confession we are given special graces to avoid precisely those

defects and sins which we have confessed and repented. To value frequent Confession is a sign of spiritual refinement and love of God. To despise it or to be indifferent to it suggest inward coarseness and frequently a real blindness to supernatural realities.

How often we should go to Confession depends on the needs of each individual soul. Anyone who is seriously determined to fulfill the Will of God in everything and to belong entirely to God will feel a real need to come to this sacrament more often and more regularly: *Confession periodically renewed — the Confession of 'devotion' — has always accompanied the ascent to holiness in the Church.*¹²

Each Confession benefits the whole Church. The Communion of Saints and the Sacrament of Penance.

In the Sacrament of Penance man is reconciled with God and with the Church. It is one of the most intimate and personal of human acts, and brings about many fundamental changes in the sanctuary of each man's conscience. Yet at the same time this Sacrament also possesses a deep and inseparable social dimension and also brings about many changes in the family circle, the studies, the work, the friendly relationships, etc., of the person who goes to Confession.

The greatest tragedy in any man's life is sin, because the result of sin is a far-reaching disorder which starts in the very center of his being and spreads outward to affect all those around him. In the Sacrament of Penance Our Lord sorts out all those misplaced elements; in addition to pardoning the sins, he restores to the soul its lost order and harmony.

A well-made confession brings much good to all those who live and work with us. What is more, it is of benefit to very many other people with whom we come into contact in the course of a day. The grace that we receive in this sacrament means that we say and do everything in a very different way.

Not only that, but when a Christian goes to Confession, the whole Church receives an incalculable benefit. Every time a priest pronounces the words of absolution, She rejoices and is mysteriously enriched, because every Confession, through the Communion of Saints, sends blessings which resound through the whole Mystical Body of Christ.

In the intimate life of the Church — whose cornerstone is Christ — every member supports all the others with his good works and merits, and is at the same time supported by them. We all need to be, and in fact we all are, continually receiving a share of the spiritual benefits which are common to us all. Our own merits are helping our fellow men in every part of the world. In the same way sin, lukewarmness, venial sins and self-satisfied mediocrity weigh down every member of the pilgrim Church: *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*¹³

*This is the other aspect of that solidarity which, on the religious level, is developed in the profound and magnificent mystery of the 'Communion of Saints', thanks to which it has been possible to say that 'every soul that rises above itself raises up the world'. To this 'law of ascent' there unfortunately corresponds the 'law of descent'. Consequently one can speak of a 'communion of sin', whereby a soul that lowers itself through sin drags down with itself the Church and, in some way, the whole world. In other words there is no sin, not even the most intimate and secret one, that exclusively concerns the person committing it. With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sine has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and on the whole human family.*¹⁴

Whenever anybody makes a sincere and repentant Confession it is a moment of rejoicing not only for the penitent but for everybody. *When she has found the lost coin, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying: Rejoice with me.*¹⁵ The saints in Heaven, the holy souls in Purgatory, and the Church which is still on pilgrimage through this world rejoice together every time an absolution is given.

'To loosen' the chains of sin is at the same time to tighten the bonds of brotherhood. Ought we not to go to this Sacrament more joyfully and more regularly when we know that by the very fact of making a good Confession we are helping so many other Christians, and especially those who are closest to us?

Let us ask God, in the words of the Church: *Listen favorably, Lord, to our prayers and help us in our need. The coming of your Son brings us comfort: grant that we may be freed from the taint of our old habits of sin.*¹⁶

1. Isaiah 40:3-4

2. *Prayer, Mass for Saturday of the First Week in Advent*

3. Revelations 21:1

4. Matthew 9:2

5. John Paul II, *Homily at the Parish of St. Ignatius*, Rome, 16 March 1980

6. John Paul II, *Homily*, 5 April 1979

7. John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, 20
8. *idem*, Rome, 17 November 1978
9. John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of Japan*, Tokyo, 23 February 1981
10. John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, 20
11. John 21:17
12. John Paul II, *Address to members of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary*, 30 January 1981
13. 1 Corinthians 12:26
14. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 2 December 1984, 16
15. Luke 15:9
16. *Prayer, Mass for Tuesday of the First Week in Advent*

“The Living Bread”

Communion restores and renews our strength, so that we may reach heaven. The Viaticum.

In the First Reading of today’s Mass¹ we read that Elias the prophet, fleeing from Jezabel, went to Horeb, the holy mountain. During the long and difficult journey, he felt so tired he wished to die. *Enough, Yahweh, he said. Take up my soul, for I am no better than my fathers.* And lying down there, he fell asleep. But an angel of the Lord woke him and offered him bread saying, *Rise up and eat, for you still have a long journey ahead. Elias arose, ate and drank, and strengthened by the meal walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God.* What he could not do of his own strength, he could do with the meal that the Lord gave him when he was most distraught.

The holy mountain which was the prophet’s destination is an image of heaven. The forty days of travel represents our journey through life, during which we too encounter temptations, difficulties and fatigue. At times we too may find ourselves distraught and without hope. As the Angel does, so does the Church invite us to nourish ourselves with the bread — in all ways unique — that is Christ himself, present in the Holy Eucharist. In him we will find the strength to reach heaven, in spite of our weakness.

Holy Communion was called the *Viaticum* during the early years of Christianity, drawing an analogy between this sacrament and the viaticum, or provisions of food and money, that Romans took with them on long journeys. Later, this term was reserved for the spiritual assistance — in particular, the Holy Eucharist — that the Church gives to her children during the final and definitive stage of their journey to eternal life.² The first Christians had the custom of taking Communion to those imprisoned, especially when their martyrdom drew near.³ Saint Thomas teaches that this sacrament is called the Viaticum because it prefigures the joy of possessing God in our true homeland, and because it makes it possible for us to reach that goal.⁴ It is our great help during our life, and especially near the end of the road when the attacks of the enemy may be all the more intense. This is the reason why the Church has always recommended that no Christian should die without it. From the very beginning, the need — and the obligation — to receive this sacrament was evident, even though one might already have received Communion on that day.⁵

We may also recall today the obligation — at times grave — that we have to do everything possible so that no relative, friend or colleague of ours dies without the spiritual assistance that our Mother the Church provides for the final moments of our journey.

This is the best and most effective and perhaps the last possible manifestation of charity and affection towards those persons here on earth. The Lord rewards us with a deep joy when we fulfill this most agreeable though at times difficult duty.

Throughout our life, deeds should express our gratitude to our Lord for many things, but especially for having given us Holy Communion. Our gratitude will be shown in preparing to receive him better each day, and in receiving him fully aware that He gives us more than he have Elias — all the strength we need to travel resolutely down the road of sanctity.

The Bread of life. Effects of Holy Communion in the soul.

I am the bread of life ... Jesus tells us in the Gospel of the Mass.⁶ *If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.*

Today our Lord forcefully reminds us that we need to receive him in Holy Communion in order to participate in the divine life, to overcome temptations, to foster and nourish the life of grace born in us through Baptism. Whoever receives Communion in a state of grace participates in the fruits of the holy Mass and obtains benefits that are proper and specific to the reception of the Sacrament. He receives Christ himself, the source of all grace, really and spiritually. Thus, the Holy Eucharist is the greatest sacrament, the center and summit of all the rest. The true presence of Christ in this sacrament gives it an infinite supernatural effectiveness.

There is no greater joy in this life than to receive our Lord. When we wish to give ourselves to others we often given them something that belongs to us, or something we know to symbolize a deeper attitude of affection, of love. But we always encounter some limitation to our self-giving. In Holy Communion, divine power surpasses all human limitations: under the Eucharistic species, Christ gives himself to us completely. Love achieves her ideal in this sacrament — complete identification with the person loved and longed for. *When two pieces of wax are put into the fire, they melt and become as a single thing. Something similar occurs when we participate in the Body of Christ and in his Precious Blood.*⁷ Truly there is no great joy or greater good than to receive Christ himself in Holy Communion with dignity.

The soul cannot but be grateful when, fighting off all routine, we frequently consider the

richness of this sacrament. The Holy Eucharist is for the spiritual life what food is for the life of the body. Just as food strengthens us and prevents weakness and death, so the Holy Eucharist frees us from venial sins which weaken and debilitate the soul, and preserves us from mortal sins which cause its death. Food restores our strength and our health. *Through frequent or daily Communion spiritual life becomes fuller and the soul is enriched with virtues. The person receiving Communion receives a sure sign of eternal life.*⁸ Just as food is needed for the growth of the body, the Holy Eucharist increases our sanctity and consolidates our union with God, *because participating in the Body and Blood of Christ transforms us into that which we receive.*⁹

Communion helps us to give of ourselves in family life; it moves us to work with joy and with perfection; it strengthens us to bear with human and supernatural elegance the difficulties and errors of ordinary life.

*The Master is here and He calls you,*¹⁰ we are told every day. Let us not ignore the invitation. Let us go with joy and well prepared to meet him. We have everything to gain from the encounter.

Frequent or daily reception of this sacrament. The Visit to the Blessed Sacrament; spiritual communions throughout the day.

Because we have many weaknesses we should frequently seek the Master in Holy Communion. *The banquet is prepared*¹¹ and many are invited, although few attend. How can we excuse ourselves? Love destroys all excuses.

The desire to receive this sacrament can be renewed often during the day by means of the spiritual communion that *consists in an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in a loving conversation as if we had already received him.*¹² We will receive many graces and be given help to work better and serve others. It will be easier for us to place the Mass at the center of our day.

The *Visit to the Blessed Sacrament* is also a very beneficial practice, *a manifestation of our gratitude, a sign of the love and adoration we owe our Lord.*¹³ There is no better place than before the Tabernacle for those intimate, personal conversations that are required for permanent union with Christ. That is the most appropriate place for our dialogue with our Lord — as is clear from the lives of the saints — and for giving impulse to continuous prayer during work, in the street ... everywhere. Sacramentally present, the Lord sees us and hears us with greater intimacy. His heart still beats out of love for us and is *the source of all life and holiness.*¹⁴ He invites us daily to return the visit that He made to us, coming sacramentally into our soul. He tells us, 'You too come away to a desert place to rest awhile.'

Near him we will find peace if we have lost it, strength to finish well the work at hand, and joy in the service of others. *What shall we do, you ask, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? Love him, adore him, thank him and ask him. What does a poor man do in the presence of the rich man? A sick man in the presence of a doctor? One who is thirsty at the sight of a crystal-clear fountain?*¹⁵

Jesus has what we lack and need. He is our strength along the road of life. Let us ask Our Lady to show us how to receive him *with the purity, humility and devotion* with which she received him, *with the spirit and fervor of the saints.*

1. 1 Kings 19:4-8

2. cf A. Bride, *Viatique*, in DTC, XC, 2842-2858

3. cf St. Cyprian, *De lapsis*, 13; *Vita Basilii* 4: PG 29, 315; *Acts of the Martyrs*, etc.

4. cf St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3, q.74, a.4

5. *Code of Canon Law*, canon 921,2

6. John 6:48-51

7. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, 10:2

8. Paul VI, Instruction, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 15 August 1967, 37

9. *ibid*, 7

10. John 11:28

11. Luke 14:16

12. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*, Introduction, III

13. Paul VI, Encyclical, *Mysterium Fidei*, 3 September 1965, 67

14. *Litany to the Sacred Heart*; cf Pius XII, Encyclical, *Haurietis aquas*, 15 May 1956, 20, 34

15. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *op cit*

“Words That Will Not Pass Away”

Prayerful reading of the Gospels.

As we come to the conclusion of the liturgical year, we consider these words of the Master in today’s Gospel: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*¹ What Jesus has said will literally last forever. God has directed these words to every man and every woman who will walk the face of the earth. *In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son.*² Just as He spoke to our forefathers in the Faith, Jesus Christ speaks to us in our day. Because his message is divine, it cannot be limited by human constraints of time and place.

Sacred Scripture acquires the fullness of its meaning in the figure and preaching of Christ. St. Augustine has stated this idea in a most graphic manner: *The Law was pregnant with Christ.*³ On another occasion this holy Doctor of the Church affirmed: *To read the books of the prophets without seeing the coming of Christ is a most insipid practice. Seek therefore to find Christ in these words and they will prove not only delightful but stimulating.*⁴ Christ will enlighten our minds about the riches within Sacred Scripture: *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*⁵ The Jews who refused to believe in the Gospel were left with a chest full of treasure — but without the key to unlock it. St. Paul explained this situation to the first Christians at Corinth in this way: *But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.*⁶ *The economy of the Old Testament was deliberately so orientated that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy the coming of Christ, redeemer of all men, and of the messianic kingdom ... God, the inspirer and author of the books of both Testaments, in his wisdom has so brought it about that the New should be hidden in the Old and that the Old should be made manifest in the New.*⁷ In this context, it is quite moving for us to read the dialogue between Philip the Apostle and the Ethiopian official from the court of Queen Candace. The Ethiopian was sitting in his chariot reading the Prophet Isaiah. Philip ran up to the man and asked him, *Do you understand what you are reading?* The Ethiopian replied, *How can I, unless some one guides me?* Philip took a seat in the chariot and *beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus.*⁸ He explained the writings of Isaiah by means of the message of Jesus. His catechesis was wonderfully straightforward: Jesus was the key concept.

St. John Chrysotom has commented on this passage from the *Acts of the Apostles*: *Let us meditate on the importance of our reading the Scriptures with devotions, even during our travels ... Some people excuse themselves from this practice because they are busy with their family affairs, or because they have military drills, or because they have some worry or other. They think that such matters preclude any serious effort to read and meditate upon Sacred Scripture ... This Ethiopian official is an example for all of us: those who have a quiet life, those who belong to the army, those who are officials, those who have chosen a monastic life, those who care for their families at home. Let everyone learn that no circumstance should be an impediment for our divine reading. We can do this at home or in the town square or the public park, or on a trip or in the company of others or right in the middle of our work. I beseech you, do not be careless with your reading of the Scriptures.*⁹

From her earliest days the Church has recommended that the faithful read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, especially the books of the New Testament. We will find Christ coming out to meet us. Through these few minutes each day we will become best friends with Jesus. Truly, love depends on prior knowledge.

God speaks to us through Sacred Scripture.

The books of the Old Testament outlines in advance the path which Christ market out in his earthly sojourn.¹⁰ Sacred Scripture was, in a certain sense, a grand announcement of the Messiah. The Prophets foretold the day of his coming and they ardently desired to see it.¹¹ The disciples recognized in Christ the fulfillment of all the prophecies.¹² When St. Paul had to defend himself before King Agrippa, he stated simply: *So I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass.*¹³ Of course, Christ was not bound by the patriarchs and prophets. It was God who inspired them to describe the characteristics of the Son of God. As Jesus said to the leaders of Israel. *If you believed, Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.*¹⁴ At a later date He said to the: *Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.*¹⁵

Jesus took upon himself the types and figures of the Old Testament — the temple,¹⁶ manna,¹⁷ the rock,¹⁸ the serpent raised up in the wilderness.¹⁹ His biblical references are unmistakable. This perhaps explains the Lord’s frustration with the scribes and the Pharisees: *You search the scriptures,*

*because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me.*²⁰

We read in today's Gospel that the heavens and the earth will pass away, but that God's word will last forever. God's Revelation to man is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. *But now that the faith is founded in Christ, and in this era of grace, the law of the Gospel has been made manifest, there is no reason to enquire of him in that manner, nor for him to speak or to answer as He did then. For, in giving us, as He did, his Son, He has said everything to us together, once and for all, in this single Word, and He has no occasion to speak further.*²¹

We read in the *Letter to the Hebrews: For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*²² This word is directed to every person who receives it with faith. *In the sacred books the Father who is in Heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them. And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life.*²³

The teachings of Jesus are always 'up to date'. We are often amazed at the relevancy of the saga of the Prodigal Son, of the importance in every age of the leaven to transform the dough, of the reactions of the people cured by the Lord. How many times have we joined Bartimaeus in asking Jesus for his light: *ut videam! That I may see!* We also have used that plea of the publican: *My God, have mercy on me as a sinner!* Our daily reading of the Gospel should be a source of strength and comfort.

The fruits to be gained by this practice.

*How sweet are thy words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*²⁴

Monsignor Ronald Knox encouraged people to meditate on the Lord's Passion with this analogy from parish life: *When you have a lot of people singing without any organ accompaniment, there is a constant tendency for the note to drop all the time; it gets lower and lower as it goes on. And therefore, when the choir isn't accustomed to singing without accompaniment, every now and then the choirmaster, who has a pitch-pipe concealed on his person, gives a little 'toot' in the background, to remind them of the higher note which they ought to be taking, and aren't.*

*And, you see, we are rather like that. We go on living from day to day without thinking much about how we are living, or what we are here for, or whether the things that chiefly interest us are really worth living for; and we get accustomed to our sins, and feel vaguely that it is a pity we go on committing them, but after all, there doesn't seem to be much chance of our stopping; and our prayers get very languid and washed out, and we think of very little except our food and our amusements — do you see what I mean? All the time, the note on which our lives are lived is dropping, dropping, till it's ready to die away into our boots, and we don't notice, just as the choir doesn't notice when the note drops. So we want that sudden little 'toot' of the pitch-pipe, to pull us together and screw the note of our lives up again. And the pitch-pipe we use ... is meditation on Our Lord's Passion.*²⁵

Let us never turn the pages of the Holy Gospel as if it were just any old book. With what love did our forefathers in the Faith care for the Word of God! They went to great lengths to pass it on from generation to generation in all of its integrity. St. Cyprian has written that the reading of Scripture is like the foundation for the building up of our hope. It is the means to consolidate our faith, the food for our charity and our unerring guide on the way of life.²⁶ St. Augustine compares the teachings of Scripture to *lights shining forth out of the darkness.*²⁷ We can find no better beacon for our journey to the Father.

When you open the Holy Gospel, think that what is written there — the words and deeds of Christ — is something that you should not only know, but live. Everything, every point that is told there, has been gathered, detail by detail, for you to make it come alive in the individual circumstances of your life.

God has called us Catholics to follow him closely. In that holy Writing you will find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life there.

You too, like the Apostle, will learn to ask, full of love, 'Lord, what would you have me do?' And in your soul you will hear the conclusive answer, 'The Will of God!'

*Take up the Gospel every day, then, and read it and live it as a definite rule. This is what the saints have done.*²⁸

This is how we can draw abundant fruit from Sacred Scripture. We will unite our prayer with the words of the Psalmist: *Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*²⁹

1. Luke 21:33

2. Hebrews 1:1

3. St. Augustine, *Sermon 196*, 1

4. *idem, Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, 9,3
5. Luke 24:45
6. 2 Corinthians 3:14
7. Second Vatican Council, Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, 15-16
8. cf Acts 8:27-35
9. St. John Chrysotom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 35
10. cf Luke 22:37
11. cf Luke 10:24
12. cf John 1:41-45
13. Acts 26:22
14. John 5:46
15. John 8:56
16. John 2:19
17. cf John 6:32
18. cf Luke 12:10
19. cf John 3:14
20. John 5:39
21. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, 22, 3
22. Hebrews 4:12
23. Second Vatican Council, Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, 21
24. Psalms 118:103
25. R. A. Knox, *A Retreat for Lay People*, pp. 122-123
26. cf St. Cyprian, *Treatise on prayer*
27. St. Augustine, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 128
28. J. Escrivà, *The Forge*, 754
29. Psalms 118:105

“The Power of Prayer”

Trusting and persevering prayer.

*I call upon you, God, for you will answer me; bend your ear and hear my prayer. Guard me as the pupil of your eye; hide me in the shade of your wings.*¹ This is the Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass.

The text of today's liturgy focus our attention on the power of trusting and persevering prayer to reach the mind of God. In the Gospel passage St. Luke prefaces the parable with an explanation of Christ's intent: *Jesus told his disciples a parable about the need to pray, continually and never lose heart.*² In the supernatural life there are actions which are performed once and for all, such as Baptism and Holy Orders. Other actions are repeated many, many times, such as pardoning, understanding, smiling cheerfully ... There are other actions and attitudes which we should practice continually. Among these we find the spirit of prayer, which is the manifestation of a living faith in our Father God. St. Augustine commented on this Gospel passage by emphasizing the close connection between faith and trusting prayer: *If one's faith weakens, prayer withers ... Faith is the fountain of prayer ... A river cannot flow if its source is dried up.*³ Our prayer needs to be continuous and confident like the prayer of Jesus, our model: *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always.*⁴ God is always listening to our prayers.

The *First Reading* from the book of Exodus presents us with the scene of the Chosen People in battle with the Amalekites at Rephidim.⁵ Moses decides to pray to God on a hilltop while Joshua and his forces take on the enemy assault. *As long as Moses kept his arms raised, Israel had the advantage; when he let his arms fall, the advantage went to Amalek.* To keep Moses praying, Aaron and Hur supported his arms, one on each side. They were thus able to keep Moses praying until sunset. *With the edge of the sword Joshua cut down Amalek and his people.*

We cannot grow weary of praying. If we should ever become tired of praying, let us ask our friends to shore us up. The Lord sends us many graces in times of trial. These graces are more necessary and more important than the gifts we ask for. St. Alphonsus Liguori has taught: *The Lord wants to grant us his graces, but He also wants us to ask for them. One day he said to his disciples: 'Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full' (John 16:24). It was as if he were saying: Do not complain to me if you are not filled with blessings. Complain to yourselves for not having sought from me what you need. From now on, ask of me and your prayers will be answered.*⁶ St. Bernard has commented that many people complain like this, saying that the Lord has forsaken them. But Jesus himself laments that those same complainers have not really asked for his assistance.⁷ Let us resolve to pray as Moses did: with perseverance that nothing could shake, and at times with the help of his friends as was necessary. A great deal depends on our devotion.

Let us examine the quality of our prayer today. Is it persevering, trusting, insistent, tireless? *Persevere in prayer, as the Master told us. This point of departure will be your source of peace, of cheerfulness, of serenity, and so it will make you humanly and supernaturally effective.*⁸ There is nothing more powerfully effective than steadfast prayer.

Perseverance in prayer. The parable of the unjust judge.

We pray in the *Responsorial Psalm*: *I lift up my eyes to the mountains: from where shall come my help? My help shall come from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*⁹

The parable in today's Gospel presents us with a marked contrast of personalities. On the one hand there is the unjust judge, *who had neither fear of God nor respect for man.* He does not practice the two essential components of the virtue of justice. The Prophet Isaiah had already spoken of this kind of person in the Old Testament: *They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them.*¹⁰ *They acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right.*¹¹ Jeremiah also makes reference to such people: *They know no bounds in deeds of wickedness, he says, they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.*¹²

The Lord sets in contrast to the unjust judge the figure of the widow, the ancient symbol for the defenseless person. More specifically, the tireless perseverance of the widow is juxtaposed to the firm resistance of the unjust judge. The unexpected conclusion to the parable is the result of the ceaseless petitions of the poor widow. After many refusals to hear her case, the judge finally relents. And so, the weaker party has triumphed. The reason for her victory lies not in any conversion on the judge's part. The widow has simply worn down the defenses of the judge to the point of his capitulation by not giving up. The Lord concludes the parable with this query: *Now, will not God see*

justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them? Jesus wants us to see the main message of the parable: God, who is full of mercy, awaits our steadfast prayer.

Until the end of time the Church will offer up constant supplication to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Church prays for all the needs of her sons and daughters. This is the primary responsibility of the Church, the first duty of her priests. This is the most important thing that we, the faithful, can accomplish since we too are defenseless like the widow of the parable.

At the conclusion of the parable, Jesus adds: *But when the Son of Man comes, will He find any faith on earth?* Will the Lord find faith as unswerving as that of the widow? This is the faith of the children of God who believe in the goodness and power of their Father in Heaven. Many may come to shut God out of his life. He may not feel any need for God. He may seek reasons and solutions for those problems in life to which only the Lord can provide satisfactory answers. Such as these will never find the good things, the truths, which are indispensable. As the Virgin Mary announced in the *Magnificat*: *He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away.*¹³ We have to go to God like needy children. Of course, we also have to employ whatever human means are required, given the circumstances. For many goods, however, we will find that only the divine mercy is efficacious. The Holy Curè d'Ars would tell the story of a founder of an orphanage who was considering the use of advertisements to attract donations. The Saint advised the founder: *Rather than making noise in the papers, why don't you make a fuss before the Tabernacle?* The Lord wants us to bring our concerns before him right there. There is nothing to prevent us from putting ads in the paper too, if that will help.

Down through the centuries Christian people have been moved to present their petitions to God through their Mother Mary: St. Bernard teaches that *our advocate was assumed into Heaven so that she could act as Mother of the Judge and Mother of Mercy. There she will work on behalf of our salvation.*¹⁴ Let us not fail to go to her with our many needs each day.

Prayer as the direct consequence of faith.

Prayer is the direct consequence of a living faith. At the same time we find in prayer greater *firmness in our faith.*¹⁵ Both enjoy a unity of purpose. As a result, everything we ask for should help to make us better. If this were not to be the case, *we would not become more pious, but greedy and ambitious.*¹⁶ When we pray to God for a new home, for help in an important examination, we should consider whether that request will fulfill the Will of God or not. We can pray for certain goods, for our health, for the health of a friend, for a way out of a tight spot ... Yet if we live by faith, if we have unity of life, then we will have a deeper understanding of the relative importance of material goods and human wants. After all, what we really want is God himself. He is the ultimate end of our prayers. When we pray for things here on earth we should only desire what will bring us closer to him.

God is especially pleased with our prayers for spiritual benefits, for ourselves as well as for our relatives, friends and acquaintances. We should pray for the people around us that they may come closer to the Lord. How much we owe our families and friends! *I happened to hurt the hand of a friend. When I saw that his look was so sad and reproachful, I feared that you were not in his heart. And I felt dismayed as if I were standing before an empty tabernacle.*

O my God, if you were not in him, my friend and I would be so far apart. His hand in mine would be nothing more than a meeting of flesh, his heart only the heart of a man.

*I firmly desire that your Life be in him and in me. This is because I want my friend to be my brother, thanks to you.*¹⁷

Let us take advantage of this month of the Holy Rosary to pray to Our Lady for all our needs, and for the needs of our friends and acquaintances.

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1. *Entrance Antiphon*, Psalms 16:6-8
 2. Luke 18:1-8
 3. cf St. Augustine, *Sermon 115*, 1
 4. John 11:42
 5. Exodus 17:8-13
 6. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Sermon 46 for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost*
 7. cf St Bernard, *Sermon 17 on various themes*
 8. J. Escrivà, *The Forge* 536
 9. *Responsorial Psalm*, Psalms 120:1-2
 10. Isaiah 1:23
 11. Isaiah 5:23
 12. Jeremiah 5:28

13. Luke 1:53
14. St. Bernard, *Sermon I on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 1
15. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 1, 8, 1
16. ibid
17. M Quoist, *Prayers to be said in the street*, Salamanca 1962

“Growth in Interior Life”

Interior life is destined to grow. We should correspond with all the grace we receive.

Jesus sometimes asks the Apostles to listen attentively to his doctrine. At other times He calls them together so that He can be alone with them and explain a parable to them once again, or show them what lesson they should draw from something that has happened. He wants them to realize that they are being given a treasure which is meant for the whole Church and of which later they will have to give an account. *Take heed ...*, He says to them on one occasion. And He gives them this lesson: *To him who has, more will be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*¹ Saint John Chrysostom comments: *To him who is diligent and fervent will be given all the things that depend on God; but to him who has no love or fervor and who does not do what depends on him, what belongs to God will not be given him. For ‘even what he thinks he has will be taken away’ (Luke 8:18), says the Lord, not because God takes it away from him, but because he is incapable of receiving fresh graces.*²

To him who has, more will be given ... This is a basic teaching for the interior life of every Christian. To him who corresponds with grace, more grace will be given, so that he will have still more grace. But he who fails to make the inspirations, motions and help of the Holy Spirit bear fruit will become even poorer. Those men who traded with the talents entrusted to them received a greater fortune or reward, but the man who hid his talent in the ground lost it.³ Interior life, like love, is destined to grow: *If you say ‘enough’ you are already dead.*⁴ The interior life always demands progress, correspondence, being ready to receive new graces. If you don’t go forward, you go backwards.

God has promised that we will always have access to all the help we need. At every moment we will be able to say with the Psalmist: *The Lord takes thought for me.*⁵ The difficulties, temptations, internal or external obstacles we come up against cause us to grow; the greater the difficulty, the more grace we receive. If He permits us to experience great temptations or setbacks, the Lord will give us still greater help to overcome them. Then all those things that seem to retard our struggle for holiness, or even make succeeding in it seem impossible, will become the cause of spiritual progress and of our effectiveness in the apostolate. It is only a lack of love, nothing less than lukewarmness, that causes the soul’s life to fall sick or die. Only a bad will, a lack of generosity towards God, can delay or prevent our union with him. *The vessel of faith carried to the fountain is filled according to its capacity.*⁶ Jesus Christ is an inexhaustible source of help, of love and of understanding. With what capacity, with what longing do we approach him? Lord, we say to him in our prayer, make us thirst for you more and more. Make me thirst for you even more intensely than the man dying in the desert thirsts for water!

Faithfulness in little things and to a spirit of sacrifice.

There are various reasons that cause us to make scant progress in the interior life, and even to lose ground and give way to discouragement. However, these reasons can be reduced to just a few: carelessness, negligence in little things connected with service to God and friendship with him; drawing back from the sacrifices He asks of us.⁷ All we have to offer to God each day are little acts of faith and love. Petitions. Acts of thanksgiving during the Holy Mass. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and being aware that we are going to meet Jesus Christ himself who is waiting for us ... Our customary prayers throughout the day. Overcoming our shortcomings at work, answering people pleasantly, asking for things politely ... Many little things done with love and for love comprise our treasure for this or that day, which we will carry with us into eternity. Our interior life is normally nourished by little things carried out with love and attention. To claim anything else would be to mistake our way, to find nothing or very little to offer to God. *It is good for us to remember, Monsignor Escriva points out, the story of that character imagined by a French author, who set out to hunt lions in the corridors of his home, and naturally did not find any. Our life is quite ordinary; trying to serve God in big things would be like trying to hunt lions in the corridor. Just like the huntsman in the story, we would end up empty-handed,*⁸ with nothing to offer. We have the ordinary everyday things.

Just as drops of water added to one another give life to the thirsty earth, so do our little deeds: a glance at an image of Our Lady, a word of encouragement for a friend, a reverent genuflection before the tabernacle, rejecting a distraction during our prayer, overcoming our laziness ... all create good habits, virtues which enable the life of our soul to flourish. If we are faithful to these little acts, if we frequently renew our desire to please God, when something bigger arises for us to offer him such as an illness which is hard to bear or some failure at work, then, too, we will be able to gather fruit from what God has wanted or permitted. Then the words of Christ will be fulfilled: *He who is faithful in*

*very little is faithful also in much.*⁹

Another thing that causes us to regress in the life of the soul is *refusing to accept the sacrifices that God asks of us.*¹⁰ Such sacrifices provide an opportunity for us to go against our own selfishness — always a sign of love. They show our determination to seek Christ throughout the day instead of seeking ourselves.

Love for God *is acquired through spiritual toil,*¹¹ through the effort and interest that is born, with the help of grace, in the depths of our soul. There can be no love, either human or divine, without this willing sacrifice. *Love grows within us, and develops in the midst of our setbacks and the resistance each of us puts up to that love on the inside, and also grows and develops in the face of resistance from 'the outside', that is, despite the many external forces that are foreign and even hostile to it.*¹² As Our Lord has promised us that the help of his grace will never fail us, it all depends on our correspondence with it, on our determination, on our willing start time and again without getting discouraged. The more faithful we are to grace, the more help He gives us, the easier we will find it to follow the way. We will also find that more is being demanded of us: an even greater *finesse* in our soul. Love always calls for more love.

Contrition and interior growth.

This interior life of ours is given a special chance to grow when we are confronted with adverse situations. For the soul, there is no obstacle greater than that which is created by our own wretchedness, and as a result of our carelessness and lack of love. But in those circumstances the Holy Spirit teaches us and moves us to react in a supernatural way, with an act of contrition. *God, be merciful to me a sinner!*¹³ Saint Francis de Sales teaches that we should feel ourselves strengthened by the silent saying of such ejaculatory prayers, filled with love and sorrow and desires for a deep reconciliation, so that through them we may come to trust in his merciful Heart.¹⁴ Acts of contrition are an effective means of spiritual progress.

To ask for forgiveness is to love. It is to contemplate Christ with growing dispositions of understanding and mercy. And as we are sinners,¹⁵ our way will be filled with acts of sorrow, of love, that fill our soul with hope and renew our longing to set off again on the way to sanctity. We need to return to Christ time and again, without becoming discouraged or over-worried, although there may be many times when we have not responded well to Love. God's mercy is infinite, and it encourages us to start again with a new determination, with renewed hope. We must be like the prodigal son, who, instead of remaining far away in a foreign land, filled with shame and living in misery, *Came to his senses and said: '... I will arise and to my father.*¹⁶ *Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father's house. We return to our Father's house by means of that sacrament of pardon ...*

*God is waiting for us like the father in the parable, with open arms, even though we don't deserve it. It doesn't matter how great our debt is. Just like the prodigal son, all we have to do is open our heart, to be homesick for our Father's house, to wonder at and rejoice in the gift which God makes us of being able to call ourselves his children, of really being his children, even though our response to him has been so poor.*¹⁷ God never abandons us. He always welcomes us, comforts us and moves us to start again with more love, with more humility.

Our weaknesses help us to seek for divine mercy, and to be humble. Growth in the virtue of humility means we are able to take many steps forward in the interior life. All the virtues benefit from our being more humble. If at times we find we fail to correspond with all the graces we have received, if we have not been as faithful to God as he was expecting us to be, we must turn trustingly to him with a contrite heart: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*¹⁸

We should often think of those things which although they are small, separate us from God. Then we will be moved to sorrow and contrition, and be brought closer to him. In this way our interior life emerges enriched, not only by our contending with exterior obstacles, but also by the recognition of our weaknesses, our mistakes and our sins. If we find it more difficult to begin again we will have recourse to Mary, who makes easy the way that leads to her Son. We should ask her to help us today to make many acts of contrition. Perhaps we shall find it helpful to repeat the prayer of the tax collector, *God, be merciful to me a sinner!* or the prayer of King David, *'Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicias.'* *A humble and contrite heart, O god, thou wilt not despise.*¹⁹ It will be particularly helpful to say some ejaculatory prayers as we see the walls of a church in the distance, knowing that Jesus Christ is there in person, in the Blessed Sacrament, the fountain of all mercy.

Our Lady, who is Mother of Grace, of Mercy, of Forgiveness, will always enkindle in us the hope of attaining the ambitious target of becoming saints. Let us place the fruits of these moments of personal prayer in her hands, with the conviction that if we correspond with grace, still more grace will be given us.

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1. Mark 4:24-25
 2. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. Matthew's Gospel*, 45, 1
 3. cf Matthew 25:14-30
 4. St. Augustine, *Sermon 51*, 3
 5. Psalms 39:18
 6. St. Augustine, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, 17
 7. cf R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*
 8. J. Escrivà, *Letter*, 24 March 1930
 9. cf Luke 16:10
 10. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *loc cit*
 11. John Paul II, *Homily*, 3 February 1980
 12. *ibidem*
 13. Luke 18:13
 14. cf St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God 2*, 20
 15. cf 1 John 1:8-9
 16. Luke 15:17-18
 17. J. Escrivà, *Christ is passing by*, 64
 18. Psalms 50:12
 19. Psalms 50:19

