

ANTONIO ROSMINI

Spiritual lessons

A method of meditation to be used for the purification
of the soul – On examination of conscience –
On the order of our petitions to God according to
the spirit of the Institute of Charity

Translated by A. Belsito



EDIZIONI ROSMINIANE – STRESA 2020

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Instruction VIII

A method of meditation¹ to be used for the purification of the soul

1. It is important that anyone who is about to engage in holy meditation should bring with him a good will – that is, that he should sincerely wish to draw spiritual profit from it.

2. Our Lord said: «To those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away»². So anyone who wants to profit by meditation must bring to it a good and willing heart, prepared to receive the seed which the divine husbandman sows, and to cultivate its fruit. The man who comes to meditation with a docile and obedient heart is one of those «*who have*»; and so, to him «*more will be given*».

3. According to the method described here, meditation is divided into: (1) preparation; (2) exercise of the memory; (3) exercise of the understanding; (4) exercise of the will.

1. Benedict XIV, in his Constitution *Quemadmodum*, of 16 December 1746, granted an indulgence of seven years and seven quarantines to those who teach or learn the practice of mental prayer, every time they confess their sins and receive Holy Communion. To those who practise mental prayer assiduously and, having confessed their sins, receive Holy Communion, the Pope granted a plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in purgatory.

This indulgence could be gained once a month, on a day of their own choice. Finally, to those who spend at least a quarter of an hour every day for a month in mental prayer and, having confessed their sins, receive Holy Communion, he granted once a month on a day of their choice a plenary indulgence again applicable to the souls in purgatory (*Bulls of Benedict XIV*, vol. 2, p.74).

2. Lk 8:18.

I

Preparation

4. Holy Scripture recommends those who want to pray to prepare their souls so that they may be properly disposed. «*Before offering a prayer – we read in the Book of Ecclesiasticus – prepare yourself; do not be like one who puts the Lord to the test*»³.

5. This demands that since prayer is like a conversation between the soul and God, it is quite unfitting that anyone should approach it inattentively, without first recollecting himself and realizing the deep reverence with which we ought to address God on so important a matter as our eternal salvation. This is why anyone who comes to prayer with a distracted and wandering mind can be said to ‘tempt God’ – to provoke him to punish rather than listen to him. But this does not apply when the distractions are involuntary.

Again, since the object of praying is to ask that the holiness of God may be communicated to our soul, if we pray without proper preparation, we act rashly, asking our Creator to work in us without our first co-operating as much as we can. This would amount to looking for an unnecessary miracle, and in scriptural language again be *to tempt God*. St Bernard thinks it is so necessary to make fitting preparation for prayer that he makes our success depend upon it: «God will show himself to you in prayer to the extent that you have prepared yourself to meet God»⁴.

6. The preparation for prayer is either *remote* or *proximate*.

NOTE: Anyone who want to practise meditation will find it useful to choose a book as a guide, and to arrange a fixed time. We consider the best time to be first thing in the morning, as soon as we have risen.

3. Sir 18:23.

4. *Serm. LXIX* in Cant.

7. The *remote* preparation consists in: (1) reading, the previous evening, the material for the meditation in the chosen book and fixing the points or considerations in one's mind; (2) on going to bed, spending a few moments going over the selected points, summing up the essence of them in a short sentence or an ejaculatory prayer. This summary is to be repeated on awakening during the night and on the following morning; (3) getting up at the time fixed and immediately turning the mind to the subject of the meditation.

8. The summary serves to recall frequently to the mind the heart of the meditation, which will supply constant spiritual nourishment to the soul; and the more profoundly spiritual is the ejaculatory prayer, the better it is, and the more likely it is to be make a deep impression on whoever uses it whenever he recalls it. It is like a word spoken by the God in whom and by whom the soul lives.

NOTE: If anyone is unable to make a meditation in the morning, he should do so at some time in the evening. But the *remote* preparation should be made in the morning.

9. The *proximate* preparation consists in (a) the *preparatory prayer*, (b) the *preludes*.

10. The *preparatory prayer* is made in this way: at the proper time, the Christian who intends to meditate stands a little apart from the chosen place in order to recollect himself in calm and tranquility. Then in the depths of his heart he quietly makes: (1) an act of faith in the presence of God, reminding himself also of the importance of what he is about to undertake; (2) an act of sorrow for the sins he has committed, especially those which impede him from deriving fruit from his prayer; (3) a resolve to avoid any voluntary faults during the meditation, especially those into which he usually falls; (4) an act of indifference over its success, abandoning himself to God and resting satisfied with whatever result the Lord may reward him with, according to his good pleasure, for God's greater glory and the greater profit of his own soul.

11. It is best if these acts are made interiorly, without words. But anyone may use the help of words if he finds that he is unable to make the acts purely with the spirit. They are to be made in all simplicity, in whatever way he may be inspired to use at the time. To compensate for the lethargy which some people at times suffer, it may be helpful to have ready to mind some formula, such as:

«O my God, my Creator, here before you is your faithful servant who is yet looking for the way of life. Do not look at the sins which abound in him, for which he begs your forgiveness, but take pity on him, and in this meditation, cause your grace to abound where before there was only sinfulness. I resolve to use every care to avoid the defects into which I habitually fall during my meditation. For the rest, I abandon myself to you, my God. I am equally ready to receive either dryness or consolation; if you want me to be in darkness, may you be blessed; if in light, may you be blessed; if I am to feel empty, or tempted, or distracted, may you be blessed. I will not give up this holy exercise before the due time in spite of these things. Only have pity on me, now and always, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen».

Only a short time is to be spent over this prayer, (with slight pauses between one sentiment and another), or in making the acts contained in it. All is to be done with tranquillity of spirit; and two minutes should be enough.

12. After saying the prayer, the Christian will genuflect as a sign of reverence for God, who must be present in his mind throughout. Then, going to where he intends to pray, he will put himself in the attitude he has decided to adopt and begin.

13. The best attitude, normally, is on one's knees, as Fr Surin teaches. But if this position (which one must try to get used to) proves too uncomfortable or harmful to the health, it is best to look for one that is more conducive to ease and calm of spirit, as St Philip [Neri] teaches, saying that to pray well it is helpful if the bodily posture is comfortable (BACCI, *Vita di S. Filippo*). All the same, to suffer some little bodily discomfort (as long as this does not disturb the mind) makes the prayer more meritorious and helps to detach the soul from the senses.

14. Once the Christian is in the chosen place and the preferred attitude, the preludes begin. These are: (1) recalling briefly the previous meditation (when the meditations are linked together or form a series); (2) making the “construction of place”, if the material for meditation is historical or is connected with history. This is done by using the imagination, representing to oneself the scene where the event took place, together with the circumstances – e.g. Jerusalem, Calvary, the Sanhedrin, the Jews, the crowd etc. But if the material of the meditation is simply reflective, one may for example consider this life as an exile, and oneself as a pilgrim far from his goal, his home in God; (3) an ejaculatory prayer, in which one asks for the particular grace and effect which one hopes to obtain from the meditation; or it could be a defect which one wishes to discern in oneself and eradicate, or a virtue which one wants to acquire.

NOTE 1: If the meditations are not linked together or aimed at the same effect, the first prelude may be omitted.

NOTE 2: These preludes were taught by St Ignatius, and are effective in restraining as far as possible the impatience and volatility of the imagination which, more than any other bodily faculty, tends to disturb whoever tries to meditate. They enable the mind to penetrate more easily into the various parts of the subject.

15. These preludes should be short and clear, and generally they should not take more than two or three minutes. But everything should be done calmly and without anxiety.

16. If anyone lacks imagination and finds the “construction of place” difficult, he should not make over-strenuous efforts. This can be harmful, and make the mind dull rather than lively and alert. It would be better to omit entirely that prelude.

II

Exercise of the memory

17. The meditation begins effortlessly with the use of the memory, by mentally glancing over the chosen material, as if one were an onlooker.

18. The exercise of the memory helps the soul not to become immersed too soon in the depths of the meditation. It is well to keep the spirit in a peaceful state for a while, so that it does not get tired at once and so be unable to last the course.

19. Again, the exercise of the memory should not last too long, but be as clear and precise as possible, so that the mind may find the way prepared. Should this part of the meditation cause the affections to rise, they should not be suppressed but rather held in check.

If the soul goes on in an ordered fashion, without wandering or falling into dryness, it should be left to take its own gentle course, without taking thought for any method. But if difficulties or confusion arise, the mind needs to be subjected to the method we are laying down. This will be useful for anyone to learn, so as to be able to practise it when necessary.

III

Exercise of the intellect

20. Once the way has been prepared by the exercise of the memory, it is time for the intellect to enter into the meditation. This can come about as described as follows.

NOTE: The aim of the method we are describing is the purification of the soul from defects, and its sanctification. This begins with the exercise of the intellect, and finishes with the exercise of the will.

21. There are six stages: (1) We have to try, through *contemplating* and *reasoning*, to discover what eternal truths are contained in the matter put forward in the meditation; (2) we then weigh their infinite importance; (3) we reflect on the state of our soul, looking carefully at the sins and imperfections that are opposed to these truths, and do so with a quite impartial judgement; (4) we find out what are the *roots* and *causes* of them; (5) we look for effective *means* of getting rid of these, with God's help; (6) we firmly *purpose* to detest these causes of our failings and to set about using the means we judged suitable to rid ourselves of them entirely.

22. The process of the mid in meditation may be compared to that of the farmer. He starts from the general proposition: «If I do not cultivate my field, I shall have nothing to eat» He then applies this general truth and concludes: «Therefore I must exert myself and work at my field». He then turns to what in particular he needs to do: «At such and such a time I must plough, and at another sow, etc.». These are the means which follow from the resolution.

23. The fruit of the meditation depends to a great extent on purposing not simply to amend our faults in general, but rather to discover and fix our sights on our own particular defects, and on suitable means of overcoming them.

24. Anyone who finds difficulty over the second action proposed for the intellect – the weighing of the importance of the moral truths contained in the meditation – will find things made easier if he looks one by one at: (1) the *necessity*; (2) the *usefulness*; (3) the *fittingness*; (4) the *worth*; (5) the *sweetness* of these truths; (6) the *ease* with which they can be practised; (7) the *harm* that results from not living according to them, and the great *benefits* that come of practising them.

25. If after we have pondered on one of the eternal truths and realized what in our own lives is opposed to it, we still have diffi-

culty in making a firm *resolution*, we shall be helped in our weakness by these considerations: (1) what advice would we give to a friend who asked us for guidance over this matter? (2) what will we wish we had decided to do over this when the moment comes for us to face God's judgment at the gates of eternity? (3) since we do not wish to be ungrateful for the endless benefits that God has given us, what return do we owe him? (4) what is required of us when we remember the greatness of the reward we look forward to, the increase in our favour with God, the example left us by Christ? And so on.

26. The main faults we can fall into during the exercise of the intellect are:

- (1) *A lack of simplicity in the development of our meditation*, and hence anxiety and disturbance of mind. These feelings arise either from fear that there may not be enough time to go over the proposed subject; or because we are afraid of passing too quickly from one point to another; or lastly through making too great an effort, forcing our thoughts. We can avoid these faults if we (a) do not concern ourselves with the outcome of the meditation, but relax in freedom of mind, not worrying whether there will be enough time or whether we may run out of material; (b) we do not make excessive efforts, but go forward gently, and simply contemplate, if we find it difficult to reason over our subject. We must guard against spending all or most of the hour on the exercise of the intellect, for we should devote a considerable part of it to the exercise of the will, which is the most important and fruitful part of the meditation. So we must take care not to waste in useless, abstract or distracting reflections. Rather we need to occupy our time in a spiritual way that will result in building up solid benefit for our souls – such too as will prepare us for the operation of the will and assist it to produce a real amendment in us and to purify us from our defects.
- (2) *A lack of simplicity in the arrangement of the meditation*. This will result in confusion during the exercise of the intellect. We can put order into our considerations by not trying to meditate

on many truths at the same time. It is better to select one, and make sure we draw profit from that. This profit does not depend on the number of truths, but on the intensity with which the mind enters into whatever truth we put before ourselves. Concentration on a single point is of more value than passing lightly over many.

27. Anyone who is able to enter sufficiently into the proposed truths in a short time can pass on to the exercise of the will, from which (as has been said) the most important fruit of the meditation can be gained.

28. The object of our meditation is to arrive at effective resolutions, and the point of the exercise of the intellect is that it can show us what these should be.

29. To this end: (1) we focus on our formal sins – that is, those which embody an essential defect. Once these have been rooted out, we can go on to tackle the defects which are external and material. And by the same token we need free ourselves from our sinful ways before we undertake non-essential works; (2) we look at our habitual and daily failings before giving thought to those which are accidental and relatively infrequent. We act in this way because we can be deceived by the mischievous subtleties of self-love into looking to the future rather than at our present state. In this way we may fail to examine the defects which mar our conduct here and now.

In short, the axe must be applied to our immediate faults – those which are more urgent and essential.

30. From these fundamental considerations, which guide us to make our resolutions so that we are not vainly beating the air, we can clearly see the mistake made by people who (1) form great plans to convert souls, preach the gospel to heathens, reform the whole world, and so on, without taking care first to get rid of the defects of their own souls. Such people, distracted by these grandiose ideas

(which are usually the outcome of a secret pride) refuse to humble themselves in order to get to know and root out from their souls their most obstinate defects, such as impatience, lack of mortification, bitterness, pride, inconsiderate behaviour and so on. Their fault lies in mistaking the proper order of things: they overlook what is most necessary and concern themselves with non-essentials; they forget that the rooting out of vices must come before the cultivation of virtues; and instead of looking to their own amendment, turn their thoughts to the amendment of others; (2) although they do examine their own faults, they look no further than the ones which are merely material and external, instead of attacking chiefly those which are spiritual and internal – those which are essentially evil, and which corrupt their souls.

He defects in this category include anything which offends against truth or against charity, any injustice towards other people, any lack of humility before God or failure to give him his due. So it is a false and topsy-turvy proceeding if anyone, before looking into his own failings in these essential matters of morality, pays careful attention only to his faults against the positive commands of the Church, his fasts, how many vocal prayers he recites, how exactly he pronounces them, whether he is faithful to the timetable he has laid down for himself, and so on. Certainly these things should be well regulated; but not at the expense of the things which should have precedence, because they are far more important. Again it would be a fault against the advice given in No. 29 if anyone, instead of working to overcome his daily defects, were merely to make vague efforts against possible and remote shortcomings.

IV

Exercise of the will

31. The exercise of the *will* consist in actually making, and strengthening, with the help of the *affections* and prayers for the divine *grace*, the *resolution* which the intellect formed.

32. St Ignatius teaches that the exercise of the will calls for more reverence than that of the intellect, since in it holy affections are aroused in us, and through these we converse more intimately with God. Since this is the case, St Ignatius advises those who cannot spend the whole of the hour's meditation on their knees a least to kneel during the exercise of the will, and to stand or sit for the rest of the time.

33. The exercise of the will consists in: (1) an act of deep humility, in which we recall the sins we have discovered in ourselves, feel shame, and humble ourselves before God and his saints, recognizing our wretchedness; and at the same time (2) an act of *contrition*. (3) Next we at once make the *resolution* which we have previously formed with the intellect, seeing it as best suited to our individual needs.

34. If our resolution is related not to a non-essential work or some pious custom useful for our spiritual progress, though not absolutely necessary, but rather to some *formal* sin of ours, however small or great, then we have to use every possible effort to make our resolution effective, since it is vital to the purification of our soul.

35. To give greater force to this resolution we can (1) think of it as made in the presence of the whole heavenly court, before the throne of God's majesty, picturing before our eyes heaven, the angels and saints, and the golden altar which the Apocalypse describes as being next to the throne of God⁵, and seeing ourselves placing on the altar our written resolution. (2) We can also consider that the angels and saints are witnesses of the resolution we are making, and that on the Day of Judgement they will testify for or against us, according as our resolution was sincere or feigned. At the same time we shall pray to the saints in heaven, especially the ones the Church honours and prays to on that day, asking their intercession so that our resolution may be sincere, and that we may be faithful to it. (3)

5. Rev 8:3.

We can offer to God as a pledge of what we are promising: our health, our honour, our life, our bodily senses and so on, begging him to take these things away from us rather than allow us to fail in our resolution; and if we should so fail, to punish us by depriving us of these things rather than condemn us to eternal punishment; and lastly asking him to add to our temporal punishment the grace of perfect amendment. (4) We should reflect that we ought to keep our resolution especially because our Saviour shed his blood for us; and to reinforce this thought we can imagine that we offer to God a written record of our resolution sealed with his precious blood, so that it may be placed in the wound of his divine side as in an ark. And preserved there until it is taken out on the day of judgement. (5) Lastly, it will help if we set ourselves some penance or mortification, to be performed every time we fail to keep our resolution. There is no need to use every one of these considerations in each meditation: we can draw on them more or less, according to the importance of the subject and the difficulty we have in overcoming ourselves.

36. Should our resolution be concerned not with something essentially sinful but only with some shortcoming in our way of life, or something less than essential and not covered by any specific commandment, then the resolution can be confirmed simply by an act of profound humility on account of our inconstancy, together with prayer to God that he may make us more diligent in carrying out what we have resolved on, if he considers this useful to us for attaining our end.

37. We follow the making of the resolution with an act of *diffidence* in ourselves and fear over our inconstancy, confessing freely both to God and to ourselves our weakness and ineffectiveness, as well as our inability to keep our promises unless aided by God's merciful goodness.

38. We then raise ourselves up from feelings of self-doubt, fear or discouragement by making an act of complete *confidence* in God

and in his all-powerful grace, asking him most earnestly for this grace.

39. This divine grace, the one solid foundation of our hopes, we can ask (1) from the eternal Father through Christ; (2) from the Son of God himself; (3) from the Holy Spirit, through his love for us; (4) from our Saviour through the merits of his blood, his wounds and his death; (5) from the Blessed Virgin and the saints the Church celebrates on that day. It will help to arouse our devotion if we imagine ourselves as appearing before God, Christ and the saints in the person of a wretched beggar who shows rich people his misery, his nakedness and his wounds. We do this not to move the heavenly spirits to compassion, but rather to move ourselves to fervent prayer to them for the help we are in need of.

40. We pray with great confidence, asking for the divine grace which alone can make our resolution effective, and after that we break out into an act of ardent *love of God*.

41. This act may be made (1) by choosing God rather than the selfish pleasure we purpose to abandon, or any bad habit we are now resolved to overcome; (2) by rejoicing in the infinite glory of God, both internal and external, and having a keen desire to contribute to that external glory by our own sanctification and the keeping of our resolution; (3) by grieving over the many occasions when we have failed to give proper esteem to God's infinite beauty, and over our tardiness in coming to know it. Also by begging all the saints and the Seraphim to offer their love to God together with our own, so that the sum total of this love may have the power to render our resolution effective.

42. This act of love should give rise to the *intimate, quiet union* of the soul with her celestial Spouse – a union which will be all the more intense the more we harness all our powers to the making of it.

43. We must direct our *memory* to our heavenly Spouse, emptying it of every idea other than him, bending the whole of our attention on him alone, as if (in the words of St Theresa) nothing existed but our own soul and God. So too we direct our *mind* to him, emptying it of all human thoughts, and attending solely to our Spouse and his voice. Again, we direct our *will* to him, emptying it of every human desire that it may be entirely absorbed in the love of that one beloved of ours, loving him absolutely and solely, and seeing all other things only in relation to him. St Ignatius also recommends that we *imagine* we are using our five senses in relation to our Spouse; we *taste* the sweetness of his words as our spiritual food; we *hear* his gentle voice; we *savour* his perfume; we *feel* the happiness of his chaste embrace. In these ways all our powers are employed in contemplating the beloved ... distinguished *among ten thousand*⁶, and we can say: «*It is no longer I that live, but it is Christ who lives in me*»⁷.

44. During this quiet, intimate union with the heavenly Spouse the soul can hear or reply, according as she experiences greater calmness and more devout affection in the one or the other, and can also enter into familiar colloquy with him. Giving vent to her feelings in which she needs light and help, either for herself or for others.

45. It will be found useful to keep the soul in perfect quiet and peace during this union for a time, without doing anything in particular, but simply attending with ears of the heart to what the beloved may say, and listening with reverence to his divine voice. In this peaceful state she can then say with Samuel, «*Speak Lord, for your servant is listening*»⁸; or again, «Show me what is displeasing to thee in me, what affection, what sin; dispel my blindness and give me the grace to sacrifice everything to thee».

6. Song 5:10.

7. Gal 2:20.

8. 1Sam 3:10.

46. Whether in the choice of a state of life, or in carrying out the duties of a chosen state, Christian perfection consists in conforming ourselves entirely, in thought, word and action, to the will of God. But our natural inclinations go against this perfect conformity. So, the Christian who aims at carrying out his duties perfectly has *need of strength of soul* to overcome the repugnance of nature to the perfect carrying out of the divine will. To obtain this strength, he must prepare his soul to fight against this reluctance; and this can be best done during the intimate union with the divine Spouse. So, with this in mind, the following acts can be made during the union: (1) we should make an act of interior resignation and indifference towards all that God may have destined for us. By this we prepare ourselves to receive from the hand of God every adversity that may arise; and here we may foresee such events as are likely to wound our senses and our self-love: pain, sickness, humiliation, persecution, contempt, calumnies, troubles, difficult tasks, occupations that we find disagreeable, change of way of life, change of fortune, of house, of country, and so on⁹. (2) we offer to God in spirit the sacrifice of everything most dear to us in the world; we detach our affection from everything earthly, and especially from whatever we know we are most attached to – that opinion, that source of comfort, that post, that place, that person, that rank or dignity – whatever it may be.

47. These colloquies may be varied by making them sometimes with God our Father, at other times with the Blessed Trinity, or with Jesus Christ, or with the Blessed Virgin, or our guardian angel, or the saints in heaven, according to the nature of the material of our meditation and our own disposition. Then we end by saying the “Our Father”.

9. The Italian text adds this quotation (taken from the Latin version of the original): «The sudden disasters arising from unexpected happenings usually cause consternation in people’s minds; and once the mind is disturbed, even a slight misfortune can overcome it. So, a man of fortitude should keep a look-out (as it were from the watchtower of his mind) for the future events, and prepare himself by foresight and reflection, so that misfortune does not catch him unawares and overwhelm him». (ST BASIL, *Const. mon.*, chapter III).

V

The examination to be made after meditation

48. After our meditation, as St Ignatius advises, we should carefully examine what faults we committed during it.

49. We should examine: (1) whether we applied ourselves to the meditation with *reverence* and *fervour*; (2) whether we spent the *whole of the time* fixed for it; (3) whether we lessened the spontaneous affections of our heart through paying too scrupulous attention to following a set method; (4) whether we deviated from the method not through an inspiration of the Holy Spirit or a spontaneous impulse of the heart (which would be praiseworthy), but through negligence, luke-warmness or carelessness in learning it (which would be a defect); (5) whether we used the meditation in a sincere effort to get to know and to overcome our particular sins and defects, the ones which we fall into most frequently and which need most attention; (6) lastly, whether we have corrected the faults we habitually fall into during meditation, or whether we have committed the same faults yet again.

50. If the purpose of the meditation is to choose a state of life, or if it is made during a retreat it will be helpful to spend a quarter of an hour over this examination; but in daily meditation less time will suffice, provided that we have already made progress in prayer and have overcome our chief defects.

51. Once we have discovered what faults we have committed during our meditation, we should take good note of them so as to avoid them in the future.

Instruction IX

On examination of conscience

1. The *general examination* of conscience aims to discover all the sins and defects of which we are guilty and to ascertain the moral state of our soul.

2. This *general examination* may cover our whole life, as when we make a general confession; or it may be limited to a part of our life, as in the case of a yearly or half yearly confession, or of our ordinary confessions; or lastly when we make our daily examination to see how we have passed the day.

3. The *particular examination*, on the other hand, has for its object a single sin or defect which we want to overcome, or a particular virtue that we want to acquire.

4. The *particular examination* should be regarded as a purely practical exercise which helps to put into effect the resolutions made in the general examination. It is, then, a kind of instrument or practical means serving to give effect to the general examination, so that the resolutions made in it are reduced to practice. We shall speak first of things which are helpful equally to either examination, and afterwards treat of each separately.

I.

Observations on examination of conscience whether particular or general

5. What spiritual profit we draw from examination of conscience, meditation or any other spiritual exercise depends on the *good will* and *uprightness of intention* with which we approach them.

The peace which Jesus Christ brought to earth was announced only to «*men of good will*»¹⁰. This good will consists in a sincere and heat felt desire for justice; and when God sees this in a soul, it is the beginning of all spiritual profit and of all speedy progress in virtue. Since the desire for justice is itself a gift from God, we have to ask it of him without ceasing if we feel that we do not already possess it. If anyone were to make an examination of conscience – however punctiliously – merely out of habit or custom, or worse, merely to quiet remorse by performing it, and not with the aim of overcoming in himself *all injustice*, it would be of no avail for him. So, the justice we desire should be the sole aim of the examination.

6. What then is to be done during the examination? We have to try to attain a clear knowledge of ourselves and especially of our sins and the means of overcoming them.

7. So that *the knowledge of our sins* may be of service to us, we need to (1) get to know the number and the nature of the sins we have committed; (2) assess in the sight of God their malice, so that we may feel all their vileness, which can be fully grasped only in the light of the knowledge of God and his goodness to us; (3) see what degree of attachment we have to sin and consider how this causes spiritual blindness in us.

8. This *spiritual blindness* which results from sin is apt to escape our notice, since it obscures our vision and prevents us from realizing our vices and defects; it leads us to make false judgements about our true state, so that we justify to ourselves what we ought to condemn, and even at times turn into virtues and merit the actions which in reality are vices and faults. We must all fear this spiritual blindness, since it is most difficult to be entirely exempt from it, and even those who have already attained a high degree of perfection can scarcely escape its influence. It follows that fear of such blindness, or

10. Lk 2:10.

at least of a dimming of our spiritual vision, should motivate us: (1) to work out our salvation always with fear and trembling; (2) to be convinced that our examination of conscience can never bring us a sufficient knowledge of ourselves; (3) to make ever greater efforts to become impartial in recognizing and judging our faults, as if we were dealing with those of someone else; (4) to pray without ceasing to God, asking him to purify us from our hidden sins; (5) to put all our trust and hope of salvation in God alone – never in ourselves or in any means we use.

9. In order to know the *means of avoiding sin*, we must search out and discern well: (1) which among our sins are the causes of other sins, and which are rather effects; (2) what internal urges cause us first to incline to and then fall into sin; (3) what are our sinful habits; (4) what occasions weaken our good intention and cause us to sin; (5) what means would be most suitable to help us to fight against the enemies we have come to recognize. These means should be such as to: (1) root out especially the sins that are the causes of other sins; (2) counter the internal urgings which lead us to fall into sin; (3) oppose our sinful habits; (4) enable us to avoid the occasions that have led us into sin.

10. We need to consider well that when we are dealing with our inclinations and sinful affections, the obscuring of our spiritual vision that these cause makes it difficult to persuade ourselves of the need to adopt certain means which would be most valuable in overcoming our sins, but which on that very account we are afraid of, and feel a great disinclination to adopt. And, so we refuse to look steadily at them. This danger is a most insidious one, which at times can put in doubt the salvation of our souls, and often impedes our progress in the way of perfection, rendering our efforts useless. There is no better remedy against it than to be entirely candid and open with those who direct our soul. When we do this, even to a scruple, they will be able to discern what we fail to see, and so be in a position to help us.

II. The general examination

11. According to St Ignatius, there are five points to be considered in our daily general examination: (1) we thank God for all the benefits we have received; (2) we earnestly ask him for the grace to know and overcome all our sins; (3) we go over our day, hour by hour, from the time we got up; first examining our thoughts, then our words, and lastly our actions; (4) we ask pardon for the faults we have committed; (5) we make a purpose of amendment, in the way described above in the instruction on meditation.

12. It is well to begin with thanksgiving and a recognition of the blessings we have received, so as to move ourselves too feel remorse over the shameful way we have repaid God through our infidelities.

13. If the general examination takes in a longer period than one day, the same series of acts is to be used – not now considering our actions from hour to hour (which would be impossible), but taking one period at a time successively.

14. When we are examining ourselves, it is very useful to follow these rules: (1) to avoid the excessive rigorism or false humility which would lead us to find sins where there were in fact none; (2) not to suppose that we can always have a certain knowledge of our sins, or of their seriousness, but rather to remain calm in our uncertainty, seeing it as a sign of our ignorance, and as a good reason for humility and trust in God; (3) to ensure that our repentance is deep and sincere; and it will be the more *sincere*, the more we contemplate our sins by the light of the intellect, and the more *profound*, the greater our feelings of detestation for sin. This part of our examination is the most important, and we should devote to it the greater part of the time.

15. The *general* examination should direct how the *particular* examination is to be spent. That is, during the general examination we need to discover what is our “ruling passion”, or the main cause of our sins; and accordingly make this the material of our particular examination. Once we have got rid of one particular fault, we make another one the subject of our particular examination; and after we have mastered our faults we go on to consider the opposite virtues, beginning with the one we most lack and need to acquire.

III

The particular examination

16. The particular examination may be made twice a day, about midday and before going to bed.

17. It is our custom in the evening to join the particular examination with the general – in this way: after we have gone over the first three points of the general examination, and we have looked over the sins in general that we have committed during the day, we begin to make the particular examination of the period since the previous one (i.e. from midday onwards); the fourth and fifth points are common to both examinations, though we must ensure that our repentance and purpose of amendment, after being directed to our faults in general, are focussed on the particular one we have in mind to overcome.

18. St. Ignatius teaches that in order to make the particular examination well, (1) on waking in the morning we should resolve to keep a careful watch over ourselves concerning the specific defect that we are trying to get rid of; (2) when we make our midday examination, we should resolve afresh to be most diligent over mastering this fault for the rest of the day; (3) should we fall into this fault, we must each time strike our breast and immediately make an act of contrition (which can be done without attracting notice); (4) in the

morning and evening, after each examination, we should note how often we have fallen, and at night compare the counts, comparing also one day with another, one week with another, and so find out what progress we have made in amending this fault. If we find that we have had some success, we must thank God for it; if we have not, we must not lose heart but must look into the causes, making more fervent resolutions and asking God with greater importunity to give us the victory over ourselves. We should also impose on ourselves, or ask our confessor to impose on us, some penance each time we have failed.

19 It is not good to plan to change too often the material of our particular examination; but still we can for a time substitute another fault, if this helps to relieve the tedium that an over-long dwelling on one subject might cause. But after this, we must return to the first subject with greater courage and fervour. All this should be done with great gentleness of spirit and with much serenity and calmness as possible.

Lesson X

On the order of our petitions to God according to the spirit of the Institute of Charity.

*«One thing I have asked of the Lord;
this will I seek: that I may dwell
in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life».*
Psalm 27;4.

Chapter I.

Of the most necessary, and best of all petitions.

1. The end of this Society is simply one: to fulfil justice in the most perfect way possible, and, by so doing, to obtain the salvation and perfection of our souls.

NOTE. Justice, which gives salvation and perfection to the soul, consists in CHARITY, – that is, in having God as the one sole object of our affections. And the more perfect is this charity, the greater also is man's perfection. Charity unites man to God; and is a beginning of the possession of God in this life which is completed in the life to come, where the entire and perfect possession of God forms the happiness of the blessed.

Both *justice* and *happiness* may be said to be the end of man: but justice is the end which man ought to propose to himself; happiness is the end which God had before Him when He created man. By his nature man essentially desires happiness. For that very reason, happiness is not a duty; it is not, considered in itself, the end which the *will* of man is *bound* to propose to itself; but it is the end which man *may* have, and which he cannot help having in view.

If, however, in the happiness to which man is destined, we consider what is just, then even happiness is an end which man *ought* to propose to himself: that is to say, he ought to desire to be happy,

through a love of justice; he ought to love happiness, considered as an *effect of justice*, and therefore as something that God wills. For God wills the happiness of the just man, and it is most just that the good man should be happy. Indeed, the principal reason why even the blessed in heaven will enjoy their happiness, is because they will see that it is just; so that, even in their happiness, they will love justice beyond measure, and, for and in that happiness, they will praise the most just will of God. For the same reason, the very pains of the reprobate will increase the happiness of the saints, because they will love the justice which inflicts those pains. Justice therefore is always the ultimate end, or final reason, for loving rightly anything whatsoever.

2. It follows that the chief and *essential* prayer for the members of the Institute of Charity is to ask unceasingly for the salvation and perfection of their own souls, and that they may become ever more just and more holy. Although this truth is very evident of itself, it is still useful to support it by good reasons, – of which the following are the seven main ones.

3. *First reason.* Our brethren ought thoroughly to understand this great truth, that in the justice and sanctity of his soul each one possesses every good; for in this way he possesses God, the infinite good, beyond which no desire can go; nor can any desire of a created being ever exhaust this good which is the essence of good, and which therefore, as we have said, is every good. If we have faith, and believe in Jesus Christ, can we consider any good to be wanting to him who possesses justice and who cares for nothing else? No, for of all things worth desiring, nothing can ever be wanting to him, for Jesus Christ has said: «*Strive first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well*»¹¹. And St. Paul says, more generally: «*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God ... What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold His*

11. Mat 6:33.

own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will he not with Him also give us everything else?»¹².

NOTE: To one who does not thoroughly understand this doctrine, the following objection may occur: «If I think only of my own sanctification, will this not be selfishness? And is not the salvation of others as precious as my own?»

To the *second* question, whether the salvation of others is not as precious as our own, I answer: the salvation of others is certainly for them as precious and as necessary, as my salvation is for me. But, just as it would not profit them anything if I were saved and they were lost, so it would profit me nothing if they were saved and I were lost: for man has nothing to give in exchange for his soul if he has lost it, according to the words of Christ: “*For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?*” (Matt. 16, 26). He cannot redeem his soul, therefore, with the souls of his brethren who are saved.

As to the *first* question - whether our doctrine does not savour of selfishness - I answer: this doubt arises only from the doctrine not being understood. For we must note well that the eagerness which people have for worldly things and eagerness for justice are in their nature different, and even contrary to one another. The first is certainly a cause and an effect of selfishness, because in our eagerness for the things of this world we deprive others of them. But the eagerness for justice is nothing less than a most ardent desire to give everyone his due, - of being kind to all, generous to all, and of doing good to all without ceasing. So our own justice implies in itself a universal charity; and in praying that God may make us perfectly just, we implicitly pray for all others without exception: for we pray that God may make us perfect in regard to all; and that He may lead us to do all the good that is according to His Divine pleasure, by co-operating in His infinite love for the world.

4. *Second reason.* If we are not content with this good, of being made perfectly just, it can only be that we lack faith and have only a defective understanding of so great a good. Because, as we have just

12. Rom 8:28; 31-32.

shown, our own justice includes both every good for ourselves and a universal charity towards others. So if we know what justice is and how perfect a good it is, yet still are not content with this, we show an extreme weakness, meanness, and wilful blindness of soul, loving the mere appearance of good rather than good itself.

5. *Third reason.* It is clearly an act of perfect virtue – disinterested and most generous – if we devote ourselves entirely to the great purpose of reaching the highest possible degree of justice, dismissing all other ambitions and resigning ourselves (as far as concerns the good or evil we may meet with) into the holy hands of God, so that He may do for us and with us all that He pleases. Our divine Master, Jesus Christ, says: «*It is more blessed to give than to receive*»¹³: that is, to merit is a more noble act than to enjoy. So Jesus Himself invites us to be more eager for justice than for the happiness which is its reward. Accordingly, He asked His Father to give His Apostles not heaven but innocence of life: «*I am not asking you to take them out of this world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one*»¹⁴. In these words, He asks only for them to be protected from evil; but this wish embraces all good, for when man is freed from evil, God, through His goodness which is essentially diffusive, fills him with every good.

6. *Fourth reason.* We know for certain that our justice or holiness is what God wills for us. Scripture tells us: «*For this is the will of God, your sanctification*»¹⁵; and again: «*Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and obey it*»¹⁶. And that this is the only thing which has for us an absolute and final value, we also gather from the words of Jesus to Martha: «*But one thing is necessary*»¹⁷. On the one hand, then, in this matter we know for certain the will of God, who gave us His

13. Acts 20:35.

14. John 17:15.

15. 1Thess. 4:3.

16. Lk 11:28.

17. Lk 10:42.

law for us to keep; but for the rest, the things that are *not* necessary, we do not know the divine will until God makes it known to us.

And here we must consider all that Scripture says in praise of the divine law and the word of God. Here is the proof of both the excellence and the necessity of the petition we are explaining.

7. *Fifth reason.* As this prayer asks for the one thing needful, over which the will of God is perfectly clear, so also it is the only petition that will certainly be granted. A sincere desire for justice can never fail of its effect, since of it Jesus said: «*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*»¹⁸. Therefore, in this petition we find peace, and an inward certainty that in making it we are pleasing God. But, if we ask for things that are not necessary, we may have reason to fear meeting the reproof contained in Christ's words: «*Until now you have not asked anything in my name*»¹⁹, or again: «*You do not know what you are asking*»²⁰.

8. *Sixth reason.* Another reason why this petition is so excellent is that in asking of God the end we desire, we leave ourselves in His hands as regards the means. By so acting, man gives himself up entirely to the Divine will, full of confidence in God's wisdom, power, and goodness; and in this way, he humbly gives up his own will and judgment, in effect saying to God: «*Lord, give me justice; the rest I leave to you. I know nothing; you alone know how to give me this justice; and I know that whatever means you choose will be the most suitable, and I will bless you for them. It is for you alone to decide on them, for I am ignorant of them, and I am indifferent to everything. It is enough for me if you grant me the end*».

9. *Seventh reason.* This kind of universal prayer is very often used by the Church. She uses it whenever she says the *Kyrie Eleison*, or

18. Mat 5:6.

19. John 16:24.

20. Mat 20:22.

«*Lord have mercy*», without adding more. She uses it in saying the *Hail Mary*, and generally in the Litanies: «*Pray for us*». So also in other universal prayers of this kind. In all of them the Church asks for nothing in particular, but leaves the means of our salvation to the will of God, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary as our intercessor. So too almost all the prayers in the Mass are of this kind – and especially the one which (with two others) is said before the communion of the Body of Christ: «*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, Who by the will of the Father, and the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, did through your death give life to the world; deliver me, by your most sacred Body and Blood, from all my iniquities and from all evils; and make me ever keep your commandments, and never allow me to be separated from you, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns God, world without end*». The same style and order is used in most of the Collects of the Church – as in that of the 18th Sunday after Pentecost: «*May the operation of your mercy direct our hearts, we beseech you, O Lord; for without you we are not able to please you*».

10. Now let us see what stands in the way of our seeing the great excellence of this kind of prayer, which is especially characteristic of the Institute of Charity, as of all disciples of Christ. The obstacle is usually a false zeal, together with a secret presumption. This leads a man to forget about himself (as if he had no great need of making progress in the spiritual life) and to busy himself only about the salvation of his neighbour. So, full of this concern, he leaves aside the grave and laborious task of discovering and overcoming his own defects, and deceives himself with the notion that the one important thing is to do good to others; and that this zeal will stand him in good stead for all other virtues. He then defends his mistake with the excuse that he is seeking the glory of God. This specious error misleads many clergy.

But what would it avail him if God were glorified and he himself were lost? Of what value to the lost souls is the glory which God has in heaven?

Moreover, has God any need of the glory that anyone wants to give Him against His will? I say “against His will”, because we know

that the will of God is our sanctification. We do not know, as a rule, to what extent and in what way God may wish to make use of our activities for the sanctification of our neighbour. To take charge of the souls of others, calls for some manifestation of the Divine will, a special mission, such as that of the Apostles, and through the Bishops, parish priests and their helpers.

Should a priest, or an ordinary Christian, have such a mission, or a certain sign of God's will, the care of souls becomes a duty for him, and so a part of his own sanctification. So, in the end, justice and the carrying out of the divine command is the only thing which, even in this case, he ought to seek and desire. It follows that the glory which we are able, and are bound to give to God, is only that of doing, with the help of God's grace, His adorable will in all things, and so carrying out His holy law – neither more nor less. Greater glory than this we are neither bound to give nor capable of giving to God our Creator.

Indeed, justice is a condition so necessary for the external glory we may give to God that, even if we were certain that by the slightest sin of ours we could convert everyone now in the world and bring about the salvation of all who are to come into it in the future, and even convert hell with all the demons, raising them to the highest level of sanctity, yet still we ought not to commit that sin. Nor would the pretext of promoting God's glory excuse us; for any glory which we could give to God by means of the smallest sin, it is not our duty to give – rather, we are bound not to give it. For the God of infinite holiness does not want it of us. I will go even further, and say that anyone who truly loves God would not consent to part with a single degree of his love for God, even if he knew that, as a result of this lessening of his love, God would receive unbounded acts of seraphic love from everyone in creation. This is because anyone who truly loves God would not consent to lessen that love in the slightest degree: he looks on every smallest spark of his love of God as an infinite, precious treasure, and indeed his only good. So, he would never consent to exchange this love for any good whatever. For his own part he wishes, cost what it may, to love God as much as he

possibly can, independently of what other creatures may do. His only good is his love of God; in this lies his perfection, his justice, and all that God wants of him.

Hence it is clear why pious frauds or lies uttered through a mistaken zeal, or any deviation from the pure and simple truth, or other offences against God committed under the pretext of saving souls, are abominable to right-minded men. To those who truly serve God, and in the eyes of God their Master, all such things are hateful; for, as the Apostle says, we are not «*to do evil so that good may come*»²¹.

11. So it remains certain that the chief and essential petition for members of the Institute of Charity is to ask that the justice of God may be imparted to them, while they abandon themselves into his hands as regards the means that he may use to communicate to them His holiness and justice.

12. In consequence it is easy to see that this comprehensive petition implies another most holy prayer, according to what follows. What we wish for is God's justice: so, if we pray for this, we must also ask for all that justice leads to; and this means that we ought to ask, in general, for all that is just.

13. This is why our Lord, in the prayer that he gave us²², taught us to ask, "*hallowed be Thy name*" – because it is *just* that it should be so; and again, "*Thy kingdom come*" – because it is *just* that it should come; and "*Thy will be done*" – again because it is *just* that it should be done. All this concerns what is just in regard to God. – For ourselves, in the same Lord's Prayer, we ask for our *supernatural bread* – which is, in fact, the Word of God made Man, especially as He is in the Blessed Sacrament; *for the forgiveness of our sins*; and for *deliverance from evil*, and *from temptation*. All this refers to justice with regard to ourselves.

21. See Rom 3:8.

22. See Mat 6:9-13.

14. So too there are many other excellent forms of prayer, especially those in which we ask for what is certainly just in general, or for our own justice. For example, when we pray that what God has predestined may come to pass, as Jesus did, in the words he addressed to his Father: *«I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those you gave me, because they are yours»*²³. Nothing better than this can be asked for, since it is most excellent and most just. Again, when we pray for the Church, asking that it may bring forth the greatest fruit, and give the greatest glory to God - this is certainly a holy prayer. So too when we ask for all good, in the order which the wisdom of God sees to be best; for all means of salvation that are pleasing to God; and for any other things that are certainly just, and contained in the will of God. In all these ways, we ask only for what is best, and we keep within the scope of the petition we are speaking of now.

Chapter II. Of other petitions.

15. The main petition of which we have spoken so far, which consists in asking, first, for justice for ourselves, and, second, for all that is just, is also the principle which settles what should be the order of all our other petitions.

We have to consider how the principle of justice, though one and undivided in itself, leads (when it is applied to particular circumstances) to various consequences which become so many rules of conduct for members of the Institute of Charity, for whom justice is the beginning and the end. These particular rules, which spring from the application of the principle of justice come under three heads: a) to fulfil exactly the duties that belong to our own state; b) in doing good, to follow the indications of Divine Providence or of the will of God as these are made clear to us through external cir-

23. John 17:9.

cumstances; c) to press on of our own accord and as vigorously as possible in whatever relates to the contemplative life or our union with God.

16. From these three general rules there derive three classes of petitions, ordered according to the spirit of the Institute:

1. Petitions in which what we ask for is determined by the duties arising from our state of life.
2. Petitions in which what we ask for is determined by such manifestations of God's will as happen to confront us.
3. Those spontaneous petitions in which we ask for whatever we choose, since we are free to do this.

We shall speak briefly about each of these classes.

I. What we ought to pray for by reason of our state of life.

17. The *first* thing we ought to ask of God, next to our own justice and all that is just, is the justice or sanctification of such souls as God may have entrusted to our care.

18. This special prayer is implicitly contained (as we have seen) in the general petition for our own justice, since if God has entrusted certain souls to us, it is our duty to pray for them, as this is the most effective means we have of helping them. It is for this reason the Church imposes on Bishops and parish priests the duty of offering Mass each Sunday for the people committed to their charge; and the Superior General of the Institute of Charity daily offers Mass for the souls of all its members, and the other Superiors offer their Mass on Sundays for those in their spiritual care. All this is in conformity with the example given to us by Christ who after the Last Supper, and before he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, prayed first for Himself. But since He already possessed all justice, He had only to ask of His Father the proper effect of justice, which is the glory due to it. Hence, He prayed: «*Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son*»²⁴.

24. John 17:1.

This glory, moreover, He asked for out of love for the glory of His Father; and so, by an act of generosity and justice, He directed His own glory to that of His Father, and after saying, «*Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son* – he added – *that Thy Son may glorify Thee*»²⁵. Next, after praying for Himself, He prayed for His Apostles, that is, for those who, of all who had been given Him by His Father, were nearest to Him: «*I am asking on their behalf*»²⁶; and He gives as the reason the fact that the Father had entrusted them to His care, as His own: «*Holy Father, protect in your name those you have given Me*»²⁷. And He asks for them only spiritual benefits; but these in the highest possible, infinite degree, saying, in the strongest and most expressive words that human language is capable of: «*So that they may be one, as We are one*»²⁸. And then, after praying for those who belonged to Him most closely, and who were nearest to Him in the spiritual order, He prayed also for those who belonged to Him less closely, saying: «*I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their word*»²⁹. This prayer is an example to Superiors to pray not only for those presently in their care but also for those who may be entrusted to them in the future, and indeed, remembering the union which exists between a part and the body, for the entire Church, as our Lord did when He expressed the sublime object of His prayer in these words: «*That they may all be one, as Thou, Father, are in Me, and I am in Thee; may they also be one in Us*»³⁰.

19. So each of us has a duty, after he has prayed for himself, to pray for the souls confided to his care; and it is justice that requires this. But in this prayer, he must follow the order of the will of God; and this order will be clarified by the following reflections.

25. John 17:1.

26. John 17:9.

27. John 17:11.

28. Ibid.

29. John 17:20.

30. John 17:21.

20. Each of us knows that the divine will is for him to be saved, to love God, and to be perfect as his Heavenly Father is perfect; and he knows too that his salvation is to be brought about by using his own will in cooperation with divine grace. But although he can save himself by his own will in this way, he cannot in the same way save his brethren, if their will does not consent. It follows that although a man can be sure of being heard as regards his own salvation, given his cooperation with divine grace, he does not know whether he will be heard when it comes to the salvation of others for whom he prays. So he has to pray for them conditionally, that is, submitting finally everything to God Who, being under no obligation to anyone, has from eternity gratuitously predestined some to everlasting glory, while foreknowing that others, through their own sins, will be lost. So we have to offer our prayers for others in conformity always with the eternal predestination of the elect, – praying only that the most perfect, most wise, most holy, and most just predestination of the elect may come about as from eternity it was determined and decreed by the God of infinite power and holiness; for there can be no greater good than that which from eternity was willed by our most holy God. So when we pray for our brethren, we pray that all the elect may fulfil their election in accordance with the good pleasure of our Heavenly Father. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us an example of this conformity to the divine will (which is the rule of all goodness) when He said: *«I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those you gave me, because they are yours»*³¹. That is: «I pray for those whom you have destined to eternal salvation, in giving them for this reason to Me; I pray for them, not so much because they are mine but because according to your good pleasure they are yours. I pray for them because of the infinite love I have for you».

NOTE: As for those prayers of the Church which we are all bound to say, we must say them according to the mind and intention of the Church; and we must ask for everything contained in those prayers, and always in due order. Our duty obliges us to do this. It will be well, though, to bear in mind the order which we have set down

31. John 17:9

here, of which the two main rules are:

I. In praying for others, we must first intend to pray for their eternal salvation, according to the command: «*In everything, do to others as you would like them do to you*» (Mat. 7:12); and again: «*For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world, but forfeit their own life*» (Mat. 16:26.). So, when we ask for temporal things, we always ask for them conditionally – that is, provided that they will be good for the soul of the person concerned.

II. In praying for particular souls, we must intend implicitly to pray for the good of the whole body of the Church, to the end that the vineyard of Christ may bring forth the greatest possible fruit, and that each soul may make the greatest possible return to the Master of the vineyard; for in this consists the glory of the Heavenly Father, which our Lord Jesus Christ ever seeks. «*My Father is gloried by this, that you bear much fruit, and become My disciples*» (John 15:8). So also in the parable of the Vine, our Lord says: «*Every branch that bear fruit, He (my heavenly Father) prunes to make it bear more fruit*» (John 15:2).

21. In the *second* place, every one ought to pray that whatever task he has been given in connection with his state of life may be blessed by God, so that it may (I) be profitable for his own salvation, (II) promote the glory of God, and (III) benefit the souls of others. To this end he needs to ask for light and strength to carry out his task perfectly; and he must pray that, whatever happens to him, he may be protected by the divine goodness.

The reasoning behind the three ends enumerated above is this: the spiritual order of things is always to be preferred to the corporal or visible order. Nothing in this world is of permanent value unless it is a means tending to the salvation of our own soul or the souls of others or to the glory of God. So, whatever we ask for, even in connection with the position we hold, must be asked for conditionally; that is, if and in so far as it may increase our holiness, and may give greater glory to God, and contribute the more to the salvation of others.

22. In the *third* place, everyone, to the extent that he is subject to others, should pray for those who are placed over him. First, for

the Sovereign Pontiff and for all who govern the Church; and then for the head of the State, and for the members of the government, because of the very great influence which even a temporal sovereign or government may have for the good of the Church, if through divine light and inspiration they are faithful servants of God in their charge over their people. After these, he should pray for his own Superiors, ecclesiastical and civil; and for all those upon whom depends the salvation of his soul or the welfare of the society or body to which he belongs, so that God may bring everyone to do what will lead to this great end.

23. In the *fourth* place, the obligations of the natural law, and so of justice, require each of us to pray for all his benefactors, living and dead, in proportion to the benefits he has received from them.

24. Among our benefactors we should before all pray for our parents, from whom we received our existence, which necessarily precedes every other kind of good, spiritual and temporal; then for those from whom we have received spiritual benefits; and, lastly, we should pray for those who have conferred temporal benefits on us.

We will now consider what we should ask of God according to the indications of external circumstances.

II. What we ought to ask of God according to external circumstances.

25. As regards our duty of praying for others, the external circumstances which decide for whom we should pray are two: the *spiritual* bond which unites us to them, and the *natural*.

26. The *spiritual bond*. We ought first to pray for those who are actually praying with us; for by that very fact they are joined to us in the closest possible spiritual union, and before God we are one heart and one soul, and our prayer rises to the throne of God like the single voice of one body. It is in this way that the priest prays many

times in the course of the Mass, as at the Offertory, when he says: «*Receive, O holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this host without spot, which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer to Thee, my living and true God, for my innumerable sins, offences and negligence*» – by these words he prays for himself, asking for justice; «*and for all here present*» – that is, for all those with whom he is praying; «*and also for all faithful Christians, living and dead*» – that is, for those with whom the spiritual bond is less close: «*that to me and to them it may be profitable for salvation unto life everlasting*». This prayer is throughout a prayer for justice, and for its everlasting reward.

27. Again we ought to feel moved to pray for others when they ask this of us. So, we must pray for those who commend themselves to our prayers, complying with their good and holy request and seeing it as an invitation of divine Providence to exercise charity towards them.

28. Besides the spiritual bond, there is, as we have said, a *natural bond* which, founded on reason, is sanctified by grace, and should lead us to pray. *Compassion* is the main basis of this bond.

Every feeling of compassion, like all other reasonable natural feelings, can be seen as an impulse of divine Providence inviting us to exercise of charity towards others, especially by praying for them. And in all this Christ left us an example. At the tomb of Lazarus, he wept, he prayed, he gave thanks – and he restored him to life. He acted similarly when he saw the widow of Nain desolate over the death of her son. So, this kind of tender compassion, of which our Lord gave so many examples, is entirely in accord with the spirit of the Institute of Charity: the prayer that arises from it is an expression of a genuine, holy charity which is most pleasing to God. Moreover, since our feelings of compassion are usually aroused by the sight of various temporal miseries, we should rightly see these occasions as moving us to pray for those who are afflicted, so that the afflictions which they suffer, even if these are not great, may be taken away from them. But the same cannot be said of prayer for things that are

superfluous: for as our Lord taught, we should not be greedy for such things.

29. Still, we may pray in general for all kinds of good, as a consequence of justice, and as willed by God. Indeed, when we pray for justice, we are in reality asking for all kinds of good.

III. What we may pray for of our own accord.

30. After the petitions dealt with above, any kind of prayer, as long as it is made, expressly or implicitly, in proper order, is a holy act, one belonging to that hidden life which we, as members of the Institute of Charity, have freely taken upon ourselves. We do not look only to the duties of our state and to external circumstances to provide a stimulus to prayer. It is simply that these indicate more clearly to us what should be the matter or subject of our prayers. So we will now look at the proper order of the things we may ask of God when we pray of our own accord, and when the matter of our prayer is not determined by the two principles mentioned above.

31. The twofold order laid down here covers most cases. But we should always be ready to yield to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, who «*breathes where He will*»³².

32. We shall never be mistaken in our prayers if we remain constant in asking for what is necessary and fundamental, whatever form our prayer takes, for example when we pray for the good of the universal Church. This form of prayer is certainly the best, if whoever uses it understands what is meant by praying for the Church: that is, if he intends to pray comprehensively for all the special ends of which we have treated, in the order described; and, therefore, means to include in the one prayer all possible prayers in due order. For he is a member of the Church: and so, in praying for the Church he

32. John 3:8.

prays also for himself, in the order and manner in which he should pray; and he prays also for others, in the order most conducive to the greater glory of God and the fulfilment of His will, which is always directed to the salvation of souls. This is why the Canon of the Mass begins with a universal prayer begging the heavenly Father, *“to accept the sacrifices which are offered, first for the Catholic Church, that He may vouchsafe to grant it peace, and preserve, unite, and govern it throughout the whole world, together with His Servant the Sovereign Pontiff; with the Bishop, and with all who profess the Catholic and Apostolic faith”*. And, we need to remember that even the prayer which we offer for ourselves in the words taught us by our Lord, is also a prayer for the whole Church; for we say, in the plural, *«Our Father»*: that is, *«Father of all of us who are of one body with Christ, Father of me and of all my brethren»*.

It is to this essential and fundamental prayer, as the highest and most sublime of all, that we ought most frequently to have recourse when our souls are spontaneously moved to pray.

