

Marian Meditations Part I



Marian Meditations

by
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Part I



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INDEX

Meditation 1: Mary in God's Mind	7
Meditation 2: Mary in the Old Testament	12
Meditation 3: Mary Immaculate — The Evidence . . .	16
Meditation 4: Mary Immaculate — The Mystery . . .	21
Meditation 5: Mary Immaculate — Her Greatness . . .	25
Meditation 6: Mary Immaculate — The Privilege . . .	28
Meditation 7: Mary Immaculate — Her Beauty . . .	33
Meditation 8: Mary Immaculate — Her Sanctity . . .	37
Meditation 9: Mary Immaculate — The Redemption	42
Meditation 10: The Nativity of Our Lady (1)	46
Meditation 11: The Nativity of Our Lady (2)	50
Meditation 12: The Nativity of Our Lady (3)	55
Meditation 13: The Name of Mary (1)	60
Meditation 14: The Name of Mary (2)	64
Meditation 15: The Presentation of Our Lady (1) . . .	69
Meditation 16: The Presentation of Our Lady (2) . . .	73
Meditation 17: The Presentation of Our Lady (3) . . .	78
Meditation 18: The Espousal of Our Lady	83
Meditation 19: The Annunciation — Our Lady at Prayer	87
Meditation 20: The Annunciation — Our Lady's Retirement	91

Meditation 21: The Annunciation — the Message of the Angel	95
Meditation 22: The Annunciation — The Hail Mary	99
Meditation 23: The Annunciation — Mary's Behaviour in Her Humility	104
Meditation 24: The Annunciation — Virginal Purity . . .	108
Meditation 25: The Annunciation — Handmaid of the Lord	113
Meditation 26: The Annunciation — The Mother of God	117
Meditation 27: The Annunciation — Marian Slavery	122
Meditation 28: The Annunciation — Feast of Mary . . .	126
Meditation 29: The Visitation of Our Blessed Lady . . .	131
Meditation 30: Our Lady's Visitation and Elizabeth . . .	136
Meditation 31: Our Lady's Visitation and the Baptist . . .	142
Meditation 32: The <i>Magnificat</i> (1)	148
Meditation 33: The <i>Magnificat</i> (2)	153
Meditation 34: The <i>Magnificat</i> (3)	158
Meditation 35: The <i>Magnificat</i> (4)	163
Meditation 36: The <i>Magnificat</i> (5)	168
Meditation 37: The <i>Magnificat</i> (6)	173
Meditation 38: The <i>Magnificat</i> (7)	177
Meditation 39: The Expectation of Christ's Birth	182
Meditation 40: On the Road to Bethlehem	187

Preface

“Every artist of genius has his masterpiece, the work in which he incarnated, so to speak, the best of himself. The supreme artist, God, has also His masterpiece, which in the words of the prophet: ‘He has revealed to men in the midst of the years.’ (Hab. 3:2) This masterpiece is not the universe, not the earth with its beauty, not the angels, not man who represents in himself, in a marvellous synthesis, all creatures.

The true masterpiece of God is Mary. In Her He has willed to reveal, more than in all works, His wisdom, goodness and power. In Her, as in a marvellous compendium, He has united whatever is most great and fair in the triple order of nature, grace and glory. In Mary alone is found whatever in any creature there is of goodness. In Her alone He incarnated Himself, for in Her His Word took flesh. In Mary only He has transfused, in a sense, His own incommunicable attributes. She, therefore, is the masterpiece divine.” (Fr. Gabriel Roschini, OSM, in “The Divine Masterpiece”)

In the first volume of his “Marian Meditations”, Father Idelfonso Villa, SDB makes us penetrate the in-

timacy of the most Blessed Trinity shaping Our Lady from all eternity and in time.

In the Old Testament, one holy woman prefigures Her ascendancy on the heart of God, another Her queenship and Her intercessory power in favour of Her own people.

“In the fullness of time”, God slowly unveils the mystery. Mary is made immaculate in the silent womb of Her mother. The angels worship their queen just born and promptly consecrated to the service of the Lord. The years of silent retreat in the Temple of Jerusalem prepare the Virgin Mary for Her chaste espousal with Joseph, “the just man”.

She is now ready to begin Her public mission. Made the Mother of God by the power of the Most High, Mary declares Herself “the handmaid of the Lord” and acts accordingly by discreetly yet efficiently helping Her aged cousin Elizabeth. She now longs to see the face of the Word Incarnate, Her divine Son.

Fr. Benoit Wailliez, SSPX

MEDITATION 1

Mary in God's Mind

1. The Idea of Mary in Eternity

All of us have existed from eternity in the mind of God. All of us were perfectly known to Him. He thought of you individually. Billions of years before you were born, the thought of you was in Him. He loved you already. Says St. John rightly, Let us love *God because He first loved us*. If this can be said of all, what should be said of Mary? She, much more and better than any other being, engaged God's mind. The eyes of God envisage Mary — Mary before all else — and all else in Her.

This is His first thought after that of His own essence. If, by an impossibility, God could forget everything and ignore us all even then He could not help seeing Mary in His mind, on account of Her close association with God, on account of the union that holds Her so closely to divinity. After the One He has of Himself, Mary is God's greatest idea.

2. The Idea of Mary in Creation

When a sculptor wants, through his masterpiece to give expression to his mental conceptions, first he tries in clay, and then only does he proceed with the actual carving of the statue. Now the whole of creation is just a practice or rehearsal that God has done till He came to shape Mary as the masterpiece of His hand. She is like the sum of the whole of creation.

The graces and beauty that have been distributed amongst other beings are accumulated in Mary. Thus, when God shaped His Mother, He seems to have derived the inspiration from all His previous creatures so as to make Her far superior to all. He took inspiration from the Seraphim in order to make Her burn with love, from the angels for Her purity, from the Patriarchs like Abraham for Her fortitude in faith, from Ruth for Her modesty, from Judith for Her courage. But when it was a question of shaping Her heart as Mother, He could draw inspiration from nothing. There is nothing that could compare with the heart of Our Lady. It was then necessary that God should look at His own heart in order to give Her a heart similar to His. She would love God and men just as God loves Himself and us.

The Church applies to Her those words of the Book of Proverbs which were originally intended for the Divine Wisdom:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with Water.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth.

While as yet he had not made the earth or the fields or the highest part of the dust of the world.

When he prepared the Heavens, I was there:

When he set a compass upon the face of the depth:

When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth.

Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.

That is why looking around everywhere in creation you should see Mary. The blue of the sky should

remind you of Her mantle. The stars, Her crown; the sun, Her shining without shadows or spot; the moon, Her placid beauty; the sea, the immensity of Her grace; the flowers, Her incomparable beauty. And so on. You can, as a true lover, see everywhere the image of Mary for She is the image of God...

3. The Idea of Mary in You

Now God expects your imitation also in this. He wants that His central idea should also be your central thought, the one that gives warmth and action to the life of your soul. She before any other creature was predestined to grace, to glory, to the incomparable dignity of God's Mother. But after Her we also have been predestined to the never failing grace and to the glory that awaits us if we correspond to it. Ours is the peerless dignity of being called, and indeed, of being, children of God and brothers of Christ. But this dignity is intimately linked to Mary. She is our Mother. She it is who will grant us the grace of being a child of God.

Therefore, all your dignity and glory must come from God but through Mary. Do you now realise why the Lord expects Her to be the ruling thought of your life? Is it so in reality? How do you achieve this wonderful divine plan? Do you earnestly endeavour that

Mary in God's Mind

Mary should be the central thought, the driving force that prompts all your actions? Do you act accordingly by thinking of Her always, seeing Her in everything, trying to copy Her and by dint of exercise being Her living and perfect picture?

Ask grace from God and help from Our Lady that henceforth you may do so. Let Her be your constant preoccupation, your constant thought.

Never do anything without Her, for such is the Will of God. Do not now spoil God's plan by self-love or any other passion. Let nothing block your way thus, to see, know and love your Mother.



MEDITATION 2

Mary in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is full of prophecies, symbols and figures, referring to the Messiah and His Mother. Let us briefly see some of them.

1. Prophecy

By prophecy we mean the foretelling of future events which are not known by natural reason. As only God can know the future with certainty, Prophecy is a mark of divinity.

a) The first prophecy about Our Lady was made by God Himself in the Garden. *A woman will crush thy head*, He tells the infernal serpent. Plumb the depth of these words. How good is God! He punishes, and at the same time, He forgives. The very instant He sentences us to death, He also promises a Messiah to free us, together with a woman who will crush the devil. How reassuring it is to know that the devil

will always be under the feet of Mary! What a sense of security is ours when we learn neither She nor Her children will ever be reached by Satan. Give thanks to God and your congratulations to man for the triumph and grace She brought. Draw the conclusion that the more closely your soul is linked to Mary, the tighter you will hold the devil under your feet. How enraged he must be to realise that it is a woman and through Her all mankind, that will always crush his head!

b) Let us also consider the prophecy of Isaiah that from the branch of Jesse would blossom a flower on which the Lord would rest... Elsewhere He announces Her virginity. *Behold a virgin will conceive and bring forth a son who will be called Emmanuel.* Here you have the two crowns of Our Blessed Lady: Her divine maternity and Her virginity.

c) In this manner, we could go through many other prophecies, for all the books, especially the Psalms of David and the Canticles of Solomon, contain splendid prophecies about Her: God multiplied these prophecies about Her just as He did with His Son.

2. Symbols

These are more numerous still. In the earthly paradise the Tree of Life signifies Our Blessed Lady,

who is the veritable paradise where Christ the real Tree of Life lived. Noah's Ark that was saved from the floods; the dove of the Ark which rather than alight on the mud of the earth, returns white and immaculate to the Ark with a green branch in its beak.

Jacob's ladder, that joins Heaven with earth. Aaron's rod which blossoms forth in the darkness of the Tabernacle only in the presence of God. The Ark of the Covenant, built with incorruptible timber and enclosing the great mysteries. The burning bush which, surrounded by the majesty of God, flamed with divine fire without being consumed. These and a thousand other symbols to be found in Holy Writ reveal the beauty, the dignity, the greatness the excellence of Mary. We could say that God has made use of everything available to call to the minds of men the thought of His Mother so that they should live in expectation of Her.

3. The Figures

The famous women of the Old Testament are likewise figures of Mary: Eve, the Mother of mankind — but for its perdition — whilst Mary is to be the real Mother for our salvation.

Abigail, who with her beauty charms David, represents Mary loving God Himself and being loved by Him. Jael, who pierces with a nail the head of Sisara, the enemy of the people of God represents Our Lady crushing the head of the devil.

Judith, when killing Holophernes and setting her people free from that tyrant, is an image of Mary through whom we are freed from Satan.

Esther, before the throne of the king, interceding for her people, depicts Our Lady who continuously prays and intercedes for us before the throne of God.

And so on. As the great figures of the Old Testament pass before us, we would find Mary in them. Be amazed at God's love for Mary. See Him so in love with Her that He continuously speaks of Her in prophecy, symbol and figure. Mary seems to be the ruling, the constant ever present thought of the Almighty. Are you also thus, inclined towards your Mother? Is She the central thought of your mind? Do you think of Her, speak of Her, see Her everywhere? Are you united to Her, do you live for Her and in Her, can you do anything without Her? Reflect and draw the unavoidable consequence: to love with insatiable love your loving Mother.

MEDITATION 3

Mary Immaculate – The Evidence

When the happy time scheduled by God for the salvation of mankind arrived, Our Blessed Lady was conceived, yet not like the rest of men, but pure and spotless, without contracting original sin.

Let us meditate on the evidence which establishes this consoling truth.

1. God

Remember the sin of Adam and Eve and God's punishment. He curses the serpent in these words:

I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed. She shall crush thy head and thou shall bruise her heel.

In these words consider three points:

1. that an extraordinary woman and her offspring would take revenge on the serpent;

2. that between the woman and the serpent there will be eternal enmity, and

3. that the devil will be conquered by the woman.

Well, then; had not Mary been immaculate, had She been stained with the slightest shadow of sin, there would not have been perpetual enmity, since sin is an act of friendship with the devil. Moreover, She would not be the Vanquisher but the vanquished because sin is a triumph of the devil. Victory goes to the Woman and Her offspring, and that offspring is none other than Her Son, Jesus Christ, and we ourselves, Christ's brothers. Consequently, with Her and through Her we must fight the devil, thereby following Her immaculate purity through our fight and victory over Satan.

2. The Angel

With the words: *The Lord is with Thee, full of grace*, the Angel clearly calls Her Immaculate. When and how was She filled with grace? Surely it was just at the moment of Her immaculate conception. This fullness of grace is prodigious, is unique, is for ever. Were it not so, the Angel could not have uttered these words.

There have indeed, been many saints with great sanctity and great grace; but none with such pleni-

tude. At least at the moment of their birth, due to original sin they had no grace whatsoever. But with Mary it was not so. At every instance and always, She was full of grace. Therefore, She was never with sin, not even original sin. Consequently, when the Angel hails Her as full of grace, he equivalently calls Her Immaculate. Relish these sweet words and thank the Angel for having made such a panegyric of Mary Immaculate.

3. The Church

For 19 centuries the Church was longing for this dogma. Watch the magnificent parade: there are the holy Fathers, the Doctors, the ecclesiastical writers, the Mystics, the Ascetics, all the Saints (and especially those who most loved Mary) who have woven an endless crown of praises to Her Immaculate Conception. There are the Virgins of the Holy Church who in order to follow Her immaculate purity, gave themselves up to Her through the vow of virginity. Behold how many they are and how resplendent! What a fine army under the banner of Mary Immaculate. The whole Christian people acclaimed Her in hymn and song, pure and spotless in Her Conception.

There has been no dogma more strongly and deeply felt, nor one better understood than this. After 19 centuries of waiting, Pope Pius IX, gathering all that longing and praise, shapes with it as Her everlasting crown the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Pause and see Mary as the shining goal of the praises of the whole Church in this mystery. See how those words of the *Magnificat* are fulfilled! *All generations shall call Me Blessed!*

4. Mary

She Herself confirms the infallible utterance of the Supreme Pontiff. It is the white Virgin of Lourdes who after seventeen apparitions in the end declares Herself to the girl and tells her: *I am the Immaculate Conception*. The miraculous spring, the throngs of pilgrims, the thousands of patients, the insistent prayers and the everlasting canticles of Lourdes are just an echo of those words and a confirmation of the pontifical pronouncement.

Mary is Immaculate in Her Conception. Remember the story of Lourdes and you also will join in spreading the chorus of praises which there endlessly proclaims Mary Immaculate.

5. Ourselves

God, the Angel, the Pope, Mary Herself are the witnesses who proclaim this dogma, and we, what shall we do? Merely rejoice in it? That is not enough. We can, we must, take part in it. Mary Immaculate is a Captain at the head of an army in battle array against the serpent and its hordes.

We must enlist, under the flag of Mary and fight sin wherever it is found: we must launch war against lukewarmness, ingratitude, self-love. Only thus, shall we be imitators of Mary Immaculate. War then, against sin, for Mary Immaculate.



MEDITATION 4

Mary Immaculate – The Mystery

Think deeply what this means. Try to penetrate deeper and deeper into this mystery. You will derive much advantage from it.

1. The State of Mankind before Sin

Just think what man was and what he could have been without the sin of Adam. God's plan was so sublime, so magnificent. After having created other beings God, wanting to appoint and create a king for all creation, thinks of man. How lovingly He shaped him, not with a mere word as the other creatures but with an all-special interest. He infuses in him a soul, spiritual and immortal, to the image and likeness of His divinity. Then He places him in an earthly paradise, an abode of all delights. Life there was happy, without sorrows, sufferings or tears. All was joy and content-

ment. The soul of man was endowed by God with dignity, namely, the perfect subjection of the passions to reason. He was endowed with infused science so he could know everything without labour or study — he was, above all, endowed with sanctifying grace which made man an image of God, His Son, His temple. The role of humanity was thus, one of happiness and sanctity to serve and love God. At the end of life, without going through the test of death, man would be taken to Heaven to praise God eternally. Sublime indeed, was God's plan. Stop a little and consider it.

2. The Fall

But sin interfered and all evils arrived. God was not the author of suffering and sorrow. He did not make us for unhappiness. But we ourselves by sin created suffering. Accursed sin, cause of all evil. Recall all the sadness, all the anxieties, sufferings and tortures of the human heart from Adam till today. Survey all the sicknesses, oftentimes so painful and repugnant, which scourge humanity. Think especially of the cruel agony of death, the humiliation of decay in the tomb. What a horrible picture! And all this due to sin! Compare the happy plan of God with the actual pitiful state of man, oftentimes

ruled by brutish passions which make us similar to the beasts. Victims of sins of all kinds — sometimes even the lowest and most degrading loss of sanctifying grace, of immortality, of the sight of God — and then finally, Hell, the end of such a miserable life. Sin closed Heaven. No one was entitled to enter therein. Think well of this and hence deduce how hideous must sin be, if God so punishes it.

3. Universality of Sin

But worst of all, Adam's sin was universal for the whole of mankind.

Adam was not just a private individual. He was the fountainhead of human life. From him all other men were to take origin. He was, then, the representative of humanity. All of us were included in him. Now, everything that God gave him was not for him exclusively, but for everybody. All of us were supposed to become equal to him. In this is no injustice whatsoever. If a father is enormously rich, his children also will be rich. But if this father squanders away his estate and becomes penniless, his children, through no fault of theirs, will be born in poverty. That is what happened to us. No one was richer than Adam. God desired we also should be rich in grace. However,

Adam lost everything and now we are born in poverty. A great pity, indeed, but a great truth. She should have been born like ourselves. But God says no. He exempts Her and Her alone. She is born just as She was shaped by God, pure spotless, immaculate. Pause to admire Her beauty. Congratulate Mary in being Immaculate. See the angels escorting Her with palms and celebrating Her entry into the world. A triumphal entry which far from being a defeat like ours, is a victory scored over the serpent. With the angels sing the praises of Our Lady as She appears in the world so beautiful and shining. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a whiter flower than the soul of Mary at Her Conception.

Think also that since She was sinless, She was not bound either by the law of suffering — or of death. Nevertheless, God wanted Her to suffer and die that She should be similar to that Son of Hers who embraced the cross for our love. Suffering was not in Her a punishment, as it is with us, but just a token of Her love for God and of Her imitation of Jesus, as it also was a token of Her love for men and an example for our consolation. Thank Her for this and be courageous when comes the time for you to suffer like your Mother and embrace the Cross as She did.

MEDITATION 5

Mary Immaculate – Her Greatness

We are dealing with a mystery. Therefore, we cannot plumb the depths of it since we would be lost in its immensity. Nevertheless, it is sweet and consoling to ponder, as far as in us lies, over those reasons for which Mary had to be immaculate.

1. The Queen of the Angels

Mary was to rule over the very angels. They were to honour Her and rejoice with Her as Queen. How could then they have as Queen some one less pure and perfect than themselves? If She has, even for a fleeting moment, been a slave of sin, that is to say a slave of the other angels who had rebelled against God, could they have accepted Her? This is not possible. Our reason rises in protest against

such an absurdity. We have to hold that Mary had to be pure, holy and immaculate.

2. Daughter of God, the Father

She is the predestined Daughter of God. Predestined thereby to a greatness the like of which was not to be found except in God Himself. God wanted Her to be as closely united to divinity as possible so that She (without being God, of course, since this is absurd), should be as close to Him as possible. Then, if God and sin are the most opposed ideas, how could Mary, who is so close to God harbour at the same time in Her heart any stain of sin? There you have an absurdity that we refuse to admit and which shows to us the necessity of Her Immaculate Conception.

3. Mother of God the Son

From Mary, Jesus took flesh and blood and offered them as a pure and holy Host on the Cross for the redemption of mankind. How could that Host be pure and holy if its origin had been stained with sin? Furthermore, none of us can choose our mother. We just receive the one given us by God. But it was not so with Our Lord He chose and shaped His

Mother just as He wanted. Now, Christ being able, as He was, to shape Her most beautiful, pure and holy in Her conception, how could He allow Her to be stained and enslaved by sin? Christian people, already many centuries ago, used to chant: *If He could not make Her Immaculate He is not God; if He could but would not, He is not Son; let us, then, rather say that He could and would* which is equivalent to saying that there was no power wanting in God, neither was will wanting.

Consequently, the Lord Who created Adam and Eve in grace, would certainly do the same with Mary.

If He could but would not make Mary immaculate, He would not have shown for Her a love befitting a good son towards his mother, since He would have deprived Her of a beauty that was to be Her most cherished treasure. Thus, there is no other way: He had to make Her Immaculate.



MEDITATION 6

Mary Immaculate – The Privilege

Let us today consider the wonderful privilege granted to Mary by God in Her Conception. Let us try to further something of the treasures it contains and the reason why Our Lady holds it so dear.

1. A Unique Privilege

Picture the devil at the entrance of the world. Whenever a man begins his life, Satan brands him with the hallmark of sin.

On all men the infernal serpent spits its filthy spittle. All of us, due to that stain from the devil, were born like that: repugnant and hideous in the sight of God. Think now of what this means for us all. Think of the greatest saints. The most ardent lovers of God are those whom He loved best. See with your imagination all the patriarchs, proph-

ets, apostles, martyrs, virgins file past. All of them must exclaim with David: *I was conceived in iniquity. I was begotten in sin. What a sore sight!*

See now instead how the scene changes. Now it is the contrary. Watch that most pure soul springing up from the hands of God, and eluding the devil, entering the world victorious. See the angels accompany Her singing Thou art all beautiful, Mary. *There is no stain in Thee!* Thou art the exception. Where the others fall, Thou standest. Where the others die, Thou livest. Where the others are stained, Thou remainest pure and immaculate! A most glorious and unique privilege, indeed!

2. A Great Privilege

It is great because it makes Our Beloved Mother appear as very great in the eyes of God, of the angels, and of ourselves. If all of us had been born in grace, we would not find this privilege one of the principal reasons to exalt the figure of Mary. She Herself was doubtlessly referring to this privilege when She sang *The Lord has done great things to my Soul.*

She adds then that in order to perform all those great things, God had to deploy all the strength

of His mighty arm. And so it was. Ancient history tells us how Cyrus, in order to enter Babylon, had to change the course of the River Euphrates so that he could penetrate the City along its dry river bed. God, by changing the course of the stream of original sin that was running along the river bed of human life, causing thereby Our Blessed Lady to enter it without being contaminated by its water, did likewise.

Moreover, God showed His greatness by making Mary the object of a special redemption. All of us have been redeemed by Christ; and this is our great glory. But somebody might think that since Mary did not sin, She was not redeemed nor did She therefore need receive from Christ something that we ourselves received. Should it be possible for us to have scored a glory that is not also Hers? No! Impossible! There are two kinds of redemption: one is the *liberative* redemption which raises the fallen and gives new life to those who have died the death of sin. All of us were redeemed in this way. But there is also a *preventive* redemption — the one which prevents one from falling. This is the redemption that applies to Mary. It was Mary. It was on the strength of Christ's redemption, and in view

of His divine merits, that Mary, and Mary alone, received the grace of not falling. Her redemption, then, is more perfect than ours.

And thus, also here She scores another advantage over us. Thus, consider how great is this high privilege!

3. A Divine Privilege

God alone could work such a prodigy of beauty and grace. God, as the lawgiver, is above all law. Consequently, He could repeal or condone this universal law. This privilege is an exception beyond even the thought of men. It was beyond their reach. Only God could make this exception. Remember how through Joshua He prolonged the light of the sun. How, through Moses, He divided the waters of the sea. How through His angels He forbade the flames of the Babylonian furnace to harm the three Hebrew youths. Now, this very same God caused the waters of sin to part in front of Mary; bade them to leave Her untouched. All these biblical incidents were just a figure of this immense miracle of the power and of the love of God. That is why the triumph of Mary Immaculate is a triumph of Almighty God.

This privilege is truly divine. The glory of Our Immaculate Mother is a divine glory.

4. Our Privilege

We also partake of this privilege. We were born in sin. But immediately we enjoyed the privilege of being baptized, our souls became pure and innocent, similar to that of the Son of Man's Baptismal grace rendering us most lovely before God. That is why we joyfully meditate on the Immaculate Conception of Mary we must meditate also on our own birth to the life of grace and ask ourselves: *Do I keep the immaculate beauty of my baptism? Have I lost it? Do I possess a real esteem for it?*

Ask pardon from Mary and beg Her help always to live up to that life of purity of Her Immaculate Heart.



MEDITATION 7

Mary Immaculate – Her Beauty

In all Her mysteries and titles Mary is the same; Queen of the highest Heavenly beauty. However, there is something special in Her title of Immaculate which compels us to see Her particularly beautiful.

1. Beauty of Creation

In order to fathom the beauty of Mary we should know the beauty which God enclosed in creation so that thus, we can deduce the beauty He enclosed in Mary. Look at the beauty of the earth. Once upon a time nothing was. It was all chaos, darkness, nothingness. But one day God said, *Let it be done*, and there sprang to existence the fishes, the air with its birds, forests, mountains, valleys and all kinds of animals therein. Pause now to consider the

beauty of this creation. Ponder over this variety. See the wonderful order that reigns in it. Everything attains its end, even though we might not know how.

2. Earthly Paradise

But all this was still little for God. So, He set apart in this very earth an orchard of delight, gorgeous and splendid, where He gathered together all the most beautiful things of creation, the most colourful plants and animals the sweetest and most savoury fruits, the most enchanted river: in one word, all good without any admixture of evil. That was the earthly paradise.

3. The Realm Beyond the Senses

All this lies in the limited field of sensible creation. But what do we see beyond? Try to imagine what Heaven will be like: those immortal dwellings beside which the earthly paradise is just a shadow. Remember what St. Paul says about it: *Neither eye saw nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love Him*. Think also that everything on this earth is just temporal, whereas Heavenly beauty and happiness are eternal. This is earthly and that is celestial. This is a prison and an exile, whereas the

other is a homeland and the abode of joy and happiness. What will Heaven be like? What beautiful things will it contain even apart from the sight of God! So many delights that we cannot imagine nor even suspect!

4. The King of Creation

And now ask yourself and for whom was all this made? To whom did God subordinate the whole of Creation? The earth is for man; the earthly paradise is for the just and the innocent. All this is for a creature that is soon going to raise the banner of rebellion against God and disregard His commandments.

And for whom Heaven? For His angels, His courtiers and servants, amongst whom alas He is going to find traitors and ingrates who too, will rebel and disobey His divine Majesty, daring in the madness of their pride to attempt to overthrow God and try to install themselves in His place. All on earth was for man! All in Heaven was for the angels!

5. Mary's Beauty

Now to keep on questioning "What do you think God, Who created such wonders for un-

grateful men and ungrateful angels, would then do for Mary and for Jesus?" If He made Heaven in order to cheer man, what will He do in order to please Mary whom He loves much more than all other creation? If He created such wonders for His servants, what would He do for the dwelling, abode and palace of His Son Who wanted no other paradise than the womb of Mary? Think how willingly God quitted His Heavenly abode in order to take His abode in Mary. What purity would He have given to the blood that was to flow through the veins of His Son! What crimson would He give to those lips that so often were to kiss the cheeks of His Son! What brilliance to those eyes which were to fall in ecstasy gazing into the eyes of His divine Son! What hands would be those that were to bear the One Who in His own hands bears, the whole of creation! What heart so pure, so delicate, so tender! He gathered in it all the tenderness of the hearts of all mothers.

Continue contemplating the beauty of Mary Immaculate and you will realize that in comparison with Her all earthly beauty hardly deserves the name!

MEDITATION 8

Mary Immaculate – Her Sanctity

All that we have been contemplating in the previous meditation referred to the physical beauty of Our Lady, but with what can we compare the beauty of Her soul? Let us now pause and try to fathom its depths.

1. Sanctity on Earth Consists in Grace

But who had greater grace than Mary who was said to have reached the plenitude of grace? A soul in the grace of God is the most beautiful sight that can be imagined upon earth. It is just a reflection of the beauty of God Himself. Think of the great sanctity attained by some saints of the Church of God. Think of the sanctity of St. Monica, who was able to produce a saint like Augustine; of St. Elizabeth who converted a whole kingdom to God; of St.

Theresa of Jesus who was told by God that just for her He would have willingly created the world with all its wonders. Recall the names of St. Francis Xavier, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Paul of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Cecilia who daily used to converse with the angels, St. Agnes whose only stain was that of her own blood shed on the altar of her virginity. Think of the thousands upon thousands of saints who daily exhale the perfume of their sanctity in the Garden of the Church. Put all the sanctity and the beauty of these souls together and compare it with that of Mary. She at the very first moment of Her Conception possesses more sanctity and grace than all those saints together. Where they end She begins: *Fundamenta eius in montibus sanctis*. What then will Mary be?

2. The Sanctity of Mary

The reason for this superiority of Mary above all the saints together is that they all, as St. John says, had to wash their garments in the blood of the Lamb. Then, if they had to wash them, it was because they were stained, at least, for some time, whereas the soul of Mary needed no washing because She had never in the least been stained. Go into a garden and

pluck the most attractive, delicately perfumed rose; examining its petals at close quarters you find dust, dirt, or stain, or sometimes even, deeply hidden in it a little insect, or a tiny worm. The same happens in the Garden of the Church. There are many flowers, lilies of purity, roses of love divine, violets of humility. However, all have a worm in their roots. All have been touched by the fang of the serpent, Mary, and Mary alone, is the flower without stain or thorn. She, the rose of the enclosed garden, is more pure than the sun which also has spots. That is why the Church sings that She no has spots. That is why the Church sings that She is purer and brighter than light. How beautiful must the soul of Mary be!

3. The Sanctity and the Beauty of Her Soul Consist in Love

And that is why it is found in a perfect degree in Heaven. Love is unifying, is a sharing with God; and who ever shared with Him more than Mary? The angels, the cherubim and seraphim are all burning with the fire of charity. How ardent must be their love for God! And consequently, how great must their beauty be! The saints tell us that if we could see an angel, we would believe him to be

God and would adore him which would cause us to die; that we would be happy for time without end by merely gazing on him, that never would we tire of seeing him. Such is the beauty we would never tire of seeing him. Such is the beauty of an angel. However, in comparison with Mary all that is nothing. Mary Immaculate is nearer to God, has a greater fire of love than all the angels together, because, while they after all are just servants of God, Mary is the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven and of angels.

Contemplate Mary as Murillo painted Her, wrapped in the clouds, Her hands upon Her breast; Her gaze reaching towards Heaven, lost in God as though Her body was not of this world. The moon under Her feet; clad in the snow-white and blue Heavens; the stars pinned to Her mantle; surrounded by angels who rapt in joy, bearing palms and roses in their hands, regard their beautiful Queen. A wonderful portrait. Murillo painted Her so after much prayer and many Communion. However, this is just a portrait. The reality, instead, was executed by God the divine artist. And when God brings all His power and love to bear upon the soul of Mary, what a masterpiece must have

Mary Immaculate — Her Sanctity

sprung from His hands! What must the beauty of our Immaculate Mother be? *Tota pulchra es!* Repeat this many times; Thou art most beautiful, Mother of mine; so much so that God Himself has fallen in love with Thy beauty. Oh! Give me a share in it. Let the shining purity of that soul enthral me and compel me to imitate Thee as far as I can. I give Thee my heart, my life, my soul. Never abandon me, I shall one day in Heaven enjoy Thy immortal beauty and be happy with Thee for ever.



MEDITATION 9

Mary Immaculate – The Redemption

Let us today contemplate Our Blessed Lady playing Her part in the work of the redemption of mankind together with Christ Jesus and how She took part in that work precisely on account of Her being Immaculate.

1. The Work of Redemption

Redemption was God's most important work, much more important than that of creation. One word sufficed for creation, whereas in order to redeem us He sent His Son personally to accomplish it. And that in a way that was the most humiliating for God and the most advantageous for us. Indeed, God by humbling Himself in redemption not only redeemed us but also shortened the distance between man and God and became equal to us so that we should be similar to Him. What a great bounty,

what an immense love. In this magnificent work of God, in this really divine accomplishment, God so intimately associated Our Lady with His work that, as St. Augustine puts it, She thereby gave the due solution to two divine conflicts: two conflicts, which appeared insoluble to human wisdom.

2. The First Conflict

The offence inflicted by man towards God had to some extent been infinite in malice, because the One offended was infinite and an offence is measured by the dignity of the person offended. As a consequence, only an atonement of infinite value could give due satisfaction for sin. But an action of infinite value can only be accomplished by God. Therefore, only God could redeem the world. But redemption had to be achieved through a sacrifice and sacrifice means the destruction of something in honour of God. And since God could not suffer or die, God could not be the victim or host of the sacrifice. On the one hand, the victim cannot but be God and on the other, God cannot be the victim. What is to be done? Where is the solution? All the power and the wisdom of God was necessary to solve this problem. All the sanctity

and love of the Holy Ghost was required to carry out the divine solution: the Holy Ghost shaped in the most pure womb of Our Most Blessed Lady a most perfect body out of Her most pure flesh. Think slowly over the words of the Catechism and you will see how the solution to the conflict lay in Our Blessed Lady, the Virgin Mother of God, in whose womb the Word took flesh. So God has now a Mother who gave Him body and blood to be offered for the redemption of the world. Thanks to Mary He can now be a victim; He can now achieve our redemption.

3. The Second Conflict

But this victim had to be perfectly sinless for He had to rescue the world from sin and pay the price of ransom. But if that victim had to take flesh and blood from a woman, He must be a human victim like ourselves. And we all are born in sin. Would that victim also be born in sin like the rest of us? That cannot be. It is absurd. How then to solve this difficulty?

There is only one way out. And one that supposes an unheard-of miracle. An extraordinary and unique privilege. But for God nothing is impossible. So it was done: Mary Immaculate, conceived without sin, is the solution. She gives God that pure flesh and clean

blood which alone can be the holy victim required for the sacrifice of the Cross. It is by Christ that we are redeemed, but it is through Mary Immaculate that He redeemed us. Glory be to the Redeptor and to the co-Redemptrix! Thus, Mary, who took such a great part in the work of our redemption, could not be absent when it was consummated on the Cross. She, who had not been present with Her Son in His apostolic preachings, nor was She a witness of all His miracles, nor did She appear at His side in the hours of triumph and glory, was, however, present by the side of Her Son at the hour of His sacrifice.

And She was indeed, so closely united with Her Son that the piercing of the thorns, the blows of the scourges, the whole agony of His death was shared by Her till the end. She with Jesus drank to the very dregs the chalice of the passion. She was bound with Him on the altar of the Cross as though they were two victims of the same sacrifice, as though they were two hosts offered on the same altar: hosts and victims pleasing to God since they were so pure and immaculate. Thank Our Blessed Lady on seeing Her thus, cooperating so efficaciously in our salvation. Thank God that She with Her immaculate purity is the solution of all those thorny problems.

MEDITATION 10

The Nativity of Our Lady (1)

1. Our Own Nativity

We celebrate our birthday as a day of rejoicing. It is customary to rejoice at the birth of a child, more especially if he is the firstborn. What a joy, how many congratulations are given to the happy parents! And yet how many times we ought rather to weep. Some children are confronted with an unhappy future. Our hopes of baby's future happiness are doubtful and uncertain. We know for certain that the child will have to suffer. Nobody teaches him to cry and yet how quickly he learns to weep. And tears will never long be absent from his eyes, nor sorrow from his heart.

The same happens in the spiritual order. The newly born child is a slave of the devil. He is stained with sin. He, although he looks so innocent, is deprived of Heaven. As yet Heaven is not

his inheritance. He will receive baptism and with it comes grace, but how long will that grace last? The age of reason is often the beginning of a story of sin. Alas, we are generally made aware that children have reached the age of reason because they have begun to show signs of malice. Sorrow, tears, uncertainty, sin, concupiscence surround every cradle.

2. The Attitude of the Church

The Church does not celebrate birthdays as does the world. Instead, She rejoices just when the world puts on the garments of mourning. If you read the Martyrology, you will see how the Church commemorates the day of death and considers such a day as *dies natalis*, the birthday for Heaven. The Church generally appoints the very day of the death of the saint as his feast day, ignoring the day on which he was born into this world. The principles, then, are diametrically opposed. The world looks at things with earthly eyes, rejoicing at the beginnings of earthly life. The Church looks forward to the Heavenly life and cares not for the earthly birthday but only for birth to Heaven. Who is right?

Naturally, the point of view of our holy Mother the Church is the true one. The day on which we are born marks the beginning of a trail of sorrow.

We are born with the sentence of death and suffering on our head. The day of our death marks the beginning of the true life which will know neither death, nor end, nor pain, nor sorrow, but only a happy and hallowed eternity. This then is our real life; and only our birth to this eternal life is worthy of celebration.

3. Mary's Birthday

However, there is an exception to this general rule. The Church herself admits it. She who usually never cares for the earthly birthday of her sons, one day by an extraordinary exception puts on her garments of joy and gives signs of great joy and of inexpressible tenderness. She has established a special feast to celebrate the birthday of Our Heavenly Mother. The Woman predestined to be the Mother of God appears on this earth with a soul holy and immaculate, with the same purity and sanctity that She had when She sprang from the hands of God. Her earthly life is a life of grace, a Heavenly life, a divine life. That is why the Church in her liturgy rejoices

The Nativity of Our Lady (1)

and bids us all rejoice: *Let us with great joy celebrate the Nativity of the most Holy Virgin Mary, because Her birth has filled with joy the whole universe.* Rejoice, you also, and congratulate your beloved Mother, the only One who with Her earthly life brings the seed of a life of grace for Herself and for the rest of mankind.



MEDITATION 11

The Nativity of Our Lady (2)

The Nativity of Our Heavenly Mother is a motive of universal joy for Heaven and earth. At Her birth God rejoices, and with Him the angels, saints and the Church.

1. God's Joy

Mary is the masterpiece of His hands. When, says the Book of Genesis, the Lord saw the things He had created, they looked good to Him and He rejoiced in them. How much more then, would He rejoice at seeing Mary! Enter deeply into this consideration. Remember how man had sinned; how through his sin the whole creation and the plans of God were upset. God could no longer look at the earth with delight. There was nowhere for His eyes to alight. Everywhere the kingdom of sin was established. But then Mary appears and all changes.

After thousands of years God looks again at creation, to find it beautiful and interesting. He looks at the earth and men and no longer takes His eyes from them in disgust. In Mary, He again sees His perfect and pure reflection: and through Mary He again sees His image reflected in the rest of creation, restored to its original beauty. What joy to find Her so pure, so holy, so full of grace!

Contemplate the Eternal Father taking delight in the birth of His most beloved Daughter. See God the Son looking with ineffable love at the One Whom He will call by the most sweet name of Mother. See the Holy Ghost so interested in this little maiden Whom He wants gifted from the very first moment of Her life with more grace, beauty, sanctity and purity than all the saints together.

With what immense love did the Holy Ghost place in Her soul one by one all the virtues that were to adorn the heart of His Most Beloved Spouse!

2. The Joy of the Angels

After God, and together with God, the angels rejoiced. Their Queen and Mistress has just been born. She is the most beautiful sight in Heaven. With this little maiden they try to compare all the beautiful

things of the heavenly court and they admit that after God nothing can be compared with Her.

Somebody has suggested that the revolt of the rebellious angels in Heaven was because God revealed to them that they must one day adore His Son made man and that they must acknowledge the Mother of that Son as their Queen. It is thought that the proud Lucifer felt hurt and humiliated at the thought that he should abase himself before a Woman whom he considered less perfect than himself. Consequently, refusing to obey, he raised the cry of rebellion that swept so many angels to Hell. If such was the case it is clear how the devil, full of wrath and despair, must today acknowledge that Mary is incomparably more beautiful than he was and that therefore there was no justification for his rebellion.

On the other hand, see how today the good angels rejoice now more than ever for having been faithful to God, since, far from being humiliated, it is an immense glory for them to have Mary as their Queen. See them, all joyful and eager, unable to restrain their enthusiasm, coming down in innumerable legions to the cradle of Mary, desirous to be the first to venerate Her and offer Her their homage.

Hear instead the roaring of the infernal beast as the tiny foot commences to crush him.

The devil will throughout all eternity feel the smashing defeat that so much humiliates him. For all eternity he will feel crushed under the delicate foot of that maiden. What shame for him, what humiliation!

3. The Joy of the Saints in the Bosom of Abraham

In spite of their being just and holy the poor souls who were still in the bosom of Abraham could not yet enjoy the glory of Heaven.

Among them we see the souls of the great patriarchs, prophets and other prominent figures of the Old Testament. Centuries and centuries have passed, and the day of freedom had still not dawned for them. How long were those hours of waiting? How eternal are days when we are longing for something and our expectations are not realized. What then must have been the longing of those souls! Now look at them again on the day when the Lord informs them that the predestined Woman has already reached the earth: that the Mother of the promised Messiah has already been born; that the Mother of the One who is going to set them free is already alive.

Meditation 11

You can imagine the joy, the hymns of gratitude that they intone to the Lord, the praises with which they greeted our Blessed, Lady.

Now they count the hours, the time that still remains for them in prison, after which there will come eternal freedom, a freedom brought about by an eternal freedom, a freedom brought about by a charming maiden just newly born.

Share the joy and enthusiasm of the angels and of the just. Prostrate before the cradle of Mary. Join them in praise.



MEDITATION 12

The Nativity of Our Lady (3)

If the joy of God and of the angels in the Nativity of Mary was great, ours shall be no less, because after all Our Blessed Lady was born especially for us. She has our own nature and it is we who are to enjoy the benefits of that happy birth.

1. Our Joy

The birth of our Heavenly Mother is the end of a sad night; a night of centuries during which mankind was buried. Isaias says that men were submerged in the shadows of death, since sad indeed, is the night of sin and nothing can be compared with it so well as the black and terrible darkness of death.

See mankind filling past without seeing a ray of light in the midst of that darkness. How sad is night. What, then, would be a night of many years, of many

centuries? In the midst of this night there used to shine a few holy souls but in comparison with the surrounding darkness their light was as nothing. The darkness could not be dispelled. When the night is pitch dark, and the light of the stars cannot be seen we cannot take one safe step. We grope and labour under the fear of stumbling over something. But if in the darkness we see the light of the dawn, a light which spreads every minute increasing in clarity and light, then we feel joy; a joy completed when at length the sun fully shines.

So it was when Mary appeared in the darkness of death: She was the sweet twilight heralding the dawn of God, a promise of the divine Sun which will soon appear to cast its rays on the whole earth. As the light of dawn rises in the East, the animals of the forest hide themselves in their dens while the nocturnal birds flee away. Instead, the innocent little birds of the air chirp and sing. The flowers open and give forth their perfume, while all things are clad in gorgeous colours.

So it was when Mary was born. The devils flee, the angels sing, virtues flourish and the whole world is filled with light and joy. How beautiful and magnificent was the morning of our redemption!

2. Your Own Joy

And who on realizing what has happened in the world does not share this joy? Does not the heart of every man rejoice? Do you not feel it also within yourself? Do you not see that the darkness of death and sin which once flooded your heart has gone away and that now there is a shining light which enlightens and guides you to your eternal destiny? That light which comes to you from Mary is Christ. She is the light of your life.

Imagine the arid desert without flowers, without plants, without life. But take to it water: very soon there will be palm trees bearing green branches and fruit.

A barren vine may yield no fruit; but graft a healthy branch on to it and it will produce rich sweet grapes. That is the picture of your soul: an arid desert, a barren vine. If your vine bears fruit, it is because Christ has, by means of Mary, been grafted into you. If your soul is not barren, it is because our Blessed Lady has planted in your heart the sweet oasis of Jesus.

Remember the little cloud of Elias, a symbol of Mary, that brought fertility to a dry land. In the same way Mary has rendered the earth fertile:

through Her there have sprung up lilies of virginity, roses of love. The same will happen in your heart, but only with Her and through Her. Do not forget that: without Her, there is but barren land, dry desert, a withered branch. Why not rejoice at the Nativity of Our Lady, a Nativity so glorious and fruitful for your soul?

3. Jesus is Always Preceded by Mary

Lastly, this birth reminds us of the most sweet truth, that Mary goes always in front of Jesus. God wanted that in nature the sun should not rise all of a sudden but should be preceded by the clarity of the dawn. He has made the same arrangement in the order of grace. He disposed that the Word made flesh should appear in the world only after having been heralded by the splendid dawn of this Maiden, Queen of the angels, conceived without stain. Good Queen of the angels, conceived without stain. God has so arranged that the Sun of Justice, Our Lord Jesus Christ, should not rise and shine in our souls without them having been previously visited by the Mother of All Grace. He has decided that His kingdom should not be established in this world unless there be first set in it the throne of Mary. Mary is,

The Nativity of Our Lady (3)

therefore, the dawn of Jesus. Study Mary deeply, love Her filially in order to know and love Jesus. Examine yourself on this most important point. See whether you do everything with Mary and through Mary in order to please Jesus. Imitate Mary, empty your soul of yourself and fill it with Her and thus, be filled with that divine life which Jesus wishes to bring to your soul.



MEDITATION 13

The Name of Mary (1)

1. The Importance of This Name

When a child is born, one of the first things we do, is to give him a name. All of us fondly commemorate our name feast, when we manifest our filial devotion to our parents or to our children. We wish them many happy returns. We send them presents, we pay them visits. All this is part of the ritual of that happy day. Today, we are meditating on the feast of the Name of Mary, a feast which ought to be a great occasion for all Her devotees and Her loving children. The importance of a name depends on its fitness to the person to whom it is applied. The better the person is pictured by a name, the more appropriate that name is. In the world, more often than not, names are given because of some particular liking for that name by the parents or on account of some family connection implied.

We seldom pause to choose a name that suits the person concerned. But it was not so with Mary. It was not right and proper that just any name whatsoever should be given to Her. Her name must express all the graces and wonders and marvels with which God had endowed Her. Thus, God and God alone could give Her a fitting and adequate name. And the name chosen was Mary.

2. The Greatness of This Name

In order to surmise its greatness it is enough to see that God is the Author of this name. God gave this name to Our Lady as a sign of what She was going to be. When the Lord chose anyone for some extraordinary mission, He would first of all change the name of the person so chosen and the new name would reflect the highest aim to which He was calling that person. So, He changed the name of Abraham; He chose the name of Isaac; through an angel He instructed Zacharias that the Precursor should be called John; and Christ Himself changed the name from Simon to Peter, when He founded His Church and appointed amongst His apostles the one who was going to be its head and foundation.

Now, how compare the dignity and importance of the mission entrusted to Abraham, to Isaac, to the Baptist and to Peter with the dignity and mission of Mary? Who then could but God Himself give Her a worthy name?

The name we bear was imposed at the choice of our parents, although, of course, a very different one could have been given to us. But with Our Lady it was not so. She was called Mary nor could She have any other name, because God Himself would find no better. How great and sublime is that most holy and sweet name. That is why the Gospel, which has so little about Our Lady, does not pass over this so important detail, but expressly states: *And the name of the Virgin was Mary.*

So, Peter Damian says that the name of Mary was from eternity drawn from the divine Treasury when redemption through the incarnation of the Word was decreed in Heaven.

3. Its Usefulness

From all this you can deduce how we should respect this holy name, and how after the name of Jesus there is no other so holy, so useful for us as the name of Mary. If the name of Jesus is sancti-

The Name of Mary (1)

fying. so provided we know how to utter it with the respect and love that it deserves, is the name of Mary. That is why after God and Jesus Mary is the most popular name and those in sorrow invoke it, the dying have it on their lips. How many churches, how many chapels have been raised the world over in honour of the name of Mary! How many sinners have been converted through its invocation. There is nothing sweeter for holy souls and nothing more profitable for the sinner than to put those two blessed names, Jesus and Mary, together, to utter them often, so as to draw from them the great advantage that their utterance brings to our souls. Do you also do it?

Have you ever meditated on the importance of this most holy name and on its divine greatness? Do you utter it with fervour and especially in the temptations, difficulties and sorrows of life? Is it especially engraved on your heart?



MEDITATION 14

The Name of Mary (2)

That this holy Name may not be indifferent to us but rather induce us to a deeper knowledge and to a more fervent invocation of it, it is imperative that we should meditate on its meaning.

As about 300 different interpretations have been given it is rather difficult to ascertain its true meaning. But it is providential that God should have left it open to so many interpretations, all of them so good and so meaningful, and thus, they make us understand that all excellences and perfections are contained in Our Blessed Lady.

The most probable of all these interpretations are the following:

1. Beautiful

Or rather, the beautiful *par excellence*, ad thought to mean that She is Beauty itself. And there is no

other way to see Her. *As beautiful as the moon*, sings the Church. Indeed, just as in the darkness of night, when everything is deprived of beauty, the placid and serene light of the moon suddenly shines, greater than the stars, so does Mary with Her shining beauty dispel darkness and share Her light with all who would partake of it.

She is also called *Tota Pulchra*, "All Beautiful" All, *Tota*. In Mary there is nothing that is not extremely beautiful; body, soul, eyes, senses, heart, everything unstained, nothing to mar Her beauty. Give a thought to the things that the world calls beautiful and you will be convinced that the world has no idea of what real beauty is. The world gives the name of beauty only to corporeal beauty, which more often than not, is artificial and merely outward, external. The world is satisfied with that beauty, because it knows no other. Instead, Mary is always and at every moment most beautiful, *Tota Pulchra*. How aptly then the name of Mary applies to Her as thus interpreted.

2. Lady and Mistress

How certain it is that She really is Queen and Mistress. She was never a slave to sin, nor to the devil, nor to the passions, She was, it is true, the Handmaid

of the Lord; but just on account of that She is Queen and Mistress. And Christians have always thus understood it. Therefore, they called Her *Our Lady*. She is the Queen of the Angels, of those angels who take a pride in serving Her. The angels were very often Her servants in the Annunciation, in the Flight to Egypt, in the grotto of Bethlehem, in Calvary itself, where the angels of sorrow went to comfort and to weep with Her. She is Lady and Mistress over the devils who fear Her and are put to flight at the mere mention of Her name. On hearing Her holy Name, Heavens and earth bend the knee. And God has willed that the devil fears Our Lady even more than he does Jesus; thus, his humiliation is the greater and the triumph of Our Lady the more admirable.

Lastly, She is Lady and Mistress of all men, but She is Lady and Queen of Mercy. Jesus wanted Her to share His kingdom and sceptre, thus, while He took justice upon Himself as the judge of the living and the dead, to Mary He entrusted the power and administration of mercy. Her majesty and grandeur do not hurt, do not frighten, but rather lovingly urge us through sweet force. See whether you also feel these sentiments when you are at the feet of this great Lady. She is Queen and Lady of our hearts. She

alone has the right to command our hearts. Is She truly the absolute Queen of your heart?

3. The Sea and the Star of the Sea

The sea is a gathering together of the waters of the earth and of the rain from the skies. Genesis says that when God created the earth, He gathered all the waters in one place and called it the sea. So with Our Lady. God gathered in Mary all the graces which He had distributed amongst His creatures, whether angels or men. And therefore, She is a sea of graces where we can find whatever we want.

From the sea rise the clouds which later on come down upon the earth bringing with them rain which gives fertility to the fields. In the same manner Our Blessed Lady from the immense ocean of Her graces pours all the gifts that bear sanctity and virtue into the souls of men.

The waters of the sea are bitter, as were also the sorrows of the Heart of Mary, that veritable ocean of bitterness, since She suffered during the passion of Her Son more than all other human hearts together. On account of that She is called the Queen of Martyrs, because She suffered more than them all.

Finally, *She is the Star of the Sea*, because She is the light which guides those who are sailing across the ocean of this earthly life, across the sea of our passions where shipwreck is always possible across the sea of darkness where we are groping for our bearings, where self-love, blindness and the violence of our passions carry us away.

She is the Star which shines from high so that no matter where we are we can find Her. God placed Her so high, that She might be seen from everywhere. But for that same reason unless we lift our eyes we cannot see Her. The more we lower them towards the things of the earth, the less we see Her rays. Hence how fitting is the name of Mary in each and every one of its connotations!

Try to imitate Mary, try to keep Her always in view by ceaselessly repeating Her most sweet Name, just as the lover never grows tired of repeating the name of the person he loves.



MEDITATION 15

The Presentation of Our Lady (1)

This mystery of the life of Our Heavenly Mother so highly practical for the great lessons we can derive from it, is so tender and delicate.

1. Readiness to Follow the Divine Vocation

This is one of the most admirable lessons of this mystery. See Our Lady, a tender maid of three years, saying goodbye to Her parents, quickly climbing the steps of the Temple without turning back, and delivering Herself to the service of God in the sanctuary. What sublime details at the age of three!

How Our Lady hastens to give Herself up to the service of God! By an exceptional miracle, Mary had already at that age the use of reason. So deliberately and quite aware of what She was doing She ran to the Temple. There was no danger whatsoever at home for Her, for Hers was a home of saints. She does not con-

sider Her tender age, at which She needs so much the care of a father and, far more, that of a mother. She does not stop at the thought of the sorrow which is going to be inflicted on Her parents. She is not preoccupied about the new kind of life She is going to undertake. All those considerations remain for human prudence. But She has heard the voice of God and immediately runs to answer it. The sooner the better. All delay is too great for Her. She climbs rapidly the flight of steps which leads to the temple. What a fine lesson of fervour is given to us by that incomparable maid. Do you try to serve God in the same manner? What do you do with God's inspirations? Do you follow them with the same promptitude? Do you like Mary, throw yourself into the arms of God, equally blindly and confidently without any preoccupation, leaving to Him the care of the rest? When shall we reach that absolute detachment from all, even from ourselves, from our way of looking at things, from our judgement, so that we do only what God wants, and as He wants?

2. The Consecration of Our Lady

She enters the Temple and delivers Herself up to God in order to be His, entirely and for ever.

How fervently would Our Lady accomplish this consecration and how pleasing it would be to God. Remember how many times you have said something similar to God, how often you consecrated yourself to Him, how you also told Him that you wanted your soul to be always and entirely His. But what a difference between your word and Mary's! Yours will have sometimes caused sorrow to God when He foresaw how badly you would fulfil your promise. Instead what an amount of glory was given to God by this most perfect surrendering of Our Heavenly Mother, a surrender so entire and so enduring.

The thought of pleasing God is ever present to Mary. She was His from the very first moment of Her conception. She never ceased being God's property. And since She was aware of the graces She had received from God She well knew it. And She wishes that Her union with God should if possible be more intimate and perfect. What a shining example! And you, who on account of your misery, need this union much more urgently, how little you care for it, how little you try to achieve to belong to God!

And yet this should be your ruling thought, your greatest longing. Ask Mary for that grace.

3. A Life of Fervour

Hence you will deduce that the Lord wants us to serve Him, not anyhow but just as Our Lady did, with fervour (as opposed to tepidity which is the state into which we blindly fall if we make no effort in our spiritual life.)

When routine prevails, when there is no spirit of self-denial or self-control, when we are overcome by laziness and spiritual indifference, we immediately fall into tepidity. But God is nauseated by tepidity. The Lord says that He will cast away the tepid as we reject food which the stomach cannot retain.

To cause nausea to Our Lord! To provoke repugnance in God! This is a thought to fill us with holy fear. Are you anywhere near this state? Do you keep a watch over yourself so that you steer as far as possible from tepidity? Then the example of Mary will encourage you. Work with energy, with decision, with promptitude, with fervour just like Mary. No time for complacency. No more wasting the graces of God; and wasted they are when this accursed tepidity enters into the soul. Fight lukewarmness and routine. Follow your Mother so that your soul may be really and entirely God's.

MEDITATION 16

The Presentation of Our Lady (2)

The life of Our Lady in the Temple is an excellent subject for meditation, since it is the continuation of Her offering to God. We can, therefore, find in it great lessons for our own behaviour.

1. A Life of Prayers

The Temple is called the House of Prayer. Certainly we can pray to God anywhere but the Temple is a chosen place for prayer. Thus Mary, not satisfied with the communion with God She can observe at home, wishes to enter the Temple where She may lead a more prayerful life. See the tender maid so pure and innocent, prostrate in the Temple praying to, speaking with, God. What intimate communication between God and Her! What a model of fervour! Test the qualities of your own prayer in the light of this example: humility, attention, trust, perseverance. Mary

at prayer is the perfect model. Kneel by Her side and compare your prayer with Hers. Is there any resemblance? Are you aware that the Temple is a House of Prayer and that you go there only to speak with God and adore Him? Do you know how to pray in the company of Our Blessed Lady?

St. Bonaventure says that Mary used to pray seven times a day and that during those prayers She used to address the following supplications to God:

1. to love Him with the whole of Her heart,
2. to love Her neighbour in God and for God,
3. to have an implacable hatred for all sin, for every imperfection,
4. to beg profound humility, together with all other virtues, especially immaculate purity,
5. to ask the grace of knowing the promised Messiah,
6. to be very obedient to the priests of the Temple as the representatives of God, and to let Herself be led by them in order always to do the Holy will of God,
7. that God should as soon as possible send a Redeemer for the salvation of the world.

Do you not think that you also should ask something similar? Consider all these petitions

and you will soon see how in every one of them you can in imitation of Mary find something to implore from God.

2. A Life of Sanctification

The Temple is also the House of Sanctification. God led Mary there in order to prepare Her for Her high destiny: that of being the Mother of God. Later on, Jesus, before His public life, withdrew into the desert, left His house and went far away from the world in order the more intimately to contact God.

You can imagine the life of interior and external recollection which Our Lady led in the Temple. It is an image of the interior life of the soul. How fond we are of an external life! We like it and we believe that the more external works we perform the more we move about, the more we do for God's glory. Yet a life of apostolate which is not grounded on the interior life is completely useless. God does not bless it. It yields no fruit. It is good to work for others but first, it is necessary that we work for ourselves. Ask Our Lady for a greater love of retirement, of solitude, of self-denial. Pray for an increase of interior life.

3. A Life of Labour

Hers was a life of labour in God and for God. She had always worked for God; but now in the Temple whatever She did was to be exclusively for God. See the little maiden all intent on the cleanliness and tidiness of the things used in the temple services. What love and devotion accompanied Her work. Whatever we do for God, even when it is very small, has an immense value. There is nothing small in the service of the Almighty. Also, you must learn how to raise all your labour to God so that you always grow in love and merit in His presence. Then nothing will go unrewarded.

4. Your Own Life in the Temple

Remember how Our Lord Jesus Christ once cast out from the Temple those who were profaning it. Although His goodness and kindness were so great, yet on this occasion He purified that Mansion of Prayer, the House of God, with energetic wrath and a holy, burning zeal, even taking a scourge in His hand to purify it the better.

The House of God! How well was that term understood by Our Blessed Lady! How worthily She lived in it! When you are in the Temple do you also

imitate Our Lady? Or do you rather imitate those who caused such displeasure to Our Lord?

Have you nothing to reprove yourself with as regards your reverence towards the House of God or in your way of speaking with Him? Do you honestly try hard to fight against voluntary distractions? Think, moreover, that there is another Temple where above all God wishes to dwell, to speak with you and to be spoken to by you. It is the Temple of your heart. He has condescended to be in those temples scattered over the earth, that He might establish His Mansion in the living temples of our souls. It is there that He achieves His communion with us. Have you mastered the art of withdrawing into the solitude of the sanctuary of your soul, there to speak with God? Do you always behave with the dignity due to the Mansion of God that you have in your heart? Derive from Mary a greater devotion to the shrine of your soul. Often visit Jesus and His churches and tabernacles; but do not forget to visit Him much more often in the Temple of your Heart!



MEDITATION 17

The Presentation of Our Lady (3)

Her Virginity — we might end our meditation on the Presentation of Our Lady by thinking of Her virginity, since it was on that occasion that She made Her vow of virginity to God.

1. The Vow of Virginity of Our Lady

It is not dogmatically certain that She made this vow, for we are told only that She was a Virgin, before, during and after Her giving forth the Child Jesus. However, with many doctors and holy fathers, the Church admits that Mary chose to be united with God through this vow. Tradition tells us that She uttered this vow when She was presented in the Temple at the age of three. Contemplate that scene as best as you can. Mary in the Temple, in the presence of God surrounded by choirs of admiring angels. The angels do not know what is

going to happen. Yet they guess something great is about to take place, since God is all intent. Then She opens Her lips and utters Her vow of virginity. What a marvellous sight! Hear the canticles intoned by the angels in praise of this young maid. Picture God's joy on hearing that vow. Innumerable graces were poured on Our Lady, at that moment. How many sins are committed in the world! How much He is offended, how deeply His heart is wounded. However. The joy and complaisance of God in the vow of Mary was much greater than all the sorrow that the sins of the world could cause Him. She alone by this action gave God enough glory to cancel out all the loss of glory destroyed by sinners with their horrible sins.

2. The Value of Virginity

From this you can deduce what this mysterious virtue means for God and for Mary. Although without any counsel or command to follow, without either any example to guide Her, Mary seems to guess the value of virginity in God's eyes; and realising that it gives Him pleasure and glory decides to embrace it. She could see that this virtue, unknown as it was in Her world, would not be appreciated;

that, indeed, all Her companions and even Her very relations would deem Her dishonoured.

She foresaw that to be a virgin would draw down on Her sorrow, reproaches, rudeness and contempt. However, She does not hesitate. God wants it, and that suffices. The rest She will leave in the hands of God. What an example of detachment and generosity for us, who are always complaining, we who are so reluctant to obey that at times we even refuse Him. So half-hearted is our surrender, so calculating are we when it is a matter of making a heavy sacrifice.

But God was already preparing Her reward. God cannot be beaten in generosity, When we are generous with Him, He overwhelms us with new graces and favours. Mary thought that by that pledge She was renouncing motherhood, that, as She later told the angel the divine maternity was not possible for Her. And yet the reward of that vow of virginity was none other than that God appointed Her to be His Mother. How great is God in His rewards, but especially how generously He rewards virginity and purity. How great must be the value of this virtue when it so attracts and enamours the heart of God!

3. You and Virginal Purity

Meditate on the greatness of this virtue so that you may be induced to thank God for the love that He has put in your heart for it. To be a virgin is to be an angel on earth, but with even more merit than they. The angels are virgins: they cannot be otherwise because they are not of flesh. But for you, burdened with flesh and a corruptible body, saddled with all concupiscence in the midst of a corrupt world, with a constant struggle against the passions which the devil is fanning in you and around you, yet in spite of all to be pure, to be chaste, to be a virgin, all this although it may sound as an exaggeration is more than angelic. A pure soul is the image of Mary, is Her faithful portrait. Such a soul is the spouse of God.

God's predilection for virginity goes to the extent of loving virginal souls as His spouses on whom He lavishes divine gifts, for whom He reserves such a singular reward which only a virgin can enjoy. In fact, they are the bodyguard of the Virgin of Virgins. They follow the Immaculate Lamb in close attendance, singing the hymn of virginity which they alone may sing. Glory to this virtue. Glory to Mary who taught us the value of virginity. Let this enthusiasm for virginity and for

Meditation 17

the Virgin of virgins encourage us in our difficulties, strengthen us to practice self-denial and penance and fervour, so that Christian purity may till the end of our life blossom within us without ever failing. So let it be, dear Mother Mary.



MEDITATION 18

The Espousal of Our Lady

Traditionally Our Lady is believed to have remained in the Temple from the age of three until She was fifteen, when, according to the Jewish custom She was betrothed by order and arrangements of the priests to St. Joseph. Since everything that Mary did cannot but be a matter of instruction for us, let us today see what we can learn from Her at this moment of Her Life.

1. Trust in God

This is the first lesson. Inspired by God, Our Lady had in His honour made a vow of virginity. By this vow She had renounced the very possibility of marriage and this only to conform to the will of God. Now in the name of God the priests tell Her that the divine will is that She should get married. What would anyone else have done in such a case?

How difficult it is for us to divest ourselves of our opinions and especially, of course, when we are perfectly convinced that we are right.

See, instead, the most prudent behaviour of our Heavenly Mother. Nobody could be more sure than She that Her vow of virginity was from God. Nor could She doubt that, humanly speaking, marriage and the vow were absolutely incompatible. What could She do? Should She insist on Her point and disregard that of the priests? She obeys and trusts.

This is the solution. A blind obedience and boundless trust in God. It was His work. It was He who had allowed the obstacles and contradictions. It was for Him to straighten them out. What an example for us! A difficult one, no doubt, but beautiful.

Sublime, pleasing to God. Do you not instead argue and doubt and pass judgement regarding the orders and suggestions of your superiors? See how little you resemble Mary in this regard.

2. The Virginal Union

But God, for whom nothing is impossible, found a way out. His solution was the virginal union of Mary and Joseph. Mary should not remain alone nor should She bear a Son without being betrothed.

The world, having no idea about the miraculous conception brought about by the Holy Ghost, might have punished Mary for adultery, but the wisdom of God by giving Her a spouse, safeguards the honour of Mary, whilst at the same time through a virginal betrothal Her virginity is safeguarded. How well God does things!

How infinite is His wisdom. And how masterful His providence. It is madness to insist that everything should go according to our plans, measures and time-tables, disregarding altogether whatever God may have designed for us.

Contemplate now these two virginal spouses. St Joseph was chosen by the priests because amongst all those who aspired to the hand of Mary he was virginal. Poetical tradition says that the Lord caused Joseph's rod to blossom with lilies after it had been placed in the Ark of the Covenant. St. Joseph had made no vow of virginity, such a vow being unknown in his day but certainly Our Blessed Lady on the very same day of Her espousals would have informed Joseph of the vow She had taken. Then St. Joseph admiring the pure virtue of the Virgin and not wanting to lag behind would, in the footsteps of his spouse, also by vow consecrate

his virginity to God, It is sweet to think that it was Joseph who through Mary after Her made the first vow of virginity. Joseph immediately realized that his destiny was to be the guardian of the virginal purity of Mary. There was a veil over the Ark of the Covenant warding off the curious glances of the bystanders. That veil was an image of Joseph who hid and guarded the great mystery that was enclosed in the Ark of the New Testament. Mary.

3. Practical Conclusion

Strengthen your trust in God. Ask pardon for your hesitation. Timidity. Never doubt that although you do not see the aim of the trials and tribulations sent you by the Lord nevertheless it is all for the best. Do not insist that every detail of the divine plans in your regard should be made known to you. Allow yourself to be led even when you think everything is just the contrary of what it ought to be. See how St. Joseph becomes more virginal the closer he approaches Mary. And do not forget that to look at Mary, to approach Her, to be united with Her, will be also for you a source of purity, an increase of chastity, an increase of your love for virginity.

MEDITATION 19

The Annunciation – Our Lady at Prayer

1. How She Prays

Moved by holy curiosity peep through the little window of the home in Nazareth and you will find Mary at prayer. What a sight! Admire Her external demeanour. No exaggerations. No dramatic attitudes. Her hands joined or crossed on Her breast. Perhaps Her forehead touches the ground for She is prostrate in adoration. Her eyes lowered in modest recollection or raised to the Heavens towards the Mansions above.

See Her interior fervour! No distractions, inopportune thoughts, tiredness, lukewarmness, or annoyance. Look at Her well, for She is the model of prayer. The angels in ecstasy joyfully witness Her prayer. God is pleased with Her, He communes with Her, gives Her an increase of grace, grants favours to the world in response to the prayers of

Mary. Could you not learn how to copy some of Your Mother's fervour?

2. What She Prays

Later on Jesus would teach us that we must ask for the Kingdom of God and its justice and this is exactly what Mary is asking for: that the Saviour come, that God send the Messiah, that the Lord hasten the hour of Redemption. And She asks it with such fervour that God does not know how to refuse. Mary's prayer anticipates the happy hour, Remember the wedding feast at Cana: Christ said there that His hour had not yet arrived. But through the intercession of Mary He anticipates it and works the miracle. Think of God advancing the hour when He will send His Son down to earth. In the same way as He advances the hour of the first miracle, He anticipates the hour of the Redemption on the Cross, the hour of His Resurrection, all in response to Mary's request.

3. Why She Prays

She prays because prayer is not only useful but necessary. She needed it not for Herself, neither did Christ; yet the prayer of Jesus and the prayer of Mary

go on without interruption. The first time that the Gospels speak of Mary, they introduce Her praying. It was during Her prayer that She received the visit from the Angel. The last time the Evangelists mention Her, She is portrayed in the Supper Room teaching the Apostles how to pray, preparing them to receive in a prayerful way the Holy Ghost. Mary begins Her life praying and ends it in prayer. What an example God has given us in Mary! Moreover, it was through prayer that She prepared to become the Mother of the Messiah. The holy work of the Incarnation is pivoted around Mary's prayer.

4. Your Own Prayer

In front of this sublime model, reflect:

a) how necessary prayer is for you. Your passions, your sins, your imperfections and miseries ceaselessly remind you of this necessity;

b) what fruit would you reap if you were a soul of prayer. Your communication with God, your relishing the things of God, your perfection and sanctity depend on your prayer;

c) how do you pray and how ought you to pray in the presence of such a model. Consider your want of fervour, your inattention, your want of

Meditation 19

composure, your tiredness and sloth, your excuses to shorten, or perhaps drop, your prayer when you most need it;

d) see how you say your vocal prayers such as the Little Office, the Rosary and the rest.

Implore a great spirit of prayer. Through the prayers of holy souls entreat the Lord to grant the world many children of Mary.



MEDITATION 20

The Annunciation — Our Lady's Retirement

1. A Life of Recollection

Such is the life of the one who says goodbye to everything external and makes use of it only in so far as it is indispensable for his interior life. How little we understand the interior life! What a confusion of ideas prevail when we believe that what matters is to work much, to do much, with a good intention of course, but only externally, without giving proper importance to the real life of our soul, namely, to the interior life. An external work will never be fruitful, either for you or for others, if it is not well grounded on the interior life. Nobody can give what he does not possess. And how could you give a life of fervour and sanctity to others, if you do not have it yourself? God gives Himself to souls only in retirement and recollection. His voice,

says the Holy Scripture, is like the murmur of a soft breeze. In the tumult of external occupations, that Voice is not heard. That is why nobody is so keen on promoting that din and tumult of external things as the devil, who thus can silence the Voice of God.

Moreover, virtue flourishes like plants in a green-house, well protected against the rigours of the weather. How can virtue grow in the midst of the noise of worldly bustle?

2. Mary a Model

How She loved retirement in Her little house! Nobody sees Her. No one is aware of what She is doing. But God is pleased with that recollection and there He goes to meet Her. The Angel does not appear in the street, in the squares, not even publicly in the Temple but only in the solitude and retirement of Nazareth. It is there that Mary feels Herself to be wholly and exclusively God's and God is wholly Hers. There, without witnesses, the great and intimate communications between God and Mary take place. There the great mystery of the Incarnation is brought about. Her retirement is definite. If She goes out of Her home, it is for the sake of charity, as at the Visitation, or in a spirit of obe-

dience, as when She goes to Bethlehem, to Egypt, or to the Temple of Jerusalem. She would never indulge in touring for recreation or as a mere pastime.

Watch Her in the street and see Her interior recollection as shown in Her demeanour, in Her eyes. Be present at the visits She makes, mark Her actions. Attend to Her conversations, listen to the words that fall from Her lips. Convinced that She is God's Temple, She is not carried away by social life: even in the midst of the world, She never abandons Her interior recollection. Look at Her, busy at home. Even in those days when the work is most pressing She knows how to sanctify it in the presence of God, whose sight She never loses. Everything helps to increase the intensity of Her already intense interior life.

3. Your Own Recollection

Have you learnt how to speak with God in the solitude of the sanctuary of your soul? Examine your interior and exterior life and see how frequently the latter interferes with the former. See if you love retirement, or do you rather pine for the outside world? Examine your visits and conversations. Are they frivolous? Against charity? Dissipated? Do you keep recollected everywhere? At home, in your

amusements and relaxations? Do you give the necessary importance to your monthly recollection, to your yearly Retreat? Do you make use of them for your spiritual advancement? Do you look forward to those sacred days?

Rigorously put right any faulty attitude in this regard. You should often take stock of your interior life: any increase or decrease in it should be carefully watched.



MEDITATION 21

The Annunciation — The Message of the Angel

1. The Angel Before Mary

The Angel of the Incarnation was one of the greatest and most beautiful spirits which surround the throne of God — watch him, a magnificent being, shining, sublime. We might be led into mistaking him for God Himself. Consider the dignity of his message, the importance of his embassy for Mary. God does not entrust it to a man as He was wont to do on other occasions, when Moses, Elias, Eliseus, the prophets and patriarchs were His messengers. No, this time, to be dispatched to Our Blessed Lady He chose an angel and in fact one of the highest. It was quite befitting that the woman who was more than an angel for Her purity should be visited by an angel of God. Let us picture that visit.

The Angel enters Her dwelling and offers Her his most respectful greetings. He who would never bend except before the throne of God now falls at the feet of Mary. What did the Angel, used as he was to see the wonders of Heaven, see in Mary? What could he see on earth to strike him as wonderful? Yet when he saw Mary he was dumb-founded, struck with admiration and awe. After the beauty of the divine essence, he had never even in Heaven seen anything similar to the soul of that Virgin hidden in the retirement of Nazareth. And the world knew nothing about Her. In truth, in order to know Mary you must look at Her, not with the eyes of a man but the eyes of an angel.

2. The Greeting

Hail, O Thou, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee and blessed art Thou amongst all women! This greeting springs from admiration. It is an outburst of enthusiasm. Every sentence gives vent to fond love. How greatly does the Angel love Mary! How fine is his greeting of praise? From a human mouth these words would have sounded ridiculous flattery, a passionate overstatement. But such terms cannot be applied to the words of an angel who is in-

capable of adulation, of falsehood, of exaggeration!
What then is Mary?

3. The Embassy

Now the Angel declares the purpose of his message. He comes about the conception and the birth of a Son who will be the Messiah. He begs Mary's consent. The whole of creation, men and angels, and even God Himself now speak through the mouth of that Angel. All with impatient anxiety are hanging on the answer. Sublime moment!

On Her word depends redemption and the salvation of mankind. The Angel continues to trace the figure of the Messiah. He will be called Jesus, or Saviour. He will be the holy of holies. He will be the Son of the Most High while at the same time remaining the Son of Mary. So Mary is going to be the real Mother of God. For the first time those adorable names are blended together, Jesus and Mary. So far She has been the little humble maid hidden away in Nazareth. Henceforth She will be Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Into this message of the Angel all the faith, all the longing, all the hopes of mankind are packed. There too are enclosed all the treasures of grace which had been poured on Mary

from the moment of Her Immaculate Conception till now. The Angel's embassy to Mary will be eternally remembered.

4. You in the Presence of Mary

Do you too appear before Her with the enthusiasm, fervour and love of the Angel? Can you study, appreciate and revere your Mother as he did? The Angel spoke once to Mary. You instead can speak with Her many times. Do you really do so by constantly living in Her presence, by doing everything with Her and for Her? God sends His messages to you through His angels, especially through your Guardian Angel, through your superiors, through Our Lady, while sometimes He even speaks to you directly Himself. How do you receive these inspirations, these calls, these knockings at your heart?

Ask the Lord for the eyes of an Angel in order to know and study your Mother well, in order to love Her with fond tenderness, in order always to live for and with Her. Ask the Lord to give you a firm will to cooperate with grace, to receive His inspirations come as they may, with the spirit of faith, and follow them generously. Speak with the Angel of the Annunciation and with your own Guardian Angel.

MEDITATION 22

The Annunciation – The Hail Mary

1. Ave

This is a word of fond greeting, but the Angel uses it with a meaning of congratulation. In a hymn the Church says that *Ave* is just the contrary of *Eva* for as through Eve death was ushered into the world, so through Mary life is given to us. Thus, the congratulations of the Angel must be extended to the whole of mankind. On this great occasion of His life give your congratulations too to Mary and congratulate yourself also since through Her you were made a child of God.

2. Full of Grace

She was, indeed, overflowing with grace: to other saints, and even to the angels themselves grace was given only in part. But to Mary, grace

was given in its fullness and plenitude. In order to understand the words of the Angel it is necessary to know what grace is. Just think for a moment what grace means for the rest of mankind: it is something divine, something of God, something from God. It is a divine entity that is communicated to man in order to raise him to divine life. It confers on him the title of Child of God. It gives him a right to inheritance from the Eternal Father. Since man becomes a child of God he is consequently also heir to Heaven.

Now if all that wonder is achieved by grace in other men, if grace sanctifies and divinises them to such an extent, what must grace operate in Mary, since it was given Her in its total and complete fullness? If She possesses all grace, to Her we must appeal in order to be partakers of grace. But if She was made full of grace, how could grace increase in Her during Her life? This is a mystery. When a glass is full, it can hold no more. But to God, nothing is impossible. God could dilate and increase at any moment the capacity of Her soul, that most precious vase, so that whilst always being full it could at the same time take in an increasing measure of the grace it already contains.

3. The Lord is With Thee

The Lord is with Thee, more than with us, the Angel implied. The Lord is with Thee more than with any other creature. By totally possessing Thee He is with Thee. There is nothing in Mary that does not wholly belong to, nothing which is not completely possessed by, Almighty God. God is also with us, but how half-heartily on our part! We do not easily let God possess us as fully as did Mary. Moreover, the Lord was with Thee, Mary, and thought of Thee and took delight in Thee before anything was created by His hands. He is with Thee for ever, He wanted Thee so closely united to Him as to become His Mother whilst He became Thy Son.

Meditate on how Jesus wants to unite Himself also to you. To this purpose He seeks and calls you and unites Himself to you through grace and through Eucharistic Communion.

4. Blessed Amongst Woman

Just as sin was introduced into the world through a woman so through Thee came grace and redemption. All generations will remember Eve in order to deplore her behaviour. But all will remember Thee in order to bless Thy name. Eve

was to us a step-mother who caused death to her children. Mary, the true Mother, who gives us life with love.

Of old, the whole of mankind centred all its rancour upon women. Women were ill-treated and despised. Mary has rehabilitated women and raised them in such a manner that a woman is the most sublime creature as well as the one who holds the highest place in Heaven.

5. Blessed is the Fruit of Thy Womb

These are not words of the Angel but of St. Elizabeth. However, they are so closely linked to the Angelic message that the Church brings them into the one same prayer. These words are glorious for Mary because they express what Her Son will be. It is through Her Son that She is blessed and hailed by all. In that blessed Fruit we shall all find salvation.

Eve caused our perdition by handing over to us the fruit of sin. Mary will save us by giving us the fruit of sanctification which is called Jesus. Whenever you say the *Hail Mary* utter it with veneration. Do not fall into routine when saying the Rosary. Never omit to greet Mary at the Angelus.

The Annunciation — The Hail Mary

Whenever you say the Angelus remember this great day of the Annunciation and beg Mary to fill you with grace, to bring the Lord to remain with you, to make you through all eternity a sharer in Her happiness and blessing.



MEDITATION 23

The Annunciation – Mary's Behaviour in Her Humility

1. Mary's Fear

Mary was troubled when She heard the words of the Angel. Listen to the quickened and anxious beating of Her heart. Full of astonishment and awe She seems to ask Herself: "What is all this?" The Angel had brought a message true in its every word. But Her humility had been struck. Later on She will publicly acknowledge the truth of the words of the Archangel. She will even proclaim that all generations shall call Her Blessed. Yet She will do so not for Her own glory, but only to give praise to God. However, at this moment, She Herself is the object of this praise and consequently She is taken aback, She feels frightened. She is on Her guard, fearing a temptation, sensing some danger. Join the Angel

and allay Her fear. Tell Her: "Fear not, Mary! You have no reason to be afraid, no need to fear this praise." However, it is good for me that you should give me the example and teach me how to receive praise which men may give me. Be my model, oh Mother most humble.

2. Her Sublime Humility

Consider especially at this point how immense is Her humility. There are other instances when Mary's humility appears quite natural and logical when, for instance, in Bethlehem She is rejected by all, or when in Egypt She is running away from Her enemies: or in Nazareth, when She lives hidden and unknown in that little house of an artisan. Also when at the foot of the Cross She stands as the Mother of One sentenced to the gallows. But when She receives the visit of an Angel, when She is sought after by God who begs Her consent and awaits Her answer, just at the very moment when She is exalted to the highest imaginable dignity, how great and sublime is Her humility.

Adam was raised in Paradise much less high. The bad angels in Heaven were not raised so high. Yet they grew dizzy at their height; they succumbed

to pride and fell into the abyss. But Mary knows well that this message comes from God, for an angel cannot lie. And because truth is the very essence of the message, She does not feel dismayed. Feeling troubles, She humbles Herself more and more. How great, how loving and attractive is Mary on account of Her humility! Through this most profound humility God thus wonderfully amends the destruction caused by sin whose beginning is pride.

3. True Humility

Humility is not cowardice. Truly, it makes us feel small in our own esteem but it makes us great in the eyes of God. Never had Mary appeared so great in the eyes of God as on this occasion. But humility is not the virtue of the cowardly and of the miserable: on the contrary, it is the virtue of the strong, of the magnanimous.

Contemplate Mary. She feels troubled at the words of the Angel but Her discernment remains tranquil and serene. She ponders and then finally acts with determination. This is true humility: to recognize the voice of God, to submit to His will, to surrender our opinion to it even though it may cost us as much as it cost Mary, for She knew full

well what amount of suffering and sorrow would torture Her heart. Yet She immediately accepted the divine proposal. Humble, yes, but at the same time magnanimous and courageous. This is the fruit of humility.

4. Your Humility

Are you similar to Mary in humility and in the generosity of your sacrifice? Do you not rather search after flattery and smiles and sweet words? Are you ready to take for yourself whatever is heavy and despised and humiliating, at least when God gives it to you? Do you accept it with resignation; or do you rather protest and try to shirk it? Think of your nothingness, for in the same way as God raised the grandeur of Creation from nothingness, your greatness also will spring from the acknowledgment of your own nothingness. Know God Who is all, and know your own nothingness. Thus, you will find real humility.

Perform some act of external humility. Make many acts of interior humility. Feel obliged and thankful to those who by despising you, making fun of you, casting contempt on you, help you to practise humility.

MEDITATION 24

The Annunciation — The Virginal Purity

1. The Objections of Mary

Mary has still an objection to the words of the Angel. It is a fear of Herself. Eve in Paradise fears when eating the forbidden fruit, but she does not fear sin: she only fears the punishment of sin, namely, death. On the contrary, Mary's only fear on receiving the Angel's message is lest She should go against Her word to God. Her fear is just, reasonable, wholly inspired by the love of God and of virtue. Are these your objections whenever you hear the voice of God? Are your fears not rather prompted by your self-love which is always so ready to offer resistance to the divine demands?

2. Virginit

How great is Mary's love for virginal purity! Behold what unheard-of glories, what ineffable

grandeur, are offered to Mary on behalf of God and through the mouth of an angel. Yet She is not dazed. She thinks of Her virginity; and since the choice seems to be between the dignity of being God's Mother or the sacrifice of the virginity She has vowed to God, She has no hesitation. She chooses the grace that sanctifies rather than the grace that exalts and raises to honour. Meditate in silence on the love which Mary has for virginity. Let your heart exhaust itself, expanding with feelings of admiration for your Mother. Recall the vow She made at the age of three, the fidelity She used in keeping it, the test to which the Lord now submits Her. See how Mary as a prudent, humble and most chaste virgin scores a victory over all and holds high the banner of virginity.

No doubt, God is enamoured of Mary even more now on seeing Her so virginal and pure. What She fears to be a hindrance is rather an attraction which implies God to choose Her as His Mother — Precisely because She is a virgin She is going to be the Mother of God.

3. Incarnation Through Virginity

Try to understand the sublimity of this plan. See God drawing a blue-print for the magnificent work

of the Incarnation on the basis of the virginity of His Mother. As we have already seen elsewhere, the redemption of mankind was faced by two insurmountable difficulties:

a) Humanly speaking, redemption was not possible because all mankind together could not atone for one single sin. It was necessary that redemption should be achieved by God.

b) But God could not possible atone and redeem as long as He could not sacrifice Himself, immolate Himself, suffer and die for man. Divinely speaking redemption seemed also impossible.

But God finds a way: He will become man and thus possess a body through which to suffer and die. But this body could not be formed like other bodies. Otherwise it would be born stained like the rest: it would be a body conceived in sin. And such a body could not be taken up by the Son of God. The way out of this conflict is Mary Immaculate, stainlessly conceived; the Virgin Mary could be a Mother without any detriment to Her virginity. In this way Jesus, as God, holy, virginal and pure, will likewise, because His Mother is holy, virginal and pure, be so as man. Incarnation through virginity! How much beauty there is in this virtue!

4. The Predilection of Jesus

Our Lord had a great love and preference for virginity. To it He devoted one of His beatitudes. He loved with preference that disciple who was a virgin. To him at the foot of the Cross He entrusted the treasure of His Mother, judging him on account of his virginity to be the one best fit to look after the Virgin of Virgins. Jesus remained with us in the Eucharist and gave His priests full power over His body and blood, but He demands that the priesthood be virginal. Jesus has some chosen souls, virgins of the Lord, as His spouses. Finally, He reserves for the virgins a special reward in Heaven; they accompany the Lamb of God wherever He goes and sing with Him a new canticle which they alone know.

5. Your Virginity

Think often of the exceptional grace bestowed by God on the souls He has called to the state of virginity. If you are one of those chosen ones, be convinced of the privilege which is yours and give thanks to God. Show your gratitude in a practical manner, taking care that an interior and external modesty accompanies all your actions, your looks,

Meditation 24

enquiries, composure, clothing. Then foster humility, the basis of chastity in your soul. Many have fallen into shameful sins on account of their pride. Cultivate mortification and penance so essential to this virtue. No sacrifice is too great if it is necessary to keep virginity intact and flourishing. Finally, ask Our Lady the grace of imitating Her especially in Her love for virginal chastity. Ask Her to help you to cooperate with Her in spreading love and reverence for virginity.



MEDITATION 25

The Annunciation — Handmaid of the Lord

1. Mary's Answer

Picture that scene at Nazareth and in spirit watch it from close quarters. The angel has already ended his embassy. His mission is over; he keeps silent. He awaits Mary's answer. Look at the whole of creation. Look at God Himself at this solemn moment. What a moving scene! Draw close to Mary and beg Her not to delay Her answer. Tell Her that all the unfortunate children of Eve, all of us, born slaves of sin, are eagerly awaiting Her word of redemption and of grace. Tell Her that the whole world and the very Heavens themselves are in suspense while waiting Her answer.

And then the silence is broken. Mary speaks. The Angel trembles with emotion. From Mary prostrate on the ground, from the bottom of Her soul spring

these simple and sublime words *Behold the Handmaid of the Lord!* Now the Angel is troubled. With all his angelic intelligence, he fails to comprehend Her great humility, Her great sanctity. The Queen of queens, the Mistress of Heaven and earth, the One blessed amongst women, a slave, a handmaid! Yes, She accepts that state, She avows it unashamedly. She does not try to conceal it. She proclaims it in the face of the whole world, and stresses this truth so that all may know that, for all Her greatness, She is and always has been the handmaid of the Lord. Try to penetrate the heart of God Himself. What would God on hearing these words feel in the face of this adorable behaviour? If God fills the humble and the poor in spirit with His blessings what will not He do with this little Handmaid of His? How readily He will respond: "So Thou art My Handmaid, then I make Thee my Queen." He would instantly order all the angels of Heaven to render obeisance to Her. Do you also the same. Honour the immense greatness amidst such profound humility.

2. True servitude

But you must not limit yourself to mere lip service, You also have often raised to God words of of-

fering, of surrender, of servitude. Yes, but then afterwards how have you kept your word? With Mary it was otherwise. She says what She feels and She does what She says. On account of that She repeats *Be it done to me according to Thy word!*

Ponder and relish the word of meaning enclosed in the word *Fiat*, "Be it done", the formula of true servitude to God. "I am a Handmaid and therefore I have nothing, I can want nothing except God. Everything must come from God, nothing from the Handmaid." *Fiat*, then, implies a total renunciation, a complete, perfect and absolute surrender of Her being. Neither self-will, nor freedom, nor choice; only what God wants and orders sublime servitude indeed!

But there is still more. This servitude must not halt in the face of any sacrifice, heavy and painful though it be. Mary at this point proceeds quite cautiously. She is perfectly aware of the step She is taking. Without haste, She thinks, ponders things over, raises objections to the Angel, advancing reasons, suggesting solutions. All this is a clear sign that She is proceeding with full knowledge. She knows from now on all that She must suffer, if She is going to be the Mother of God. She knows in advance the

tortures lying in wait for Her; She appreciates that to be a co-Redemptrix will mean wading through a sea of bitter sorrows. Nevertheless, She knows that such is God's will; hence that suffices. Until She clearly knows what God wants She raises some difficulties; but as soon as she knows the will of God, She has naught to say than *Be it done!* Remember the words of Christ in His passion. He also said *Let Thy will, not Mine, be done!* Is not this fiat the same as that of His Mother? This is real servitude, real sanctity, the only way we can overcome self-love. Are you like your Mother? Do you also say, "Let God's will be done!" especially when self-love rises in rebellion? Why do you not ask your Mother to help you follow Her example in order that you also may do the Holy Will of God?



MEDITATION 26

The Annunciation — The Mother of God

1. The all-Powerfulness of Her “Faith”

When Mary says, *Be it done*, She not only practises Her Submission to God, She tells us the secret of Her omnipotence. Hardly had She uttered these words than as announced by the Angel, the Holy Ghost overshadowed Her and gave accomplishment to the work of the Incarnation. At that very moment the Word was made flesh and began dwelling amongst us. Such was the power of Mary's word. At the beginning of time "Be it done", was the word uttered by the omnipotence of God; at once worlds sprang out of nothing, swimming round in space.

In the abyss of Her humility the same word is uttered by Mary and thus, is brought about a work even more wonderful than the one

achieved by the Creator. That initial "Be it done" drew Creation from naught. This "Be it done" of Mary draws God Himself from His eternity, so that He, without ceasing to be God, commences to be man. Look at the Holy Virgin and look at the Holy Ghost whilst in the Immaculate blood of Mary He organises the body of Jesus Christ. This body and blood taken from the Virgin become the matter of the sacrifice which later He will offer on the Cross for the redemption of the world. Adore such a sublime mystery and thank Jesus and Mary for it.

2. The Divine Maternity

Mary at that moment became the true Mother of God. A sublime and wonderful dignity! This dignity is infinite, in as much as the dignity of Her Son is infinite. Mary has a real and physical relationship with the Son of God. From this moment God abides in Mary, not in image, not only with His grace, but with His very Divine Person. There is now between God and Mary a true identification in as much as the blood and flesh of His Son are the blood and flesh of Mary. This is the most intimate and sublime union which can exist between a creature and God.

Through it Mary, as the Mother of God, attains the highest authority, namely, that of commanding Her Divine Son. She also acquires the highest privilege, namely, that of a special right to the love of Her Divine Son and from Him receives all the treasures of grace and glory together with the power to communicate them to others.

The truth of Her divine mediation is based on this divine maternity. She is an all-powerful Mediatrix because She partakes by grace of the omnipotence which God has by His own nature. Moreover through this maternity, She is the dispenser of grace. We can clearly see that God wants to grant graces to mankind through the ministry of Mary, rather than by Himself directly. How wonderful, sublime and divine is this maternity of Mary!

We shall never fathom the depths of its profound magnificence. God can create more worlds, more angels and many other beings very much more perfect than the angels themselves, but He cannot produce a greater Mother than the Mother of God.

3. The Life of the Mother of God

At that time Her life was a life of intimate union with God both in body and soul. It was the in-

timate life of a Mother with Her Son. It was only one life, only one beating of both hearts. What an intense and deep recollection was Hers! All was centred upon the life of Her divine Son. Whatever She did, She did for Him and with Him. She would view things with the eyes of Her Son. She would love with His heart. His pleasure was Her pleasure. Hence, that most intimate life with Jesus; hence, those pure and perfect sentiments of love and joy towards that God Who was enclosed in Her bosom. If Heaven consists in the possession of God, Mary was already enjoying Paradise through that most intimate possession which was more perfect, indeed, than that of even the angels in Heaven. It was, then, through the union with Her Son a totally divine life, totally glorious, totally sanctifying.

4. The Mother of God is My Mother

But that union affects me also. God wanted His Mother to be my Mother also, thus, She loved me from that moment as His brother. Hence, She ardently desired that Her Son should be born and should redeem the world, and consequently, too She had me constantly in mind. She wanted then, as She wants now, to keep me as Her son, to be an-

The Annunciation — The Mother of God

other Jesus. She wants me to be united with Her as She was with Jesus, so that I also like Jesus should partake of the same life. What immense happiness to think that I have as Mother the One chosen as the Mother of God. It is through Mary that we acquire a real relationship with Jesus. Jesus and I are brothers. Think of this and thank both Mother and Son for this marvellous achievement of love.

Imitate Mary in Her divine maternity by living more intimately with Jesus. Make this union rich in practical results. But make sure you first unite yourself to your soul maybe in word and in deed, to make yourself really worthy of such a great Mother.



MEDITATION 27

The Annunciation — Marian Slavery

1. In What it Consists

I must have an intimate knowledge of the strict meaning of this word. A slave depends on somebody else in such a manner that all that he is and has does not belong to him but to his master. (Such was the barbaric law of old.) He disposes of nothing and of nobody, not even of himself. He has no freedom. He must do only what his master orders. He has no self-will. He must limit his desires. He must limit his desires to the wishes of his master. He has no juridical personality. He is a thing rather than a person. The master does with him what he pleases. He can sell him, or present him to another. He can punish him even without reason, kill him even for a whim. Nobody can call the master to task for what he does with his slave. The slave is merely at his mercy and caprice.

Now this slavery of man to man as it existed in pagan times is brutal and unworthy, degrading, forbidden by God. It was abolished by Christ. But if this slavery is practiced towards God, and if a man freely and voluntarily renders himself a slave to Him, this slavery is the greatest, the most worthy and beautiful possible. It is a proof of a most profound humility based on the formula. "All belongs to God, nothing is mine. Consequently, everything for God and nothing for myself." So then, my body with its senses, my soul with its powers and all the actions and movements of my being, all my sensations, thoughts, affections, loves, all my words, as well as my silences, my laughter, whatever I suffer, whatever I do, whenever I walk sleep, eat, or pray, all is for God. This most sublime slavery is the highest possible sanctity.

The more independently of God I live and work, the greater my faults and my imperfections; whereas the more God dwells and works within me, the greater will my perfection be. Is this not slavery? Well, thus my own slavery to Mary ought to be. I must live as Her son. I must depend in Her for everything. My intention is that I must depend on Her for everything. My intentions must always be

Hers. The means I use must be Hers. I must hide in Her heart in order to live on Her presence so that, by living in this manner, I shall finally direct all my activities, not to my own glory or profit, but only to Her glory, and to Her service.

2. The Divine Mould

But all this means that I must lose myself in Mary, like a drop in the ocean, or like the metal in the mould. Mary is the mould of God. God wants us to be similar to Jesus and thus, He gives us the pattern. We must, by being similar to Mary, be shaped in it in order to be perfect images of Jesus. Now think well of what is entailed by this being shaped, by our being emptied into that mould. You must be filled with Mary. Until you do so you will not be a real slave, nay you will not be a real lover of Mary.

But think also of the inherent reward. To be similar to Mary is a reward in itself. Is this too little? Think of being able to attract the love of God as She did. Because She made Herself a slave, She became the Queen and Mother of God. Something similar will happen to you. God cannot be beaten in generosity. That is why we cannot even imagine the reward that He reserves for those who surren-

der themselves perfectly to Him in this holy slavery. Do not however think of the reward, but give yourself up and expect no other prize than that of intimately loving Jesus and Mary and of being similar to them.

Without fear adopt this practice, this divine slavery. Ask Mary to help you. Examine yourself daily and ask yourself often whether you are really emptying yourself of yourself. When self-love tingles, remember Mary. At every stroke of the hour remember your slavery. Never think of your own likes or dislikes, just think whether or not your loving Mother wants it so.



MEDITATION 28

The Annunciation — Feast of Mary

This incomparable mystery in the life of Our Lady was accomplished through the embassy of an angel. It will, then, be convenient to compare this embassy with the messages which God so often sends our souls.

1. The Embassy

God sent the Angel in a visible way to announce to Our Heavenly Mother Her promotion to the dignity of Mother of God. It appears that the Angel took on a human shape most befitting the lofty scope of his embassy, that of a beautiful youth surrounded by Heavenly splendour, for he had to deal with the most sublime business ever undertaken between Heaven and earth, between God and man.

Thus does God often attempt to deal with us about some business appertaining to His glory and to the welfare of our souls. And He does so through His angels although in an invisible shape. How often is our guardian angel in the name of God trying to draw our attention to some inspiration, and yet we do not pay any heed. If we could see him visibly, we would not behave in this manner.

But why do we not see with the eyes of Faith? We should also see God through the eyes of Faith in those who speak to us in His name, namely, the superiors, the spiritual directors, the preachers, good readings, good example and even humiliations and trials. What are all these but embassies sent to us by God? Compared with the way Our Lady received the Angel how do we receive them?

2. The Salutation of the Angel

Consider in this salutation not only the praise he offers Mary but also the glorious truths he recalls to Her mind. He calls Her full of grace, tells Her that God is with Her, and adds that She is blessed amongst woman.

Thus, does the Angel prepare Mary to correspond to these favours from God and give Her con-

sent to His message and thus does not hinder the plans of God. So it is that God often speaks to us, very often and in many ways, and especially with His internal light He whispers into our hearts and reminds us of the graces He has bestowed on us. Hence the obligation we have to correspond to, and cooperate with them. He encourages us with the hope of the wealth of grace and glory that we can gain through our correspondence.

But we, so wretched, what do we do? How do we receive those inspirations from God? And if perchance on some rare occasion we feel inspired to work on our own sanctification with fervour and enthusiasm, is it not true that more often than not we pay no heed to such prompting? And we keep on wasting our time by disregarding those whisperings of grace thus deadening our ears to the advances of God.

3. How Mary Receives the Message

Consider how Our Lady, so prepared by the Angel, receives the most important part of God's message: that She will be the Mother of God because She will bring forth the Holy of Holies. Mary listens, but instead of immediately giving Her consent as though impelled by self-glory, She instead

with great prudence and humility ponders over the words and examines if they coincide with the Will of God as shown to Her in His agreement to Her vow of virginity.

Learn prudence of Mary. How easily we believe something to be God's business, seeing it as easily as a suggestion from an angel when it redounds to our own profit or glory. How readily we sprint towards those things that please us. And how often we afterwards realise that the inspiration did not after all come from the Angel of Light but from the Angel of Darkness, and what we thought to be a divine whisper was in reality a temptation! Examine, meditate, take advice, so that you may always be right in your choice and resolves, thereby imitating the prudence of your Heavenly Mother.

4. The Consent

Mary once She was satisfied that everything came from God, gave Her consent. Think also how the Lord behaves. God could have done all that without awaiting Our Lady's consent but He does not want to force Her will.

In like manner He proceeds with us. God does not want any forced consent, any forced love. God

Meditation 28

wants souls who freely, voluntarily and generously surrender themselves to Him. When it was a matter of creating you, He did not seek your consent; yet for the work of your salvation and sanctification, it is absolutely necessary that you should spontaneously give your consent. He will not forcibly make you a saint against your own will. He will give you His grace and His help; but whether you sanctify yourself through that grace, or waste it and ignore it, that is your own personal business. The business of your sanctification depends on you, on your own free will. Make no mistake about that.



MEDITATION 29

The Visitation of Our Blessed Lady

The Visitation of Our Blessed Lady is a witness given by God to confirm the miraculous conception which took place in Mary. That is why it is a sublime mystery in the life of Our Heavenly Mother and a consoling one for us, Her devoted children.

1. The Mystery

No sooner had the mystery of the Incarnation been completed than the mystery of the Visitation takes place. Both are closely connected with each other. We could say that in the Annunciation Heaven itself through an angel hails Mary with the most beautiful of all salutations, and acknowledges Her as the Mother of God and the Queen of Heaven. But God does not want Earth to remain indiffer-

ent, and thus on earth too He prepares a salutation, a witness for Mary.

The Angel spoke for Heaven. Saint Elizabeth spoke in the name of earth. Her words, sentiments and praises contain something of ours. In her greetings to Mary, she speaks also for us. Rejoice at this arrangement made by God, Who indeed wanted that we through Elizabeth should share the joy that thrilled Heaven and earth in front of the Incarnation of the Word and the Divine Maternity of Mary. Imagine, then, that you yourself are speaking. Repeat with enthusiasm and fervour the praises which were addressed to Our Heavenly Mother by Her cousin.

2. Mary's Visitation Was an Act of Delicate Courtesy

Our Lady knew how happy St. Elizabeth would be when after so many years of sterility God granted her to have a child at such an advanced age. What joy pervaded her home! How great was Elizabeth's happiness when she realized that God had in the end yielded to her constant prayer! Our Lady knew it and without hesitation She decided to share that joy and even, by running to give Her personal con-

gratulations, to increase it. Courtesy and sanctity are never at variance. Ridiculous exaggerations and false compliments such as the world offers are, of course, another question. But selfish, discourteous behaviour by which we do not give our neighbour his due is directly opposed to sanctity.

Think of these most delicate and courteous traits of Our Heavenly Mother and be persuaded that good manners and courtesy, when practised in a Christian way, are a great part of sanctity, nay, they form one and the same thing with it. It will be well to examine ourselves in front of this exquisite model, Our Blessed Lady.

3. It Was an Act of Obedience

Our Lady was not driven by a mere act of courtesy and far less by a desire of verifying the words of the Angel since Mary's faith never faltered or wavered. Neither did She go to visit Her cousin just to inform Her of the mystery that had taken place in Her bosom and which had raised Her to the dignity of Mother of the Messiah. On the contrary, She had kept it hidden even from Her spouse, St. Joseph. Not a word had been said to him about the secret that had arisen between God and Herself.

Mary goes to Elizabeth's house out of obedience, moved by an inner drive, by an inspiration from God which compels Her. She does not waver. She follows the inspiration without any fear. She was still a young girl. The way is long and hard. Her state was very delicate. Yet because God wants it She immediately puts it into execution. What an immense love for obedience, what trust in God!

Little did Mary know about the aim intended by God in this visit. She knew nothing of what was going to happen in that house. Yet She never questioned; She did not worry. The only thing that matters is to abandon Herself to God and obey blindly and promptly. God knows where He is taking Her. That suffices.

4. The Visit Was Primarily an Act of Charity

This is the only occasion when the Gospel says that Mary went with all haste. This haste does not seem to be in keeping with the calm and tranquillity of Her condition. Why, then, this haste? Because of the flame of charity. In Her virginal bosom, She has the Word of God Who is love and this fire inflames Her and makes Her run where charity calls Her.

St. Paul said that he was spurred on by the charity of Christ. So, he could have no rest and wanted to bring the flame of His charity all over the world. How great, then, would be the fire of the love of Mary. How eager was Her desire that Jesus should spread His grace as soon as possible and begin the work of the sanctification of souls. On account of this She flies in great haste to give vent to the charity which inflames Her.

Now, think and compare your visits with Hers. Are they always a model of delicate courtesy under the inspiration of God? Are they, above all, prompted by that spirit of charity whereby you long to do some good to your neighbour? Are they not rather a means of wasting time, of indulging in back-biting and criticism? How much hypocrisy very often lies under the visits which are prompted by the spirit of the world?

Examine your conversations also and the motives behind your words. Promise Our Lady that you will always edify your neighbour by never uttering words offensive to others and that always you will keep in mind the law of charity so well practised by Our Heavenly Mother.

MEDITATION 30

Our Lady's Visitation and St. Elizabeth

During the three months that the Ark of the Covenant remained in the house of Obbedom, the Lord blessed that house and poured into it countless graces and marvels. Is it any wonder then that the three months which Our Lady spent in the house of Zachary should be rich in Heavenly blessings, since Mary was the Divine Ark containing the Heavenly Manna? Let us, then, see what the Visitation meant for St. Elizabeth and for St. John.

1. St. Elizabeth and the Visitation

It is sweet to think that it was through Our Blessed Lady that Jesus wanted to achieve the first sanctification of souls: the souls of Elizabeth and of her son, John. Realise, too, that the sanctification of your soul will not be achieved by God except in

the measure in which you give yourself up to Mary. Consider also the reception given by St. Elizabeth to Her cousin. What joy! She had never before experienced anything like it. Imagine how Elizabeth would entertain Her; how she would try to render Her stay as pleasant as possible. What would you have done on a similar occasion? Do you not feel a kind of holy jealousy at the fortune of this woman who is the first to offer her homage to Mary? But rather than feel jealous it would be better to imitate her. Our Lady wants to visit your heart. She wishes to dwell in your soul. Do you try to entertain Her or do you leave Her alone without giving a thought to the mysteries you have in your soul? This is rank discourtesy. Look after Mary, keep Her company, serve your Heavenly Mother. Oh, how fortunate to be able to render a service to Our Lady, to be useful to the Most Holy Virgin! Think what this means. You will derive sweet consolation and practical guidance from it.

2. Elizabeth Was Filled with the Holy Ghost

No sooner had Elizabeth heard Mary's salutation than Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. What power lies in the words of Mary! How effec-

tive they are, since a simple greeting from Her is enough to fill a soul with grace and sanctity! Just as flowers spread their perfume around so does Mary pour the grace and loveliness that fills Her soul into those who draw close to Her.

Ask Mary to reserve for you some of Her soul sanctifying words. Ask Her not to ignore you since it is precisely your great misery more than anything else that entitles you to them. Be confident that Our Lady will not let you down.

Think also how your own words ought to be. Whatever word comes from your mouth should be of edification or sanctification. Never an idle, useless, or harmful word that destroys, disedifies or leads your neighbour into fault.

3. Elizabeth's Praises

As soon as St. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost, she recognised the Divine Conception of Mary by which She had become the Mother of God. She broke into exclamations of praise: Blessed art Thou amongst women, and Blessed is the fruit of Thy womb. Consider how the greatness of Mary is known only under the light of Heaven. Only through prayer, only by asking it from the Lord.

We should, then, pray that we may realise what Mary is. Without light from above we cannot catch a glimpse of Her beauty nor recognise Her next-to-infinite sanctity. Consider the mystery of these exclamations of St. Elizabeth on seeing the greatness of Her cousin. What did she discover in Her since the Gospel tells us that she could not control herself, but in a loud voice broke into irresistible cries of surprise and joy.

Consider that the words she utters are the very words of the Angel: *Blessed art Thou amongst women...* What an admirable coincidence! The Angel and the woman greet Mary as the Queen of Heaven and earth raised above all creatures. Marvellous, indeed, are the ways of the Lord. What must have taken place in the heart of Mary on seeing the mystery of Her divine maternity discovered by Her cousin and on hearing repeated the very words of the Angel? Angels, men, earth and Heaven are all united in the same praise. That is so because the Author is the same: it was the Holy Ghost Who inspired the Angel and St. Elizabeth; it was the loving spouse of Mary who thus made use of all creatures in order to exalt and praise Her.

4. Her Humility

The other words of Elizabeth show feelings of deep and lovely humility. How have I deserved to be thus, visited by *the Mother of my Lord*? Elizabeth was bound to Mary by links of human relationship. She was senior in age to Mary. She too was a holy woman. Yet she proclaims that she does not merit to receive the visit of Our Lady. And do you think you deserve it? Have you reason to ask Our Lady not to leave you, to ask Her to accompany and to visit you? Yes, you have a very powerful reason to demand Her visit and it is just the reason given above: namely: that you are so small, so despicable, so miserable: this entitles you to trust in Our Lady more and more, because She, like a loving Mother, lavishes Her fondest care on Her most needy, most weak, most feeble child. And Her glory will be the greater if She manages to give such a child the life so badly needed. How great will be the glory of Mary if She, in spite of all your failings, ingratitude and miseries, manages to make of you a holy soul. Trust Her, then, and ask Her to try.

Finally, St. Elizabeth prophesies that because Mary believed in the Word of God She will be blessed. Eve did not believe in God's word and brought

Our Lady's Visitation and St. Elizabeth

us havoc. Mary believed, and through Her faith the Incarnation and our Redemption took place. Thank Mary for Her faith which has brought salvation to us. Ask Her for the grace to imitate that same spirit of simple faith, to follow Her words, to accept Her inspirations. Since faith entails humility and mistrust of ourselves, faith, together with obedience and the acceptance of God's will, is the way to make good Eve's disobedience; it enables us to partake of the fruits of Mary's obedience.



MEDITATION 31

Our Lady's Visitation and the Baptist

The wonderful blessings rich in abundant graces, brought to St. Elizabeth by her cousin's visit, were nevertheless surpassed by the favours bestowed on the child in her bosom. Let us consider the effects of Our Lady's visit on St. John.

1. A Fruitful Visit

The first effect that the child, a future forerunner of Our Lord, experienced whilst still in the bosom of his mother was an intimate joy, so great and uncontrollable that he leapt in the maternal womb, as Elizabeth expressed her immense joy to her august visitor. The spirit of God is peace, joy and contentment. You may have sorrows and displeasures. You may perhaps have to undergo very painful trials. Nevertheless, by being with Jesus

and by enjoying His presence and the presence of your beloved Mother everything will become sweet. Do not seek for happiness and joy outside Jesus, because nowhere save in Him will you find it. Moreover, the joy of the child on hearing the words of Mary and on feeling the closeness of Jesus signifies the joy of an awakening world at the arrival of its Redeemer. Darkness is always sad, whereas the awakening of Creation is full of joy, life and beauty. Recall the sight of a world sunk in the eternal darkness of sin, and see it suddenly awakening. Night is over, day has arrived and the sweet awakening from such a horrible nightmare causes humanity to exult with happiness and immense joy. All that is pictured in the leap of joy which St. John made in the womb of his mother. It is the first sign of happiness. A happiness that will be eternal for all those who wish to avail themselves of the coming of Jesus.

Think of a prisoner loaded with chains under sentence to death, lying sadly in a dark dungeon. How he will welcome the dawn of the day of freedom, on which his fetters will be shattered, and he will begin a new life of light and joy! Such were the feelings of St. John, the representative of mankind.

His happiness at that moment was the expression of the joy of all those who through Christ would one day enjoy the life of Heaven.

2. The Sanctification of St. John

This was the principal aim of this mystery. God wanted to sanctify His forerunner; and since Jesus could not go there by Himself, He went within the most pure womb of Mary. Think of the principal details in this mysterious sanctification. St. John must precede Jesus on the path of sanctity for only on that path can souls meet Him. Only if you strive towards sanctity do you go along with Jesus. Again think of the readiness and the promptness which we must bring to the service of God. No putting off, no procrastination, no leaving things for later on or for the morrow. That is slackness and lukewarmness. God must be served promptly and speedily. We can proceed along the road to sanctity only by advancing and keeping on the run. No stopping or delay. No turning back. Do you see an example of sanctification in St. John? Jesus is in a hurry to achieve it. John is not yet born and God already wants him a saint. How happy we would be if only we could say the same! But since the grace of being born a saint has not been granted

us, why do we delay and waste the time He gives us? The subject of the Baptist's preaching is summed up in his words: *Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world!* How feelingly must St. John have uttered these words since he, pardoned and sanctified in the bosom of his mother, had been the first to experience them in himself.

I am not worthy to undo the lace of His sandals, he would say later, meaning thereby, "I am nothing in His presence because whatever I am I am not of myself but only thanks to Him". Apply these words to yourself and be persuaded of their truth.

Without God you are but rottenness and misery. Without Him there is nothing pleasing in your soul. Whatever we are, we are through Him. If there is anything good, worthy and great within us, it is only through Him. The Baptist is the first successful example of what the power and goodness of Jesus can achieve. The experiment will be repeated later on in all other souls.

3. Through Mary

A thousand times should we repeat these words. Whatever was achieved in the Precursor and in all souls is done *through Mary*.

She appears here for the first time as the instrument of the wonders of God, performing Her most high mission of Mediatrix of all graces. The first ransom of the soul of St. John is achieved with Mary and through Mary. At the sound of Her voice, at the very moment She addresses Her cousin.

Neither before nor after, but only then, this first liberation of a soul from the power of the devil is performed. We would say that Her words are a sentence of pardon, or a declaration of victory over Satan. The Lord could have achieved this sanctification in a hidden and silent way, but He wanted to reveal the power and the mission of His Son Who was coming to save this world whilst at the same time He wanted to introduce Mary as the Mediatrix of the grace of sanctification and salvation.

Jesus will always be the source-spring, but Mary is the channel through which this stream of grace flows into our souls.

St. John the Baptist was, therefore, a child of Mary by grace. Like him as all saintly souls have been we also must be children of Mary. When shall we have the practical conviction that we shall become saints only in the measure of our love and imitation of Our Heavenly Mother? Ask St. John the

Our Lady's Visitation and the Baptist

Baptist to intercede for you so that he may be not only the Precursor of Jesus but also the Forerunner of Mary.



MEDITATION 32

The *Magnificat* (1)

This canticle was Our Lady's answer to the praise given Her by St. Elizabeth. It well deserves, therefore, that all who love Our Lady should know it and meditate upon it.

1. How Sublime is the *Magnificat*!

It would suffice to know that it sprang from the lips of Our Mother: that alone would make it very dear to us. But it will be much dearer if we are acquainted with its circumstances. It is the canticle which Our Lady raised in praise of God after having been filled with the Holy Ghost and with the divine joy of knowing that She was the Mother of God. It has been said that it is a canticle of praise to the Redemption. Who, except God, could sing the Redemption better than Mary? There is no one so fit to extol this most sublime

work of God; not even the angels of Heaven. It was Our Blessed Lady, then, Who in a public and official manner heralded to all generations the power and love which God packed into this work of the Redemption of mankind.

2. It is a Canticle of Love

It is Mary's canticle of love and of thanksgiving. How must Her heart have beaten with deep emotion when She with Her most pure lips gave vent to the feelings pent up in Her heart?

Just as you contemplate a rich jewel kept in a casket of great value; just as you admire the miraculous relics of the saints guarded in sumptuous plate and admire that jewel which Mary was guarding in Her heart and which today in Her canticle She discloses to humanity. We shall never be able to understand all the meaning and vigour of expression that She brought to it. The more you scrutinize it, the more you will find in it; but never will you exhaust it. We would have to love as Mary did, we would have to fathom God's mysteries as She did in order to understand fully the *Magnificat*. See then with how much devotion and fervour you should often repeat this canticle, since you

know that in it the loving heart of Mary gives vent to Her feelings.

It is the summary of Her gratitude to God. Whenever you have to thank God for some particular grace you will find no better words to express your gratitude than those of the *Magnificat*. Can any other canticle please God as much as the *Magnificat* since it reminds Him of the intense love of the one Who composed and uttered it for us?

3. This Canticle is Mary's Sublime Prayer

How often would you like to pray as Your Heavenly Mother did. Here, then, you have a marvellous example of this most high prayer. It is not mere supposition or imagination: in order to speak with God you have the very words of Mary, those She uttered on that occasion. Words that were uttered aloud by Her so that we might learn how to pour out our heart in the presence of God.

One day the apostles asked the divine Master to teach them how to pray. For them was composed the *Our Father*. Since it has been composed by God Himself no other prayer can be compared with it. Now imagine that as the apostles petitioned Jesus so you too requested Our Lady to teach you how to

pray. And then She, a model of prayer, volunteering to teach you, sings the *Magnificat*. If the *Our Father* is the prayer of Jesus, the *Magnificat* is Mary's prayer. Therefore, next to the *Our Father* and the *Hail Mary* there can be no better prayer than Mary's Prayer — Mary's canticle, the *Magnificat*.

4. Mary's Words

Finally, in this canticle we possess Mary's longest speech. In the Gospel, only a few casual words of Mary are quoted; but they are so few that we, Her children, do not feel satisfied. Instead, in the *Magnificat* we have neither an abstract nor a sample. We have the very words of Mary; in fact, all the words She uttered on that occasion.

There seems to be some deep reason for all this: it appears as though She wanted to show us that although She was sparing in words whenever She spoke with men or with the angels, as though She would not waste time in idle words but would limit Herself to the use of the most essential expressions only, yet, when speaking with God, She was not thus restrained. Here She measures neither time nor words but just lets Her heart speak. Meditate on Her prudence when talking to man and on Her

Meditation 32

love when talking with God. Try to follow this prudence when speaking with men as well as Her love when dealing with God by prolonging your prayer instead of growing tired of it. Relish conversation with Heaven rather than the idle talk of the earth.

Finally, ask Her that you may always love Her canticle because it is Hers and because it is inspired by the Holy Ghost. Ask the grace to recite it with that devotion and fervour She had when first She sang it in the presence of God.



MEDITATION 33

The Magnificat (2)

So marvellous and rich in meaning are the words of the *Magnificat* that we cannot possibly glide over them. We must pause to relish their sweetness and study the lessons of this wonderful synthesis of prayer, of thanksgiving and of practical virtue.

1. My Soul Magnifies the Lord

This is the aim of man: to praise and magnify the Lord. A sweet obligation indeed, but nevertheless an obligation. God has created all for His glory, but proper glory can be given to Him on earth only by man. Glory is knowledge followed by praise. We cannot praise unless we know. And since the rest of creation has no knowledge, we are commissioned by them, so to say, to perform this duty that we may see and learn God in them

and that in their name we may praise Him. This is, then, our task, to gather those notes of bounty, wisdom, power, beauty and love which God has deposited in creatures and with them to shape a hymn of gratitude that we must sing to the praise of God. Magnificent and sublime duty indeed. How do you fulfil it? Do you know how to praise God? Do you strive to know Him the better in order the better to love Him? Whenever you do not do so, you fail in your duty: you are a false note, out of tune in this symphony of praise. You are unable to interpret the canticle which the whole of creation has entrusted to you. It is your fault and your shame. Look at Mary. The first words She utters are intended to turn the praises showered on Her by St. Elizabeth to God. To Him only is glory. A fine beginning for Her canticle.

Moreover, see how Mary praises the Lord with the whole of Her soul and heart. We sometimes speak, but only with our tongue, not with the whole of our being. When we sin, be it only venially, we render God smaller within us: just the opposite of magnifying God. And whenever we commit a mortal sin we make Him not only smaller but cause Him to disappear entirely from our souls.

All the saints with their works magnified God. They enhanced and magnified God within themselves with their sanctity. Not always, of course, since they also had their faults and imperfections. Mary is the only one that never for a single moment ceased magnifying and enhancing God's presence, in Her most pure soul. Mary says "My soul magnifies", in the present tense; not in the past nor the future but now and always. One would say that this was Her perpetual preoccupation, Her principal job as though She had no other.

Meditate on this example and think how you yourself compare. Oh, if we would always magnify and increase God's presence within us. If, at least, we would never make Him smaller within us! How great would our sanctity be! We are small and worthless but with the little we have and in the little way we can, let us in imitation of Mary, resolve to praise and magnify the Lord.

2. My Spirit has Found Joy in God My Saviour

Mary rejoices or rather She overflows with an infinite joy. But not for earthly things. It is an intimate, spiritual joy whose object is God Himself. She rejoices in God, in the full and perfect posses-

sion of God. St. Elizabeth had reminded Her of Her great graces and privileges. But although these are sufficient reason for rejoicing, yet Mary does not so much as think of the gifts as of their Author and Giver.

St. Augustine used to tell the Lord: "Not Thy gifts, but Thyself." More rightly does Our Lady express this same feeling. We do not know how to look for God. And therefore we never come to the point of enjoying Him. But God has ineffable consolations for those who love Him. What would He then have poured on the Heart of Mary? No wonder, then, that Her most blessed soul should exalt with divine joy! Note, however, that Mary does not say only "My spirit has found joy in God", but "in God Who is My Saviour." Here is the root of the spiritual joy, of the eternal happiness for which we hope.

Here is the reason: God is Our Saviour. We were doomed to the eternal sadness of Hell; but thanks to Our Saviour, our lot has been reversed. We now hope for the eternal joys of Heaven. What happiness, indeed, will a soul feel on seeing His Creator there? And how much more so, on seeing in God His Saviour and Sanctifier! What would

Indeed, have been the use of our creation if God had not equally saved and sanctified us? At the thought of such a high Redeemer and Saviour, join in Our Lady's rejoicing. This joy is all spiritual. Even if the body were afflicted by penance and mortification or trial, the spirit will go on rejoicing.

Think also that Mary's rejoicing is centred on God. No selfishness, no self-gratification or complaisance; only the joy of love; that joy of loving and of seeing that the object of our love is loved, even if we ourselves have to suffer. Mary was contemplating Jesus within Herself and this contemplation caused Her to rejoice in God.

You also should see God within yourself, realise that He is in your heart. The clearer you thus see Him, the more you will rejoice. Apply this contemplation to Holy Communion. Do you not hold Jesus within yourself just as Mary did? Do you enjoy His Real Presence? Ask Our Lady to teach you how to see Jesus within you; how lovingly to embrace Him, how to rejoice in the sweetness of His presence, how to find bitter all the sweetness of the earth in comparison with this happiness of possessing Jesus.

MEDITATION 34

The Magnificat (3)

1. Because He has Looked Graciously upon the Lowliness of His Handmaid

How marvellous and practical is the lesson of humility which Our Lady thus gives us. She has just been greeted by the Angel on behalf of God. She has just been raised to the dignity of God's Mother. She has just been blessed among all women by St. Elizabeth, and yet She pledges to lower Herself in the depths of humility, stating that She is just a mere handmaid of the Lord.

Thereby She tells us that whatever can be found in Her is God's gift, since everything in Her comes from that God Who has looked upon Her. And "to look upon" in Biblical language means "to watch with satisfaction" to look with good eyes, "to be pleased with and to love". So, everything for Her springs from that look of love which God be-

stowed upon Her, otherwise She would be merely one of so many daughters of Eve. Think deeply over all these words; imbibe this truth, because if it is correct when applied to Mary, it is much more so when applied to you. What are you, indeed, and, above all, what are you in the presence of God? In whatever you have, what is yours and what is God's? Were God to demand back all that He has given you and that belongs to Him in the order of nature and of grace, of earthly and spiritual things, of internal and external gifts, what would be left you? One thing, and one thing only: sin. That is exclusively yours. The rest is God's. Cannot you, therefore, say, that God has looked also upon you with good eyes and has therefore filled you with good things and has given you all that you possess?

Learn then that much more rightly than Our Blessed Lady, you must not only know but practise humility, since this is the only just and rational attitude that you can take.

Consider also how Our Lady shows us that the foundation of all the Heavenly blessings and graces of God lies precisely in humility. That is why Mary says that She praises God and rejoices in Her

Saviour because He has looked graciously upon the lowliness of His handmaid.

If you too praise God, far from praising yourself for any virtue or achievement as did the Pharisee of the Gospel who claimed so many merits for all his works in front of God, you will, on the contrary, at every instant acknowledge that it is the bounty and mercy of God which tries to raise you from dust and misery to the height of sanctity. In proportion to your lowering yourself by an acknowledgement of your misery and by a hidden life of humility, God will lift you up.

2. Behold from this Day Forward all Generations Will Call Me Blessed

This is just a confirmation of the foregoing. The humble soul enamours the Heart of God. God spares no means to raise him and exalt him. How much has God exalted all His saints! But He has done so especially with Mary. Who of us is more humble than She? On account of that all generations will call Her blessed.

She humbles Herself and God exalts Her. Watch this divine competition: God vying with Mary: Mary is determined to humble Herself before

God and God is determined to raise Her above all the angels to the very highest secrets of divinity. Nobody as humble as Mary and nobody so exalted as Her. If you study Her humility you will get lost since you cannot reach the depths of Her self-abasement. If you meditate on Her exaltation you cannot follow since here also our sight fails and the mind cannot pursue Her in Her flight to God. What must, then, humility be? What does God see in humility which makes it the essential condition to please Him? If Mary had not rendered Herself a handmaid, She would not now be the Queen and Mother of God.

The conclusion is that as pride and vanity are unreasonable, in so far as they have no foundation whatsoever, so they are also useless and fruitless. The proud soul achieves nothing. The humble achieves all.

It is, then, in your own interest to work at the acquisition of humility and at getting rid of any trace of that revolting pride.

St. Bernard was right when he said that the *Magnificat* was Mary's ecstasy of humility. Humility was the root of all the other grandeurs and marvels.

Lastly, think of the prophecy contained in these words: All generations will call Me blessed. Then the utmost certainty: How consoling it is for us to find that these words of Mary have been fulfilled to the very letter. Count the titles of Mary, number the shrines and temples raised in Her honour.

Does not every Church and Chapel contain a Marian altar? Is there any town, big or small, which does not cherish one of Her images; which does not celebrate Her feasts with joy and splendour? Think of the month of Our Lady; think of the feasts of the Assumption, of the Immaculate Conception, recall the principal solemnities of Our Lady. Watch Christian people flocking to the feet of Our Heavenly Mother. Then climb up to Heaven and contemplate the Saints, acknowledging that their sanctity is Mary's gift. See the angels who, together with mankind, never cease to call Her blessed. How magnificently has Mary's prophecy been fulfilled!



MEDITATION 35

The Magnificat (4)

I. Because He whose Name is Holy has Wrought for Me His Wonders

How badly we misunderstand humility! We think it consists in loudly speaking ill of ourselves, in not acknowledging anything good in anything we do, in not seeing the graces God bestows on us. Humility is far from that.

Just listen to Mary. *All generations will call Me blessed. The Almighty has wrought His wonders for me.* And yet these are expressions of humility. Do not forget that humility is truth, simplicity, sincerity. Acknowledge whatever good is in you not to praise yourself for it, since this would be pride, but to acknowledge the immense and magnificent work of God operated in your heart, in order to praise Him the more, in order to correspond to His grace the better, in order to love Him with greater fervour and

enthusiasm every day, as a natural outcome of your gratitude. What was Mary hinting at when She said that God had wrought wonders in Her? Of what was She thinking when She uttered these words? Try to find out by going over the favours and gifts She had received from God.

Think of Her predestination from eternity. Think how pleasant and sweet was the thought of Mary in the Divine Mind. Think of the ineffable privilege of Her Immaculate Conception. Think of all the infinite graces inherent in it. The list of these graces would pass through Her memory when intoning the *Magnificat*. She would recall all the wonders which God wished to place in Her heart. She would recall the salutation of the Angel, the mystery of the Incarnation. She would be struck by that miracle of miracles, that She, a creature, a handmaid of the Lord should be at the same time really and truly the Mother of Her God. Then She would realise how God in order to put His plan into execution, had done something great and unknown to both Heaven and earth, namely, that She should be a Mother without ceasing to be a Virgin. At the sight of all this, and burdened by the realisation of all these wonders, She exclaims with all fervour: "He has wrought for me His

wonders." Do you now see the point? Everything is attributed to the power of God, to the immensity, to the sanctity of God, to His Holy Name. God with His sanctity and bounty and infinite mercy decreed all, it was His infinite power that achieved all.

Now apply these same words to your own soul. Cannot you see that great things have also been done in you by the bounteous power of God? Is it not because of His bounty that God should have so tenderly and lovingly and without any merits on your part heaped so many graces on you? Recall too how, from your birth up to this very day, the Lord has gone on forgiving your sins, taking you from the abyss of misery into which you had fallen, carrying you into an abyss of grace. Acknowledge it. This is not pride. Praise Him as Mary did. Bless His power. Extol His bounty. Lovingly adore His Holy Name.

2. He has Mercy Upon those Who Fear Him, from Generation to Generation

Here is another delicate touch of humility. Mary rejoices that God's Mercy shed on Her should also be shed on others. All that God has done in Her soul, He will likewise do to all who fear Him. She

does not want to be the only one. She is pleased to announce that everyone can have a share in God's bounty.

How human it is to want to be the first, and much more to be unique! But true humility is never exclusive, never ambitious, never jealous of the good of one's neighbour. All this might be quite human, but Mary is God-like and consequently She does not act that way. She does not think that way.

Moreover, She says that this mercy and bounty of God will reach far out to all those who fear the Lord. She does not here speak of servile fear which is that of slaves but rather that of reverential and loving fear shown by children. She refers to that holy fear of God mentioned in the Holy Writ as the beginning of wisdom, and therefore the beginning of sanctity and the foundation of love. Fear and love; both are inseparable when referring to God. We must fear with love and we must love with fear. Fear of yourself, of your sins, of your relapses, of your miseries, of your little gratitude, of your want of correspondence to grace.

How good is God towards those who fear Him! How good must He be towards those who love Him! Fear His justice, but, above all, love His boun-

The Magnificat (4)

ty. Trust in His mercy and you will see the words of Mary fulfilled in yourself. Rejoice at having a God so merciful, Who out of mercy refuses nothing to anyone. Strive with all your might in order that through your penance, through your love you may be able to spread this Kingdom of Bounty and Mercy not only within your own soul but to the whole world, including in it all the just, the lukewarm and even the greatest sinners, in whose souls the light of God's infinite mercy is still not shining.



MEDITATION 36

The Magnificat (5)

1. He has done Valiantly with the Strength of His Arm

Here Our Blessed Lady is extolling the power of God as shown forth especially in certain of His works. All His works are the fruit of His infinite power. But of them this omnipotence shines forth more clearly in some than in others.

Mary would look up to the boundless Heavens, would watch the countless stars, so shining, so incalculable, so lively and swift in the midst of the harmony of Creation. How the starry sky reflects as in a mirror the omnipotence of God. And what about the earth, with its plants and animals, with its valleys and hills, its seas and rivers? All these works of God would pass before Her mind and She would ask Herself: is not this an achievement of the mighty Arm of God? Who but He could have

conceived and achieved the like? She would look at humanity, at the angels. She would contemplate the shining splendour of the Heavenly court surrounding the throne of God; She would especially look at Her own soul.

Where could She see better the strength of the Mighty Arm of God than in the work achieved in Her own heart, in Her own most pure soul? Ponder over what all this means. God created all these wonders, as it were, without any effort, by just a mere word, by a mere wish. But to accomplish the work of the Incarnation God had, so to say, to display all His omnipotence and to exert, as it were, all His power.

When creating the world He met no resistance for all came from nothingness. The greater the resistance we meet in our work the greater the effort required. In the case of Creation the resistance was nil, since there was nothing before the Creation, but in the case of the Incarnation it was not so. God had, so to say, to exert His divinity, God had to exert violence over Himself, in order to reduce divinity to the smallness, to the nothingness of humanity and to be enclosed in a human wrapping and then be hidden away in the bosom of Mary.

God had to perform a unique and never repeated operation, namely, that of choosing a woman and making Her His Mother; to assemble in Her all the marvels of the whole Creation; to render Her Immaculate, Virgin and Mother at the same time. Does this not entail an immense strain on the mighty arm of God? So great was this effort that He, so to say, reached the limit of His power.

God could make another thousand universes, create untold millions of beings, multitudes of angels, myriads of stars and skies, much more shining, much more beautiful than the present ones, but He could not achieve a work of greater grandeur than the Mother of God. Apply all this also to Holy Communion. Is not the Eucharist another effort of His mighty arm? Does It not exhaust the wisdom, the power, and even the love of God?

Could even so powerful a God give you anything greater than He gives you in the Holy Eucharist?

2. He has Driven the Proud Astray in the Conceit of Their Hearts

Here you have another token of the might of His arm. His omnipotence shines forth in His

works of mercy and bounty, but also in His works of justice. Just as His mercy embraces the humble, so does His justice reach the proud. Our Heavenly Mother would certainly recall the difference between Her exaltation to the Throne of God in order to be Empress of Heaven, and the miserable fall of Lucifer from the heights of Heaven to the abysses of Hell. She was exalted for Her humility, he fell on account of his pride.

Note this expression: *The proud in the conceit of their hearts*. She is clearly referring to the internal pride, not to the external, which is rather a fatuous vanity. The inner pride is more refined. Outwardly it appears humble whereas inwardly the pride of heart and mind is deeply rooted. And the worst of it is that this pride is so subtle that it penetrates to the most intimate recesses of our heart almost unnoticed by us.

Pay attention to the distinction between pride of mind and pride of heart. By pride of mind we, firmly convinced of being right, stick to our opinion, refuse to yield. We must always be right, we can stand no contradiction, we never give way.

Pride of the heart is that accursed self-love which strikes deep roots in our hearts. Ask Our Lady to free you from such double pride of mind

Meditation 36

and heart so that through Her intercession we may escape that Divine Justice which, according to Our Lady Herself, deals out such dire punishment to interior pride.



MEDITATION 37

The Magnificat (6)

1. He Has Put Down the Mighty from Their Seat and Exalted the Lowly

Just as in the previous verse Our Lady states how God behaves with the proud of mind and heart, so in like manner She now tells us how that pride is manifested by way of vanity, haughtiness, craving for power, ambition, reluctance to obey. This is why obedience is the inseparable sister of humility. Both agree in this spirit of submission and simplicity, which is so pleasing to God. How many of these mighty ones were there on earth! Through an inspiration from Heaven Our Lady could see them in their places, issuing orders to their kneeling servants and slaves as if they were gods.

But now listen to the forceful expression of Mary: *God will put down those mighty men from their seat of vanity... and will put them aside with contempt.*

How unexpected do those hard expressions sound on the sweet and compassionate lips of Mary! But the fact is that we cannot fathom the hatred that God has for pride.

God does not deign to glance on the hollow vanities of this earth. When God is looking for a mother, He does not seek Her among the proud of the earth but among the humble. When He is born in Bethlehem He sends His angels to announce the great tidings to simple shepherds. He disregards the proud and mighty. How terrible must be God's contempt, how frightful His punishments which merit the forcible words of Mary.

Examine whether you also have any such worldly spirit no matter in how small a degree. Look at your soul and by your readiness to obey, from the degree of your submission and humility, gauge your abhorrence for pride and vanity. Thus, you will see if you deserve, or not, the great reward that Mary announces for the humble. For them exaltation, glorification, a lofty throne in Heaven.

Check and compare these two expressions of Mary: the one threatening with the punishment of contempt the proud ones of earth, the other, glorification for the humble and simple.

2. He Has Filled the Hungry with Good Things and Sent the Rich Away Empty-handed

Furthermore, Our Lady seems to find endless praise for humility. These words are just, being indeed, a confirmation, a repetition of the previous ones.

Here She speaks about another manifestation of humility, namely poverty, and of another shape of pride, namely, abundance and comfort. There is actual and real poverty and there is poverty of the spirit. Jesus wanted to be born, to live and to die embracing poverty. If we knew how much Jesus loves it then we would certainly appreciate it a little more.

However, we must at least look for, and desire poverty of spirit; to be detached from all; never to covet or envy, nor desire the comfort of riches; to rejoice when we lack something or when things are not going fully according to our plans.

Finally, by being anxious to be detached from everything, we should also be detached from ourselves. A detached heart, shorn of anything that is not God, is so very pleasing to Him. God wants us to be detached of ourselves in order to be filled with God. When you pour plaster into a mould you

make sure that the mould is perfectly clean and free from all foreign substances so that it may receive all the details of the original. In like manner, Mary and Jesus want to shape your heart so as to make it a faithful copy of their own. Consequently, they want you to admit no foreign element. You must, therefore, keep your heart clean, keep it detached. You must be ready to root out, no matter how painfully, all that is not of Jesus and Mary.

Think of this, especially at the moment of Holy Communion, and do not forget that there is no place for Jesus and self at the same time. If you want Him to come in, self-love must go. This is the hunger to which Mary refers in the *Magnificat* when She sings that He has filled the hungry with good things. Approach Jesus with true hunger and you too will see those words fulfilled. And do not forget that the rich, the satisfied and self-sufficient are left with what is theirs; and since what is theirs is nothingness, they are sent empty-handed away.



MEDITATION 38

The Magnificat (7)

1. He Has Protected His Servant Israel Keeping His Merciful Design in Remembrance

Here Our Lady recalls the great mercy God showed Israel.

They were a people enslaved by the Pharaohs, and God released them from that slavery, led them across the desert, fed them therewith manna from Heaven and after having brought them out triumphant from their enemies, installed them in the rich Promised Land. Finally, He made them His own possession, His chosen people, and with a touching affection and an admirable providence, looked after them as though they were members of His own family. Now apply all this, point by point, to all the wonders that God has done to you, and you will see the shadow of reality.

He took you away from the slavery of the devil, who is infinitely worse than the Pharaohs. He constantly shelters you in the desert of this life, He feeds you on the truly divine Manna of His Body and Blood. He lovingly leads you by His hand to the promised land of Heaven. Nay, there is still something more: to Israel He granted the title of servant and this was indeed, a great distinction, since serving God is a privilege. But to you He gives the honour of being His own child. He calls you "brother of Christ", "heir of His throne." What a sublime reality! Do not doubt that although Mary speaks about the mercy of God towards Israel, yet She was also thinking of God's mercy towards you.

Our Lady does not mention how Israel corresponded to the Lord. But you know it well: hardness of heart, mistrust in Him in the Desert, total forgetfulness of God in the delights of the promised land, defection and idolatry, looking for other gods to adore, and finally, rejection of the Son of God when He came down to save them, the cruel sentence of death on the Cross for their Redeemer. This is the return made to God by His people.

But is this not, also, perhaps, a figure of your own behaviour? Have not you, also, perchance, imitated Israel in this enormous, black ingratitude? Could not God say also of you that from His chosen vineyard He harvested only sour and bitter fruit? On some occasions, at least, it was so. Acknowledge it with humility and shame. But promise that it will never be so again.

2. How Well did God Keep His Word!

God had made a promise to Abraham and to his sons, the other great Patriarchs of the Old Testament, and He fulfilled His word. He was well aware what they would do with His benefits. Nevertheless, He does not go back on His word nor does He cancel His promise. God is faithful. But as Our Lady says, God's fidelity and exactitude is for evermore; in other words, as He abode by His promise, so will He keep His word in His subsequent promises. In fact, according to St. Paul this fidelity of God shines forth in three things:

a) In not letting the devil tempt us above our strength, since it is clear that if He gave him a free hand, the devil, such being his shrewdness, his power and knowledge, would conquer us;

b) He is faithful by not abandoning us in temptation. It is not so in human friendships. Earthly friends leave us in the lurch in the trials of life and especially in the most frightful trial, that of death. Then we are alone. They are of no help. But with God it is not so. The greater the temptation and the trial, the more loving and effective His help and grace. He gives us grace to the measure of our needs. He never fails us, although we have so many times failed Him.

c) Finally, He is faithful in giving us His eternal reward once we have, with the help of His grace, accomplished our fight and achieved victory.

In this fidelity of God lies our hope. Heaven will be ours. We shall possess God most certainly, because His word never falters. What encouragement and consolation flows into our daily life from a look at God, from a glance at Heaven. What should you say to God in front of the example of fidelity given you by His Holy Mother? Is it not a shame that you should have been so many times unfaithful, inconstant in your promises to God? If you had kept just half of the promises that you

have so often made Him, how great would your present sanctity be! Ask Our Lady for the grace of being faithful and exact; the grace to fulfil your promises made to God.

3. Summary and Conclusion

The *Magnificat* is a sublime canticle. How beautiful is Mary's prayer, how many things it embraces! What a canticle of gratitude to God! It is the canticle of redemption that broadcasts the marvellous works achieved by the all-powerful, all merciful arm of God. It is the canticle of humility. Its "*leit-motif*" clearly shows the path we must follow. It is the same path followed by Jesus and Herself. They found no other way, they took no other. Generously, then, start on this road. Throw yourself wholeheartedly into this project. Imitate Jesus and Mary in their humility. Have a tender and fervent devotion to this sublime canticle; say it daily to render thanks to God. And whilst uttering the canticle of humility examine yourself how you keep your promise to faithfully follow your models on the path of humility.

MEDITATION 39

The Expectation of Christ's Birth

With a feast especially dedicated to the mystery during the holy season of Advent the Church celebrates Our Lady's expectation of the birth of Christ. This feast was probably started by St. Alphonsus, Archbishop of Toledo, who, during the midnight Matins of this feast was favoured with an apparition of Our Heavenly Mother Who clothed him with a precious chasuble brought by angels.

1. The Life of Our Lady During this Period

Consider this life under two aspects, one interior, the other external. Under the interior aspect the life of Mary was one of absolute compenetration with Her divine Son. We should not say that Mother and Son were leading similar lives; no, rather they were having the one *identical* and same life. We

cannot imagine a greater dependency than that of Jesus in the most pure womb of Mary, He was receiving all His life from Her. He was dependent on Her for everything. What a mystery! God depending on a creature. Probe the profundity of this divine intimacy between Mary and Her Son and first of all learn the lesson of recollection.

Through the virtue of recollection Mary entirely concentrated on Jesus. Learn fervour and love, for through these virtues Mary was living only for Jesus. Through the eyes of Her Son She would see much better than through Her own. She would love with the heart of Her Son. Her only pleasure was to give pleasure to Him. What a perfect and powerful love would She not feel towards that God Who had enclosed Himself in Her bosom! Hers was a life of untold joy, because all things divine are joyful and the possession of God which Mary was enjoying equalled in fact the glory of the Blessed in Heaven.

Finally, Her life was one of intense desire which She would give vent to in prayer, doing violence to the Heart of God that He would hasten as quickly as possible the hour of His manifestation to the world. The Hour of Redemption! This was the

thought which transfixed the whole life of Mary in those days. It was sweet to think that as a result of this sublime and fervent prayer the Eternal Father anticipated the hour of the redemption of the world and sent His Son to save us.

2. Her External Life

How admirable is Our Mother in every detail! In spite of Her most intense and divine interior life She lets nothing appear outwardly. Her external demeanour showed a sweet calm, a lovable simplicity, an amiable serenity.

No one at all suspects what is happening interiorly. Not even St. Joseph. How closely guarded is the treasure of Mary! How jealously She keeps it from human eyes! Neither ambition, nor pride, nor self-love, nor craving for praise can move Her a fraction to share Her secret. She will never lend Herself importance in front of Her neighbour. She will never esteem Herself superior to anybody, although She was superior to all. What practical humility, what precious simplicity! How often our scanty merits evaporate because we lay them open in front of all and are unable to keep our secrets only for God. How often we endanger our merits

because we imprudently expose them to the eyes of men, longing, more or less directly, for some word of praise, some appreciation.

3. The Life of Her Son

Contemplate the life of Jesus in those moments, hidden, like in a Tabernacle, in the bosom of Mary. What darkness and silence beset His life! What helplessness and weakness are His! He depends on Her for everything; He must receive everything from Her. And yet meanwhile He is governing the world. From there He continues to be the joy of the angels. But, above all, from there with His divine presence, He is through His divine contact with His beloved Mother sanctifying Mary more and more. What an active intimacy, oneness of life and interior activity between Mary and Her Son, between the Son and His Mother.

4. Your Own Life

Here is the model for your own life. Real living is living with Jesus. A real life is one of total surrender to Jesus and to Mary. No one suspects the sweetness, the charm and the perfection that is hidden in the interior life. Learn from Jesus and Mary

what interior life is; compare yourself with them. Do you enjoy silence; do you relish living hidden and unknown? Do you welcome its external simplicity? In your heart is there that fervour, that love for Mary which leads you to see and speak with Jesus in the intimacy of your soul?

How is it that this contact with Jesus, this presence of Jesus, so similar to His life hidden in the womb of His Mother, does not bring forth in you especially at Holy Communion the sanctity it begot in Her? To this end you must watch over your senses, mortify them, concentrate on your interior, compel your powers to see Jesus within you, grow accustomed to deal with Him in the intimate recesses of your soul.

Lastly, consider that you have here a most perfect model of Marian slavery. Jesus is the first voluntary slave of Mary. His life depends on Her. So must your life be one of entire surrender and dedication to Mary. Hence nothing without Her.



MEDITATION 40

On the Road to Bethlehem

1. The Register

The decree of Augustus enjoining a general registration in the whole of his empire gave the occasion for this journey to Bethlehem, enabling Our Lady to exercise those most beautiful and difficult virtues, submission and obedience. Contemplate Mary in the company of St. Joseph in their poor dwelling in Nazareth. Poor indeed, but they lack nothing. With the greatest love She had prepared, down to the most minute detail, the things required for Her Son's birth so near approaching. The little cradle had been made by Joseph. The swaddling clothes have been stitched and embroidered by Her. It is true, there is poverty in everything but there is much love. And love had such a store of ingenuity and inventiveness: love has taught Her how best to comfort and receive Her dear Divine Child.

All of a sudden, a rumour going round the village reached the humble couple. Soon they have the confirmation of that rumour. Everybody is to be compelled to go and get registered in his place of origin. And since She and Joseph belong to the clan of David, there is no choice: they must undertake the journey to the royal city of Bethlehem.

What a set-back! How can they undertake such a journey now, just when the divine birth is expected? And that too just at the whim of a proud man, who tyrannically decrees that it should be so. Is there no means of evading the order? Could it, at least, be deferred? Why not wait just a little at least until the happy event has taken place? Yet Our Heavenly Mother speaks not a word, utters no criticism, no protest. Although with a heavy heart, She submits to the divine will, trusts in God, thrusts Herself into His Arms and sets Herself to obey.

Was there at any time any person anywhere with better reason to disregard an order than Our Blessed Lady then? If She had not submitted to the order of had just ignored it, who could have blamed Her? Would we not have said that She had done very well; that it would have been a great imprudence to embark on such a journey at such a time?

And yet Mary does not listen to the prudence of the worldly wise. She thinks only of obedience ignoring all else. What a submission of will and of judgment! Note this well, because this is the hardest point of obedience. She had ample reasons to excuse Her; but with Mary obedience comes first. For above obedience there is nothing. A hard, painful and practical lesson is thus, given to us by Mary!

2. The Journey

It was rather long, about five days. It was hard, because the road is poor and the beast of burden is not of much help. It was unpleasant, for December has its biting cold and merciless winds, its rains and even snow. Try to accompany Our Lady for a little while. See Her wrapped in a dark mantle: a veil over Her face. St. Joseph by Her side, does not take his eyes off Her and sees to it that the humble beast treads the best portion of the road. Imagine the sweetness of the face hidden under the veil; Her purity, modesty and recollection: all harmony and Heavenly beauty; all sanctity.

Other travellers who can do the journey faster and more comfortably overtake and pass the little group. They go by criticising and cursing mighty

Caesar's order but Mary proceeds rapt in ecstasy, all transfigured, thinking of the treasure She is carrying within Herself. On the road as well as at home the passing life around Her does not touch Her soul. She lives every moment with Jesus and for Jesus.

How beautiful Our Lady's prayer would be during that journey! See the angels vying with each other to have the honour of accompanying Her. You also should try to accompany your Mother during the stages of that journey. Would you not like to help Her to alight, to find Her shelter beneath some palm tree, to bring Her some water. Place yourself at Her service and even though you do all these services in a clumsy way, ask Her not to despise you but rather to take you into Her company. Refuse Her nothing, since She deserves everything.

3. Bethlehem

At last they have arrived. It is time to rest. Joseph goes around looking for a decent place in keeping with their poverty. But here again the hand of God tries them with suffering and trial. No inns no friends, all doors are closed to them. How trying after several days hard travelling and on the eve of

giving birth to Her Son. Mary has no where to stay. Do you not think that in Her place we would have given vent to bad temper or despair?

But not a word of complaint from our Lady. Again She trusts Herself into the arms of God and awaits the manifestation of God's Holy Will. In the end God's will must always prevail. Why then should we not accept it with more resignation and joy especially when something unpleasant happens to us? Look at Mary. See Her enter that miserable stable. Her delicate sentiments, Her maternal love must have been hurt. How repugnant is everything around. How could She spend the night in that place? Could She possibly give birth to Her Son in such a den? Yet Mary is serene and joyful. If this is the will of God then it is Hers also. Throw yourself at the feet of that most pure virgin and beg pardon for your pride, for that self-love of yours which so often goes against the Holy will of God. Implore from Her a submission, an obedience like Hers, that you may learn how to obey and submit even joyfully without uttering a word not only your will but also your judgement to your superior. Even when you are convinced of being perfectly right.



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