

LOVE AND GRACE  
IN MARRIAGE



# LOVE AND GRACE IN MARRIAGE

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## *The Vocation of Love*

### THE VOCATION OF LOVE

The love which impels man and woman toward each other takes many forms. It is at once a force in each of those who love, and the living bond between them. With some, it is a free gift; with others, a greedy and devouring passion. It occurs in marriage and outside of marriage. In speaking of it, one can consider primarily the consecration of two hearts to each other, or place the emphasis on its carnal aspect. For some, the measuring stick of love is to be sought in the will to belong to one's partner and in fidelity to the sworn promise; for others, it is in the passion whose disappearance means the death of love.

Our aim here is to speak of Christian married love. This is the commitment of two persons, giving themselves to each other totally, exclusively, definitively. It is movement springing from the depths of the soul, which permeates the whole being, making it pulsate and respond to the beloved across the envelop of the flesh. Love will experience periods of decline in passionate fervor, without however love being lessened. For love consists essentially in an ardor of the will: a very pure

melody which does not always accompany the sensible passion, although the latter often brings a support and an appropriate means of expression.

Christian love is authentically human; it is at the same time supernatural. Charity, that love which descends from the heart of God, works inside it like a powerful sap, and makes it bear fruits of holiness.

In this chapter, after considering briefly the creation of love and the original sin which wounded it, we will meditate on the salvation which Christ has offered it: conjugal love comes from God and goes to God; it is not only cause of joy, but source of grace, if husband and wife bring to the work of God a generous collaboration and accept the inevitable crosses. In the end, the vocation of Christian love will appear in full clarity: it must praise God, speak to men of His love, and collaborate with the divine paternity for the increase of the family of the Lord.

The importance and the dignity of love appear clearly when its place in creation is considered. It is the last in time of the divine works, after which God rested. And if it is remembered that the six "days" of Creation represent immense periods of time, the distinctiveness and the value of love will acquire in our eyes an even greater significance.

In the course of the long unrolling of the centuries, surprising events were produced. One day, after the interminable phase of the formation of the earth, life appeared, all fresh and modest—perhaps in the form of a humble moss—an event infinitely more important than the formation of the chains of mountains or the development of the continents: was not the most marvellous destiny reserved for life?

Next appeared the animals, servants without master, while waiting for those who would govern them.

Finally man was created. His young splendor is more striking than the light of the rising sun. Everything in this immense creation is for him, and he is for God. Each creature is a step which must permit him to raise himself toward the Creator.

But the divine work is not yet finished! God says: "It is not good that man be alone," and to all of His gifts He adds the best: in the evening of the last day, surrounded by a respectful and attentive nature, God creates woman and unites her with man. And the dazzling purity of their love makes a new song resound, wholly unknown to the earth.

"And on the seventh day, God rested from all of the work that he had made."

The creatures who had preceded love had prepared the way for it. They aspired toward it as a tree does toward its fruit. In it, all the beauties of the universe are rediscovered, and through it, are transcended. In creation everything is related; the most modest creature is necessary to all of the others, the most humble makes possible the most glorious, and hence participates in his dignity. The glory of love is also the glory of all of creation.

However, the union of man and woman is not the ultimate end of the divine work. God thinks of the nuptials of Christ and the Church in instituting marriage. He asks of marriage not only the prefiguring of that union which hovers at the horizon of the centuries to come, but also the cooperation of the couple in obeying the commandment to increase and multiply. It is this supernatural vocation which makes a mysterious light shine in the face of young love, which nourishes there the proud sense of its high nobility and the humility of the good worker who forgets himself before the grandeur of his mission.

An old maxim tells us that the corruption of the best of creatures makes him the worst of things. The history of human love gives a striking confirmation of this. Love, ordained to the highest destinies, falls often into the worst decadence. The explanation may be sought in original sin, which was not only an individual fault, but also the sin of a couple; by the rupture of the alliance between God and the first couple, the love which united man to woman lost its original purity; a corrosive acid destroys it from inside; a law

of gravity draws it towards the earth; wear and tear and aging menace it every day.

Corrupted, it becomes corrupter. God has made it a source of joy, of peace, of life, of sanctity; sin makes it a cause of suffering, of crime, of death. The stream of life which ought to make the earth fruitful becomes instead a ravaging torrent.

The first task of love was to unite. Sinful love becomes the source of disunion: it separates man from God, it makes him unfaithful to his vows, it reduces him to slavery; it introduces deep within his being a seed of division which sets flesh against spirit, corrupting one and the other.

And yet, though fallen from its original splendor, love has not lost all goodness and nobility: it cannot still the promise which it was charged to bring to the world, and the sign with which it was marked by God has not lost all of its primitive splendor.

### *The Redemption of Love*

What would have happened to human love if Christ had not saved it? Like the sick, the paralyzed, the possessed at the gates of the cities of Palestine, love waited for a savior. The Savior came, He regenerated love, He healed it by the institution of the sacrament of marriage, He reconciled it with God. Henceforth, love would have the strength to resist its enemies from within and without.

Woe to those presumptuous loves who do not want the Savior! Happy those which place a humble confidence in Him: "Love did not triumph, it knelt before grace, praying to be invested by it, nourished and fortified for the glory of God," wrote a sensitive young man, recalling the morning of his marriage.

Having healed love, the untiring labor of grace recreates it unceasingly, daily renewing its youth and with a supreme skill making use of all the pleasures and pains, strivings and even faults in order to make it even more joyous and strong. The conjugal community is solid, for grace is a powerful



worker of union. It makes that union, it repairs it, it consolidates it day after day. To render homage to that grace, a certain young husband, after a painful crisis in his marriage had been resolved, wrote these penetrating words:

“Yes, the sacrament is upon us; we received it without being fully conscious of it, although with the right intention; that is why it has ‘taken’ in us; it compensates us now for that vague weak confidence which we had in it, it restores to us our love, freed, increased, founded in the eternal.”

The source of this grace is the sacrament of marriage and this sacrament, like all the others, is the fruit of the cross. Christ redeemed love and He redeems it everyday. Why is it then that so few Christian couples think to express their gratitude to the Lord for this marvelous gift?

It may be objected that, long before the coming of Christ, great instances of conjugal love were offered to humanity, whose memory has been preserved in the Bible and in profane literature. This causes no difficulties for the Christian: he knows that the spring of Calvary flows down over the two sides of the mountain: the Old Testament and the New. It was already the grace of Christ which shone in the house of Tobias, as in that of the patriarchs. It is that same grace, which, in our day, and unknown to them, guards the love of non-Christian homes of good will.

Strengthened with such certitudes, how can Christian couples be anything but optimistic? Difficulties and temptations cannot make them fear for their love or its future. They know that to doubt love is to doubt grace. Those who have learned that Christ gave his life for love of love, can never lack hope.

### *Love Goes To God*

The source of Christian love is not in the heart of man. It is in God. To spouses who wish to love, who wish to learn to love more and more, there is only one good counsel: seek God, love God, be united with God, put Him in first place.

Whoever separates himself from God, loses love. On the

other hand, this love grows in the measure that love for God grows. The conjugal union is worth—both humanly and eternally speaking—whatever the union of husband and wife with God is worth. The more they are open to the God of love, the richer is the exchange of love between them. An infinite perspective opens before them: their love will never stop increasing since it can always open more profoundly to the gift of God. If they wish their love to be a living flame, always higher, let them love God more every day.

It is by prayer and the sacraments that the married couple plumb the depths of divine grace. Confession maintains the transparency of their hearts, and that germinal fire which the Eucharist brings to each one illuminates and rekindles their conjugal life. What a magnificent meaning the Confession before marriage and the Communion in the course of the nuptial Mass acquire when looked at from this aspect.

The lessening of so many loves is explained by the forgetting of this fundamental principle that to separate oneself from God and to sin against Him is to sin against love by cutting oneself off from the source of love. To refuse God is to refuse the spouse his daily bread: love. He lies who pretends to esteem love while scorning love.

God is the beginning of love, but He is also the end of love. Love comes from God, it goes to God. God is its Alpha and Omega.

The error is to make love an absolute, a final end, a god. Doubtless men would not commit this error if love did not speak so well of another love, of that love for which the human heart thirsts. If simple natural love did not possess a foretaste of this other love, men would not place such hopes in it, and would not reproach it for having deceived them so bitterly.

If love makes man a fascinating promise, it is on the part of another, and only that other is able to keep it.

Human love is not, for all this, "the greatest impostor." It is not love which deceives, it is man who misapprehends it. If



we must speak of deception, it is not love that is guilty, but those who make of it an all-powerful god, capable of satiating the human heart. This is the great deceit. Deluded, the heart of man demands everything from love, and love disappoints him.

How could it be otherwise? No creature can fill up a heart large enough to receive its Creator. This deception often makes people lose faith in love: an unbelief as bad as the idolatry of love, of which it is the rotten fruit. After having asked everything from love, the human heart renounces that which it ought to expect from it; a way to go to God. This is what should have been asked of it from the first. Love is a means, and not the end.

For the human heart love is in fact the great opportunity: an opportunity to free it from itself as from the unjust rule of a creature. It makes the heart attentive, free, an offering. The visitation of love is an hour of grace. Why not have confidence in this force that calls us beyond ourselves, and follow it from love to the author of love.

In happy loves, the spouses are not slow in finding Him who lives at the center of their union. One of them wrote: "I understand better and better that the true marriage is that of the soul with God." In unhappy loves, suffering cuts into the heart a place where God will come to live if the unhappy heart does not succumb to the temptation of despair, nor still more grave, to the temptation of denying that hunger for love and for the infinite in the depths of his being. For such unhappy homes, it is thus equally true to say that love leads to God.

Through the whole course of married life, a living love never ceases to be a route to God, because it is the great school of giving and of detachment.

Love is a means, but it is also more. A means is abandoned when the goal is reached; on the beach the now useless boat is forgotten. Man and wife take to God the love which bears them toward Him. Love cooperated day by day in their sal-

vation; they must work for the salvation of love. But little by little a change takes place. While at the beginning they go to God by the way of love, a day comes when it seems truer to say that they go by God to love. Or rather their love is in God and there is no need to leave one for the other.

### *Love Is Source of Grace*

God is already present to the heart of simple natural love and those who search there will find Him. But in Christian homes, founded on the sacrament of marriage, His presence is infinitely more real and more efficacious.

It is not love, properly speaking, which becomes a sacrament, it is the mutual promise and the union which follow it; but love, the inspiration of that promise, and the living soul of that union, participates in the sacrament. It may be said of love that it is not only sanctified but sanctifying.

In all ages men have asked from love the sweetness and joy of life; they have asked everything from it, and yet they have not hoped enough in it. Christ came, and now love is capable of transmitting to men the divine life. Love, the cause of joy, has become the source of grace. Men have asked everything from it; it gives them more than everything, because it gives the cause of all: God.

Married Christians turn to the sacraments and especially to the Eucharist, the greatest sacrament of all, to nourish their spiritual life. But why are they so often ignorant of the fact that grace is offered to them in the very heart of their love, in their very home where burns the inextinguishable flame of the sacrament of marriage? At the deepest level of their union, Jesus Christ waits to give Himself to them. Pope Pius XI, to help us understand this mystery, invited us to compare the sacrament of marriage with the sacrament of the Eucharist. For this purpose he recalled the words of Cardinal Bellarmine: "The sacrament of marriage can be thought of under two aspects: first, when it takes place, second, while it perdures after having been established. It is in fact a sacra-

ment like the Eucharist, which is a sacrament not only at the moment when it is consecrated, but during the time it remains and as long as husband and wife live, their society is always the sacrament of Christ and the church" (Encyclical *Casti Connubi*).

### *Love Is Never At Rest*

Christ did much for love, but he requires of couples that they not remain idle. Love, marvelously saved and called to the holiest of destinies, remains vulnerable and in danger. Christ did not give it the graces of immunity, but rather the graces of labor and combat, which assure it the strength to surmount temptations (routine is not the least to be overcome) and to triumph over inner and outer enemies. A love which refuses labor and combat is a love defeated in advance. There is no peace for love save an armed peace.

The most dangerous adversary of love is self-love. One hears married men and women say, "I expected much from love, but I was deceived." Often enough the truth is that they have deceived love: it is love which expected much of them. Love is proud; it does not give its joys or its grace to selfish hearts. To claim its riches without making any outlay on one's own part is to insult love's dignity. Those who come to it as beggars are rejected, those who give all receive all.

"He who saves his life loses it, he who consents to lose it, saves it." This teaching of Christ which formulates the great law of life is valid for love. But in married life it sometimes has a tragic side: there two are one, and the selfishness of one alone is enough to compromise their common work.

Let us remember that Christ came to save love, but that He will not save it in spite of itself and without cooperation. He requires that love consent to its salvation, and that it bring to that work an alert intelligence and a tireless perseverance.

### *Love and the Cross*

A great love requires a great labor: it is not the work of a

day, it is not an easy enterprise. It will know suffering, some through its own fault, some through the trials inherent in every human life. Let it accept them. The suffering will purify it and help it combat and overcome the germs of sin and of death which it contains. Love will be protected by the cross, as the houses of the Hebrews were by the blood of the paschal lamb on their door: the avenging angel will not enter.

More than protection, the cross offers to love a new nobility. The cross is the touchstone which forces it to reveal its value. Either it will accede to a new nobility by transcending itself, or, disdaining that nobility, it will remain the more or less debased slave of selfishness and sensuality.

True, there is in life a circle of radiant hours—there was even in the life of Christ—but the illusion of an easy and endless happiness is fatal for love. It is responsible for many failures of which we are the powerless witnesses. For those who enter into marriage without understanding that there is joy only beyond the mortification of all that indulgent selfishness introduced into the human heart by sin, fail inevitably. Because they have refused the cross, they will not enter into the best joys of love.

While those who do not love truly turn away from the open arms of the cross, others see there the great opportunity offered to their love to affirm and strengthen itself. It is easy to love when all one's desires go with it; it is exalting to love when, for the joy of the other, self sacrifice is required. This greatness of love was unknown before sin. On a path without obstacles, love had no need to surpass itself. Sin, by causing suffering, furnished this occasion; better, it gave to love the weapon with which to vanquish it. To expiate the sin which is the refusal of love, human love following the example of Christ will use suffering, the daughter of sin, and gain the glory of sacrifice.

The Christian couple understands the cross.



*Love Is Praise of God*

Like every creature, love is invited to sing the glory of God, for which it has been created: "All works of the Lord bless the Lord." Here is a primary aspect of its vocation. But this obligation must not be misunderstood. It is not a question merely of reserving, in the Christian home, a time consecrated to prayer. God does not demand "His part"; he demands "all." The whole life of love must be a praise of God.

It is possible to think that among the praises of the earth, the Lord delights especially in those which Christian love offers to Him—even as the artist, among his works, regards with special tenderness those in which he recognizes himself the most, where he has best expressed himself. Let those couples desirous of praising God, make of their love a beautiful and shining work.

It is true that the nuptials of God and the soul of the one consecrated to virginity are an even more precious praise in the eyes of the Lord, but it is precisely one of the glories of human nuptials to have furnished the image and to have been the source of these. Coventry Patmore has expressed it in an unforgettable sentence: "Married lives which do not betray the honor at the heart of love are fountains of virginity."

But how many unions offend the God they are supposed to praise! That is the great scandal. In order to make reparation, those ever-growing number of Christian homes who have understood this do their utmost to love their love in all its natural and supernatural splendor.

In addition to a praise of God, love must also be a message from God.

The work testifies to the talent of the artist; a choral tells us something of the deep life of J. S. Bach. In the same way, creatures speak to us of the creator, and reveal to us His thoughts and His perfections: the starry heavens speak of His knowledge, the ocean manifests His power, the clear gaze of a child lets us glimpse His purity. But love takes us into a

deeper, more profound secret, infinitely more enriching for the human heart: it teaches us of the love which is in the heart of God.

A great human love proves that love exists on the earth—and this is already a singularly important piece of news for many of our contemporaries who have lost faith in love—but especially it offers us an authentic image of the divine intimacy, of that love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. It proclaims that “God is love.” Human love is the reference which helps us to understand divine love. By its power to make two beings one, while safeguarding the personalities of each, love allows us to acquire an understanding of the mysterious union of Christ with humanity and of the spiritual marriage of the soul with God.

Such is the message of God which conjugal love is charged with bearing to men. Its importance helps us estimate the value and the confidence that God gives to love.

### *Love Is in the Service of the Father*

Is not the desire of God to share His happiness and His life with many children in the ardent intimacy of the trinitarian dwelling more comprehensible to us when we find a similar desire in our human homes?

But it is not only a matter of comprehending the profound desire of the heart of God: we must listen to it. For the Creator has made love the irreplaceable collaborator of His paternity. Through love of love, God has tied His hands; He will have no posterity except that which will be given to Him by the union of man and woman.

And when narrow and greedy hearts make themselves deaf to His prayer, the great-hearted Father cannot discharge His tenderness. But when love leaves a large passage for love, God can shower His affection on many children.

Spouses must seek to recognize the beating of the heart of God in that ardent desire for a child in the most intimate center of their love.

God has confidence in you, have confidence in Him. He who promised not to leave without recompense a glass of water offered to a beggar, will he not shower abundant benedictions upon the homes which give Him many children?

Words cannot worthily express the praise of love; it is the life of Christian spouses engaged in the magnificent adventure of love that can. People watch and listen for the testimony Christian couples have to give. The command of Christ: you will be my witness, is especially addressed to the love of the Christian wife and husband.

### WITH THE EYES OF GOD

Someone has remarked that true love is *not* blind. "It is rather its striking insight which makes it appear blind; it sees what no one else sees; it even sees beyond the beloved's gift of himself."

The eyes of love see beyond mere appearances the radiant face of the saint that the beloved must become, and that he already is potentially. The eyes of love see the loved one as the Creator did.

The vision of the Creator is a creative vision. To look upon and to create is one and the same act of God. His glance is not that of a spectator. He does not gaze at a being already existing, but he introduces and poses a being in existence. The glance of God "conceives" a man, a unique saint, and behold that man exists.

The artist is an earthly image of the Creator. His cathedral has to begin with an interior and creative vision. It is that vision become stone. Even if the execution betrays it, it is always through that first intuition that the artist sees his work.

It happens sometimes that God communicates to us His vision of a being; and then we see with an astonishing clearness the true face of a child of God, more or less hidden in the flesh, and which our love will bring forth, much as the artist makes the statue appear from a block of stone.

The soul we see in this way vibrates with our mere look of love. It awakens, it breaks its shell, it shines radiantly. For our human glance, when it is the vision of love, is also creative.

Husbands and wives, fathers, mothers, and children should ask God to give them His eyes, as He promised Ezechial: "I will place my eye in your heart." Then life will sing in the heart of your loved ones, and they will experience the exaltation which one of Mauriac's characters expresses: "I remember the thawing of my whole being under his look, my emotions springing up, myself liberated at the sources."

### *The Renewal of Love*

In chapter 14 of St. Luke Christ invites his hearers to a consideration of the need of sitting down together. Today, in a century of dizzying speeds, it is more necessary than ever to recall this need.

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the best Christian couples, those who never omit the duty of kneeling down together, often omit the duty of sitting down together.

Before setting out to establish a home and family a couple reflects, ponders, considers, plans. But since they began doing it, have they ever sat down together to examine the progress, to rediscover the goal, to look again at the ideal, to consult with the Master craftsman?

I know the objections and the difficulties of stopping to make such an assessment, but I also know that a home can be a failure if some important things are not attended to. In a home where time is not taken to stop and think, material and moral disorder very often insidiously introduces itself and becomes a habit; routine begins to dominate family prayer, meals, and all the common activities; discipline is reduced to the more or less nervous reflexes of the parents; and the bond begins to crack.

These deficiencies and many others may be observed not only in homes without formation, ignorant of the problems



of discipline and marital spirituality, but also in those which might be considered "graduates in family science." Through failing to practice the necessary recollection, the couple no longer sees what is apparent to an outsider, negligences which friends mention to each other, but not to those involved for fear of being misunderstood.

Some families, and family movements, have seen this problem and made certain attempts at a solution. One couple told me recently from their own experience how helpful it is for husbands and wives to leave their children once a year and vacation together or take a trip for a week. But perhaps you are thinking that not everyone has the domestic help, the friends, or parents who are willing to take care of the children. There are other solutions. Three families I know banded together for their vacations, went to the same place, and each couple was able to get away for a week by themselves, leaving to the other two the care of their children.

There is still another way to escape the routine of the home. Take your calendar, and just as you note a concert or a movie, or a visit with friends, make a note for a date with yourselves, and let it be understood that these two or three hours are sacred. No lesser reason than it would take to cancel a dinner invitation with friends should be sufficient to cancel the engagement with yourselves.

How to use these hours? First of all, decide that you are not in a hurry (be different this time). Launch out into the deep, change your point of view, forget your preoccupations. Read together perhaps a well-chosen chapter of a book reserved for these privileged occasions.

Then—if you haven't already—pray for a long moment. Having thus entered into the peace of the Lord, speak to one another of those thoughts, feelings, secrets, which it is not easy and often not desirable to speak during the active and noisy days, and which nevertheless it is dangerous to seal up in your heart, for as you know, "silence is the enemy of love." Make a pilgrimage to the roots of your love, think

again of the ideal which you had in the beginning when you walked together with a light step. Renew your fervor. Make an examination of your marital conscience. Bring to this examination sincerity and clarity, and get down to the real causes of any troubles you observe.

Why not devote some time to meditating on each of your children, asking the Lord to "put His eye in your heart," according to His promise, in order to see and love them as He does, in order to guide them according to His plans.

Finally and especially, ask yourselves if God really comes first among you.

If you have time left, do whatever you like, but don't go back to ordinary tasks, or to TV. Have you nothing more to say? Then be quiet together, for you may find this not the least profitable moment. Recall the phrase of Maeterlinck: "Not knowing each other yet, we did not dare to be silent together."

What I have just described is only one means of keeping your love and your home young and vital; certainly there are many other ways. But this one, adopted by many couples I know, has already proved itself worthwhile.

### THE CONCERN OF LOVE

In the course of my visits to homes, I sometimes ask: "Do you care about the sanctification of your children?" I always get a very quick and confident "yes." Then I ask, "Are you concerned about your own sanctification?" Again I get a "yes." But when I ask, "Are you ever concerned about the spiritual progress of your partner?" I often get a hesitation.

Frequently the answers are negative: "My husband is no longer a child; he can take care of himself." I don't doubt that, but it's not a question of directing him. Why leave him to struggle alone at this most important and difficult task? "I respect his private life too much to interfere with it." Preaching to him is certainly a lack of respect, but an over-

cautiousness is a failure in love. "He is more perfect than I am." Is that a real reason for not helping him? When I am in the confessional, and I have the feeling that my penitent is holier than I, I don't abandon him for that reason; I don't ask him to take my place, and I kneel in his; I know that I have the grace for my state.

All this shows, once again, that the duties and obligations to the partner in marriage are not very well appreciated.

At the time they are united in the sacrament of marriage, how few are the couples who understand the wonderful confidence which Christ places in them: "This person in whom My grace has worked for many years, I now confide to you. I need you to finish what has been started; I depend on you. Never forget that you more than anyone else are responsible for his sanctification, that no one else can bring him more abundantly the graces which he needs."

The only language which love knows desires the fullest perfection of the beloved. His human development and happiness surely, but first and above all his spiritual fulfillment without which his life cannot be a success, but rather a failure, eternally. True love is ambitious for the best; true love demands the highest.

This ambition is not to be confused with the tyranny of those self-centered individuals, who, when they find annoying faults in their partner, become impatient and complain of them. This is the reaction of self-love. To be lovingly concerned is not so much to concentrate on the defects of another (as every teacher knows) but rather to nurture in a soul, in the same way one protects a candle-flame, the growth of generosity towards God and neighbor. If I am not mistaken, St. Francis de Sales said to Philotheus: "Do you want to get rid of faults? Set fire to the four corners of the forest, and the beasts will flee from it."

Perhaps you are asking: "What can one do in a practical way to help in the sanctification of his partner? Sanctification

is such a high sounding work, I don't even know where to start. In my case it seems an impossible task."

What must be done first is in the interior order, and for some, whose partners refuse all spiritual effort, this is all that can be done. But it is already a great deal to have and to maintain deep in your soul that desire for the sanctification of him whom God has confided to you. Take responsibility for the task, join yourself to it, promise yourself to spare nothing to help him realize his vocation. And let that desire be translated into prayer, never forgetting that your prayer as a spouse draws an exceptional force and efficaciousness from the sacrament of marriage. Join penance to prayer. You have not done everything for him so long as you have not done penance.

Then take a clear look at your partner. Know his gifts, apparent or hidden like good seed in his soul, and help him bring them to fruition. Don't ignore his faults, but don't pit yourself against them: that would be a grave defect of which many married persons are guilty. There are those who only know how to see what is bad. This clarity of self-love is very different from the lucidity of love which I am urging upon you. Something I remember will clarify perhaps what I mean. Invited to dine with some friends, I was subjected to a test by their seven-year old son. "What is this?" he asked me. "A bottle," I said. "You must be more exact." "A green bottle." "What else," he said. "A bottle half full." The boy clapped his hands, and went and got his scoresheet. In one column, he listed the pessimists, those who answered, "A bottle half empty"; on the other, the optimists, those who answered "a bottle half full." I was not a little proud to be with the latter. Do you always have this optimistic view of your partner?

Do not be satisfied to know his virtues and vices. Help him to know them. I know this is difficult to do, I know it is often preferable to be silent. But sometimes at least the silence is only weakness, human respect, timidity. Believe me,



there is something singularly refreshing in a home where the husband and wife can speak frankly and fully to each other, and hear the other with an open heart. Let your help be humble, the aid of a sinner who aids a sinner and hopes to be aided by him.

To humility join discretion, which forbids all pressure, all sentimental intimidation, which respects the ways of God in that person, ways which may not correspond to our desires. After all, it is God's plans we must will, and not our own. Finally, let your love be patient, that simple patience which confidently expects the seasons to come. Then your loving concern will yield its fruits.

#### A NOTE TO NEWLYWEDS

To give you a full view of what Jesus Christ has done to save love and to make it grow, recall that it is you who conferred the sacrament upon yourselves. You assumed in some manner a sacerdotal power. This was Christ's way of making marriage magnificent.

Listen to Him as He speaks to each of you: "I know you wish to give everything to the one you love. You bring him the wealth of your heart, but I know that you would like to have still more to give. Therefore, I have confided in you the graces of marriage. I have charged my priest to transmit them to you. But I wish that your partner receive them through you; I wish you to receive them through him. I want you to have the joy of giving him more than a human love. I want him to recognize you with warmth and gratitude, as the giver of a magnificent, divine gift." Isn't this a marvelous revelation of the love of Christ?

Be faithful to the Catholic conception of marriage and love! As opposed to it, what can secular attitudes offer or philosophies invent?

Jesus Christ having given you so much, what does He expect from you.

He asks your collaboration; He needs you. If it is true that you could not be creatures without Him, it is no less true that He cannot be Creator without you. Promise today to welcome this God who knocks at your door beseeching you: "Give me children. Don't refuse me the joy of being Father, the joy of giving life, the joy of communicating My grace and My happiness. Don't be miserly!"

Others—friends and visitors will come knocking at your door. May they find love, gentleness, and devotion to Jesus Christ in this home where He is master. How many will be revived by the flame of your hearth who would have died of cold outside. Don't forget that it is in the family and by the family that Christian couples are the witnesses of Christ.

Thus you will aid priests whose achievements often could not endure without your collaboration. How many times they worry that the new convert or the solitary Christian will not be taken in by this "Church in miniature," the Christian family!

Christ not only asks your collaboration but he invites Himself into your family as He did at Cana and Bethany. Do not treat Him as a simple visitor welcomed with politeness; or like the doctor called in case of an accident; not even as a friend whose visit brings joy; but rather as the true head of the family.

Under the Christian roof He is at home; the members of the family know Him. Everything about the house—the way of life, the rapport of husband and wife, the affection between parents and children affirm that He is the head of the family. Nothing is done, nothing is said or thought except under His paternal regard. Children and friends can easily see that He presides over mealtimes, bedtime, work and play, at all hours, both difficult and joyous.

In this life in common with Christ, keep close to your heart the desire to enter always further into His knowledge by the study of His teachings and meditations on His thought, by reading about His deeds throughout the centuries. How

radiant these families are, where minds are always young and ready to be awed, never ceasing to explore the mysteries of their faith! And how easy it is for them to pass from study to prayer in common. May this be an honored evening habit among you when you and the children are gathered together in the intimacy of the family.

In this period of prayer you assume the cares and concerns of God. Isn't it natural that the family share the preoccupations of Christ since Christ shares theirs?

Day by day parents and children avidly follow together the great epic of the apostles who plant the cross in the four corners of the world. And in your home let the big news be what concerns the sufferings and progress of the Church.

### SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The subject of this essay came to me this morning during Mass—the Mass of the Holy Family. It is no gospel of sweetness, tenderness, happy familial intimacy which was chosen for this Mass, but that disconcerting page of St. Luke.

On the return journey, Mary and Joseph are astonished to discover that Jesus is not there. At first they wait confidently, then begin to search, and slowly their hearts become panicky; they go from group to group, asking, awakening those sleeping. Finally they take the road back to the city. They pass several stragglers, who know nothing. The dam which holds back their sobs is near breaking, but each one, for the love of the other, keeps still. The distance to Jerusalem seems endless to them. Mary has reached the limit of her strength, and Joseph the silent watches her covertly; the anguish on the face of his wife cuts into his heart.

During this time, Jesus calmly discusses theology with some rabbis in a room of the Temple. But this calm should not deceive us. He sees, He cannot but see that man and woman on the road who stagger with sorrow. An hour, a half-hour running, and He could be with them, and the sun would rise

again in their hearts. But no, the will of the Father is formal: it is here, in the house of God, and not beside that tragic couple, that He must remain.

His heart is frightfully torn. . . . An agony of forty-eight hours, and of this first agony there are no witnesses.

Nothing of all this appears to the old rabbis. Nor does any of it appear in His response to the reproach which the tenderest of mothers cannot keep back. Indeed, the reproach is very like a sob: "My child, why have you done this? Look! Your father and I have sought you in anguish." "And why did you look for me," replies Jesus; "did you not know that I must be about my Father's affairs?" But they do not understand these words, still less the serenity of voice in which they are spoken.

Thus, even the saints—even the greatest of saints, Mary and Joseph—God puts to the test.

He asked Abraham to sacrifice his promised son, St. Paul to consent to chains while many awaited him, Joan of Arc to mount the stake, condemned by men of the Church. For God means to be treated as God; His own must recognize His absolute and unique sovereignty, and honor it by a submission without reserve, whatever be the cost.

Is God not our Father? It is precisely His paternal love which is expressed in these demands. He is ambitious for His children. He wants them to be great, because He wants them to be happy. And the greatness of man lies in recognizing, with all his powers and his whole being, the divine sovereignty. And the happiness of man lies in discovering that this sovereign God is a Father, *his* Father.

What an absurdity to pretend to honor the paternity of God and empty His sovereignty of meaning!

How many think they have gone beyond a religion of fear because they approach God with a supposed filial love which is really only a familiarity toward a Santa Claus! They are not beyond a religion of fear, but on this side of it. In fact, they are not even religious, for religion is first of all the



recognition of the transcendence of God and His absolute sovereignty, a recognition which is fulfilled in the adoration of His Paternity.

Is God treated as God in your home? So many households reverse the roles. God, yes, but He must respect their little comforts, their pleasures, the success of their children; He must be at their service. They pay Him an assessment, so they have a claim on Him. If God doesn't meet their expectations, they demand an accounting, they remonstrate with Him. God was terribly angry when the Jewish people tried to annex Him and lay claim to rights on Him.

No, not God at the service of man. . . . Those who adore, who prostrate themselves before the Lord, these alone have the right to approach God with a filial tenderness which will never be confident folly. These alone can have the wonderful experience of the divine Paternity whose solicitude never fails. No doubt trials will not be spared them, but joy in their trials will be generously given.

Meditate on the home of Nazareth and you will understand what sort of home it is where God is treated as God.

### MANUE AND HIS WIFE

*There was a certain tribesman of Dan called Manue, who lived at Saraa, and had a wife that bore him no children.*

To bear no children: the great shame of a Jewish woman—but also the sorrow which sharpens and purifies the desire to have a child. While others expect a child by their own resources, a sterile couple can only wait upon God. And this is why so many children destined for great things are born to homes long childless: an Isaac, a John the Baptist. . . . Higher and more fertile than fleshly union is the encounter of human prayer and divine will. (And here is a great hope for childless homes: if not the hope of a child by miracle, at least the hope of a spiritual fruitfulness.)

*To her the Lord's angel appeared and said, Poor barren one, poor childless one, thou art to conceive and bear a son. See to it that no wine or strong drink, no unclean food passes thy lips, for this son whom thou art to conceive and bear is to be a Nazarite from his birth; even when he is a child, no razor must come near his head, And he shall strike the first blow to deliver Israel from the power of the Philistines.*

God speaks only to the wife at first: perhaps because more attentive. So humble that we do not even know her name; she is only "the wife of Manue." This shadowy image is all silence, all attentiveness. Her destiny is only to hear one day this Word which will make her a mother.

*So when she met her husband she told him, I have been speaking with a messenger from God, who might have been an angel, such awe his look inspired in me, who he was, his home, his name, he would not tell, but the message he gave me was that I should conceive and bear a son. And I must abstain from wine and all strong drink, and from all unclean food, because this son of mine was to be a Nazarite from his childhood up, bound to the Lord by his vow from the day of his birth to the day of his death.*

She hastens to bring the marvelous promise to her husband. We perceive one of those homes where everything is shared. And what fidelity in her recital: every word is there, not like a lesson memorized but like a message where each syllable is important. However, she omits what might seem essential: the liberation of Israel. Why? Humility? Or rather, on the contrary, awareness that the true greatness lies beyond this, that the glory of her son will be to be not a chief of his people, but a servant of God? Mothers have such intuitions.

*Thereupon Manue entreated the Lord to send them His messenger again, and tell them how this child, once born, should be nurtured.*

Manue is not satisfied: why did God not address him? And then, one never knows, what with the imagination of women. . . . He has a sober mind, he wants no illusions. He too wants his revelation. As a man who weighs his responsibilities, he would be happy with a few supplementary explanations. To have an extraordinary son is fine: but how should he be raised? The questions multiply.

He prays therefore with insistence. But he associates his wife with his prayer: how strong and clear this conjugal "us" sounds before God! No, decidedly, while Manue wants to talk to the divine messenger, it is not from discontent, there is no mean sentiment. But in his home where all is common, there would be a fissure, a rupture of spiritual harmony, if his wife alone heard the great message.

*And the Lord granted his prayer; once more the angel of God appeared to his wife, as she sat resting in the field. Her husband was not with her, and she, upon sight of the angel, ran off to fetch him; He has come back, she told him, the man I saw a few days since.*

In response to the prayer of Manue, the visitor returns. But it is again to the wife that he appears. Manue must understand the respect which God bears for his wife, and not be jealous. The heart of the wife is the mirror where God wishes to show His face to this man.

*So he rose and followed her, and asked the angel whether it was he that had brought the message to his wife; yes, he said, it was I. Tell me then, said Manue, when thy promise is fulfilled, what life the boy is to lead, what things are they he must shun? But the angel of the Lord*

*answered, enough that thy wife should observe the warnings I gave her, eating nothing that grows in the vineyard, drinking no wine or strong drink, abstaining from all unclean food; these commands of mine she must carry out faithfully.*

The angel is there. But he has no more to say than what he has already said—there are words which determine a whole life, which contain it in advance. He repeats only that the mother must associate herself with the vocation of her son, as it were, anticipating his mission by practicing before his birth what he must afterward observe: the law of the Nazirs. (Nazirs were Israelites who had vowed themselves to moral obligations and external practices for the honoring of Yahweh.) There is a mysterious correspondence between the holiness of the mother and the vocation of the child.

*And now Manue said to the angel of the Lord, Pray do me one favor; allow us to cook a kid for thy eating. Detain me if thou wilt, said the angel, but of thy food I must not eat; offer burnt sacrifice, if thou wilt, to the Lord. And still Manue did not recognize that it was the Lord's angel; what is thy name, he asked? If thy words come true, we would fain give thee some token of gratitude. My name? said he. Do not ask my name, it is a high mystery.*

A moment of pause. This messenger is a friend: let us invite him. But no. The unknown voyager remains awesome, although friendly. He does not agree to share their meal. The angel of Yahweh is Yahweh Himself. And His people must approach Him with that reverential fear which is the foundation of all religious wisdom. Yahweh is the transcendent God, and not one of those idols, made by man and subject to man's arrangements. Yahweh has no need of food like the false gods, the earth belongs to Him. What He desires is the homage



which the human heart renders by its faith and confidence. Thus He refuses to reveal His name to Manue, for among the Semitic peoples, to reveal one's name is to deliver one's self to those to whom one confides it.

*So Manue brought the kid, and a bread-offering with it, and laid it on the rock, presenting it before the Lord; and mystery indeed there was before the eyes of Manue and his wife; as flames went up to heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord went up, too, there amid the flames.*

One of the most prodigious scenes in the Bible. There, on that hill a thousand feet above the water, a rock was placed for sacrifices. Manue and his wife have heaped up the wood, laid the kid upon it, lighted the fire. The flame mounts. And suddenly the angel of God merges with the flame, which, as if it breathed, mounts up from earth toward heaven.

The offering of the couple becomes a divine offering. Yahweh offers to Yahweh. . . . Could they think, these two humble-hearted peasants, that eleven centuries later in that same region, others would offer to God a bread and wine which would have no more than the appearance of products of the earth, which would be in reality the Son of God offering Himself to the Father in their hands? There is no offering worthy of God save God Himself. There is no valid prayer in our hearts save the flame of the Holy Spirit.

*At the sight, Manue and his wife fell down face to earth. Now that he had disappeared from their view, Manue knew him for what he was, and said to his wife, This is certain death; we have seen the Lord. Nay, answered his wife, if the Lord meant us harm, he would not have accepted our sacrifice and our bread-offering; he would not have shown us this marvelous sight, nor told us what is to befall.*

Before this wonder, Manue and his wife, with a single soul, prostrated themselves—the great gesture of adoration for all the nomads, from Abraham to the Bedouins of our day. The adoration joins this united couple more closely together. They become one before the God who has visited them.

Manue stands up. He regards his wife. He knows the tradition: one cannot see God without dying. He says it moreover composedly, without fear; it would not be too great a price for what they have just seen. His wife regards him, she dares to contradict him; he, knowing what he has been told of God; she, having read in the very heart of God (decidedly she is more spiritually advanced than he). And once again their togetherness asserts itself: the wife senses God's will, then brings her husband to understand it. No, God will not make them die; He loves them; He came to make them a marvelous promise, and He will keep His promise. The wife has understood that the logic of God is the logic of love.

*And so she bore a son, and called him Samson. As the lad grew, the Lord's blessing was on him.* (Book of Judges, chapter 13—Knox Translation throughout.)

The child will be the liberator of Israel. Not far from there, 1100 years later, in the fields at night, another child will be born, of whom this one is only the distant announcement, the pale image, but an image all the same. And that other child will also be a liberator—the true Liberator.

## CHAPTER 2



### *Within the Home*

#### **HOW DO YOU LOVE YOUR CHILDREN?**

Are couples, successful at Christian marriage, perhaps failing their children in education?

I have learned of a fifteen year old boy who tried to commit suicide, of a student of the same age who left the faith to join a fanatical group, and of a young girl marrying a divorced man. In each case they were from good Christian families.

I don't want to be a prophet of doom, but naturally I have some misgivings about their education, and alerted by these unfortunate cases, I want to ask parents: do you truly love your children?

This question may seem shocking. Is not paternal love, even more maternal love, the most natural, most spontaneous, most universal emotion, the one least weakened by original sin? Even among sinners, even among animals. . . . Surely, everybody knows that, and it is always assumed by speakers. Parents are dispensed from asking themselves this little question: do I truly love my children? And no priest ever hears a father or mother accuse himself in confession of not loving his children.

They are so sure of loving their children, but I cannot entirely share their assurance. Their love, even among the best, often seems to me to be terribly naive and instinctive. When they examine themselves, they ask such summary questions: "Have I been impatient, have I been good to them? Do they lack anything—which means do they have warm clothes and proper food, and are they receiving a good education . . . ?"

It is true, the child lacks none of these things. And yet, often in his heart, the sense of deception grows. For he sees—not necessarily in the clarity of full consciousness—that his parents do not love him for himself but for themselves, not as an autonomous person but as their prolongation, a little like a chic woman loves her hands, of which she takes great care. You may be surprised if one fine day he has enough, and rebels. The parents, astonished, wail and cry ingratitude. Or perhaps they understand, but too late, that their child has lacked nothing . . . except the essential thing: a genuine love. For to love a child is not to pamper him and provide for him; it is to understand him and to bring his personality to its own fulfillment.

For Christian parents, it is not only loving their children which is necessary, but loving them in a Christian way. And this is something other than teaching them some virtues, some religious practices, a precocious sweet piety.

Christian parents must understand, and help their children to understand, the call of Christ to them, must help them to become Christian adults, who respond to that call by the joyful gift of their young disciplined liberty, who commit themselves to the great adventure of life firmly resolved to adhere to the code of values of their Master. That code of values which contradicts so squarely that of the world in which they live, this is what must be held up to them from their youth, and the major maxims of it laid deeply into them: "He who wishes to be my disciple must take up his cross daily and follow me." "Who loves his father and mother



more than me is not worthy of me.” “Take care not to parade your justice before men, to be admired by them.” “Love your enemies, in order to be true sons of God.” “Seek first the kingdom of God, and the rest will be given to you.”

But how do you think your children will acquire the understanding of these great scriptural imperatives, admit that the kingdom of God must come first, if they see you so concerned for their human success—success in school, comfortable situation, nice marriage, social position? Adolescents have clear eyes! You cannot really help them to become true disciples of Christ unless you love them as Christ loves.

Before choosing His disciples, before giving them a mission, Scripture tells us that Christ retired to a mountain where He passed the night in intimacy with the Father. And you. . . . Do you really pray for your children? When all human means fail, does your prayer become pressing, tenacious, deepened—combat with God, like Jacob, to wrestle from Him the necessary aid? And every day, do you pray for them with that prayer which consists in placing them, so to speak, under the light of God’s eyes, in order to understand them better, to help them better, love them better?

Prayer gives rise to love, and love to sacrifice. “There is no greater love than to give one’s life for those he loves.” Do you love this much, so as to make grow in grace those whom you have brought to life? So few Christians love their children enough to do penance for them! And yet, how can we pretend to have done everything, so long as we cannot truly say with St. Paul, “I make up in my body what is lacking to the passion of Christ for His body which is the Church” . . . for the members of His body, who are our children.

### *What Is Their Image of Adulthood?*

Every normal child aspires to adulthood, hastens toward the day when he will finally be a man. When your daughters play with dolls, imitating their mother, when your sons play cowboys, imitating the movies and TV, they only obey un-

consciously that instinct of imitation, which is a large element of their growth. It is therefore crucially important to ask yourself what image of adulthood you offer to your child.

I fear that in many homes, adulthood appears to the children as the ideal age where one can discuss everything, judge everything, criticize everything, where one is his own master. And the conversation around the family table would not dissuade them from this view: actions of grandparents and friends, national and international politics, decisions of civil authorities, directives from bishops or Pope, the pastor's exhortations, everything passes before the bar of judgment of the grown ups, judgments as infallible as they are pitiless.

If this is true of your home, how do you expect your children, trying to imitate adults—and so much the more as they become older—not to find it intolerable to have to submit to the directives of their parents or the Church, obey orders and commandments?

Thus are formed, even in Christian families, those rebels who, at twenty, tell you they no longer believe in anything, marry outside the Church, or end up in crime.

You say: why don't they imitate our Christian life? Because that which they see in you as characteristic of adult life is not so much religious life as your independence.

If, on the other hand, your children see you submitting your judgment and your life to those greater than you (I mean to those in authority over you), welcoming advice and counsel, if they hear you speak with deference of your religious and civil heads, if your attitude at prayer is marked by adoration, and especially if your daily actions reveal that the will of God is the guide of your life, then they will not believe it necessary to be rebellious in order to be adult.

Parents ought to consider Christ. You will observe that to form His disciples into persons submissive to their Father, He took great care to show them His own dependence upon His Father. He seemed to beware above all of allowing them to think that He acted on His own initiative and as He

pleased, that He taught in His own name, in a word, that He was independent: "No, I have not come of myself, it is the Father who sent me." "The Son can do nothing by himself, but only what He sees the Father do. What the Father does, the Son also does." "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work." "I have not spoken for myself; it is he who sent me, the Father, who prescribed what I must speak and proclaim." "I live by the Father." Such is the image of the adult which He gives us, He who was the most perfect adult.

### *Meditation for Christmas Eve*

New toys everywhere, on the rug, in the chairs, on the floor . . .

It is time for prayers. No difficulty tonight getting the children together, for here they are near the tree. The Christmas crib has been set up, almost more interesting than the toys.

The infant Jesus is lying on some straw. Mary and Joseph are near Him. Everyone watches them, and prays well tonight. It's good to be together, the curtains are drawn, the street is quiet. Nothing exists outside the little world of this warm room. It is a touching sight and everybody is happy.

But do not let your Christmas eve be in contradiction with the mystery which you mean to celebrate. The Son of God who lives in the love, the glory, and the infinite joy of the divine family, could not resist the immense call of human distress to become man and the companion of the miseries of man. You are right, on the eve of this feast, to assemble joyously around the crib. But do not let your curtains deaden the cry of misery, do not let the warm home make you forget the cold night and the homes without fires, and the abandoned children, and the great lamenting waves of human suffering.

Yes, I know that the thought of the immense distress of the world is painful. And so much the more when you can do nothing. But, is there really nothing you can do? If only

each man would learn to see the suffering around him, would help his unfortunate brother according to his means, the distress would quickly be lessened. But so long as one only bewails the misery of the world, the misery nearby is not seen—any more than one's superfluous goods are seen. And even if by chance something you read or hear in a sermon shocks your satisfied conscience, you have only to go knock on the door of some reassuring counselor. For example: We published in our magazine an article on the spirit of poverty. A month later, a subscriber in Africa wrote me: "About the article on poverty, do you really think that it must be followed to the letter? I was very troubled by the phrase of St. Basil which was quoted: 'If you have one pair of shoes too many, they *belong* to a person who has none,' a confessor told me that it need not be followed to the letter . . . the poor person perhaps wouldn't be happy with a pair of shoes . . . especially if he had the habit of going barefoot." There he is, fully reassured, going home with a light step.

Should Christmas not be the occasion to encourage your children to think of poor people and poor children? And to do what their heart tells them? Do not wait to teach your children the meaning of misery: the human heart hardens quickly.

### ALL LOVE IS LABOR

Christianity is not primarily a morality, it is not the cult of the god Duty, that faceless divinity of religion; it is not a simple serving of a remote God. It is a life with God, a community of love with him. "I stand at the door and I knock. If someone hears my word and opens it, I will enter in, I will dine with him and he with me." Still more, the Christian life is a communion. By faith—a living faith, I mean—the Christian enters into communion with the divine intellect; he participates, say the theologians, in the knowledge that God has of Himself. And as for Charity, he loves God with the very heart of Christ; it is associated intimately with



the act by which God loves himself. Here we are far from a spartan and puritan morality.

We are so habituated to all the formulas learned in the catechism, that the great realities which they veil no longer astonish us.

There are however Christians who take these supernatural realities seriously and try to live them.

Their faith is a passionate desire to know God and His thoughts. They strive to maintain a living and progressive faith, by meditation on the divine word, and by attention to what God wishes to say to them in everyday events. Young, alert, their faith penetrates always deeper into the "inexhaustible wealth of Christ." Their joy is manifest in the words of St. John which well express their sentiment: "And we have recognized the love that God has for us and we have believed."

They work at loving God—all love is labor before being possessed. This love little by little becomes the wellspring of all their acts, the meaning of life. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ," writes St. Paul: "tribulation, suffering, persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril? . . . In all that we are more than victors, thanks to Him who has loved us."

For them the morality of Christians is the radiance of the divine life of love that lives in them. Morality follows the order of Christ: "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Be merciful as your Father is merciful." St. Paul defines in these words: "Be imitators of God, like well loved sons."

In the home of these Christians you do not risk suffocation. They are not prisoners of a moralism, a legalism. They are free, free with the freedom of the children of God. In their home one breathes the open air of God. They make you long for God.

### *Is Joy Sinful?*

Each century has moralists, writers who counsel, condemn,



distinguish. One of their favorite themes since the war is anxiety, an anxiety which is closely related to anguish. If you believe them then anxiety is the great virtue. To sleep well is thoughtlessness; to be happy is an insult to the suffering of men. But having a "bad conscience," that is the state of grace. Willingly they cite the words of a certain heroine. "There will always be a stray dog somewhere who will keep me from being happy."

If the reader rebels, arguing that in such an atmosphere he feels like he is about to be asphyxiated, our moralists reprove him anew; "How can you laugh, while others cry? How dare you read your paper tranquilly by the fireside when so many others have neither hearth nor home? How can you dance on the rumbling volcano?"

Christians themselves end up having a bad conscience and wonder if joy is perhaps not sinful. However an instinct in them protests: it is not the vulgar joys of life that claims these rights; it is something deeper. And the words of Christ rise up, "Ask and you shall receive, in order that your joy may be perfect." "No one will be able to steal your joy." These words of St. Paul, too, "Rejoice without ceasing in the Lord, I repeat, rejoice."

Joy. Anxiety. It is perplexing. Where is the truth?

Our joys are tributaries of our loves. Observe that when his wife and children are happy, joy lives in the heart of the husband; when they are in trouble, joy slips away from him. For the Christian the first love—not only first in dignity, but first in strength and in reality—is the love of his God; it is the love of Christ. And if Christ is in joy—and He is, for His death has vanquished suffering and death—then there flows from the deepest wells of the Christian soul this subterranean river of indestructible joy, precisely what Christ promised to His disciples.

But this love of Christ that causes the joy of the Christian also is the source of his sorrow. To love Christ is to love those whom He loves, especially those whom He cherishes

above all: the crippled, the rejected, the lowly. The heart of the Christian opens itself to the rising tide of human suffering: that of the millions of displaced persons who have left country and home, sometimes losing their children enroute, or that of their Christian brothers behind the Iron Curtain, that of socially suppressed and politically emerging peoples in colonial areas, and also the distress of many closer to home.

The day he opens himself to the love of Christ and, through Him, to the suffering of men, what will become of his tranquility? Compassion becomes a devouring passion in his heart.

Whether he is in the subway, in the street or at the shop, he wills the "constancy of prayer and of offering." The trouble of the men who live there he offers to God. This joy of Christ that sings from the depths of himself is without ceasing until God reconciles him to all his brothers.

Champion of the unfortunate, close to the Lord, he intends also to help them. Since it is not really possible to wish them joy and not to divide his bread with them, he gives to the poor.

To help the poor is good. But it is not the whole duty of the Christian. To pretend to suffer from the distress of the world and not to try to reform the world is inconsistent. A civilization collapses (perhaps justly for having founded the tranquility of some on the misery of others), new structures emerge from the ruins; the Christian of today must cooperate in the construction of a better world.

Thus the heart of the Christian—I speak of the true disciple of Christ—is heavy with the immense human suffering (and also with the enormous sin of the world). An anxiety consumes him, it is true, but it is the anxiety of St. Paul: "Who is weak, that I do not myself feel weak, who has fallen without a fire devouring me?" Nevertheless, the sorrow of men does not replace the joy of God in him. Moreover, this joy by contrast is the measure of his sorrow; it is joy, and not

sterile anguish, which always urges upon us the aid of those in want.

### *Seeing Good*

I had intended to write on benevolence, willing the good of another, to analyse this disposition so necessary to life in common. On second thought, I have decided to speak to you of another disposition, still more fundamental, the introducer and imitator of benevolence. There is no name for it in English. Not having one, we will call it "seeing good" the ability to see the good of others who surround us.

It is the gift of a happy nature, the symptom of a well functioning faith some will say. Not at all; it is an art. And a difficult art.

I remember a page of Duhamel. It was wartime; for two years he lived side by side with a silent companion who seemed empty of soul. Then one day this taciturn person let escape a word whose intonation alerted Duhamel: Had he, then, unsuspected depths in him? Duhamel decided to find out. "For days and days I stayed there, with pickaxe and the little miner's lamp. Since that time I think with astonishment of those little explored subterranean passages where there are rivers, colonnades, domes . . ."

In the presence of every person, it is necessary at first to convince oneself that one does not really know him. And then to make an act of faith in his profound depth, intelligence, wealth of heart, and what is still more precious: the image of God in him. The discovery is astonishing. This explanation of the interior world of a human being demands patient labor, a passionate, respectful, ardent and tireless attention to his tastes, aptitudes, aspirations, enthusiasms—a thousand signs which allow us to perceive a secret life.

But do not forget the recommendations of the fox to the Little Prince, "One sees well only with the heart. That which is important is invisible to the eye."

## EUTRAPELIA

Eutrapelia is not a new baptismal name. It is not a saint, but a virtue. This strange word in fact slips timidly into the catalogue of virtues set up by solemn moralists. From the little attention they give to it, it evidently seems that Eutrapelia is in the eyes of these wise men only a giggling girl in an assembly of queens!

But you are no austere moralist, that is why I invite you to welcome little Eutrapelia. (If you so desire you will find some information about her in the *Summa Theologica*, II IIae, q. 168 a. 2.)

Eutrapelia is simply good humor. The practice of this small virtue is of great importance in social life, especially in the life of the family.

There are many varieties of good humor: the good humor of youth—a superabundance of vitality; the good humor of a fine day—daughter of the sun rather than of virtue; the innate good humor of happy temperaments; exuberant good humor, often more tiresome than helpful; and also a certain ascetic good humor which resembles a grimace more than a smile. What we eulogize here is not a function of health, weather, or circumstance. It has its source in the heart of the soul. Moreover, it possesses varied nuances. Sometimes discrete, appearing as a light; sometimes laughing, sweeping us away in a dance; conquering, it wins us away from anger; penetrating, it warms frozen hearts. But it is impossible to define. It is as mobile as the faces it brightens.

Don't think that good humor is the virtue of the indifferent, or of those who run away from the serious things in life—from human drama, from the suffering of body and of soul. Reflect, rather, if you judge it to be superficial, on the virtues of which it is the sign and the fruit.

It requires first of all the qualities of spirit; the knowledge of true values, which refuses to make dramas out of the subjects of an operetta. It requires the optimistic regard of ex-



perience which realizes the truth of the proverb: "Every cloud has a silver lining." It requires also that sense of humor whose discrete note we can discern in many of the words of Christ.

Still more than these qualities of spirit, good humor supposes a number of virtues: faith and love of God which establishes peace in hearts, like the staff in the hand of the traveller. Good humor is a victory of forgetfulness of self. But it is the Christian love of one's neighbor which more than any other virtue engenders good humor; good humor is to it what the smile is to the face. Good humor is politeness of heart.

Eutrapelia is not an insignificant virtue. It is not only those which precede it that justify its importance, it is also those which it sustains. To acquire the mastery of self, few ways are as efficacious. Without it all is laborious, with it all becomes easy. Fruit of love and of true happiness, it is the creator of love and happiness in the family, thanks to its power of union and of reconciliation. And certainly, if it is not a question every day of reconciliation—in the strict sense of the word—there are very often little displeasures to dissipate. It achieves this miracle. First it reconciles creatures with themselves, the first condition of the reconciliation with others. It reconciles them with life as well, with humble tasks and great duties. Those who practice it may well merit the beatitude addressed to the workers of peace: "Happy are the peacemakers; they will be called children of God."

If Eutrapelia reigns at your house, she will communicate her tonality to things and persons. The other virtues will share in her grace. The work of education will be facilitated and more efficacious. All their life children raised in her climate are endowed with serenity and happiness.

I hope that you understand why, in the grave times in which we live, I do not hesitate to speak to you of a virtue which can appear light to those who have not weighed it. If you practice the duty of sitting down of which I spoke previously, don't neglect to ask yourself about the duty of good



humor. Because it is a question of duty. It is also a question of acquiring the habit: all men possess the germs of it but do not develop it without a patient effort. Its practice without failure demands now and then a true heroism. As paradoxical as it may seem, good humor is an ascetic virtue, but an ascetic virtue of which those nearby will not complain. This is not true of every exercise of penance, if I may judge by this remark of a husband: "My wife wears a hair shirt but it is me that it scratches!"

### WHAT ARE VACATIONS FOR?

First of all, what do we call vacations? I would define them loosely: the time of interruption of habitual work, scholarly, professional, household. While it appears that schoolboys and men generally have vacations, the mothers of the families have just as much need of it (a remark made in passing for the attention of the husbands).

Upon return from the holidays, I often observe among parents what the teachers observe among their students—a collapse of spiritual vitality. Their energies are exhausted.

Should increase of physical activity necessarily mark the decline of spiritual vitality? This would be very unfortunate, but it seems to be so.

Where does this decline come from? From the abandoning during vacation of habitual religious exercises? Perhaps, but not necessarily. It seems to me that that is not the primary reason. It is rather in the interior order: on vacations one takes a vacation from love of God and neighbor, taking as a motto: I will do as I please. Play, sleep, walk, read, all are commanded by this sovereign law. Understand, it is not the resting, the change of pace, the sports that I find reprehensible—although sometimes these may be abused—but rather the motive: whatever I feel like doing. From this comes the perpetual attention to self, and therefore inattention to God and to others; from this comes the preference of self to the detri-

ment of others. All during the year the question hardly comes up of doing what you please. You try to do the will of God—if not always seen as the will of God, at least under the aspect of duty. Then what happens on vacation: you reverse the values. As if, in order to rest yourself from having loved and served God and others during eleven months, you now love yourself. A holiday is for the indulgence of self.

There is the error. There are no vacations from love. You do not cease to breathe during vacations. Therefore you do not cease to love; love is the respiration of the soul.

You are right to interrupt your routine tasks. But do it because it is the will of God and in the measure that it is. Let your love remain awake, alert, vigilant, eager, even more than usual. Breathe with full lungs, love with a whole heart. The soul needs to remake itself, to be renewed: for it is loving which re-creates the soul. And the vacation is precisely a time when it is easier to love, to love God and to love others. Easier to love God because the sea, the hills, the woods relate His glory. Easier to love others because, leaving the rat race behind, one is finally able at leisure to discover, marvel, read, and talk at length.

Then your vacation fulfills its purpose; it is a re-creation; re-creation of the bonds between the soul and God, between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters and all the family.

You return home refreshed for your routine duties, vitality is increased, the soul is stronger. Your vacation will be a source of strength because you make it a time of love.

### NOT BY BREAD ALONE

What would you think of a soldier overseas who buried his wife's letters in his pockets or his footlocker without reading them? That he does not love her any more. If he would say, "It is in my heart that I am united to her and not by some news and declaration of love," you would not be too much

reassured. Words of love do not make a union between beings, but words are still the best means incarnated spirits have of entering into communication and communion. To pretend that one is united to another and to neglect the means of expression and exchange, is always a disquieting symptom.

Doesn't this disquieting symptom exist in your Christian life which is supposed to be union with Christ? Christ speaks to you, do you hear him? Do you ever reread the Gospel message in order to enter into closer communication with Him?

The essential point of a message is to open up a way to the sentiments and intimate thoughts of the author. Is it thus that you read the Gospels? Beyond the words, the facts, are you joined again to the living thought of the Son of God? Do you perceive the beating of His heart? Have you established a personal relation with Jesus Christ?

He who frequently reads the Gospel, not merely mechanically but with attention of mind and heart will not be long in entering into communication with Christ. A personal love, man to God, surges between him and Christ, and a union which is the Christian life is established.

But it is never made once and for all. It must be remade each day. Each day we must listen to Christ speaking to His Father and to men, to watch Him walk, pray, grieve, cry, suffer. We must be attentive to everything by which He expresses himself, by which He communicates Himself (communicates Himself to me) because we must not forget the Gospel is a personal message; it is addressed to me.

How I wish that each of you could suffer from hunger the day when you have not read the Gospels!

I have just had a conversation which well illustrates all that I write to you. In this home the father, mother, and two oldest children read every day during the week the same page of the Gospel. On Sunday, they devote some time to an exchange of their ideas: each has his turn, without interruption or question by the others, to say what the passage suggested

to him, what he understood by it, what in his life has been enlightened by it. This common experience is rich and rewarding. They have done this for a year and a half, and they speak of it with enthusiasm.

Note well what is characteristic in the experience. Together they choose the text, they search for the authentic meaning in a commentary, and then each rereads it anew, each day, and for ten minutes he contemplates it and "listens to it." I intentionally employ the word "listen" because it is not a question of a reasoned meditation. Sometimes the text is silent, but sometimes it resounds in the soul, finding there a prolonged echo, it throws light on behavior, it answers a question. After ten minutes of attention to the word of God, a note is made on what has been learned. For the next six days the same text is reused patiently, with confidence and perseverance. Sundays, all meet together. In a climate of prayer, they reread the text. After each paragraph each one reads his notes on what the text suggested to him. At the end the father of the family tries, modestly, to summarize the essential points of what has been put forward in common.

Thus the Gospel becomes precisely the nourishment of which Christ spoke: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which comes from the mouth of God."

### THE GREAT STORY

Do you know the admirable page where St. John of the Cross shows us his complete, ultimate confidence in Christ, the Word of God? I invite you to meditate on it.

"He who in our days wishes to question God and obtain a vision or a revelation of Him not only would commit folly but would do God a grave injury, because in doing it he would turn away his eyes from Christ to look for something new. God could reply to him: I have said all these things to you by my Word, who is my Son, and I have nothing more to say nor to reveal to you. Fix your eyes on Him alone, be-



cause in Him I have enclosed everything, said everything, revealed everything. You will find in Him more than you would know to desire or ask. You ask for a word, a revelation, a partial vision; if you focus your eyes on Him, you will find all in Him. I have said everything to you, answered everything, manifested everything, revealed everything in giving Him to you as brother, teacher, companion, for ransom and reward. Since the day I descended upon Him with my Spirit on Mount Tabor, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased, listen to Him' I have put an end to all other teaching, to all other response. I have confided them to Him. Listen to Him, for I have no more to reveal, no more to manifest."

I would not think of commenting on such a text. All the same, let me make the remark to you that in the life of Christ there is a privileged period, where His message to the world is expressed with an intensity and exceptional magnificence—from Holy Thursday to the night of Easter. The gospel story of these days possesses an extraordinary virtue that I have often experienced—as much with children learning the catechism as with adults.

A faith which does not have its source in these pages will always have a bloodless life. A religious formation of children which does not put them in contact with the great mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord will always be partly beside the point.

Why is it that Christian families of the twentieth century no longer read this story of the passion and resurrection of Christ (at least during Holy Week)? In past centuries, if we believe the old ledgers, this reading was frequently made on the night before Palm Sunday by the father to all the assembled family. How I wish that all the homes would reestablish this old tradition and do so often in the course of the year, proportionately more in Lent—father, mother, children united in the same love of Christ—rereading the greatest story, the twenty pages which carry more weight than all the libraries of the earth.



## THE "YES" OF LOVE

The feast of the Annunciation commemorates the humble and fervent response that Mary made to God: *Fiat* . . . Yes! It is the feast of the consent of the Virgin to an unimaginable divine proposal. It is the feast of love, of which the perfect expression is this "Yes." Brief, discrete, and powerful, by which the soul is given, by which the soul is taken. It is the yes of the bride to the spouse, the joyous and grave consent by which the heart surrenders itself, yielding all: Mary has said yes to God and the Word was made flesh in her womb.

Before this day the world lived under the sign of *refusal*: the "no" by which Adam and Eve opposed the divine will. In the person of these distant ancestors humanity had, in effect, broken the primitive alliance in refusing to submit itself to the Lord. Humanity had answered "no" to God.

In the Annunciation, it is humanity which is converted to God. A woman had set it in rebellion; another led it on the path of submission. The proud "no" had expelled God, the humble "yes" calls Him and welcomes Him. Henceforth the word of love will be understood on the earth. Mary gives the example and in so doing merits that the grace of her consent will be offered to all men. All those who have said "yes" to Christ, whether they are of the Old or the New Testament, will be children of God. But her "yes" was necessary for all the others to become possible.

The whole life of the Virgin Mary, committed by the yes of the Annunciation, was a continual ascension of love. It is Mary, humble servant of assent, who teaches Christian families how to reiterate and live each day the yes of the first day. In the silence of love—Mary "kept all these things in her heart"—the burning flame of the first yes stays very much alive. Love is only true if it perseveres. More important still; it is only true if it grows, if it become purer and more absolute. Its perfection is not in the joy of the youthful yes which the lips exchange a first time; it is in the rich harvest of its

fruits, at the end of the season, after much work, pain, and weariness. This is the yes of old age, in the evening of a life of fidelity, which expresses the perfect consent of two beings one to another.

This yes at the end of the days is no longer a shouted word, the vehement affirmation of young love. It is grave, it is a word of the heart which the noise of words frightens; a mysterious word that the greater reserve of a more saintly love only pronounces in a low voice. "Happy two lovers who love each other enough, who desire to please enough, who understand one another enough, who are parents, who think and feel the same way, enough alike within, each separately, enough the same when side by side, who taste and know the pleasure of being quiet together, side by side, walking a long, long time . . . to walk silently along the silent paths. Happy two lovers who love each other enough to be quiet together in a land that knows quiet. . ." (Peguy).

This "land which knows quiet"—doesn't it irresistibly evoke the home of the perfect yes, the house of Nazareth, that was and is always the heart of Mary? It is in inquiring about this mystery, this home of love, that earthly spouses learn the secret of the truly Christian "yes"—faithful and constant, without slowness nor reserve, the yes of hours of anxiety and of hours of joy, the yes which consents to the other, to all others, to the other just as he is, the yes answered to his often incomprehensible demands and to his needs, the yes which participates in his joys and assumes his pains, just as the example of the Virgin of Compassion: the yes of total abnegation, without any avarice or reticence. "I wish to learn with God to be all good and all given, who reserves nothing and from whom everything is taken."

Not only will the Virgin teach couples to live this mystery of assent, of a yes always more fruitful, but she will reveal to them also that no one can say yes truly to another if he has not first said yes to God. For he who consents to God receives in part the power of divine love and he is able to say

in all sincerity: "The strength with which I love you is no different than that by which you exist" (C Claudel). It is the very love of God which passes through his heart to join another heart. As he gives a fuller consent, opening himself to the divine love, an inexhaustible source wells up in him.

If it is true to say that we must first consent to God before saying yes to another, it is necessary to add that as soon as this yes is said to another the assent to God is renewed. Thus the Christian partner in giving himself to God at the same time transmits to his spouse the graces that he has received from God for her. To open oneself to the presence of the other is to welcome in him the divine life of which he is the bearer. Love comes from God, goes to God and cannot exist perfectly except in God. He who repudiates divine love will always ignore the plenitude of human love no matter what he thinks. One does not truly love outside of God. It is impossible for the married couple to elude the divine presence.

"Lovers are never alone," writes G. Thibon. "If God is not with them to unite them He is between them to separate them." This presence gives joy to the Christian couple, because they know that He is not jealous and will not force them to moderate their love; indeed He makes it their duty to love each other always more; as long as it is He who fortifies them and aids them in this difficult and magnificent enterprise. And when, in the dark hours, they no longer see the way, and the divine presence intimidates them, they have recourse to the always close and tender presence of the Virgin Mary.

The family, like each of the partners, must say yes to God. The heart of the home is a new, unique heart which issues from these two hearts who have given themselves one to another, and it must consent to God and give itself to Him. The yes which love says to God and which is renewed many times invokes that assent of God, which is the source of family life. Because the home has said yes life is in it, flows forth from it, and it makes the earth fruitful, a mystery very close to that of the Annunciation. The Virgin has produced the Head; the

family produces the members. The family knows with wonder that in joining its yes to that of Mary, it contributes with her in giving Christ to the Father and to men.

It is always significant to note that parents only transmit natural life and that their yes to God the Creator must be doubled by a yes to the Redeemer present in His Church. Humbly, convinced of their indigence, they must come to entreat for their child this divine life that human paternity cannot give, but which the Church possesses and which she communicates by the sacraments and primarily by the first sacrament, Baptism.

To present a child at the baptismal font is to initiate him to consent. It is to dispose him to the "yes" in regard to God. Once baptized, all the education of the child consists in teaching him the word of love.

It is in teaching the child to say yes to his father and his mother that he is initiated to this life of assent to the divine wishes. The commonplace remark to a well reared child, "don't say no!" is infinitely sensible. To teach a child not to refuse, to instruct him not to close himself in, to instruct him in an alert and joyous obedience to make the gift of self without bargaining, to make him discover and joyously live in the assent of his parents—that is already progressing by degrees to the consents which God will demand of him. It is, in fact, already making a consent to God through his father and mother. The child is started in the way of consent to God by docility toward his parents. Sometimes this proves to be anguishing when they learn a child has said "yes" to God, for they are obliged themselves then to say yes to the call of God which takes him from them. But their anguish is calmed in contemplating the Virgin of the Annunciation. It also weighed upon her that one day God would call her Son far from the house at Nazareth to send Him on His way through Palestine, and to deliver him up to the crowds. It weighed upon her that one day God would call Him to Calvary, and to the Mount of



the Ascension. The yes of the Son would then demand the full assent of the Mother.

Near to her and with her, truly Christian parents understand that their child is not for them. There is joy even in their torn hearts when the child responds with a generous "yes" to the vocation God has chosen for him.

I propose to families that they invoke Our Lady of Assent. It is this acquiescing mother who will teach them consent, if they give her an intimate place in their home.

And why, in Christian homes, could we not have a more fervent devotion for the Angelus, the preferred prayer of Our Lady of Assent? Like joyous bells, the Angelus, recited three times a day would recall to hearts menaced by hardening to guard precious that youth of soul which always answers yes to God after the example of Mary.



## *Unhappy Homes*

### SO MANY FAILURES

As a priest acquires experience in his priestly vocation, a sad and oppressive truth is forced upon him: How many defections there are! How many starts, joyous and full of promise, has he witnessed, and twenty years later, how many failures! This militant whose generosity was admirable for many years, today is blasé, sceptical, tied up by compromise; into this home, long an example of conjugal spirituality, the demon of adultery is introduced; another man, pillar of his parish, sees the oldest of his children reject the religion of his fathers. On top of those "big" failures, how many, many hearts the priest of experience sees pass from fervor to a routine and lukewarm mediocrity.

Lukewarm—the term comes to me spontaneously, and here I recall a passage of the Apocalypse. In looking for it, I am struck by the fact that only a half-century after the death of Christ the faithful already grow slack. "I know your deeds," says Christ, "I know that you are neither cold nor hot, and because you are lukewarm, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth!"

In the presence of multiple defections, the moralist of our classic literature slips into skepticism. He would see there a proof of the inevitable law of gravity, which draws back all things to the earth, even the most promising beginnings. But the priest of Jesus Christ is not able to take this view. He knows that the ideal of human life must be sanctity and not mediocrity. "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Anxiously he looks for the cause of so many failures.

The explanation seems to me to be undeniable. Just as the physical organism alters itself when its essential needs are not satisfied (deprived of water, it dehydrates rapidly; deprived of nourishment, it becomes anemic; if it lacks sleep, nervous depression stalks it; if oxygen is absent, it suffocates) so the spiritual organism frustrated in its vital needs, declines. Spiritual anemia, lowering of vitality, loss of desire for the interior life is the result. Actually the party concerned often is not conscious of the alteration of his moral health. But let there be a strong temptation—there is a catastrophe. Everyone is astonished at the sudden fall. Actually, it is not as sudden as it seems; it was in preparation for a long time. How many times have I heard it said: "For twenty years this family was cited as an example, and suddenly . . ." No, not suddenly, but rather for a long time it was in a state of lessened resistance.

The vital needs of the spiritual organism are numerous. There are three urgent ones; the instructions of the spiritual authors, and still more the experience of twenty-five years of priestly life have convinced me of their imperious necessity.

1. Theoretically, our generation does not merit the reproach of underestimating the Eucharist. We were born to the Christian life in the days of the decrees of Pius X on early and frequent Communion. Young men and young girls formed the habit of going to Communion on Sunday and during the week as well. But how many abandon Communion at the hour when it is most necessary to them: when it is necessary to surmount the difficulties of conjugal life; to confront the

dangers of political engagement, to triumph over a materialistic environment, to be preserved from falling in the middle of life—"which happens spontaneously by *ennui* . . . because the route is long and the end far, because one is alone and there is no consolation."

It is not by chance that God has taken the form of bread to give Himself to us: bread is daily nourishment. Christians everyday ask the Father for their irreplaceable daily bread. How inconsistent it is to neglect to go after it. They believe they can live without eating!

2. There is another nourishment, no less necessary to the spiritual organism than the Eucharist, and still more neglected: the Word of God in the Old and New Testament. Catholics have been asked to buy the Bible; they did. There it is, on their night table, serving as a stand for their lamp. But do they open it! Love demands expression, exchange, communication. Between this officer far away and his wife still at home, who neglects to write, do you believe that love will endure very long? Our love of God, to stay alive, needs a faith, a living knowledge; "eternal life is to *know* you, the only true God." But the best way to possess a living faith is to let the living and creative Word of God, penetrate our life. It is this Word which, by presenting to us the great deeds of the Lord, the *magnalia Dei*, has the power to awaken everything in us that is worthy of admiration and praise; it is this Word, by recalling the divine promises, that makes our hope leap up; it is this Word, which by the infinite love of God, inflames in us the fire which Christ came to bring to the earth. It is not surprising that the divine life—faith, hope, and charity—diminishes and is extinguished in him who forgets to listen to the God who speaks to him.

3. Prayer is also necessary. It saves the soul from suffocation. At prayer, the prisoner comes again into the fresh air and is able to breathe again. The soul's vitality, kept up by the bread of the Word and the bread of the Eucharist is finally able to exercise itself. To God who has spoken to her,

the soul responds, to God who has given Himself, she surrenders herself. Between God and the soul a living exchange is established. It is the essence of a communion to which all love aspires. Little by little the entire life of him who prays becomes a prayer.

I know what your objections will be. The Scriptures are difficult to understand; praying is so hard. And especially how do you expect us in this day and age of social pressures and professional tasks to find the time to go to Mass, to read the Scriptures, to pray?

You find time to sleep and eat! Because one has to eat and sleep.

True, but the whole question is whether, while refusing to let your physical organism waste away, you allow your soul to die of starvation. Do you find it normal that God is practically excluded from your days?

I know some men and women who one fine day decided to do something about this problem. They knew their existence to be a function of their Christian life, and not the universe. Certain of them had to modify profoundly the pattern of their lives. I do not pretend that they succeeded day in and day out or that their schedule was never upset by a prior demand. But what I do affirm is that for the captains of industry, doctors, workers, mothers of large families—who are no less busy than you—life has been transformed since the Eucharist, the Word of God, and prayer found a place in their daily life. For those I fear neither the failure of their faith nor their homes. They are the living.

### INNOCENCE OF EYE

There is one blindness of soul which is fatal to love. The eyes of love become dead, and see no longer the beauty of this being who once conquered the heart. Love goes out like the flame of a lamp without oil, for love nourishes itself on beauty.

To restore love to life, it would be sufficient to see again



with the eyes of love the light of love's countenance. As Ruskin said, "It is a question of rediscovering the innocence of eye." He who has not lost this innocence of eye must jealously protect it.

One recognizes this innocence in the faculty of astonishment so vibrant in children. They are not blasé. Each creature, each event makes them vibrate. Beauty of every kind makes their souls sing. They have in their ability to be astonished a power of unlimited wonderment. And for them, the gift of heart follows the wonder of the heart. In truth admiration is already a gift. Have you noticed that miserly hearts do not know how to admire? Admiration is an expense which they no longer allow.

It is necessary for us to remain, or become, like children if we wish to enter one day into the kingdom of heaven and, in the present, not to be excluded from the kingdom of love. Like them, it is necessary to know how to be astonished and to wonder before our loved ones. This demands a continual effort of insatiable curiosity. Oh, not the indiscreet curiosity which is a violation of intimacy, breaking into the secret of another, but the curiosity of love which Duhamel teaches us: "I am leaning over an abyss (his child), over a hidden world. With the eye I question the shadow and I let fall a small pebble to awaken the echo from the depths."

Our love for God is subject to the same law as our human loves. If contemplation, which is an ardent attention of the spirit and of the heart, does not renew it, it very quickly declines.

It is of Mary, full of grace, that one asks the grace of innocence of eye. She is unable to refuse anything to our childlike confidence, for she loves us tenderly, perceiving in each of us, be we the worst of sinners, a beauty which perhaps we have lost except for the memory: this image of God, indelible and more or less buried, which only pure insight is still able to see.

**SILENCE, MURDERER OF LOVE**

Do you know the particular hero of Mauriac's who accuses his wife of destroying him by her contemptuous silence? While he achieved brilliant professional success, he found only indifference at home: "The more I am inclined to believe in my importance, the more you give me the feeling of my nothingness. . . ." He reacted by hate, a devouring hate, a reflex of the instinct of self-preservation. A saint would have reacted differently, but he was not a saint.

Taking it all together, I find the hate far less distant from love than the indifference of the wife.

Is it not indifference of heart that is shown by silence? Is it not worse than hate, more profound and deadly? Where there is hate, deceived love is very close. But no trace of love is inscribed on the marble of indifference. Hate means to be completely taken up by another, in order to wound him. But for indifference, the other does not exist, even as an enemy: he is crossed out of the world of the living. Indifference is the attitude that one has in the face of nothing. One expects nothing from nothingness.

I wonder if there is not, in the case of the indifferent woman, that fear of being swept up in love, a fear found in the hard-hearted and the self-sufficient. Love is a risk that she does not wish to take for love is able to sweep you away. Gone is the comfortable quiet, and the pretty, pharisaical assurances—the day when she is burned by her own fire. And precisely, if there were an "explanation" and if this explanation gave an appearance of a goodness of heart in the partner, if it proved that he was not all wrong, would she not be tempted to love him? Or at least would she not cease to have reason not to love him? For we keep these reasons, protect them, and nourish them; we do not wish to be torn from our egoism: it is warm, like a bed at the moment of awakening. She prefers to stay there, hidden. Certain people have a secret instinct which makes them turn away from the temptation to

love with the same spontaneity that others turn away from the temptation to sin.

This fear of risking love is also found in the soul's relations with God. Priests know well the category of Christians who flee a tête-a-tête with God, dreading to be fascinated by the fire and preferring the semi-darkness.

The refusal to explain oneself is one of the gravest sins against love, one of the most obvious signs of egoism. It is true that one finds oneself rarely confronted with extreme cases such as those which are found in Mauriac. But their merit is to make us discover in our heart the first symptoms of the evil which is killing them. In most homes there is not a wall between husband and wife but simply a thin veneer keeping them apart: yet how difficult it is to explain oneself, to open the door. It is true that "to explain" costs dearly. It necessitates raising the mask, being true, unveiling the heart. And to unveil the heart is already to give oneself to love.

Often the husband does not have the desire to love, the generosity to take the first step. He does not wish to be the first to speak the words of love. Certainly this demands courage: it means leaving his armor, rendering himself vulnerable. And he is afraid of this wound—the most penetrating and consummate of all—that a refusal costs when one offers the best of oneself. He comes forward, heart bared, to begin talks of peace and love; the other takes advantage of him and aims at his heart.

"Woe to him who discourages love," writes Bernanos. Woe to him who does not take seriously, or suspects other interests, of this extended hand. These gestures of love are only possible after a long interior debate, only after a heroic victory over egoism.

To try again when he has been rebuffed demands great strength of heart. However, he must not resign himself to defeat. Later he risks being too late; hearts stiffen like knees in a cast. They must be freed so much more completely after each refusal of admittance. How difficult to pronounce anew

this true word of love in the middle of this desert frosted with silence! And if again he is not listened to and if he is scoffed at, it will be more difficult to say it again, and still more so to say it again at the opportune moment, without impatience and without caring what others think. But all is possible with much patience and especially with faith in a God who never deserts the man who fights for the victory of love.

### TRoubLED HOMES

With apprehension I undertake this subject. I think of so many couples who are going to read it, hoping against hope for some help. How they suffer; the beautiful dreams of youth which believed in love, in life, in happiness, have been subjected to the erosion of time; perhaps they, too, have collapsed. However, refusing defeat, they look for someone who can help them shore up, repair, and reconstruct their sorely tried home. Will these pages like so many words already heard before deceive and irritate them? It is so easy to hurt those who suffer. Will they not be able to lament, one more time, "No one understands me!"

What makes it still more difficult to help them is that no two cases are alike. If it is difficult to counsel this man or woman who comes to confide his distress, how much more apprehensive one is in speaking to thousands at one time? There are things which one cannot say, it seems, except in a tone of confidence. However, I cannot but address some words which I believe basic and which experience has demonstrated to be efficacious to the many broken hearts everywhere. If they do find in these lines nothing which suits them particularly, they know at least that I come to them with an infinite sympathy.

To broken homes I have one thing to say above all: do not resign yourself to separation. You must not forget, that to contract marriage is to take upon oneself the ceaseless wishing and pursuing of a total union. It takes two to make this com-



mitment, but for what follows one is not freed from the union because the other neglects it or denies it. The great fault of so many married Christians is to refuse to work for union. This implies accepting the separation.

Those who work at this union without believing in it, without wishing it truly, are also lacking in their obligations. I remember this passage from a letter of a man unhappy in his home: "It is necessary to give oneself, to be so stripped of self as not to be interested in the success or the failure of the union envisaged." And he added: "A soldier departs for the attack, even when he knows that it will fail; is this not still greater and more meritorious?" I admire this man's not hesitating to leave for the attack but in his stoicism I believe I discern a resignation to defeat. And this is not Christian.

Even if conjugal harmony were simply a luxury or comfort, the partners would not have the right to renounce it. But it isn't. It is necessary both to themselves and to many others. Its failure hurts others as much as themselves. A home where discord reigns, itself becomes the seed bed of all the capital sins and often involves the moral failure of one or the other of the two spouses. We know that for the children a climate of love is a basic condition of physical and moral growth. The discord of parents tears apart their most intimate being. Society itself suffers from this failure. For it, the home is no longer a living cell, dispenser of heat and light, but a tumor which is developed at the expense of the social body.

"But what do we do?" Each particular case demands its proper response; there are, however, remarks of a general order which can be useful to anyone who refuses defeat.

### *An Attempt at Lucidity*

First of all, it is necessary to make an attempt at lucidity. It is necessary to want to see, even if that involves discoveries which hurt, even if this means betraying faults and condemning oneself. How desirable it would be that this effort be made together! In fact, at the very moment couples undertake it

together, they are already closer together. One must do everything so that an honest conversation will one day be possible. "Do everything" does not mean to take things up brusquely; it often indicates the great wisdom of knowing how to wait, to temporize. A false move risks a setback, perhaps imperiling the healing of the wound. It is not just knowing how to wait with patience and prudence, because it does not mean evading questions by cowardice. Isn't the darkness filled with menacing forms which vanish as if by magic when you strike a light?

To bring to light is to look for the causes of evil. The most visible are not always the most genuine; we must not become hypnotized by them. It is important to go beyond the obvious. Without fearing to state the faults of the partner, one must not blind oneself to one's own. It is necessary to face them. I would like to believe that many situations happen because the couples recoil before an effort of searching frankness. If they would make this effort then everything would unravel itself quickly. Truth liberates.

Once the causes of evil are identified, it is necessary to pre-occupy oneself with true remedies.

### *Change of Heart*

The first of these remedies is often to change the heart. Ah, I well know that it is easier to wait for the partner to reform; but if both react thus, there is not much chance for progress. How many things must be corrected in the depths of the heart! And first of all, how about the ever tenacious illusion of a perfect happiness? As if this perfect happiness is able to exist on earth, as if marriage must bring happiness ready-made. How many catastrophes have their origin in this illusion of so many young couples. It is time to be rid of it, once and for all.

Then one must conduct an attack on deception and its poisonous fruits: rancor, animosities take root in a heart which believes itself wronged. Look a little closer and you will discern in all this the sentiment that I have not yet named, to

which few dare to give its proper name: hate. I beg of you, do not think too quickly while reading this word that this passion is a stranger to you. I well know that in our overactive lives today, nerves quickly get the upper hand although we have no bad intention. And I am careful not to confuse impatience and hate. But I know also that it is dangerous to give free rein to these irritations which, benign at the beginning, contaminate the heart and risk stirring up hatred. Let us have courage to call this snake within us by its name when it rears its head, stands erect, and hisses. Is it not hatred which betrays itself in so many reactions and reflections? This joy of surprising the other in his wrong, this bitter need to be right against him, this venomous allusion to a past sin, this brooding over griefs—as a hunter shoots arrows at a carcass—to show the poison of malice in a word or an action, is this not hate, more or less grave as the case may be, but always pernicious? For a time it can live with love, but one day, this encroaching parasite will stifle love.

All of us must cultivate in ourselves the antidote of hate: a forgiving compassion. To pardon is to tear out the page on which one has written with malice or rage the debit account of the partner and to offer him instead the gift of an unreserved heart. I well know that here we are touching on one of the nerve centers of the life of the home. It is useless to search for other remedies if one has not obtained the grace of knowing how to pardon “seven times seventy” if necessary. And what a relief to the pardoned heart! Gone is the destructive climate of groans and reproaches, claims and counter claims. Doubtless the pain remains but there is no more bitterness. And because one has taken the lead of pardon—not a haughty pardon, but the humble pardon which does not hesitate to recognize one’s own faults—perhaps the partner will have a rebirth of love.

A change of heart is a change in point of view. To abandon the critical view is to adopt a view of love which, along the more or less rugged bark, sees a living sap working at the

inside, preparing the buds and flowers of a springtime which is often closer than one thinks. Who will say that, in this seemingly indifferent being, hard and contradictory, there is not the heart of a child who cries and calls for help? So many adults pretending to be evildoers are only poor urchins who need to be soothed. So many things and so many people have deceived them or hurt them that they no longer dare to believe in love and they dress in armor to protect themselves from blows. Your loving regard will pierce the armor.

### *Work for the Happiness of Others*

Having changed his heart, one must reeducate it. He has forgotten how to love; it is necessary to learn again. Recall the love of which you spoke on the day of your engagement. You promised to make him happy because you believed you could. Turn to the resolutions of those radiant hours. Understand what is wrong in your way of doing things and avoid these things scrupulously. Divine his wishes, force yourself to respond to them. Let nothing of his interior world be a stranger to you. Take interest in his thoughts, in his sentiments, in his joys, in his sufferings, in his enterprises. Discern what you like about him and what he does, what merits your admiration in these things and know how to tell him of it. Do not fail to recognize his acts of delicacy, modest or clumsy as they are, by which he tries to give you evidence of love. Thus you encourage him to love. Encourage him to give, also; he must know that you need him. Perhaps this source, which in all men is the image of the most secret impulse of the heart of God—the desire to make others happy—is not yet destroyed in him.

Have you noticed that I have not spoken to you of working on the religious conversion of your partner—as much as he has need of it—but only of his happiness? I believe in fact that the best way, preferable to all sermons and all zeal, to obtain the transformation of the other is to work at bringing him joy. Is it not the thought which St. Peter expressed in his



first epistle: "In like manner let wives be subject to their husbands; so that even if any do not believe the word, they may without word be won through the behavior of their wives, observing reverently your chaste behavior."

### *Sharing*

To love is also to share. This sharing is difficult when one is confronted with someone who does not hunger. When I speak of sharing I think especially of having spiritual goods in common. If you do not let him see your soul with its desires, its joys, its aspirations, its profound life, how do you expect him to love you? The discovery of your living soul will come one day after he has regained his sight and awakened his heart. But if you shut him off today, if you refuse him what is lovable in you you will not help him to love. Why do so many couples forget that one of the great laws of love is to work each day for a new conquest of their partner? As in the first days, the way remains the same: to please. Women have a "duty of elegance" which consists especially in the cultivation of elegance of soul, as recommended by St. Peter, but does not authorize them, for all that, to neglect the charm of their appearance? To men I would recall what they know well: that a woman needs to admire her husband and that they hold a woman's esteem by their manly virtues: strength of soul, spirit of decision, mastery of judgment, the social graces.

I do not hesitate to add: know how to share your grievances. Be distrustful of this wall of silence which separates two beings more surely than the oceans. Allow communication, invite it, even provoke it. The hours in the calm of the evening are helpful when, all irritation having subsided, the couples confide in each other what weighs on their hearts. Not to assuage their egoism, but for love. A fault admitted is a fault half forgiven.

### *The Meaning of Suffering*

Discord only achieves tragic proportions and disturbs hearts when the couples omit to turn to God to see the providential meaning of their problems.

For they have a meaning, these ordeals which seem absurd. Certainly God does not wish evil. He who repeated with insistence, "Be ye one," does not wish discord. But He wishes His children to triumph over evil and that suffering be for them the occasion to grow in natural and supernatural worth. When one understands His desire, it is possible still to know moments of defeat but one has the strength to surmount these moments of confusion and temptation and to accept the ordeal. Acceptance is not, however, the resignation of which I spoke above, but a realistic vision of the situation, an indispensable condition for all work of reconstruction. A woman who has suffered much gives us a poignant example of this acceptance:

"Once you have accepted the state of trouble in your home, you may find it necessary to love it more than ever, the way a mother cherishes and cares for her abnormal and deficient child with ever more devotion. . . . They love this home, *their* home, with its faults, its gray and peevish atmosphere. They love it and they are more inclined to care for this delicate object, this pale lamp always ready to go out, these embers without heat which they sweep up, which they guard twice as much because they are fragile. And if the little ones around them suffer from these misunderstandings and coldness, they love them twice as much, trying to compensate a little. If one of the partners alone undertakes this task while "the other" is swallowed up in his villainy or his vices alas! in that case he must love and watch twice as much. He is alone watching and loving, since the other is temporarily remiss. Where in a light and warm home a loving heart would have sufficed, here in this sick home a burning incandescent heart is needed.

In those who *accept*, peace is established, the dialogue with God begins again. In Him they discover an ally, an indefatigable devotion. Confidence returns. Thus aided, they can hope to remake the unity of their home. Perhaps this will be an arduous, exhausting work. One must pay the price. In fixing his eyes on Christ, who, to save men, prayed and gave His life, they will find the courage to pray and to do penance in their turn; they will figure that they have not done everything since they have not given everything. Much more than a model, Christ will be a companion to them, an everyday friend.

Tearing the heart away from an obsession with suffering will not be the least of the benefits of this religious effort. Understand, I do not extol evasion, that frequent and subtle temptation that one must pitilessly ward off, but it is not an evasion to undertake the salvation of the home by being drawn closer to God through the ordeal. What revenge on evil that it serves to make love greater! Would an easy happiness have been as favorable to this spiritual ascension? In the heart racked by suffering Christ can take that much greater a place.

In conclusion I would like to speak of the truest incentive you have for hope: your sacrament of marriage. It is to your home a source of strength, to make your union succeed, which uses the least of your efforts, even the blunders and the faults. "Just as, in the order of nature, the energies that God has poured out only manifest themselves in their full vigor if men cooperate with them by their own work and industry . . . so the strength of grace, which by the sacrament lives up in the soul, must be brought to fruition by the good will and the work of men" (Pius XI).

It is your confidence which permits this great sacrament to exercise its full efficacy. Therefore multiply your acts of faith in its power to obtain grace—healing, pacifying, comforting, unifying. The same Pius XI wrote: "You have the right to the help of actual grace." Do you understand what is extraordinary in these words, "you have the right?" The

defeat of a home is often the fault of its faith. The true Christian knows that there are no hopeless situations: if he taps the rock, a spring may spout forth; the hardest heart may open itself; the desert may flower. And how beautiful is love after the ordeal! So much stronger, purer, and more transparent than the first day!

### I DON'T LOVE HIM ANYMORE . . .

After twelve and a half years of marriage, a woman without children perceived that her husband was unfaithful to her. At this crucial moment for her home and for herself, she met a priest about whom she knew very little and to whom for that very reason she unfolded her story. This priest, knowing almost nothing of her and of the home, rather than multiply counsels, suggested questions to her for self-examination.

She saw him again, at regular intervals, during more than a year. Each time, on her return, she made notes on the salient points of the conferences, in a stenographic and almost impersonal style, for she had a horror of intimate diaries and of "true confessions."

The crisis at home evolved very slowly toward a favorable outcome. Some years later she found the notes which she had jotted down, and was going to burn them. But she thought: they helped me, might they not help other women?

So she sent them to the priest who had counseled her, with these words: "Make whatever use of these seems best. They will not make a good article, but perhaps in their outline form they will be more useful than well-polished prose. A sentence is often enough to enlighten, and to save a life."

July 10, 1950

Make an effort to understand him. Leap over the barrier. Pass into his camp. And for love of him—not yourself—help



him to become faithful again. As long as you stay on your side, not seeing his point of view, you can be of no help to him.

Why see in what has happened to him only a deliberate betrayal? Perhaps his infidelity is only in the carnal order, and if this is so, he probably does not think less of you. Why deny that he is still able to love you? Therefore do not discard your love.

If his infidelity is on the level of the heart, the occasion may not be as sordid as you imagine it: perhaps it may have sprung from pity. Could he have wished perhaps to help a weak, abandoned person in distress . . . ?

August 8, 1950

He is going through agonizing hours, hours of weakness of which he will be ashamed, but surely also hours of re-possession of himself which will lead him to you. He must therefore find in you a welcome and receptivity which he will need to make amends.

Has he perhaps already wanted to break with this woman and recoiled from it, frightened by the suffering it would provoke?

I am tempted to believe that he is fearfully torn two ways. Didn't you say to me, "He is no longer as happy as he was at the beginning of the affair, when he had that same kind of happiness which I had seen on his face twelve years ago, when I first met him" . . . ?

August 29, 1950

You speak of his contradictions: at certain times he seems to count on your love, at others, he seems intent on discouraging it.

Not knowing him myself, I am reduced to guessing. One guess is suggested to me by the confidences of a man whose wife succeeded in saving him from the worst. In his case, hatred of self had engendered hatred of life, and he wavered

on the brink of despair. He wanted to be able to deny all goodness, all love; then, having no more to hope from anyone else, he would be able to despair of himself. He would be able to hate himself, having become certain that nothing in him merited love anymore. It would be like an authorization to destroy himself, to let himself slip into hell. But no, each time that he tried to reason thus—to be sure, it was not reasoning, but that diabolical dialectic which led Judas to the tree of despair—the memory, the certitude, the undeniable fact of the love of his wife forced itself upon him. It was impossible to break this tie that held him, that kept him from making the final leap of despair. He tried to discourage the love of his wife, but in vain: she loved him. And so he did not succeed in hating himself, destroying himself, taking the final step.

You, too, I beg of you, stay firm so that your love will not fail, whatever your husband says, whatever he does.

Do not lose sight of the image of God in him, more or less buried, a live coal in the ashes. By the strength of love you will help him recover love of himself, love of you, and love of God.

October 3, 1950

Do not listen to those who tell you that all means to recapture him are good. No . . . use only the faithful weapons of love.

Love has led you out of yourself, you must hold on to this gain. Be careful, self-pity risks closing you up in yourself again.

You are profoundly humiliated by all these things. I understand that, but does the offense to God upset you as much as the offense to yourself?

November 17, 1950

He sees you sad and nervous. At one time this made him tender, today it exasperates him. He reproaches you for your

fatigue, your insomnia . . . of course, that annoys him! It would be so much "easier" if you were radiant and he could tell himself that he was taking nothing from you by giving himself to another. What should you do? Cultivate sadness to move him? Or seem gay to avoid scenes? No, neither blackmail of the heart nor imitation of happiness will help. Careful it is not blackmail, but love which succeeds. At the same time, do not be an accomplice. He will perhaps try to introduce you to the "other," to make you admit her to receptions and gatherings in your home. It is not necessary, under the guise of charity, to abandon your dignity.

You refuse yourself to him? Ethically you may. But ethics has never taught that the highest love lies in refusal. It is not a question of being justified before him, it is a question of assenting to this higher law of love, and of finding in it the light to guide your actions. I agree that cowardice and weakness are not Christian, but pardon is not cowardice or weakness. The disciple of Christ must learn to pardon not seven times but seventy times seven.

Do not listen to those who counsel separation. Do not transform a *crisis* into a *state*. To ask for separation would be to deny your promises, it would be to abandon him. Do not answer infidelity by infidelity.

December 10, 1950

While this drama in your life may seem absurd, it nevertheless has a meaning. Everything has a meaning in a world where nothing escapes the providence of God. It is putting your fidelity to the test, and it is also the purification of your love: you must eliminate all the germs of idolatry and egoism which persist tenaciously in all love. Do not refuse purification.

Forbid yourself to take his sin as an excuse to harbor within you the pernicious fruits of jealousy, rancor and hate, and to regret the gifts which you have bestowed on him.

You ask me: can sin have something good in it, can it produce good fruits? Sin, insofar as it is evil, certainly cannot. But look at the prodigal son: his fault brought forth an overwhelming compassion from his father, which had been like a sealed-up spring in his heart. You can force sin to bear good fruits in you, the fruits of selfless love, the fruits of pardon. This is what it means to redeem evil: to compel sin to produce good, an increase of love. This is the only legitimate revenge.

January 4, 1951

Do not say, "Our marriage has lost its meaning. The image of the union of Christ and the Church has been profaned in us." You are right to return to this great fundamental notion. But precisely under this ideal, your fidelity in response to his infidelity has a magnificent meaning. It is a witness to the unshakeable fidelity of Christ which the sin of humanity is not able to discourage.

February 17, 1951

"I don't love him anymore." I was very surprised to hear you speak this small, terrible sentence. How then are you more faithful than he is? Who knows, maybe he loves you more than you love him. His infidelity may be less serious than yours: it may be only weakness of the flesh, while yours would be weakness of the heart. I say "would be" because I refuse to believe that you no longer love him. I think, moreover, that you are going to discover what true love is. Or rather: your love until now has been true, but your new love will have a rarer quality. It will spring from disinterestedness, from free self-giving.

I would like to see you admit to yourself that you have at least five per cent of the wrong of what has happened on your side. Your attitude in regard to your husband would then be more just, I think. Did you try to please him every day? Did you make the effort to defend him against himself?



Were you jealous, not with the jealousy of egoism, which is a sickness of the heart, but with that jealousy of love which is the desire to protect the being whom you love, the ambition to see him great?

I have wondered also, since our last conversation, if you have not "forced" him, in the sense that we say a gardener forces a plant? Have you not constrained him during the years to be what you wanted him to be, to conform to the ideal which you had of the ideal husband, an ideal which you wanted him to embody? And so, one day, he felt the need to shake off this tutelage. What is surprising in that?

April 21, 1951

Do not let this time of distress make you neglect the others around you who have need of you.

With them, at all costs, save face or rather, save what is within. Cultivate in yourself that peace which is the fruit of pardon, of selflessness, of prayer, of attachment to God. Save your equilibrium, that is the only way to save face, to put on a good front. It is no less true that sometimes, in the hours of stress, saving face is the only way to save yourself.

Do not be like the women who recount to their friends, confidentially, the conjugal scenes which they play. You will sap the strength of your soul, and will not know how to resist the temptation to gratify the feeling of rancor and spitefulness. And the more you gratify them the worse they get.

June 16, 1951

Guard yourself against the attitude which would treat this as a contest: "War is declared, of which my husband is the prize. One battle has been lost, it is true, but it was not a fair fight, it was won by treachery. I will beat my opponent yet."

Resignation would be no better. Be distrustful of this

demon at your side who tempts you to give up your suffering, and who presses you to blind yourself to what is admirable in your husband, who invites you to regard his wrongdoing and faults with bitter and cold detachment, to keep score, as it were, and to add up your complaints.

This reaction of withdrawal into piety is very close to resignation. It is frequently a search for compensations. It is also the desire to save wounded pride. To dwell on the good reasons one has to be scornful of both sin and sinner is to esteem oneself. It is only one step away from not desiring the return of the husband, in order to safeguard this image of the woman who has been courageous and edifying in her hour of trial. It is only one step away from discouraging his attempts to return—even before they are made—to stop on his lips the confession, the confidence, the word which would re-establish contact. To safeguard their moral comfort some women take as much trouble to avoid what would make them agreeable in the eyes of their husbands as they once displayed in seeking ways to please him.

It is in your sacrament of marriage that you will find the graces necessary to avoid these snares; you must have recourse to it. You will be able to draw from it the strength to cross the distance between love and charity. This transition must be one of the principal results of your trial; most certainly your love for him was not a stranger to charity, but it remained too human. It is time that it became charity, the love of Christ in you for your husband. It is a transmutation which is not made without pain. But here precisely is one meaning of the drama which you are living.

July 21, 1951

Let there be no reprisals. Do not lower the iron curtain. If you refuse him the sight of your soul, the best of you, you bar the way of return. For him to love you, he must be able to admire you. Remember the experience of the woman who

reconquered her husband by revealing to him the life of grace being born again in his soul. Do not think that you have the right to refuse your interior life to your husband. Do not preach to him, but be attentive to silences, which are always like a door opening.

September 12, 1951

Strive to see the best in him. Men, like children, end up resembling the image which you make of them. If you stubbornly keep your esteem and confidence in him, cost what it may, there is every chance that he will become worthy of this esteem and this confidence, having recognized in your eyes what he wishes to become.

Believe him if one day he assures you that it is all over. Do not say, as did one woman I know, "Prove it to me." It would be better to deceive yourself by having confidence in him which is not merited than to refuse to him the confidence which he has merited.

I have every reason to hope that the end is near, but I must counsel you just the same to expect the crisis to be prolonged. Prepare yourself, then, for a long patience, and if it is not necessary, give thanks to God.

October 2, 1951

I reproach myself for still not having had the courage to speak to you of "this other woman," of the "enemy," as you call her. You blame her as though all the wrong were on her side. But perhaps your husband has heavy responsibilities in this regard. Do you feel responsible with him?

Recall to you the implacable words of Christ—they are like a red hot iron, but such an iron not only burns, it also cauterizes: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, in order that you may be true sons of your Father who is in heaven." Yes, you must love her, this other and pardon her.

February 1, 1952

It seemed to me as I listened to you that you were reacting as though a parenthesis in your two lives must now be purely and simply closed. As though all that happened which caused you so much pain, and which without doubt caused him so much pain, must be forgotten, conjured away. But nothing is ever utterly abolished; you cannot act as if what has happened, has not happened. From everything, even evil, good must come. Believe me, when he is in possession of himself—and I have no reason to doubt that that will be soon—he will have acquired a new maturity. There are other ways besides weakness which lead to the rebirth of the soul. But weakness also, when one triumphs over it by humility and courage, is an occasion for maturity.

You will see his love for you and his love for God stronger and more mature, after the storm, than before.



## *The Search for God*

### THE SEARCH FOR GOD

I do not remember anymore who wrote, "It has been a long time since religion has had anything to do with God," nor what observations inspired this reflection, but I wonder if he would have change his mind in the course of a visit to a Christian home. What could he learn of the God of the Christians by assisting at their common prayers, observing the attitude of the family during the blessing of the the children or watching the parents instruct and correct? Would he have the feeling of a Presence? Before the sign of the cross of these Christians would he discover the grandeur, unknown to him, of the soul which adores? Suppose that he senses a great mystery of love between husband and wife, between parents and children, would He also sense a mystery of love between God and the members of this home?

In such a home life is pure, right, generous; but does that testify in the eyes of the visitor to the holiness of God, or simply to an admirable moral philosophy? True, Christ is spoken of there; the children prepare the crib of the infant Jesus; but seeing them and hearing them would you suspect

that the infant in the crib is the God of infinite majesty by whom "was made everything that was made"?

Many Christian homes have only an inferior idea of God. This poverty is revealed by the formalism of religious gestures, by a facile attitude of prayer, by a life in part secularized. How far we are from that "generation of those who sought the face of the God of Jacob," mentioned so often in the psalms!

A change is necessary. You must carry on in your homes the search for God. No doubt that requires renewed efforts, but in a world where we wear ourselves out seeking so many things, isn't it right that the Christian be able to say with the author of Proverbs, "I have exhausted myself in seeking to know God"?

Parents and children must be curious about God, tracing the divine Name in the heavens on beautiful summer nights: "The heavens declare the glory of God," and finding him in creation, in the course of a walk through the woods and fields: "Oh Lord our God, how admirable is thy name in all the earth."

Alongside the great poem which is the universe, the Bible—Old and New Testaments—should be the preferred reading of the Christian home in quest of the glories of the Eternal God and the confidence of His love. Over the course of the centuries the Bible has been the teacher of the "adorers in spirit and in truth," because the splendors of the All-Powerful are woven into every page. Whoever assiduously and humbly frequents the Bible becomes famished for God, "and who can be sated with seeing the glory of God?"

It pleases me to imagine the home where parents and children live under the regard of the Eternal God, meditating on His perfection, in the book of nature and in the Bible. They will raise up a race of "red-blooded" children. Their virtues respond to the divine perfections which they contemplate: adoration, to the glory of God; child-like confidence, to the love of the Father; abandonment, to His providence; obedience, to His sovereignty; praise, to His splendors. Crops

do not grow away from the sun and neither do virtues away from the eternal light.

Let us assist at the night prayers of this home which adores God. We notice a preference for the great theological prayers: "Our Father, who art in heaven. . . ." "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. We praise Thee. We bless Thee. We adore Thee. We glorify Thee. We give Thee thanks. . . ." "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, the heavens and the earth are full of Thy glory. . . ." "My soul magnifies the Lord. . . ." "All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord. . . ." Under this roof, they willingly return to the psalms again and again to express their feelings for the Most High, and to pray in the communion of the whole Church.

Notice those who live in this house: adoration and love inspire everything, work and play, meals and sleep. There is no longer anything merely profane, everything is holy, everything is consecrated to God, as St. Paul demanded: "Therefore whether you eat or drink, or do anything else, do all for the glory of God." Yet it is not constraint but the joyous freedom of the children of God which reigns in this family.

A zeal for the glory of God possesses these souls. This adoring home is an apostolic home. Is it not a spontaneous reaction of those who admire to sing of their wonder, and to recruit others for their choir of praise? How could they be resigned to a lack of love of God on the part of their contemporaries, and not share with Our Lady and all the saints the burning impatience of Christ for manifestation of the glory of the Father?

The homes where God reigns prepare the people who will recognize His sovereignty.

### **CHRIST CALLS ME**

Catholicism is a creed, a conception of man and the world, a moral law, an assembly of people, a cult, a history. How-

ever, the essential thing is not any of these, it is first of all someone—Christ. In Him resides the power, the majesty, the holiness of God. But look at Him: He is also a man with His feet firmly planted on earth, with the calloused hands of the manual laborer, who looks you straight in the eyes, who speaks in a tender voice to His intimate friends, in a strong and even violent voice to those who pretend to be just. Wholly man, wholly God, He is.

Christ knows each man, calling each by his name. The Christian hears this call and comes to Him. This is a decisive meeting. "There is only one thing necessary, that is someone who demands everything from you and who is capable of giving you everything" (C Claudel). This someone has been found. A pact is concluded. It is irrevocable. The Christian wills to bind himself. He has made his commitment, he has staked his life on it. He knows the partner to whom he has given his faith and he is delivered from himself. Henceforth, his good lies in serving the cause of another and not his own interests.

Before everything else, this is what it means to be a Christian: this meeting between man and God, this irrevocable alliance, this submission to Christ, without conditions, one life for both with everything held in common.

It also means adherence to a doctrine, but this doctrine is the thought of Christ, and this adhesion is a communion with His thought. It also means submission to a morality, but this morality consists in living as Christ and by Christ. We enter a society, but this society is a living organism, the Mystical Body of Christ, and the liturgy is only the action of this body turning to the Father of infinite majesty, in prayer, adoration and love.

Since Christianity is essentially a personal attachment to Christ, the greatest thing is to realize this attachment. This is something quite different from cheerless fidelity, it is an impassioned way of life. While there is always the problem of protecting this attachment from the erosion of time, and



against enemies from without and within, defense is not enough. Love diminishes if it no longer grows; it must be reconquered and enriched everyday.

There are those who refuse to believe that all of Christianity can be reduced to love. This seems too sentimental to them—or at least it does not seem demanding enough for them. They say they want a virile religion. As though love were not virile! True love has nothing to do with that romantic pastime in which man remains all too human. There is nothing less sentimental than the love of the Christian for Christ. Let someone who thinks otherwise read St. Paul. Vanquished by Christ, Saul, the honest opponent, delivers himself over without reserve. Henceforth his life has only one pole, Christ. This love throws him into the most foolish undertakings, denies him all repose: "The love of Christ presses me!" he says. What did he look for in the intimacy of Christ? Consolation? No. Strength. Strength to live, strength to die. St. Paul was hardly sentimental and romantic.

Do you fear that the love of Christ will not leave a place in you for other loves? As a matter of fact with him there is no compromise; He does not ask for "his share," but for everything. Jesus said without any qualifications. "He who does not renounce all that he possesses can not be my disciple." (Tell me, don't you experience a certain pride in serving under a leader who is kind but firm, who speaks plainly and forcefully, who does not apologize for commanding?) Yes, you may fear for your other loves, but when they are what they ought to be—obedient to the will of God—they can only gain in vigor and quality. For them it is the love of God which then passes through the heart of man. Claudel's heroine, Dona Prouheze is right: "The force by which I love you is no different from that by which you exist." The love of God does not destroy; it creates and transfigures. But it is a jealous love; "He who loves his father or mother (or his spouse) more than me is not worthy of me."

Having set aside these two objections: (1) reduced to love,

religion is only a sentimental idyll: 2) it is not possible to remain faithful to human love when one has chosen Christ, let us meditate on some of the essential laws of intimacy between Christ and the Christian.

To make these laws clear, I will begin with those laws of conjugal love which are more familiar to you. In doing this I am faithful to the most ancient traditions. In order to make the Jewish people understand the alliance which he had contracted with them, Yahweh compared it with marriage. St. John initiates us into the intimacy of the Son of God with humanity by speaking of the "marriage of the Lamb." When the saints confide something of that union with Jesus Christ which makes them tremble and thrill, they refer to conjugal love. Isn't it perhaps because marriage says so much to men, and speaks to them so deeply, that it was instituted to reveal to us the reason for all creation: the nuptials of Christ with redeemed humanity?

### *Admire in Order to Love*

There is a strict relationship between love and admiration. "I will never love someone whom I cannot admire," says a young man or young woman. And indeed, when he returns to you with his companion, a light shines in his face, which is at the same time wonder and love. But how fragile is this young love! As fragile as the admiration which gave birth to it. That is why one must protect this admiration, care for it, stay aware of the beauty of her who is love. I do not speak so much of physical charms as of that trembling beauty which is at the heart of all being, a reflection of the beauty of God, a reflection which excites us so strongly, excites us when our insight is penetrating enough to discover it.

It happens, but too rarely, that this same light of admiration and tenderness is found on the faces of long-married couples. Life has not spared them; arguments and sorrows are written on their features; but before one another they marvel, as

much and even more than on the first day. In their presence we are impressed with the mystery of life.

The saints go far in love because they first go far in knowledge. They have the passionate interest in Christ which lovers have in one another. They are curious about Him: through His words—I was going to say by the inflections of His voice—and His actions of which the Bible tells us, they divine His soul. They search by long, patient prayer, all during their life. Doubtless they are saints because of a constant listening.

But whereas between man and woman admiration is mutual, surely, I would not have the impudence to think that the love of Christ for me is also founded on admiration! As a matter of fact, yes. It is not impudence, but faith. It is believing that there is in me a thought of the Father more or less buried, the germ of a unique saint, resembling no one else, that I must become. This divine thought escapes the knowledge of those near me, but Christ knows me for what I am—this thought of God: and all thought of the Father is joy in the sight of the Son, and wonder for His heart.

If I place myself under His gaze of love and wonder, I experience, and with more cause, what this character in a novel does, explaining the springtime of his love: “I remember this melting of my whole being before his gaze, the emotions released, the depths liberated.” And little by little I conform to that thought of the Father about me, which I discover in the gaze of the Son.

### *To Love Is to Be Responsible for Another's Happiness*

In all being there is enclosed a beautiful dream of God. But this dream is as vulnerable as the early blossoms of the almond tree which a springtime frost is sufficient to destroy. It is this beautiful dream, when we find it in another, which awakens admiration and love in us and also the irrepressible desire to protect it, to assist in the realization of the dream.

Isn't it this desire which is evidenced by the seemingly

naive question of the fiancée: "But can I make him happy?" To take charge of the happiness of another is the first movement of an authentic love. But it is no simple matter. It is something more than making his face joyful or putting a light in his eyes. It is a question of helping him discover the possibilities in himself—human qualities of heart and spirit, germs of grace—and to aid him by a devoted cooperation in the utilization of his aptitudes and gifts.

To so take charge is to adopt the mission of the person I love: in the work of men in the kingdom of God, a task is assigned to him for which I wish to be responsible. His failures are my failures, his successes, my successes.

Is it possible to find this law of taking charge in the love of Christ and the Christian? Is it possible to say without paradox that the Christian must wish himself responsible for Christ? Would it not be the same insolence as the belief of the spouse before her loved one, "he needs me to be happy!" Yes, dare to believe it; it is not insolence but the intelligence of the heart of Christ, which wished to have need of men. Christ most certainly possesses an infinite happiness to which we can add nothing. Just the same, He will not attain His perfect measure, as St. Paul says, until the day when the growth of His Mystical Body will be completed. And that, in part, depends on me, on my love and labor. There is, therefore, a part of the plenitude, the happiness, the glory of Christ which is confided to me, of which I have charge, which is in my hands. Imprudence of God! Say, rather, the confidence of God.

Responsible for Christ . . . an oppressive thought if I were not assured that for His part He takes me in charge. He who extolled the good servant for having been worthy of the talent entrusted to him, will he not make my life, placed in His hands on the day of baptism, fruitful? If I do not shy away from it, His tenacious love will ingeniously fulfill His task without fail. "Grace is insidious, grace is artful, un hoped for . . . when grace does not come straight, it comes crooked.



When it does not come from the right, it comes from the left. . . . When it does not come forth as a gushing fountain it can, if it wishes, proceed as the waters which ooze slyly through the lower part of a dam on the Loire . . ." (Peguy).

The people we love often leave us defenseless at the critical moment: with Christ, I have the certitude that absolute power is in the service of love.

Does this mean that He will spare me all suffering? Not at all. As the good wine grower, He will measure His vineyard by its abundant and savory fruit. But through all the suffering I know that His love cannot be found wanting, that suffering is only for a more perfect purity, for a greater harvest.

### *To Love Is to Give*

To pretend to have taken charge of the perfection and the happiness of a being and yet not to be willing to give in order to promote this perfection and this happiness, what a mockery! To cease to work for the "success" whether it costs little or much of time, heart, or blood, is to fail love. For love is giving. Not only of something, but of *self*. Not only the gift of a day, but of all days.

"It is so simple to love," exclaim the young. The formula does not stand the test of experience. Nothing is more arduous. The gift is never made once and for all; it must be renewed without ceasing. You are tired of giving and wish a respite, but in love there is no respite. Between love and egoism there is in fact a conflict without truce. What one loses, the other gains.

Victory is mine if I do not cease to give. It is a double victory, moreover; in pursuing without ceasing the growth of the person whom I love, I advance infallibly toward my own perfection.

All the drama of Christian love for Christ is in this dilemma: Will I sacrifice myself to him or will I sacrifice Him

for myself? In fact, this dilemma only makes itself felt little by little.

Nothing would seem simpler than to give yourself on the day when you meet Jesus Christ once and for all. Until then, you will have known Him by having heard talk about Him, but now He comes out of the fog of history; He is before you, a living Person. Everything in you that is made for love and for giving awakens and rushes forth. Finally this old dream of a love which is almost adoration becomes a reality. How well these words of Martha in Claudel's play *l'Echange* apply to the love of Christ:

And I lived at home and no longer thought of marrying,  
And one day you entered like a strange bird  
That the wind had brought  
And I became your wife,  
And the passion to serve entered my heart.

The same impatience to serve is found in him who comes to find Christ; in his soul is an overflowing fervor. But Christian life is long, long labor rather than a continuous fervor; a long labor of love, a long apprenticeship of total giving day after day, task after task, renunciation after renunciation. The victory of love is not in the beginning but at the end.

With Christ as in marriage it is the gift of self that counts. "It is not his money or his services, it is himself that I want, not simply something of his." But it is no less true that the gift of little things and humble acts of love are more than proof of the gift of self: they are the best way to care for love, to keep it young, to make it grow.

To the Christian who gives himself, Christ surrenders Himself—the cross reminds us. The Eucharist does, too, and in a way we can understand without difficulty: to make oneself nourishment for his beloved, isn't this the profound aspiration of the human heart? A heroine of Pearl Buck has just lost her husband after many years of life together. He was a quiet man. The question which the woman often asked herself

becomes more tortuous to her: Have I been useful to him, necessary . . . ? And then she understands the last words of the deceased, related to her without too much attention by a brother-in-law: "She was my daily bread." A joy, more than a joy, a great river of peace flowed into her being. Now, she knew.

To be the loved one's daily bread—not a rare and refined nourishment, but everyday bread, the bread one eats before the day's work; the bread one eats again upon returning in the evening. Bread, this most common and most necessary food . . . that is what Jesus Christ wished to be for me—to give Himself, even unto this.

### *To Love Is to Welcome*

Giving oneself to another would be impossible if the other were not open to the gift. To love is not only to give; it is also to accept the gift of the other. To "accept" sounds somehow sad. Let us say, welcome. To welcome: a door which opens, arms which extend, a face shining with joy. But a welcome can be deceiving, the door opens and closes so quickly, it imprisons us. How many pretended loves are nothing else!

The true welcome, far from confiscating liberty, far from stifling a personality, offers to strengthen it. It is thus that Christ loves us. Sometimes you are tempted to say to Him: Take me, do not give me my liberty! This prayer He cannot grant. He wishes to heal our wounds, rest our fatigue. "Come to me, you who are burdened, and I will renew your strength." But never does He bind us. Christ is too proud: He does not wish to be served by a captive, but by a free man.

*When once one has known (says God) what it is to be  
loved freely  
submissions no longer have savor.  
When one has known love by a free man, the  
prostrations of slaves say nothing.*

*When one has seen Saint Louis on his knees  
 He has no inclination to see  
 Slaves of the Orient prone on the ground,  
 Lying flat on their faces in the dust.  
 To be loved freely,  
 This is a priceless gift, a gift beyond measure (Peguy).*

Christ, who refuses to chain us, is not pleased in seeing us slaves of men or of things. He commands us to cut the ties which hold back our flight, to reject everything which burdens our steps, whether it be our eye or our hand. A jealous God? Yes, but jealous of our liberty and our love.

Christ is respectful of our liberty in another sense. "I stand at the door and knock. If you open it, I will enter and I will dine with you." If you open . . . never will He enter by force. It is our turn to be hospitable.

To welcome Christ is the other essential law of Christian life. It means opening oneself to His life, the divine life which He offers to us in superabundance; to His joy which he wishes to see perfect in us; to his peace: "My peace I leave you, my peace I give unto you . . ." "Open oneself"—these are inadequate words; let us say instead: To be hungry for Christ. Isn't this the expression which best answers the desire of Him who wishes to be our daily bread? "It is first of all a question of being hungry," said St. Catherine of Siena. And if anyone finds the term untheological let them say, have faith; it is the same thing. Doesn't the word hunger truly translate the impatience, the torturing desire for Christ, for His thoughts and for His love, which the saints have? "To arrive quickly and surely at a high knowledge of God and to obtain it from Him, the Supreme Good, Supreme Light, Supreme Love, I know nothing better than to have a fervent desire, pure, continual, humble, and violent. It is a demand which is not mere lip service but it springs forth from the spirit, from the heart, from all the corporal and spiritual



faculties, a demand which obtains grace by an immense desire" (St. Angele de Foligno).

We are only poor because our hunger is too easily satisfied; our narrowness limits the gift of Christ. If our faith were without measure we would receive a superabundance of this unlimited generosity. For his love—as well as all love—is excessive and foolish. St. Paul, who had dared to speak of the folly of the cross, and the "folly of God," understood this.

A woman, married for some ten years, wrote to me one day: "I understand more and more that the true marriage is that of the soul with God." Human love had not deceived her, and far from monopolizing her, had set her on the road to another love. It taught her how to give herself to a man, and now it teaches her how to give herself to God. What is most important, for the married Christian as for all Christians, is the union of the soul with Christ. It is a union which ends in an identification such as that of which St. Paul speaks: "Henceforth I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives, it is Christ who lives in me."

For all that, don't think that I want to suggest a celibate spirituality to you. I could never counsel you enough to appeal for help to your partner, to whom the Lord has confided you, and of your sustaining him in his spiritual ascent. At the same time I must point out that one reaches a profound intimacy with God only by a solitary path. "I will bring you into the desert and I will speak to your heart" (Osee). May each of you be respectful of the march of your beloved toward Christ, who wishes to be the first love. If at times your companion leaves you to be with Christ, do not be afraid: he will return to you, his gaze clearer and his heart stronger.

#### FIVE MINUTES A DAY

I once knew a young girl, who at the time, loved to read and meditate daily. After her marriage she still came to con-

fession to me, but she had abandoned all spiritual reading and all meditation.

Regularly I returned to this point, making her agree that her Christian life was wasting away since she no longer maintained it. But each time she would say, "Ah! you're not the mother of a family. Bottles, diapers, pregnancy, whooping cough . . . evidently, all of that means nothing to you!"

One day instead of the usual response she said to me, "All right, what do you want me to do?"

"When you leave the church go into a stationery store," I replied. "Buy a red pencil. When you get home, choose a place where you are sure you can always find the pencil and your Bible. Then each day read your Bible. Five minutes, not one minute more, not one less. Take for this reading a guiding theme such as fraternal charity, penance, the relations of Christ with His Father or any other subject, and underline in red all the texts related to the chosen theme." Persuaded that a mother of a family can find in the deeds and words of Christ a model educator, she undertook to look for all the texts referring to education.

The months passed. Conscientiously, pencil in hand, she read her Bible five minutes a day. Sometimes she admitted she spent longer than the customary five minutes. "But Madame, think of it . . . bottles, diapers, whooping cough . . . does this mean nothing to you?" I chided.

Her reading finished, she recopied on some cards the underlined passages, always at the rate of five minutes a day. Then she classified her cards and, triumphant, brought me her little treatise on education according to the Gospels.

This work had so much impassioned her that she succeeded in communicating her interest to her eight year old son and soon he was a past master of gospel science! I had a poignant experience with him: One day, at their home, in the course of dinner, he challenged me, "Father, may I ask you a question about the Gospels?" Not without a certain contentment I prepared to impart my knowledge to him.

"Father, how many species of animals are in the Gospels?"

"Hmmm, . . . a dozen, maybe. . . !"

"A dozen! There are thirty of them!" And then he marched out in order the caravan of evangelical animals: the camel, the swine, the donkey, the mosquito . . .

His mother savored a delicious revenge. And I . . . a painful confusion.

I hope that each of you succeed in consecrating five minutes a day to the reading of the Gospels. Frankly, even in an over-active life, can this be impossible? As for the result, I guarantee you: the Gospels will become your intimate friend.

### HAVE MERCY ON ME

Repentance is a great theme, pervading every page of the Old Testament. Sometimes it is a prophet preaching repentance, sometimes a believer expressing his repentance in one of those poignant prayers of which the *Miserere* (Psalm 50) is justly the most famous. And if the theme is not everywhere dominant, it remains, at least as a background, always present.

Repentance is also a major theme of the preaching of Christ and the apostles. "If you do not do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). "There will be more joy in heaven for a sinner who does penance than for ninety-nine just who have no need of penance" (Luke 15:7). "The apostles went out, preaching penance" (Mark 6:12). The liturgy itself gives it an important place. Prayers of repentance are frequent during the course of the Mass as are the days and seasons of penance during the liturgical year.

What a contrast the spiritual life of Christians of the twentieth century! Penance is only a little side show: you commit a sin deemed grievous, so you feel guilty and ask pardon of God, you try, more or less, to make reparation for your fault. For many people, penance suggests only bodily mortifications, although it is and must be primarily a disposition of the soul:

“It is your hearts, and not your garments, that must be torn asunder” (Joel 2:13).

I will avoid giving you a theoretical definition of it: abstract terms are not a great help in acquiring an understanding of repentance. For those who want to comprehend it, there is only one good counsel: familiarize yourselves with the great friends of God.

Listen to them bewail their spiritual misery, confess their sins in the most vehement terms:

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your goodness,  
Because of all your deeds of mercy, blot out my in-  
justice. . . .

For I acknowledge my guilt, and my sin is ever before  
me (Psalm 50).

You see them mortify themselves harshly. If your heart is humble, and your spirit does not rebel, you will see into their souls, and understand the penitential sense which inhabits them. Just as a child, seeing a cloud of sorrow pass over the face of his mother, understands that he has done something to pain her, so true Christians are moved to repentance by contemplating, not their sins, but the face of their God.

My ear has heard speech of thee;  
But now I have seen thee with my eyes.  
Now I am all remorse, and I do penance in dust and  
ashes (Job 42:5-6).

This is why their repentance is something quite different from that crabbed vexation, which is only a substitute of repentance in our shabby hearts.

It is not the view of self but the view of God which excites true repentance. More precisely, it is the contemplation of the perfections of the Lord—His tenderness, His sovereignty, His generosity, His glory—which arouse in the Christian heart the multiple elements of the virtue of repentance.



Because they love the Lord, because they desire with all their strength to be united with Him, to be one with Him, to live eternally in His *tenderness*, Christian sinners are apprehensive of being separated from Him. "Do not cast me out of your presence, nor take away your holy spirit" (Ps. 50). And this apprehension is the more acute as their desire to possess Him is more ardent.

In contemplating the *sovereignty* of God, His dominion over the universe, they understand at once the revolting character of their disobedience, they cannot but feel the false note which they have introduced into the universal harmony. The whole of creation obeys God with exactitude:

. . . joyfully the stars shine out, keeping the watches he has appointed,  
answer when he calls their muster-roll, and offer their glad radiance to him who fashioned them (Baruch 3:34-5).

But man, free with that freedom which is a prodigious gift of the Lord, refuses to obey!

In contemplating the *generosity* of their Father, of which they have been so often the beneficiaries, they are overwhelmed by the thought of their ingratitude. And that recognition of ingratitude toward a loved one is one of the most heart-rending sorrows of the human heart.

But we must go deeper in our understanding of repentance, and for this purpose we take our point of departure from that feeling which dominates all others in us when we love: "I want him to be happy, I want him to be happy before all else, I will spare no effort, I will not even spare myself." Thus Christians feel an ardent desire for the happiness, for the *glory of God*. It is true that the Holy Trinity possesses a happiness, an intimate glory, to which nothing can be added or taken away. But it depends upon Christians to make that glory shine in creation, and first of all in their own lives. It is also partly through them that it must be manifested in their

brothers. The friend of God is a person passionately concerned with the glory of God. If he happens by his sin to betray or to compromise in some manner the glory of the artist—what anguish prevails! He has preferred his interests to the interests of God. With a bruised heart, a renewed love, with a deeper will, he undertakes again to labor for the glory of the Lord. There arises in him the need to make reparation for his fault, to recover in humility and repentance what has been lost in fidelity. He is seized by an imperious desire, as irresistible as a torrential stream, to make redress, to affirm with much more force and not only once, but every day, and throughout life, that truly God is the “preferred.” “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name give glory!” (Ps. 113).

We can understand now why the saints have such a high estimation for humility and repentance, why a St. Teresa of Avila cried out, “Either suffer, or die.” For us, all this may appear somewhat disconcerting, somewhat excessive. In truth, it is excessive. Every great love is. And excess is always a shock to the reason. But there are “reasons which reason does not know,” the reasons of the heart.

You say: “It is fitting that great repentance follow a great sin: David after his crime, St. Peter after his denial . . . but we are not such great sinners, such repentance is not required of us.” And yet, the true Christian cannot but feel himself to be a sinner. “If we say we have no sin,” writes St. John, “we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John 1:8). He is a sinner because he violates the commands of his Father. He is a sinner because there remain in him zones inhabited by egoism where charity does not fully reign. There are fibers of his being which are not converted, there is still lukewarmness and death, hence evil and sin, in him. He is not wholly living and it is the living man who is the glory of God, “Vivens homo gloria Dei” (St. Irenaeus).

When a Curé of Ars accuses himself of being a great sinner, he must be taken seriously. “Do not ask of God,” he

wrote, "the total knowledge of your misery. I once asked for it and obtained it. If God had not sustained me then, I would have fallen that very instant into despair." He recognizes himself as sinner because he is one; he is a sinner by everything in him which inclines him away from God, by everything in him which remains, however slightly, resistant to the Spirit of Christ, by everything in him which is not transformed by charity. If then we take the saints seriously, we are singularly alerted: if they confess themselves sinners, how much more we who do not even come up to their shoulders!

It is not only the consciousness of their own sin which prostrates them before God, but also of the sins of the world. They know their solidarity with all men, they do not try to isolate themselves. In their heart it is in a way all of humanity which abases itself, which repents, appeals to the mercy of the Lord, offers itself in sacrifice.

How foreign to so many of us is this feeling of terrible solidarity with a sinful world!

Another thing surprises us, and perhaps scandalizes us: the saints declare themselves unworthy of the pardon of God. Exaggeration, we think. And yet nothing is truer, the sinner is unworthy of the love and mercy of the God whom he has offended. But there is Christ. In Him and through Him, humanity has confessed its fault, has cried out its misery, has asked for mercy, has made reparation for its sin. In Him and through Him, I can hope for the pardon of my God. Still, I must have recourse to Him. Whatever be my feelings and acts of repentance, if I am one of those who pretend to justify themselves, I will never obtain Christian repentance, and reconcile myself with the Father.

This does not mean, of course, that repentance is the whole of the Christian life, nor even its summit: it is the base of it. The summit is the great victory of Christ. It is impossible however to separate passion and resurrection, the suffering of Christ and the victory of Christ, repentance of the Christian

and victory of the Christian. Like Christ and with Christ, the Christian penitent is a conqueror. By love, he has conquered evil. To the failure of love he has responded by an excess of love. The victorious joy of Christ lives in him, and no one can take it away from him.

### LIKE A MAN WHO LOVES HIS WIFE

It is a fond memory. Some students, of whom I was one, had climbed a mountain in the Pyrenees. Seated on the rocks, after having read a page of the Gospels, we exchanged our impressions. Fervent impressions they were, for while our love for Christ was young, it was profoundly sincere. Our chaplain did not seem to share our enthusiasm. Questioned, he responded more gravely than usual: "When you wish to know the solidity of your interior life, ask yourself what is the depth of your love for the Church."

We did not understand: isn't the interior life essentially love for Christ?

"It is possible to love Christ for human reasons, he replied, because He is a compelling man. The same is not true of the Church. Love for the Church is the surest sign of the life of grace in the soul. But you probably cannot understand this now. Some day, perhaps . . ."

Thirty years have passed. How many companions have lost their way! And one more, just recently. Then this phrase heard on the mountain came back to me: "Only those who love the Church . . ." How could I doubt it: only those who did not hold fast to the Church abandoned Christ. I recall, among others, the one who protested. "It is through fidelity to Christ that I oppose myself to the Church!" Today, he is an atheist.

That complex reality which is the Church has its sensible aspects. It is a world: of saints and sinners; of men, teaching, obeying, commanding; of things of unequal importance: sac-



raments, sacramentals, holy places and objects; of reunions of all sorts—among which the Mass is central—offices, pilgrimages, congresses; of laws, administration, and regulations necessary to the cohesion of the whole; and a common spirit which creates a unity in space and time.

In the presence of this imposing edifice, whose power from a merely human standpoint is impressive, there are those who admire, even among unbelievers. And there are those who are repelled: for this large institution seems to contradict man's native taste for independence of thought and action, and also to oppose itself to that humanistic scheme of values where well-being, success, power, material and intellectual goods hold first rank. Still others are scandalized: so many out-moded customs, mediocre and indeed unworthy men, priests with bureaucratic souls . . . and all that legalism through which it is so hard to discern the spirit of the Gospels.

But let the Church be seen with the eyes of faith, and the picture changes totally. If the narrowness and the errors of Christians remain, if, indeed, they are more clearly seen and more painfully felt, at least in the eyes of faith they no longer obstruct the horizon. Beyond the mediocrities in everything that is of the earth, beyond what can be seen with merely natural vision, the believer perceives the mysterious presence of Christ in the center of that universe which is the Church, and he discerns the Holy Spirit everywhere at work to kindle in the hearts of the faithful the charity of God.

One day a woman moving in the crowd which surrounded our Lord said to herself, "If I can touch even the hem of his garment, I shall be healed." And she was healed, instantly. And Christ asked, "Who touched me? I felt power go out from me." This episode in the Gospels makes vividly apparent the role of means in the work of Christ, who, in order to communicate the divine life, wills to use earthly things. The Church, with everything that composes it, is the Body of Christ, and His garment. It is enough to touch with faith a fringe of the Church, in order to enter into communication with the

power of the Son of God, impatient to heal, to strengthen, to enlighten. When the Catholic blesses himself with holy water at the entrance to the church, listens with religious respect to the prosaic sermon of an old pastor, joins his brothers at the eucharistic repast, accepts humbly the warning of Rome about a book or a movement, when he brings his support to the apostolate of the hierarchy in a Catholic Action movement—these are so many contacts with the Church. These acts are of course of unequal importance, but through them it is the same divine power which is attained, and which sustains them.

The Catholic may have the feeling of being caught in a close network which presses on all sides, but it does not occur to him to complain about it. The Church, he realizes, is not a jail but a nourishing climate, a maternal bosom which protects and guards him, which bears him on to the *dies natalis*, that moment which is called death, and which is in fact a birth into eternal life.

Many things indeed, teachings, moral precepts, canonical rules, seem to go against his human thoughts and aspirations, and smother them. But he knows why he finds this hard: the divine cannot penetrate into the human without transforming it, Christ cannot enter our lives without mortifying in us what is still not converted into charity. Hence the Catholic rejoices in that very suffering. He knows that where the death of Christ is at work, a liberation is effected, resurrection is gained. And so he loves the Church—a love which becomes his great passion in both senses of the word—both for the suffering which it brings to him and for the graces which it procures for him, for the constraints which it imposes on him and for the liberty of the children of God to which it leads him. Not only does he no longer seek to escape it, but he feels the compelling need to guard and to multiply his contacts with it. Not because he makes the Church his god, but because he sees in it the great sacrament of God, the unique

and efficacious means of being in communication and in communion with the Lord.

The Christian who loves the Church makes me think of a man who cherishes his spouse. Whether others praise the charms and virtues of his wife, or whether they point to her faults and errors, nothing can touch the bonds of tenderness which attach him to her. Others see only her merits or defects; but he, much more profoundly, knows the mystery of her person, her eternal truth. And each time that she is spoken of, it is as if he were content to press her hand more tenderly in silence.

## *In the Service of Men*

### THE OBLIGATION TO BE COMPETENT

At the end of a day of recollection, a physician friend of mine confided to me: "I have resolved to dedicate two more hours each week to the reading of my medical journals."

If he had been neglecting to pray every day, I would certainly have preferred to learn that he had decided to make a place in his life for prayer. But this isn't the case; my friend assisted at Mass every morning, and found the time, in his busy life as a city doctor, to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day. So I was pleased with his decision, much more than if he had adopted another devotion, and I congratulated him warmly.

Many doctors, I have no doubt, read the medical journals, and for the most varied reasons: ambition, love of science, devotion to their sick patients. But that the resolution of my friend had been inspired by faith and prayer, that deserves some reflection.

There is, in fact, an obligation to be competent. Many Christians forget it, imagining probably that devotion is all that is needed. Mr. P. Chanson has painted us a graphic por-



trait of such a person: "Here is a Christian businessman, who, to his credit, has become devout. He grows jealous of his time for meditation, his job becomes a burden. And why worry about money anyway? He is intelligent, well-liked and a good speaker. He is urged to accept the presidency of his corporation. Good heavens, no—that would be an occasion of pride. He has read and reread that five minutes of prayer each day are worth more than twenty years of active life. Now, thanks to his judicious employment of time, it is an hour, tomorrow two or three perhaps, which he will consecrate to prayer. Except for the habit, he is a monk. Why should he compromise his spirituality in the hullabaloo of public assemblies. His wife and children already take enough time away from his meditation. Ah, if he were alone in the world, he would be content with next to nothing."

It is just such errors as these which make all proposals and exercises of spirituality suspect. To speak to laypeople of the interior life and union with God is, it is thought, to encourage them to disregard their responsibilities and to evade their family, professional or apostolic duties. Is someone who is preoccupied with God apt to concern himself with the things of the earth? Such objectors do not understand that the spiritual life of the layman does not consist in playing the monk, but in living the life of charity proper to his own state of life. This charity imposes a duty to consecrate one's self to those tasks with an ever-increasing competence, a competence which is itself a form of charity.

To be competent is, in fact, to love one's brothers. One who applies his intelligence and strength to discovering the secrets of nature, or to elaborating better laws for the city, or he who becomes capable of helping the suffering, or diminishing the pain of men, does he not practice fraternal love in a preeminent way?

To be competent is also to love God. He who loves God the most is not he who cries "Lord, Lord . . . ," but he who does His will and collaborates in His work. For God has done

men the honor of willing to need their assistance: the earth will not bear its harvest without the labor of man, the child will not become an adult without education. But without competence, workers and parents are poor collaborators.

To love the Lord is to bear witness to Him. The competent Christian is, in certain areas, the only witness whose testimony is accepted. Often where sermons are not listened to, where grace is not understood, competence wins respect. When a social worker, a farmer or a professor are competent, those who work with them, won by the prestige of that competence, are drawn to the man, and sometimes even to the God present in his heart. There is often astonishment: Christians do not seek only heaven! They are also fired by social problems, by art, by science! Can it be that the God of the Christians is truly interested in our planet, in our little human histories? The apologetic of competence, especially paired with the apologetic of devotion, can succeed where others fail.

#### A DUTY GREATER THAN THAT OF LOVING

When you were engaged or first married, you young wives surely asked yourselves, "Will I be able to make him happy?" And then that other question, a sign of greater maturity, "Will I be able to help this man to realize himself, to become always better?"

What has become of that man today, because of you? Do you strive, day after day, to help him attain his full stature?

Saint-Exupery has given us, in *Night Flight*, a portrait of Riviere, who was a pioneer of night flying, and organizer of regular flights between Europe and America. A bold innovator, energetic and tenacious, he was very hard on his pilots, not through lack of love, but in order to obey what he called "a duty greater than that of loving." To speak exactly, this "greater duty" is still one of love, but of a greater love. There is nothing beyond love, but there are many ways of loving. And the hardness of Riviere was one of the most effective:

out of an adolescent he made a man, out of a new employee he made a knight of the skies. By making them risk their lives, he saved those lives. Do you wives obey this duty "greater than that of loving"? Do you work for the greatness of your husband as well as his happiness? And can you prefer his greatness to his happiness when, in order to obtain the former, the latter must be sacrificed? I am not speaking of course of that essential happiness which lives in the depths of the upright soul, and which is not opposed to greatness, but of that easy happiness found in the enjoyment of the goods of the earth and the richness of the spirit.

But what is true greatness? That man alone is great who is fully aware of his responsibilities and assumes them unhesitatingly. Watch your children grow: isn't it true that their progress is measured by their ascending the scale of responsibilities? You have charge of them when they are very small, but only for a short while: they soon want to fly on their own, they want to feed themselves, to walk down the street alone. They are becoming responsible for their bodily life. And soon of their souls: helped by you, they learn that there are some acts which harm them and others which ennoble them. The years pass, and one day you can read the pride on the face of your son, to whom has been entrusted some task in man's world: a piece of ground to plant, a tractor to drive. A little later and he is a husband, responsible for the woman who has believed in him; then a father, with a joy at once exultant and solemn in his heart. Shall he stop there? No, the man who knows only his home and works only for his own has not yet attained his true stature. He lacks the awareness and the acceptance of his responsibility for the human community, and, if he is a Christian, for the salvation of his brothers, and of the whole Church.

Maybe you think that I am an accomplice to that temptation of evasion, to which so many husbands, only too happy to avoid the thousand cares and problems of the home, quickly succumb, as soon as a good pretext arises.

Maybe you accuse me of ignoring the fact that in every man there long remains the adolescent love of action for its own sake, and the enthusiasm for adventure. Not at all. Indeed, it seems to be desirable at the beginning of married life that husband and wife concentrate on building their home life, rather than engaging in outside activities. But while it is true that they must never abandon this effort, the time comes when the husband, having solidly founded his family, must no longer hesitate to assume social responsibilities. To avoid them would be betrayal. Understand: I ask that he assume these responsibilities *efficaciously*. . . . I have no intention of justifying those men who feel a silly pride in belonging to thirty-six committees, or who imagine that they will reform the planet by their interminable and sterile conferences. They would be doing something far more useful if they stayed home and spanked their children.

Without the help of a woman, a man rarely comes to moral adulthood, as we have just defined it. This is why, when I consider so many fine men whom I know, I cannot help thinking that their wives are not up to their mission. I'm not generalizing: I can easily imagine the secret sorrow of many good women whose husbands remain careless and egotistical all their lives. But how many others are there, whose love is a snare for the man, when it should inspire and stimulate him to action. I say love, I ought to say egoism in this case. For egoism is not a masculine privilege. There is a feminine egoism too, which for all its difference, is no less baneful, composed of selfishness, domination and jealousy. Men's lives by the hundred are rendered fruitless by it.

It is not always egoism, strictly speaking, which plays this role, but often merely an insufficient love. It is touching to see this father play with his children every evening, it is good to see him happy in his home. Ought he really to be encouraged to enter into political battles, or into Catholic Action which will take so much of his time?

Here indeed, for the wife, is that duty greater than that of



loving. But heroism is necessary for it, and heroic women are few. As a result, their husbands are only "good boys" all their lives.

If your husband is passionately concerned with great causes today, if every injustice finds him indignant and ready for action, if he does not hesitate to commit himself at a time when slackers crawl back to their holes, if the thought of the millions who do not know Christ is like a thorn in his heart—let me reassure you. When a man can write, as the one who had escaped from a concentration camp wrote me, "It is not in spite of my family duties, but precisely because I am a father, that I am in the fight," then I see at his side the presence of a deeply spiritual wife who understands and encourages him, and I give thanks for a victory of love.

If on the other hand, you feel obliged to agree that your love has thus far been inferior to its task, meditate on these remarks of Dr. Aujoulat, and I hope they will help you to make the appropriate resolutions:

"Will the fear of losing their Christian sense of values continue to keep Christians out of public life? Will the counsel given them, for example, always to put their marital life first and to foster day by day the life of the home and the family, make them hesitate?

"The strength of the Communists comes from the fact that they do not hesitate to sacrifice their family life for the sake of the cause. Among Christians the family is not always a radiating center, it is sometimes a barrier to the gift of self, and sometimes extinguishes any apostolic zeal.

"The crucial question is whether Christians must not sacrifice certain family joys and pleasures for the sake of "serving the city," and compensate for these renunciations by a greater effort of understanding and family intimacy, with the hope that Our Lord will, by an increase of grace make up for the hours or days taken from the life of the home."

You may think that in writing these things, I have been unfaithful to the ideal of Christian marriage. If so, you have

either misunderstood me, or you do not understand what the phrase "marital and family spirituality" means. I have no desire to promote a return to an isolationist spirituality: the wife on one side, tied to the home and the children, the husband on the other concerned only with activities outside the home. The true order consists in this: a head of the family who takes charge (in the fullest sense) of the home; a wife who without herself failing to respond to the appeals of the City and the Church, encourages her husband to assume his responsibilities, and helps him to bear them. But this is possible only where a deep mutual love exists and that common seeking of the Lord which the Christian ideal of marriage ceaselessly urges upon us.

For the more love grows, the more it becomes impatient to serve. The risk is not one of loving too much, but of loving badly. Nor is it a matter of being too preoccupied with one's spiritual life. The more the husband and wife progress in the knowledge of Christ, the more they understand the meaning of his words, addressed as much to homes as to individuals: "He who would save his life will lose it, he who loses his life will save it."

### THE LACK OF ANXIETY

You who are so tranquil in your possession of truth, so comfortably established on the first rung of the virtuous life—your lack of anxiety makes me uneasy.

"But why should we be anxious?" you say. "Even if we are not perfect, at least we try to keep the moral law and to do good around us."

That's not good enough. Morality is more than that. For morality is not only avoiding evil, or merely doing something, but of doing good, the whole good. As long as there is dissension in the world, and as long as there is a man who suffers, or there is something better to be done, you are not following the law, for each man is responsible for the world.

Moreover, you only have to read the Bible, that disquieting little book, to convince yourself of it. The whole moral law of Christ can be summed up in three words: Do you love? But love is unlimited. No one can boast of being in perfect accord with it. "The measure of love is to love without measure." Love is life and the biologist tells us—life is tension, movement, ingenuity, tenacity, and irrepressible striving. All that is contrary to quietude. There is no rest for him who loves. That is why there are so many who seek to hide from love, who fear it and prefer to submit to some code. But you must understand what love is. To love is to wish the growth of a person, it is to work furiously to that end. It is to give all that you have and all that you are. It is to suffer not having riches enough to fill him up without measure. It is to suffer not being all-powerful in your effort to create his happiness. Do you understand why quietude seems to me to be a poverty of love, and anxiety a sign of love?

There is a bad anxiety: the undying worm of miserly hearts which is made of the dread of losing, of the fear of not having enough. This kind of anxiety is morose, jealous, nervous. It is not for this, certainly, that I plead my cause, but for that humble, patient, optimistic and constant anxiety which is the true anxiety of love. Do you possess it? Or rather, does it possess you?

Do you love your partner with an "anxious" love? Perhaps there are secrets in his heart, wounds that need dressing, vague aspirations: do you try to learn what they are? And what of his talents: do you help make them fruitful, as the good servant in the Bible? Do you work untiringly to make yourself more pleasing and more useful to him? Love which does not progress falls back.

Are you anxious for your children? I do not mean whether you are dissatisfied with them, but with yourself. If they fail in their school work, what do you do first? Do you hold them responsible or do you accuse yourself? Do you assume too quickly that you have done everything? As long as you haven't

prayed with that vehemence of heart which nothing discourages, as long as you have not done penance, it is not true to say that you have done everything. Perhaps, you have not done very much.

And what of those near you—in the adjoining apartment, next door neighbors, people in your suburb, workers at the office—are you certain that you truly love them? will Christ say to you one day? “I was ill, in prison, I was hungry, and you did not come to my assistance?”

In India there are millions of children who die for lack of bread. Do you think of them at night when you bend over your peacefully sleeping children?

And what of God, do you love Him? The blasphemy of a boy in the street, the hundreds of millions of men who do not know Him as their Father, can your heart tolerate these things? In your own sphere, are you a servant, devoted to His glory? I pose these questions to you to make you anxious, if you are not already so.

But if you find in yourself that vital anxiety of love, go to God with confidence; may this confidence be unchangeable, even at the time when you have the cruel experience of your own weakness condemning you, for “God is greater than your heart.”

### THE RICH

I received a letter which said: “I am usually the passive reader type, the mother of a family too busy to write! But this time, I reacted violently to something you wrote.

“‘Your absence of anxiety bothers me,’ you say. But Father, anxiety gnaws at us. The world is there before us, full of sorrow; how could we feel at peace? Are there, then, still men who live happily in the bosom of their family, comfortable amongst well-mannered people who love them? This may have been true in other times, but for my part, I find it difficult to find a moment of peace and quiet. I place my head



in my hands, saying 'God has wished my social situation, my justly acquired fortune (really only a small one). Moreover, am I not generous with it?' I get up and go about my task a bit more calmly. But not for very long. A beggar rings. If it is just a professional bum, certainly I owe him nothing . . . Ah! but if it is a woman and she has children in unheated rooms at home . . . Mine are so joyful around the fire. Is this providential, their misery? and my comfort? I am all confused.

"Or else it is a book we read; misery is depicted, it lays in wait for us, harasses us, denies us our comfort, confuses our well-established and reasonable views; one can no longer be happy and the worst is that a material gift of money will not bring back peace at all. No, Father, you should rather help us find peace, that peace borne of charity (you see, I condemn myself: I know all this comes from a lack of love). Where is our place, we bourgeois rich (or whatever you would call us), in this misery of the world? Are our excuses (a providential plan, etc.) futile? I tell myself that while you understand our problems so well, and are a help to us, it would sometimes be much better for you to let these problems take care of themselves and preach instead poverty, charity and perfect love which strips away the unessentials. Founded in an intense charity, we would better understand the puerility of these little conjugal problems which occupy us so much.

"We are conscious of being very little—sinners, whimsical, anxious, going from pillar to post, sad because we behold evil without having the courage to remedy it. Now that you have tried to disquiet the tranquil, should you not try to calm the anxious? This anguish lays so heavily upon the heart. It would be so simple to be tranquil!"

How Christian this sounds! Here is a living example of that anxiety in which I recognize the disciple of Christ. Before the misery of the world he evaluates his wealth; it disquiets him: why me, why not them?

How wealthy you truly are, you to whom I speak! Even if

you do not have material fortune. Rich in your culture, your education, in your relatives, friends, in your family where you love one another. And still more precious, a wealth of goodness, faith, and grace. . .

And all around you, a terrible poverty: famished bodies, famished hearts, famished souls.

Are you haunted by this question: why me, and not them? Are you haunted by the desire to share? You say to me: "They do not come to me." And if they don't, do you think that it is up to them to do so?

### THE EFFICIENT AGE

"They resigned themselves unwillingly to the departure of their daughters for the cloister. The contemplatives are allowed to die of hunger."

I am terribly ashamed to think that our descendants will read these remarks in their history of the Church, in the chapter devoted to Christianity after the world war. Oh, without doubt this will not be the only note by which the historians characterize our Christian generation: they will underline a great intellectual ferment, they will celebrate the mission of the workers, the promotion of the laity, conjugal spirituality. All these do not console me about contemplatives.

The Carmelites, the Poor Clares need bread. These are brutal facts. And they know a still worse lack than that of bread: the lack of esteem. Do you need proof? (As if wanting for bread is not proof enough of the disdain of the faithful for the religious contemplatives.) Ambassadors of Christianity before God, they ought to be assailed by demands for prayers. But no, it is not to convent parlors that people flock, but to the offices of executives, and to placement bureaus. Happily, our contemplatives have faith: they are convinced that in spite of the indifference of the Christian, they are necessary to Christianity.

Do not be discouraged, good Sisters. (Perhaps certain peo-

ple betray their superiority complex by this phrase "good Sisters"; I use it purposely, because it is made of words which all well-meaning men only pronounce with honor: good Sisters.)

It is infinitely precious that in our century of mad speed, automation, newspaper, radio, movies and television, these persons willingly choose silence, solitude, prayer, penance; that among those who are enthusiastic technicians who have made prodigious discoveries, there are those who decide that it is still more worthwhile to contemplate and sing the glory of God; that in the midst of this multitude of poorly trained children who no longer know how to say "yes" to their Father, there are those who make their life one uninterrupted action of grace.

Cloistered Sisters, it is truly necessary that you welcome to your heart all the misery of the world in order to bring it to the attention of the Lord. We are much too engrossed in our cares, our personal affliction. If sometimes we know how to aid the distressed, we always forget that the best way to get help for them is to speak about them to God.

"They resigned themselves unwillingly to the departure of their daughters for the cloister; The contemplatives are allowed to die of hunger . . ." Perhaps the historians will add as a commentary: "To these Christians of the age of efficiency (efficiency, except on the religious level), the thirty years of hidden life at Nazareth, the forty days in the desert, the nights of prayer, the Passion of Christ no longer suggested anything."

### **ARE CHRISTIANS A MAJOR FORCE TODAY?**

No Christian would dare openly to confess a negative spirituality today. Nevertheless, how many flee the arena where the new world is being shaped. Happily there are others who believe in a policy of presence. Actually it is more than a policy; it is a mystique of presence. They know how to put the general interest before particular interest in order to

collaborate in the great human tasks, bearing a Christian witness everywhere.

I would say, however, that some of these partisans of the mystique of presence seem naive and pretentious. To hear them tell it, if all Catholics would imitate them, Christianity would quickly regain the esteem and the mastery of the world. In fact, for the past twenty years, numerous French Catholics, prepared as they have been by the youth movements, have found themselves in important posts in the political, professional and business spheres. And yet can one truly say that they have brought a new conception, powerful and hardy, to the new world for which they grope? Thanks to them, Catholicism has acquired more prestige, but does it appear to the eyes of our contemporaries as the greatest hope at the time of greatest distress?

Let us pass from the political plane to that of apostolic action. For twenty years in their areas, the militant Catholics worked for the Kingdom of God; in many parishes there was a liturgical revival and a missionary zeal. But do the results correspond to the expectations? Are they in proportion to the efforts expended? Does anyone wonder at the faith of Christians? Who would say in astonishment today as the pagans of the first centuries did: See how they love one another!

Christians no longer entice followers; nor do they inspire hate. What does it all mean?

It would be much too simplified a view of our contemporaries to declare them impervious to Christianity. Too easy to say purely and simply that traditional pastoral practices are outdated, that our apostolic methods have failed and that we must find new ones. Without disowning the morsel of truth in these assertions, I think the fault is deeper. What seems to me to be lacking in the Christian community and in its members is vitality: no violence or passion is there anymore. For my part, I find in this disturbing anemia the reason for the lack of love of Christians today for prayer, and espe-



cially for that form of prayer which is close union of man with God. In those who neglect it, the efficacy of the Word of God and the sacraments is thwarted.

Because contemplation does not fortify them with divine strength, Christians give way in action; because they do not contemplate the grandeur of God, they are faint-hearted; because they do not raise themselves to the thoughts of the Lord, they only have a myopic vision of the problems of the world; because they are not a branch of creative energy, they lose their effect. When they do not practice meditation, Christians live as though they are fixed at an infantile stage.

All the same, I know men and women who do not hesitate to consecrate a period of each day to meditation. For example, a village artisan has become the adviser of the young people of his area and for several years, the Christian leader of a whole region; a young widow and mother of a family assumes many civic responsibilities; a captain of industry who attributes the change of climate of his board meetings to his morning meditation. With all the men of prayer whose evolution I have been able to follow, there is greater serenity, larger and more realistic vision of the problems involved, and increased efficiency, in short, a growth of human and supernatural vitality. They don't become perfect overnight, they are not miraculously delivered from their faults and their limitations. But they are spiritual adults.

I should add that they alone are truly present to the world—even if they do not have vast responsibilities in the Church or in the State. ("Our steps only echo in the street but our heart beats throughout the whole world," writes a mother.) Presence is, before all else, of the spiritual order. Do you remember Moses praying on the mountain while the Israelites fought on the plain? (Exodus 17:8-13). It is at that point of the battle when he raises his arms to the Almighty, that his troops prevail against the enemy; when his arms fall with fatigue, his men lose their energy and retreat. As long as Christians are not first of all in the presence of God, they

will be only figures and not true actors in the part they play.

I can hear your objection: "We don't have the time." If meditation is a luxury, I admit that there is no place for it in your lives, burdened as they are with professional and familial duties. But if this prayer is a vital necessity, like eating and sleeping, then the objection is absurd. (Would not the doctor find it absurd if an anemic person would pretend he did not have time to eat?) To be truthful, it is not the time that is lacking but the faith. If you were convinced of the importance of meditation you would know how to find fifteen minutes or a half-hour daily for it. Along with the evenings reserved for reading, for work around the house, for a movie or a visit, you would not hesitate to reserve one for the pursuit of God. You also lack effort; although you have consecrated years to the study of languages or science, and expend a considerable amount of time, imagination, and energy to advance your business, you give up when it is a question of initiating yourself into the highest human activity of all: prayer.

I won't hide from you that I have a guilty conscience for having pleaded the cause of prayer with you. Isn't it monstrous to have to offer a multiplicity of arguments to invite a child to come near to his father, to open himself to his confidence, to live in his intimacy, to show him love and gratitude? And when this father is God . . . !

## CHAPTER 6

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# *Widows*

### LOURDES, 1946

The Mass of September 8 at Lourdes climaxed the pilgrimage of those who returned from the war. It was a most moving sight. From my place I saw this immense crowd of 80,000 men massed on the esplanade, around the monumental altar.

Grouped around the three symbolic tombs: that of the soldier, the prisoner who died in exile and the deported person who died in camp, were three hundred widows. What were they doing in the midst of all these men? One of them revealed their secret as the priest raised the host in his hands:

*Lord, we widows offer you  
the sacrifice of our love  
in order that there will be more love  
in homes founded anew.  
Lord, we offer you  
the sacrifice of our maternity  
in order that the families of those who returned  
will be more generous with the gift of life.*

A profound emotion shook the crowd. The men realized the meaning of the presence of the widows at their pilgrimage. Whereas they had come from the four corners of France, bearing their thanks to offer to Our Lady, these women had come from all regions, clutching in their hearts the small word "Fiat" which some had not been able to say in five years.

Thank you. Fiat. Brief words charged with meaning, one bespeaking the ardent gratitude of the men who were spared; the other expressing the generous acceptance of the greatest sacrifice that can be demanded of the heart of a woman. Would their thanks have been possible without these fiats? Was not the deliverance of these men bought by the sacrifice of these others? This is why the Fiat of the widows and the thanks of the men had to be joined at the feet of the Virgin. Fiat: a small word, but powerful and as rich in life as a seed: three hundred fiats raised a harvest of 80,000 thank you's. What the Master said is true: "The grain that dies in the earth bears much fruit."

The gratitude of the men toward the widows was touching. You could see it in their faces; you could sense it in their attitude when they met at the grotto or in the streets of the village. If they had dared, how many would have asked, timidly, as one of them did on passing a small group of widows, "Pray for my family . . ."

What was visible at Lourdes is always true. Widows, you have a mission, your suffering has meaning: in the midst of the people of France, sick, divided, but valiant also, you are an example and you give courage. Men do not often express it, they do not even seem to pay any attention to it, but do not doubt it. A man does not think of his heart when he is healthy because it does not make him aware of its presence. And yet isn't it the heart that makes the whole body live? Widows, you are the heart of a great body. May it never cease to beat, may your soul of hope, purity, fidelity and love be intensely alive and diffused in the whole country.



**OFFERTORY**

Let me give you a short lesson from the liturgy:

For centuries the offertory of the Mass was an action of the faithful. Men and women marched in procession to the altar, where they left their varied offerings: bread and wine, oil for lamps, wax for the candles. . . . From these offerings what was necessary for the sacrifice was taken; the rest was divided into two parts, one of which was for the support of the clergy and the other for the many poor in the care of the church.

It was by these offerings that the faithful entered into the sacrifice of the Lord.

And there was a deeper meaning to the offering. In carrying the bread and wine, the faithful offered infinitely more than the fruits of the earth. Bread is the symbol of human work and the efforts it demands. Wine is the symbol of human sorrow. Are not the bunches of grapes crushed in the press? The bread and wine was the whole life offered by the faithful. What they left on the altar of the Lord was not inanimate matter but themselves, living persons. How rich in meaning this offertory procession was, this long line of the poor and the rich, of peasants and city dwellers, filing toward the altar chanting psalms! . . .

Now you know why I call this section addressed to widows, *Offertory*.

Widows, remember the word of Christ: "No one takes my life, it is I who offer it." Do not make a vague resignation of your trial, but rather make it an offering to the Lord. It is not an easy thing—and when you have attained a heart of true consent, you must still make the offering every succeeding day.

At the Offertory of the Mass it is not mere things that you carry to the altar, but this person who was with you, one flesh and one life. Is he not, like the bread and wine, the matter of sacrifice which is about to be celebrated? At Mass it is

not only Christ who offers Himself; or rather it is only Christ, but as a whole body and members. And those who were His brothers, who have united their sacrifice to His, form with Him the unique holy host presented to the Father.

Widows at the same time offer those who have left them and themselves to the Lord. Love had united them for the common life of the family, now it unites them in the same offering. As long as they do not cease to offer themselves totally to the Lord, nothing can separate them from Him who, although invisible, is always present to them, always loving, more loving than ever because they are united to Him who is Love itself. He was their life's companion; He has become their companion for eternity.

These things are a link between the members of this corporate offering. Corporate offering! Let us meditate on this definition. For it will be so much truer when each of you, day after day, try to acquire a better sense of this fraternal community which you must be and of the meaning of this offering which you must renew.

But do not let your little community of offering isolate itself. It is part of the great corporate offering of the Church. Your offering is united to the offertory of four hundred thousand daily Masses around the world. And you must sing with a unanimous heart, with all your Christian brothers, the great prayer which follows the Offertory at Mass: "Right indeed it is and just, proper, and for our welfare that we should always and everywhere give thanks to Thee, Holy Lord, Almighty Father. . . ."

### THE VICTORS

The passion and resurrection of Christ: some Christians read this as a defeat followed by a victory. This is a misunderstanding of the Lord's sacrifice. The Resurrection certainly is the glorious manifestation of His victory. But this victory—

of love over evil, suffering and death combined—was won by Holy Friday. It is Christ's death which is His victory.

At the foot of the cross there are those who shake their heads and mock this pretended Savior who was not able to save Himself; there are those who are in tears, who hardly understand, but who, unlike the others, love the crucified Christ; finally there is Mary whose heart is torn by poignant sorrow and by triumphant joy. She knows that "There is no greater love than to give your life for those you love"; that "there is greater joy in giving than receiving"; that the death of her Son is the great victory of love. The others must wait until Easter morning to understand but Our Lady already knows.

May Mary once more be your model. While you await the glorious sunrise of the resurrection of the dead, believe that those who have left you are the victors. Victors, because suffering and death did not come at the end of their love; victors, because, explicitly or implicitly, their death was a gift; victors with Christ, for their sacrifice was one with His.

Do not tolerate in your souls a climate of defeat. Your husbands ask you to believe in their victory and to associate yourself with it.

One of your number who wrote to me understood this very well: "Love is stronger than death, and death illuminates love. I can say today that there is a way of loving which only death has revealed to me and obliged me to practice."

I am not unaware of the profundity of the sacrifice that was asked of you, nor of your loneliness, nor of the difficulty of your life weighed down now with toil and cares. But it is exactly for these reasons that I do not hesitate to say to you whose heart has been so terribly wounded, do not remain absorbed in grief. If you have not already done so, throw off the shroud of sadness. Let the joy of Christ surge up in you.

If in your soul, sadness fights against this joy and threatens to stifle it, resist it; it is a poison which makes you die. Make

an alliance with joy. Timid and hidden, it is perhaps still only an ember under the cinders. But it exists, it must exist, if the love of Christ lives in you.

Discover this small joy, encourage it, make it a glowing flame. It is a constant reminder to love—the Lord first, and he who has left you, and your children, and all those who encircle you. Christian love because it is forgetful of self engenders joy, while sadness is often the sign of egoism.

If joy eliminates sadness, it does not, for all that, suppress suffering, but rather transfigures it. St. Paul experienced this very thing: "I have a superabundance of joy in my tribulation." When you have conquered joy your pain and difficulties will not have disappeared but you will be courageous and at peace. Your children will be happy because they find in you this daily bread of cheerfulness for which their hearts hunger; people you meet will be better for it because in you they will recognize enough suffering to understand their pain, enough happiness to light their way. And for God, your life will be a canticle of praise and an undeniable proof of love.

When you lack courage, go without hesitation to Christ who said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. . . ." Whereas with others you must be strong and serene, with Jesus Christ abandon yourself to the sweetness of being weak, in order that He can restore your strength and renew your joy.

I leave you these two lines of Marie-Noel in order that they may sing in your memory at different times: "My strength will be ready in the hour of need, Like a child's coat that his mother has taken care of."

### THE TRUE CULT OF THE DEAD

All Saints Day is for you not just an empty custom; you live with an absent loved one. Perhaps the sentiment which tortured you the day after his death is always present in your



heart: "I did so little for him; if I could still give to him, if I could still work for his happiness . . . but it is too late, decidedly too late."

First of all, you can do very much to liberate him if he is still in that place where the souls are purified by the fire of desire for God. "Certainly I would like to, and I hope that he reaches eternal joy as soon as possible, but what upsets me is not being able to do anything more for him when he enters into His Father's House."

You will be able to pray to him, to show him your innumerable cares, projects, pains and joys of your life; he will intervene for you before God; he will tend to your needs. "I know and believe this," you answer, but all that is *receiving* from him and I want to *give* so very much to him to whom I gave so little."

Recollect yourself; hear the things that I have to say to you with a heart that is at peace, loving, and believing.

You know the words of Christ: "There is more joy in giving than receiving." Yes, this joy of giving is one of the greatest joys of heaven. Let your loved one in heaven once again enjoy the joy of giving. Appeal to his generosity: offer him the chance to give a hand to his lonely companion. The joy on his face when he pleased you was beautiful to see. Think how it would be to see joy always on his face.

But there is still something better. Whether your loved one is more admired and honored by his companions, the saints, and whether the Lord bears him a greater recognition depends on you.

Does that surprise you? Do you think: "The merits of a life are calculated at death and nothing can be added after that?" That would be a simplified view. If a notary, the day after death, made up a definitive inventory of the fortune of the dead person, the Lord would not care. He does not consider only what is but also what will be. He judges the tree by its fruits, by those that he has borne already and those he will bear in the future. Your son who almost tells a lie

stops when he thinks all of a sudden of the honest gaze of his father, generosity surges in him when he remembers how greatly you were loved. . . . Are not these the fruits of your husband's life? And who can say the number of beings who are and will be better, thanks to him?

"The tree will be judged by its fruits"; it partly depends on you that these fruits are abundant and nourishing.

The true cult of the dead is not to be sad in our hearts. It is to make sure that the lives of our deceased are still fruitful on earth and more glorious in heaven.

### EACH DAY'S GRACE

"Perhaps I would have the courage to carry my cross today, but this is not the heaviest cross. The heaviest crosses are yesterday's crosses and tomorrow's. The past weighs upon me with all the weight of lost joys and strengths: in spite of myself, when I am tired at night I dream of the time when we were two, when I only had half of a life to bear. . . . And tomorrow is still heavier: tomorrow will be the wear and tear of work, the money that I need, the children growing up without my knowing how to understand or help them."

Why do you burden yourself so? "Sufficient for the day are the cares thereof"; sufficient for the day is the grace thereof. Each day God gives whoever asks it sufficient strength for the day. Didn't He teach us to say: "Give us this day our daily bread?" The bread for the day, for *one* single day. No more, no less. Let us remember the strange episode of the manna of the Bible: over a day, a rain of bread fell, but they could not save this manna; after twenty-four hours it spoiled. But each day the miracle occurred again.

Don't linger over sterile, obsessive regrets in your heart and your thoughts. Unite yourself in the present to him who loves you always, and whom you love forever; lean upon him in prayer; he is not a memory that fades but a living presence. Don't worry about tomorrow; don't imagine the worst nor the

best. Know only that when tomorrow is today the Lord will be there to help you, and your husband also, to make you stronger than the fatigue, trials, and temptations. God gives you every day the courage to live, but He gives it only for the day. His grace is, like bread and love, a daily nourishment.

And if you object, "It is too much for me. I cannot bear to think of it!" Remember that even if the burden seems bigger than you are, it is not bigger than God.

### "I WILL"

A true Christian knows how to discover the loving hand of God behind everything that happens. And that is why a widow can respond with confidence and willingness to the thousand difficulties that come up in life.

Confidence and willingness are words of faith. Faith in an infallible divine Providence which nothing escapes—faith in the paternal devotion of the Lord, of which everything that happens, no matter how upsetting, is a manifestation. It is the certitude that God can only wish good for His children, that He is powerful enough to clear away from their path whatever would be fatal, that His goodness "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." If He permits a trial, it is because the hour has come for Him "to prune the vine so it will bear more fruit."

To respond with confidence and willingness is not a bitter consent or an acceptance of pure duty. But words of love, very similar to the words that the angel Gabriel heard from the lips of the Virgin: "Behold the handmaid . . . Let it be done to me." Willingness is a word that opens the heart to the presence of Christ. It bespeaks the giving of self, the offering of oneself to serve or suffer.

"I will" is a word of courtesy which expresses a politeness of heart and a nobility of soul. Is it not proper that the children of God imitate the "Lord of courtesy," as Dante called God?

It is a word of strength, not a tame resignation, a refusal of battle, or an easy resignation before difficulties. It is not an acceptance of evil but the will to take good from evil, to triumph by an abundance of love. It is not the discouraged attitude of a person who sits down in defeat before an obstacle, but the decision to surmount it, come what may.

It is a heroic word in many circumstances. A heroic face that smiles so as not to betray the heart's distress. A heroic soul that sings so as not to founder in sadness. Must a widow, already burdened by the care of many children take work outside the home? A little boy is ill; for the mother the nights are hard. Does she have to reduce expenses to make ends meet? She does all these things willingly. How often this demands an heroic "I will."

Not all the hours of a widow's life are dark. Not all events are sorrowful. For them, the sun shines too; joys flourish in their homes, graces bear fruit in the hearts of their children. May they also respond in these hours willingly! Perhaps it is well to recall that joys, as sorrows, must be welcomed with a good heart. We all know some who have forgotten how to open their window to the light and the springtime, to marvel with their children at the song of a bird, or to be happy before the words and gestures of a good friend.

"I will." Keep this word in your heart. Turn to it during the day: it will help you to face life. When sorrows, small or large, beset you, see in them the question Christ asks you: Will you accept? . . . I will.

### CAN WORK BE PRAYER?

To work is to pray, they say. If that is true it must be comforting for you to think that the work of an overburdened widow is doubly a prayer.

To run errands and keep house, to prepare meals and feed the children, to get the little ones up and put them to bed,



to work in the home and outside of it, have all these the value of prayer in the eyes of God?

No, one cannot say that these various tasks are always prayer, anymore than one can say that a handshake is always a token of love, unless the heart is given with it. In the same way work is only prayer in the measure that the will to offer work to God orients your acts. Christ said to the Jews: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Therefore, if your heart is far from Him when you work, your work is not a prayer. But if your heart is close to Him, if from morning to night of the long day you try to do His will and not yours, then your work is a prayer.

But one cannot be always attentive to God, you say. That is true, no more than you can think all the time of your children, although your affection for them inspires all your acts. As I mentioned before, it is not a question of a conscious attention but of a presence of heart. What absorbs the spirit need not necessarily distract the heart. I recall a widow I met in a small mountain village who told me, "My heart is always occupied with God." Her conscious attention was devoted to duties of farm life, but her heart was not engrossed for all that; it stayed with God.

You do not attain this by yourself; it is a grace, but one which the Lord is impatient to give to His children. Nor do you attain it suddenly; you must exercise it. Every morning you must take the time to foresee the day's tasks and to offer them to God for love of Him. In the course of the day you must stop your work from time to time to express once again the desire that all your acts have the value of love, praise, and prayer in the eyes of God. Persevere. It is difficult at first but it quickly fills a need of your heart. Then the great peace of God will imbue your life.

When you hold the wrist of your small feverish child to count his pulse you feel his heartbeats under your fingers. So your Father in heaven noticing each humble act of a widow's life perceives the pulse of your love for Him.

**ANOTHER KIND OF MATERNITY**

It would be quite wrong to imagine that the Mother of the Savior was after His death absorbed in the past, unconcerned with the earth and life. Certainly she possessed a wealth of memories: thirty-three years of the most profound union that ever existed between a mother and her son. And such a Son! She thought of this, yes. But not in order to escape the present. She recalled events of other days in order to live more intensely each new day as it came.

Mary's time after Good Friday was heavy with care and responsibilities. Don't forget that Jesus had confided to her the little flock of disciples. And it was no small thing to have to watch over the good will and the frailties of these simple men whose mission was to found an empire, and who sometimes still asked themselves doubting questions. She kept them in her vigilant prayer. She welcomed them when they came, full of questions, quickly enthusiastic, quickly discouraged. Her peaceful and silent soul was a refuge to them. Near to her, they found Him for whom they had left everything; they were reassured.

She loved them with a humble yet strong love. Nor did they exhaust the wealth of this love. For along with them she carried in her the whole world that had yet to be born to divine life. No one was excluded from her catholic soul; the smallest, the most hidden, the most miserable of men is also her son. You mothers who know what a half dozen children can mean in terms of care, sorrow, hope, and solicitude can imagine what Mary's life was from that day when she adopted at the request of her son, the whole of humanity.

When God takes from a woman the person whom she loves most, she thinks she has lost her heart and all her ability to love, but if she truly consents to the sacrifice, as Mary did, God gives her a new heart and an unquenchable love. A new life begins for her, too. She will be a mother again; this time it will be a spiritual motherhood and her

children will be the first beneficiaries. Moreover, it will affect many others. Often she will see proof of this. But it is in faith alone, without exception, that she must look for the whole truth. She must await with faith the day when God will point out to her what has been engendered in others by the love and sacrifice of a faithful life.

### TO LOVE STILL MORE

Read again with me that admirable page of St. Luke which presents Ann the Prophetess to us. The evangelist only needs several verses to engrave an unforgettable portrait—almost a Rembrandt etching—of this woman “well advanced in years,” to suggest the spiritual charm of the face of this old woman transparent with a divine light, to evoke for us her compelling destiny. After seven years of marriage, Ann became a widow; and she tended the house of the Lord instead of her own, and the love of God took over the love of her husband. During the long years of her widowhood, she honored God “day and night in fasting and in prayer.” And then one day when she was 84 years old in the sanctuary of the temple she met her Savior, who was only several weeks old. And then this woman, long silent, whom everyone knew but had never heard speak, became the apostle of Christ: “She began to speak of the Child to all those who desired deliverance.” It was her moment of revelation. The events of her life became clear: all the questions were answered. She understood in that instant why God had led her through the sinuous, incomprehensible route of her existence.

How many women in these twenty centuries since Ann the Prophetess have seen in their widowhood an invitation from God to pass from human to divine love. Think of St. Paul, of St. Elizabeth, of St. Frances the Roman . . . I have an unforgettable memory of a retreat at Lourdes in 1943: in their turn, without my having said a word, seven widows of that painful year of 1940 came to tell me of their conviction

that God had called them to consecrate their widowhood to Him. The priests who have received the confidences of many widows well know that there is in their hearts a call of Christ which is as indisputable, as imperious as the call of the young man to the seminary, of the young woman to the Carmelites. It is the call: "Come and follow me."

Thus it is that we see widows who do not have families turning to the convent. But the mothers who are surrounded by young children also hear this call to give themselves wholly. Fearing illusion or temptation, they are upset, for there can be no question of their leaving their home.

Certainly one must not be hasty in judging these desires, so frequent in the beginning of widowhood, to divorce oneself from all that is earthly, to promise oneself never to love another man, to close oneself up in the memory of the lost one. Many emotions enter into such desires, and they are not always the best. But it is wise to ascertain the source of the call, lest one risk becoming deaf to the desires of the Lord.

These women, already burdened by maternal and household tasks, have often to earn their bread as well, by some occupation. Is an answer to the Lord's call possible under these conditions, and if so, in what must it consist?

In the course of the past centuries the entrance into the "religious life" supposed a retreat from the "world" and temporal tasks. But in our day—and this is no small revolution—the Church, by means of the newly formed secular institutes, places the religious life at the doorstep of those who cannot leave the world. Like all the religious orders, these institutes have as an end the perfection of their members in the love of God and neighbor.

Thus the religious life is not incompatible with the widow's life, encumbered as it is with familial and professional tasks. Already many have been called by God to the perfection of charity and have joined these new religious institutes without shirking their secular responsibilities. There they find the



basic characteristics of all religious life: fraternal support, a formation, direction, a supple rule of life adapted to their state, and finally the promises or vows by which they consecrate their life to God.

Without doubt it will take time for this new form of the religious life to take definitive form, just as the classical religious orders did not attain their present forms at the very outset. We are in a tentative period of trials and passionate inquiry. How can the widow practice poverty when she cannot abandon her property which represents the welfare of her children? How can she practice obedience without arriving at the inadmissible and distasteful solution of having a superior be the true head of her family? The whole problem consists in finding a new form of the religious life adapted to the widow's situation, without being at the same time a depreciated religious life.

If widowhood presents difficulties in the pursuit of a perfect life—a lack of time, of opportunities for peaceful contemplation, overwork, isolation—it can also facilitate the ascent of the soul by the solitude that it exacts, by the sacrifice and servitude it brings in its wake. It requires much love. It is the daily renewed offering of the husband God recalled, the renouncement of future maternities, the sad surprise of not finding the same consideration as before around the house; it is solitude, a ravenous monopolization of family life, being torn between the needs of love and authority with the children, between the spiritual responsibilities of the formation of souls and the most temporal tasks. A true religious formation must teach the widow the art of using every occasion to forget herself in order to grow in the love of God.

Often the widow has the impression of being absorbed in daily tasks; she envies the nuns the silence of the cloister occupying themselves with God alone. She must remember that what counts in the end is not silence, or long prayer or even monastic peace, but doing the will of God. I don't say to do it with great love, because it is often quite difficult to

know if one loves, but with a humble good will renewed each day. The years will pass and perhaps the dominating impression will be that she has not advanced at all, until the day when she need wait no longer, and the widow, astonished even as was Ann the Prophetess, meets her Savior.

Widows who have found Christ follow Him step by step. They possess His joy. The glory of the Father is their *raison d'être*. They have understood that all is grace. Having accepted the loss of everything for the love of Christ, they find everything again in the love of Christ—and first of all, their life's companion who from henceforth will be their "companion for eternity."

Several ways of religious life welcome widows. Some receive celibates and widows. Others are reserved to widows. Among the latter, some put the accent on contemplation, others on apostolic and charitable action, some on detachment from the past, others on the permanance of a spiritual bond which binds the widow to the partner who has preceded her before God; there are those which are associated with a large religious family; others orient their offering to the Church, the priests, the families (how meaningful the sacrifice of the widows must be to those who are making a real effort to live a truly evangelical family life). . . . There are already many mansions in the house of the Father.

Perhaps the time is not far off when the women whom God called to dedicate their widowhood will receive a particular consecration. It would restore to them the place of honor and service in the Church which was theirs in the first centuries of the Christian era. It would seem to be in the line of tradition. If the Church has always solemnly affirmed her praise for the grandeurs of Christian marriage, will she not praise still more virginity and consecrated widowhood? For virginity and consecrated widowhood distinctly proclaim the Lordship of God, and that union of love with Him is the true end of human life.

## *Family Groups*

### SIGNS OF GRACE

For the historian of family groups 1949 will be a conspicuous year. It was then that they suddenly came forth out of the shadows. People took an interest in them; they began to speak of them. The attention of the general public was aroused.

The year is not actually the birthdate of family groups but it marks their public appearance. For more than ten years before they had an intense and quiet existence, a little like the young Christian communities in Imperial Rome.

In this phase of its slow maturation I could not find more than two articles concerning these groups of families in the Catholic Press. In one of these, in 1944, Father de Lestapis dedicated an enthusiastic and I would say, prophetic, article to them under the evocative title, "Toward a New Christianity through Family Groups." He predicted what today's efforts would mean, God willing, in fifty years.

But it is especially in the last three years that we have witnessed mushrooming of family groups in France and the Union Francaise, in Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Egypt, Canada, and doubtlessly in other places. (Since this article was

first published in 1949 such family groups have developed in many countries.)

If these family groups were the invention of a man, or if their development was due to publicity or arbitrary initiatives, we could dispense with them. But they "began spontaneously and without preconceived ideas" (Father Rouquette). Considering the amplitude of the phenomenon, the rapidity of its expansion and the numerous marks of Christianity, we must conclude that it is a manifestation of an interior compulsion, a sign of grace. Those who search out vital currents in the Church follow the developments of the family groups with great interest. Where do they come from? Where are they going? Where do they belong in relation to the great movements of thought and action of our times?

First of all, let us ask if there is a relationship between this germination of family groups throughout the Christian world and reflections on a family spirituality. These psychological, philosophical, and theological reflections have for some years pursued the idea of a deeper conjugal and familial spirituality. This work of theologians, philosophers, and priests concerned with the movement is part of the impulse that originated the formation of the family groups. It is "one of the most important signs of the spiritual history of our times," says Father Rouquette.

Have the family groups been created by this speculative effort? Or conversely has it been provoked, encouraged and supported by the family groups. Is there a relationship between them? I believe that it is an interaction and a reciprocal influence rather than a dependence. Without doubt the reviews and publications on conjugal spirituality favored the birth of these family groups and the care of their interior life. And conversely the desire of these homemakers to live an integral Christianity obligated the researchers to keep pace.

These two efforts, if not dependent upon one another, have perhaps a common source.

For thirty years to educators who followed young Chris-



tians through engagement and marriage one thing was obvious. The young people have reconciled love and marriage. They do not subscribe to the oft repeated phrase: "Love is one thing, marriage another." For them marriage and love are one and the same thing. Since they have not squandered their wealth of love during the years preceding marriage, they approach it with a young heart. It should be remarked that they marry much earlier than before. The woman the young man married was the first one he had loved. And they wed precisely because they loved each other. Certainly they were not all perfect nor did they all come to marriage pure. But those who knew weakness did not cease to think correctly; their weakness did not, in general, falsify their conception of life.

It is no small thing that this alliance of love and marriage has finally been renewed. The historian of religious feeling will be compelled to say it was one of the active forces in our century.

This same Christian generation arrived at adulthood with a living faith. The young people of today are not satisfied to merely be attached to their religion by tradition and conformism. They abandon what is in their eyes only formalism in tradition and conformism, and they deepen their faith in order to adhere to it with a personal motivation. This deliberate adhesion is much more than a simple acquiescence of spirit; it is love, a "gift" of self to a living person—Christ. Thus they come to marriage with two loves in their hearts—human love and the love of Christ.

They go to the theologians to learn how to live well with both loves and that is the origin of the elaboration of a conjugal and familial spirituality. They group together to aid each other in fulfilling this spirituality and this marks the origin of the family groups. Cardinal Suhard, who followed the inquiries and experiments with his extraordinary gift of attention and sympathy wrote in his letter of May 7, 1945 to *l'Anneau d'Or*, "They expect from their clergy a solid teach-

ing, not only casuistry and ethics, but a dogma of marriage and education, an asceticism and a mystique for their state of life.”

This double endeavor of which we speak—the effort of Christian thinkers in search of a conjugal and familial spirituality and the effort of families to live this spirituality—is understood perfectly only if you place yourself in the wider movement of thought and life of which Gustave Thibon has written so excellently in *Ce Que Dieu a Uni*, “the descent of the sacred into the profane, the eternal into the temporal, of spirit into life. . . .”

Thibon noted the psychological and social aspects of this phenomenon. On the psychological side: in man, spirit and flesh are reconciled. The spiritual and the vital are allied. (Father Zundel explains the same idea: “It is not a question of knowing what liberty the flesh can authorize, but what sanctity it can assume.”) It is the whole man who is restored to God. In its social aspect: a sanctity which, until the present time seemed to call for a retreat from the world affirms more and more its rights as a citizen of the world. The temporal is not, for Christians, simply the lesser part: it must be regained, put into the great current which carries all creation toward God. Christianity today is trying to establish the reign of Christ everywhere. “He must prevail,” it cries, following St. Paul. Not only in the cloisters, and not only in the churches, but in all the activities of man. Isn’t this what Catholic Action in its multiple forms has undertaken?

It would be very naive to think that this evangelization of the temporal would take place without some hard knocks and combat. The temporal is still very much in the clutches of the “prince of this world” who has no intention of relinquishing his prize. Do you think that the world of work will be led to Christ without a violent effort, that the world of capital can be easily converted to the Gospel? Or the world of politics, science, or art? This reconquest of nature by grace de-

mands that sanctity must be present everywhere in the modern world.

The whole problem is: Will there be lay saints? Men completely dedicated to Christ, clothed in His charity, moved by His Spirit: workers, farmers, heads of industry, politicians and artists who are saints?

Each century has its type of sanctity. At the birth of the Church and for three hundred years it was a witness of blood by the martyrs. For centuries after the persecutions the monasteries were the schools of sanctity. It is well to note that the new forms of sanctity do not supplant those which preceded them (even though they often eclipse them for a time). In the thirteenth century, when Christianity lived comfortably and churches and monasteries were honored and richly endowed, sanctity took on a role of poverty with the mendicant orders. During the Renaissance sanctity manifested itself in the great mission spirit which carried the religious to the New World and to the four corners of the earth. Following this effort, congregations founded to educate the young and to help all those in physical and moral distress multiplied. In the 19th century women departed for the foreign mission fields.

May we not think that the 20th century opens an era of sanctity for the married laity?

It is not easy to be a saint in the midst of the world. For some years now more and more Christians have accepted the responsibility of being present everywhere in the City. But how many have lost the enthusiasm and purity of the Christianity of their youth! Their hearts were not strong enough to be secure themselves.

Where can these witnesses of Christ be formed, these saints of our modern times who are called to take such risks? In their parishes, in the Catholic Action movement, in retreats, in spiritual guidance, assuredly. Married Christians cannot remain isolated for the hard work of sanctity. They must find spiritual formation appropriate to their state of life. For my

part, I believe that family groups must preoccupy themselves with being, above all, schools of sanctity where families return regularly to renew themselves in fraternal friendship, to draw new strength from prayer and meditation, to assure themselves that they are not alone in fighting the hard battle.

The first Christian communities who shared their material and spiritual goods inspired people to say, with envy, "See how they love one another." The spectacle of their charity was overwhelming. Why shouldn't family groups today exercise the same attraction for their contemporaries?

For many reasons our parishes today cannot realize a fraternal community, mainly because they are so large. It is infinitely easier to achieve, and much more on a human scale, for groups of about six or so families.

Thus Christianity is reconstituted from the bottom up: the family in groups of families bound one to another in the bosom of the parish. Thus we see groups of families recognizing their parish responsibilities, collaborating eagerly with their clergy in the liturgical life, in apostolic action with non-believers. In parishes where there are no family groups, the efforts of the priest, lacking both support and collaboration, are often less effective. Sometimes of course it is the priest who fails family groups because he does not understand their aspirations. But when the efforts of the pastor and the faithful are joined, no hope is too great.

The history of the Church teaches us that more than once great spiritual impulses miscarried. They were rivers lost in the sands. It is important to identify and help these impulses. If they are not aided, family groups run the danger of not recognizing the impulse which arouses them, of misapprehending their mission, of being held back by indetermination.

People should be careful of putting obstacles in the way of these groups under pretext of testing the spirit which created them. One ought not to imitate those parents who want to "prove" the priestly vocation of their son, and create a thousand difficulties, declaring that if his vocation is authentic, he



will be able to resist all obstacles. How naive! How can they ignore the fact that many vocations fail because they were not taken seriously, protected and encouraged?

A family group is a "base" of operations, a point of departure which should distrust the constant temptation to retreat into itself. The day that it becomes no more than a little ghetto, its mission will be betrayed; it will have lost its reason for existence.

To avoid such a failure, should there be a federation of all family groups which would impose forms and methods elaborated *a priori*? God save us from that! Nothing would be more dangerous than such a militarization. Moreover, many groups are already attached to different organizations. This multiplicity is a safeguard. Nothing is more useful than competition.

### THE TRIUMPH OF CHARITY

Family groups must make a constant effort to develop fraternal charity. Little by little, as families help each other and exercise fraternal love, their love comes nearer to winning the home, the neighborhood, and the country.

It is important to build a church: day and night the Eucharistic Christ will live there. It is no less necessary for Christianity to possess groups in which charity lives; it is another way of making Christ present to men. "Where fraternal love is found, there is God," chants the liturgy of Holy Thursday. "When two or three are gathered together for my sake," promised Jesus Christ, "there I am in the midst of them."

The presence of Christ means the presence of the Church. Wherever Christians love each other, there is the Church, providing only that this little community wishes to offer itself to the service of the Church.

When they are united, the Christians' power of intercession is an extraordinary power. "If two of you shall agree on earth

about anything at all for which they ask it shall be done for them by my Father in heaven.”

Fraternal love has an exceptional fertility. Round about it, evil draws back, the desert flowers. A pastor of the suburbs of Paris said to me, “When a street of my parish is morally unhealthy I ask a Christian family to come to live there, to simply give witness of their fraternal love. At the end of six months, there is a new atmosphere among the inhabitants of the street.

A fraternal community is God’s most important message to men, the revelation of the intimate life of God, His life of the Trinity. There is no discourse on God which is more eloquent and persuasive than the spectacle of Christians who “are one” as the Father and the Son are one.

Nothing glorifies God better than Christian unity. It is the great masterpiece of divine grace. God manifests His goodness there, finding in it a reflection of His Trinitarian life. “The Heavens sing of the glory of God”; fraternal love sings of eternal love.

May this be your goal: to make of your group a triumph of charity.

#### UNITED IN MY NAME . . .

On June 6, 1956, during a pilgrimage to Lourdes, I was talking with one of the group while walking toward the grotto. The speaker expressed his amazement at the rare quality of the relations established on the train in the first hour of conversation between the different members of his pilgrimage who were strangers to each other. He marveled at it, but he could not explain it. I suggested the following explanation.

Human relations are of diverse types, depending on whether they are founded on relationship, camaraderie, friendship, sport. Each has its characteristic note, its own quality. There is another type of human relations, specifically Christian. What gives them an exceptional quality is the value of what is held

in common: not only thoughts, tastes, and human emotions, but the spiritual life. These persons love Christ and have such wonderful trust that they openly disclose their love to one another and the joys, sorrows and aspirations engendered by it. And how impressive it is to perceive in other persons the echoes of grace, the thoughts and ideas of a soul in accord with grace.

What is more, the promise of Christ is realized: "When two or three are gathered together for my sake, there I am in the midst of them." His mysterious presence betrays itself; the peace, joy, and light of the exchange can have no other explanation.

Isn't this the quality of love which explains the influence of the first Christians on those around them? "See how they love one another!" Their radiance still touches us after twenty centuries.

The ambition of the family movement is to establish this quality of human relations at the heart of each group and in each family.

Common prayer, mutual aid and effort, exchange of views: are so many ways by which you are united on the spiritual level "in the name of Christ." The temptation to remain on the plane of human friendship is often great and we must constantly react against it: Christian friendship is a difficult achievement.

Days of recollection, discussion days, and other ways offered to couples to aid them in finding each other in Christ are a great help. Human respect, timidity, the heart's avarice, everyday life, and the demands of the flesh are all obstacles to a spiritual union. How many, even among the best, pass their whole life without having the experience of this intimacy in Christ: they have everything in common, except the most precious thing, their life with Christ.

## ONLY PARENTS

One family said to me recently, "they don't believe in love any more in the family groups. You no longer find couples there, only parents."

Of course I did not take this comment too seriously. However, I asked myself if it did not contain a partial truth and I talked it over with one of the responsible members of the movement. Gently, and a bit cautiously, he replied to me: "You don't suppose that after fifteen years of marriage and seven children, we still act like turtle doves? But that doesn't keep us from understanding each other." I found little reassurance in his use of the verb "understand" where I had expected him to say "love."

Family groups are based upon a certain conception of love. More exactly, they rest on the profound conviction that conjugal love is a magnificent divine reality: the work of the sixth day crowning the pyramid of creatures, the most essential and fascinating symbol of the union of love which God wished to contract with each man, which both reveals and realizes this union. If you have arrived at the point where you simply "understand one another," I ask you to reread the chapter on "Vocation of Love." At least reread the first lines of the charter of the *Equipes Notre-Dame*: "The families of the group wish that their love, sanctified by the sacrament of marriage, be a praise of God and a witness to men, proving that Christ has saved love."

Above all, don't lie to yourselves. If you do not have faith in conjugal love, don't call it wisdom or maturity. If your love is waning, don't excuse yourself under the pretext that there are so many more pressing, if not more important, things: the education of growing children, and multiple social responsibilities. Your children have an imperative need of the conjugal love which gave them birth, and it alone can sustain their growth. Whatever be your success or position, your human value is in danger if you discredit your love. And don't be



too quick to pretend that at least your spiritual life gains by the loss of your human love. You don't construct one upon the ruins of the other.

The very world around you is frustrated if your love grows cold. This world is not far from despairing of love, and of being absorbed in material things; it has a right to your living proof of the existence of love. It needs a glimpse of divine love shining through a human love to learn from you that Christ came to save love. Will you refuse to give this witness?

I am aware that love, in evolving, changes its countenance. Nor do I ask you to love as you did at twenty, but rather with a love that is each day truer and more profound. Never acquiesce to the decline of your love, never say your love is mature if it is sick unto death.

### **CATHOLICS, WHERE ARE YOU?**

Are you Catholic? Is your family group Catholic?

Don't be too quick to answer.

It is not sufficient to be inscribed on the parish registers as being Catholic; you must be permeated by the Catholicity of the Church. Calling a man or a group "Catholic" is true to the extent that Catholicity of the Church exists in them. To help you answer my question I will try to set forth the essential notes of this Catholicity.

First of all let us discard a false definition: it is not because it is propagated throughout the world that our Church is called Catholic. "The Church," writes Father de Lubac, "was already Catholic Pentecost morning, even though all its members were in one small room."

To say that the Church is Catholic is to recognize God's will to bring humanity together in one Body; it affirms that the spiritual richness of the Church suits all men without exception, that in it and in it alone they can and must find the fullness of their human and religious aspirations, forming one whole, yet not losing their personality or originality.

Our Church is at once both marvelously one and diverse. Think of its various rites: Latin, Greek, Maronite, Coptic . . . of the multiple spiritualities: Benedictine, Franciscan, Jesuit . . . How much more admirable this diversity in unity will be, how much more striking the Catholicity of the Church will appear on the day that the great Indian, Chinese, and Arab civilizations abandon what is decadent or erroneous and enter into the Church with their immense cultural and spiritual riches!

With this definition in mind we come back again to our question. A group is truly Catholic when it has a fraternal interest in all races and civilizations, in all the social settings in which the doctrine of Christ is unknown, when it impatiently desires their entrance into the Church and bends all its talents to this end—for love of them, but first of all for love of God, so that in the Church the sanctity of Christ will be resplendent in always more varied forms.

By contrast, the group which excludes from its thought, love, and prayers this or that a milieu, race, or civilization no longer merits the title of catholic, their Catholic spirit having been supplanted by the spirit of a sect: the two terms are opposite and contradictory.

Still more concretely: the family group which closes itself off from a couple because they are from another social milieu, of different education, or who refuse to welcome a family because they are strangers or converts from Judaism or Protestantism, also betray the Catholicity of the Church. Racist, sectarian, yes, but no longer Catholic.

Ask yourself if the Catholicity of the Church is present, living, and inspiring in your group as well as in your families, or if this sectarian spirit is not already stunting the growth of your hearts.

**A SELFISH SPIRITUALITY**

After several months of life together . . . disillusionment.

It should not be surprising since they entered into marriage to *take* and not to *give*.

Or take the militant who leaves his Catholic Action group after several years of enthusiasm, saying, "I no longer find anything there." He, too, is more concerned with taking than giving.

A young family leaves for South America. Their parting words are, "It is no longer possible to live a full life in France."

If the government decides on a new tax, it announces remedial, stringent measures. On all sides people protest. They don't ask if the interest of the country is at stake. They simply say, "It annoys me."

With God Himself they come to take and not to give. "What good is it to continue to go to Communion and to Confession? They don't help me. . . ."

And so it is with the woman who no longer cares for her family, the militant for his movement, the parishoner for his parish, the Frenchman for his country, man for his Creator. They are a race of profiteers. The measure of their attachment is the profit derived. Yet they do not have the frankness to admit it.

I do not propose that you make a vast examination of conscience: Am I a parasite or a good servant in my home, my parish, my profession, my country, and in the Church? This important problem cannot be seriously treated in a short bill of particulars.

As a more modest goal I suggest each family to ask themselves: why did I enter the group? To take or to give?

Then I ask each group: why do you adhere to the movement? Is it only to be on the inside and to belong, to receive a magazine, to profit from the experiences of others? If so, you are not in the right place.

Meditate on this page of Saint-Exupery in *Pilote de Guerre*:

"I no longer inhabited this community of men as one of its architects. I benefited from its peace, its tolerance, its well being. I knew nothing about it, except that I lived there like a sexton or as a man who rents chairs. As a parasite. As a defeated person.

"It is like passengers on a boat: they use the boat without giving anything to it. In the shelter of the salons, which they believe to be invulnerable, they pursue their games. They are unaware of the groaning timbers under the eternal pressure of the sea. What right will they have to complain, if the storm tears the ship apart?"

But if you answer, "We wish to participate in the great task undertaken by the family groups, to establish the reign of Christ in families, to make sanctity take root in the midst of the modern world, and not to seem withdrawn like monks, to be good workers in the City, robust apostles of Christ," then you are on the right track and your group will be useful to all.

When you have comprehended the true spirit of the movement you will not have any difficulty consenting to the discipline. Your reaction will not be, "The rules bother me; I can't stand them," but "since the decisions and program are useful to the progress of the movement, I'm for them."

Do you understand now why we cannot allow individual groups to do as they please about following the charter? It is not that in itself this or that lapse would be a catastrophe. But it is a symptom: the group entered into the movement not to give, but to take. And that is a grave matter: the group is not fulfilling its proper function in the movement. Happily, there are not too many selfish groups.

### **YOUR PRIESTS ARE MINISTERS OF THE WORD**

Never before have literature, the theater, and the movies been so interested in the priest. But one must admit that they pre-



sent little but anecdotal or exceptional aspects of the mission and life of the priest: they overlook the essential part—the mystery of the priest.

Do you do the same thing? I wondered about this during the course of recent conversations. It would be regrettable if our groups, which believe very strongly in the grandeur of marriage, and try to deepen the understanding of this “great sacrament,” had a less enlightened estimation of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Here it is obviously not a question of considering the mission of the priest in all its fullness. I simply wish to recall to your attention a sentence from one of our recent monthly letters: “Your priests are not only the dispensers of the sacraments of Christ, but also of the Word of God; do you call on their advice sufficiently?”

Christ’s mission is to sanctify. Thanks to the powers He has conferred on it, His Church also has this mission, as do the ministers of the Church. Priests have two privileged ways to accomplish their mission: sacraments and the word.

I will not discuss the sacraments here, but the ministry of the word. This word of the priest, like the Word of Christ, has a supernatural efficacy: “Who hears you, hears me.” Still it must be received with the spirit of faith, the same spirit of faith with which you receive the sacraments. Then the word comes alive and is effective, making a living faith surge forth. Human qualities do not give him this power, but the Holy Spirit which animates and enlivens the word and makes it fruitful in hearts.

You miss this supernatural meaning if you value his words according to the norms accorded to all other human words.

I hope that you will keep a very high esteem for this sacerdotal word at your monthly reunions and that you hear it with conviction, to renew and enrich the faith of the group.

Does this mean that we must renounce our method of exchange of views and ask the priest for a conference? Certainly not. Our methods are efficacious. It is very useful to study in

advance the subject which is the order of the day, to arrive prepared with discoveries and problems, to exchange views between yourselves and so permit the priest to communicate His instructions in proportion to the preparation of alert spirits thirsting for greater light. You are hungry. Ask the priest who possesses the Bread of the Word to break it with you.

### THE LAST PRIEST

I finished reading "The Power and the Glory," the admirable novel by Graham Greene. The action takes place in Mexico. It is the story of a priest, the last priest—all the others had been massacred or had fled. Sad minister of God, lax, and alcoholic. . . . How is it that he, who had a price on his head, was still there? Poor hunted beast, why doesn't he escape to the frontier? It isn't only that he lacks the desire to do so. It is not courage that keeps him there—nor any other human virtue. But no more than a magnetized needle can resist pointing north can he withdraw from the attraction of those people—here a brave woman dying, there a handful of peasants—who are famished for the Bread which only his consecrated hands can break. There is in him a strength more powerful than his sin and his laxity, a strength which does not cease and, seemingly in spite of him, brings him back to his pole: the grace of his priesthood.

But I don't intend to recount the plot to you. I only want to tell you a thought that occurred to me while I was reading.

You are wealthy, wealthy in many things! *Rich in priests.* Have you never reflected on it? If you have difficulty understanding what I am trying to say, ask the prisoners who, in their incarceration went long months deprived of all priestly visits. They will tell you that there is a hunger of soul much more torturing than bodily hunger, a spiritual deprivation infinitely more difficult to support than the privation of material goods. Those who have had the bitter experience of poverty understand their richness and their privilege.

But there is an obligation to wealth. On the last day you will be asked, "What have you done with the talents given to you? What have you done with your priests?" Can't you imagine the immense number of people confronting you—the ignorant, the unhappy, the pagans—accusing you of having deprived them of the good news by confiscating the priests who could have brought it to them.

I won't speak of the thousand and one ways of monopolizing priests. I only want to discuss your relation to the chaplain of your group. Do you think it is normal that he consecrate one or two of his evenings each month to your families? And does he have the right (I don't say the duty) to respond to your call? (I know priests who ask themselves in anguish: Should I still go to those who have received so much when so many others are waiting?)

If the priest thinks of you as collaborators giving witness in the milieu where he himself cannot penetrate, preparing the way for him, prolonging and multiplying in some way his priesthood, then fear not: his presence among you is justified. If you have frequently offered his priesthood a great field of action, enabling him to meet with those that he otherwise could not have met; if you bring those who doubt, those who search, then you are not miserly or like the rich man in the Gospel. But before reaching this conclusion it would be well to make a serious examination of conscience.

Greene has suggested another reflection. I repeat it to you without any comment. To the rich, one gives refined nourishment; the beggar joyously eats his crust of bread. Rich in priests, you often become very difficult: he must deliver discourses flattering your intellectual tastes, exceptional fervor, and rare qualities. If he does not offer these he is quickly scorned by you; this is because you do not first of all seek the *priest* in the priest. Does it take a revolution, as in Mexico, to make you weep compassionately, kissing the consecrated hand of a poor alcoholic priest?



## *The Highest Service*

### THE FAMILY AND THE PRIEST

It happened many years ago at the end of the first family retreat that I ever preached. For three days I had preached to fifteen families about their vocation and their mission in the Church. They had spoken to me with marvelous trust and confidence. Some revealed themselves as generous with the gift of God, with never a thought of cheating His law; others had confided their difficulties and arguments. Before their courage and humility I had a profound admiration; I discovered the grandeur of human love animated by the grace of God. As they left, I knew my gratitude to them was certainly as deep as theirs to me. With a smile, one of them thanked me: "Now, Marguerite and I know what it means to be married!" I replied, "And I understand the priest's mission to families."

When the retreat ended, I passed the night with a friend who had invited me to preach. As I was closing the blinds in my room, I noticed the lights through the trees. It evoked the memory of my retreatants; they have returned to their homes, and certainly this evening there is in their homes a



more ardent human love and a greater love of God. It was then that a spontaneous meditation made me see clearly the affinity which exists between marriage and the priesthood, the bond between the priest and the Christian family: "They are happy in their good homes. . . . And it is this happiness, this plentitude that Christ asks his priests to sacrifice. A demanding calling! . . . How is it that he who has renounced love and paternity is precisely the person who has the power to rekindle the flame of the family? What is this paradox? . . . No, not a paradox, but a mysterious correspondence between Holy Orders and Matrimony. If the priest abstains from founding a family, this does not mean he disdains love and a family; it is not scorn but self-sacrifice. He is the lamb marked for sacrifice, so that God will bless the whole flock. Thus the renunciation of one explains the purity and the fervor of love in the others. With these perceptives, it is evident that priests and family must understand and help each other. Isn't it only proper that families have an ardent gratitude to the priest? Don't they know what a sacrifice he has made so that their own family life will be happier and more intense? And they should pray that the friendship of Christ may transfigure the solitude of the apostle.

The priest for his part will not be jealous of the happiness of families and of the human plentitude of their lives; he will rejoice to see the fruitfulness of the divine blessings which it is his vocation to solicit for them from morning to night by the celebration of the Mass and the recitation of the breviary.

At Mass, the union must be ever closer. When the priest presents the host and chalice to the Lord at the Offertory the people offer the priest and pray for him: "Receive him, Lord: it is the gift of the human family, and just as in a moment the host will become the living Christ in his hands, we ask you that this child of man and woman be in the midst of us another Christ, sacrificed, praying, pardoning, blessing."

Why do the relations of priest and the Christian family rarely reach this level? Without doubt because each more or

less ignores the life and the ideal of the other, as if the two vocations were in two different worlds.

To initiate and aid the growth of esteem and mutual love, priests must meditate on the grandeurs of marriage, and families must come to know the nature of the priestly vocation.

### *The Mystery of the Priest*

If you want to understand the priest you must begin by opening the Gospels and studying the life of Christ, who alone merits perfectly the title of priest.

To say of Jesus Christ that He is the Son of God informs us of His origin and reveals that everything in Him is gratitude and filial piety returned to the Father, but that does not teach us anything of His mission among men. But to say that He is a priest, this one word sums up the secret of His earthly ministry.

Priest, reconciler, mediator, and similar words are the keys to the mystery of Christ. To restore the alliance between God and humanity, for whom He has obtained pardon by His sacrifice, to reestablish a violated order as one reconstructs a ruined cathedral, He Himself being the first rock—that is the priestly mission of Our Lord, the light by which we must contemplate the events of His Life.

The youngsters of Palestine follow him and harass him; he welcomes them, caresses their touseled heads and blesses them: *to bless* is a priestly function. In contact with purity personified a woman suddenly discovers the blackness of her heart; she cries, repents, hopes. "Your faith has saved you," Jesus said to her. "Your sins are forgiven you": *to pardon* is a priestly function. Seated on the mountain, the master addresses a crowd of men who have left their daily tasks to hear him; he preaches an unforgettable sermon: *to preach*, is a priestly function. After a tiring day, he bids his disciples to take a much needed rest; but He Himself, responding to a call from the deepest recesses of His heart, leaves the village and takes the mountain path. In the solitude of the crags He talks to the

Father: *to pray* is a priestly function. He presides over the Last Supper, He takes bread, breaks it, and gives it to His apostles; at the same time He gives them important instructions: *to preside, to govern* are priestly functions. The next day, the cross serving as an altar, He offers Himself in sacrifice for the love of the Father and for love of sinners, for the glory of God and for the happiness of man: *to offer sacrifice* is the highest of all priestly functions.

One afternoon in the springtime the apostles met with Jesus on a hill of Judea. When they saw Him there they fell down to worship (Mt. 28-17). They heard the words which decided their future, their life, and their death: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Then Jesus lifted up his hands over them "and it came to pass as he blessed them, that He parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24-51). How evocative are these words of St. Luke; they let us see that the Ascension does not interrupt the benediction and that even in heaven Jesus Christ does not cease to impose His hands on His apostles. It is quite different from a simple touching gesture. It is a taking of possession. A mysterious power is communicated to them, which profoundly transforms their spiritual being, which binds them and adapts them to Christ. Until then Christ availed Himself of His own body to meet men, to speak to them and sanctify them, henceforth He will use His apostles to extend Himself, for they are not just priests in His image nor by His side, but for Him and in Him. Branches of the same tree, their strength comes from the trunk.

In their turn the apostles will impose their hands and create new priests, who will also impose hands. The branches multiply but form only one tree. The priests multiply, but there is only one priesthood, one sole priestly activity, and that is Jesus Christ who exercises it by His priests. In St. Paul, the

tireless traveler, in St. Augustine preaching to his people of Hippo, in Jean Marie Vianney confessing sixteen hours a day, in Charles de Foucauld praying in the heart of the desert, in the priests of genius and great virtue, in the priests poor in human gifts, even in the priest who is a sinner, it is Christ who acts, who does not cease to bless, to pardon, to counsel, to instruct and to sanctify. If the impossible happened and Christ ceased to exist, instantly the acts of the priests would become vain, their word ineffectual: the member is dead and immobile when the soul is gone from the body. But we need not fear this, for Jesus has promised: "I will be with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world."

The priests are therefore Jesus Christ perpetuating Himself and propagating Himself. He must multiply Himself to be everything to everyone. The institution of the priesthood is the invention of His love in order that He may come to meet us. How could you understand otherwise: you only need observe and hear the priests to be convinced that by their actions another operates, that by their lips another speaks. Who, therefore, if not Christ, can say: "*I absolve you.*" "*This is my body, this is my blood?*"

Christians whose faith is pure, whose regard is simple, are not hard pressed to discover this mysterious presence of Christ in His priest. They accept it without concealment, just as they believe without objection that under the appearances of bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ. Why must so many others hesitate, rebelling before the mystery of the priest, trying to reduce him to human dimensions? Oh, I well know what difficulties beset them: whereas Christ is simply concealed under the appearance of the host, He is more or less disfigured and betrayed by the humanity of the priest.

For on that day when He asked us, His priests, to loan Him our miserable weak humanity, bruised and marked with the stigma of sin, in order to keep alive and continue His priestly ministry among men, don't you think we trembled ourselves



at His imprudence? "You wish to make yourself known to men and to attract them to you, and you clothe yourself in my miserable self! You wish to love men and you borrow my avaricious and rebellious heart!" Don't you think that our souls are torn by knowing our insufficiencies and our mediocrities, which shock our brethern and risk turning them from the very grace which—in spite of everything—we bear to them? There are times when we could cry out: "Yes, I am a sinner like yourself, I well know that everything in me betrays Him who inhabits me, that I am not transparent to His light and His love. But I also know that by me Christ comes to meet you, that I am the depository and the treasury of His gifts and that you must come to me, His priest, to find them!"

Do I surprise you by admitting that the priest dreads attracting you by his human gifts almost as much as repelling you by his defects? For his mission is not to attract the hearts of men to himself but to Him whom He wishes to serve. Whoever is the priest—whether a Lacordaire or a Don Bosco, his true grandeur does not appear in his works. It is not manifest in his words. It is not visible to the senses. It is completely interior. It is supernatural, it cannot be known and revealed except by faith. Happy are those who know how to find the priest, the unique priest, Jesus Christ—in the man, in spite of his defects or his gifts.

### *The Mission of the Priest*

When you realize that by the priest Jesus Christ continues to exercise His priestly activity, it is easy to admit that the same term of *mediator* is suitable to define both the mission of Christ and that of His priest. The word immediately characterizes the priest: he is the man who remains in the world not to separate but to unite, the man who goes from the One to others, from God to men to effect a reconciliation and an alliance. It is true that in general the peace between God and man has been concluded by the death of Christ; but it must be made effective between God and each man in particular.

This peace, moreover, is quite another thing than the current sense of the word; it is love, communion, an "espousal" says the Bible, between man and God.

The term mediator has been able to resist better than many words the profanation of time. No other intermediary has the right to this title. It belongs to people who work for the reconciliation of those whom passion or opinions have separated. One would wish its deeper meaning to be reserved to those men of great heart whose highest joy is to effect agreement, to make others understand and love one another. The priest is one of these men. Two loves inhabit his heart, the love of God and the love of men. This is why you sometimes see him involved with his brothers, sharing their existence, assuming their pains and their joys, making himself a worker with the workers, or again by prayer retiring to the intimacy of His God. To men he speaks of God, to God he speaks of men, pursuing a single end, the union of God with men.

These two loves are made one in the heart of the priest. When he teaches the catechism to children, pardons sinners, visits the sick and the dying, or as a missionary, crosses the desert or hacks a path through a virgin forest, it is not a philanthropy—the love of man for his fellowmen—which inspires him. Doubtlessly he has pity for the destitution, the suffering, and the despair of so many souls. But a still more powerful source animates him. One day at prayer he heard the heart of God beat, he discovered the immense paternal love impatient to communicate itself. Since then, he has known no rest; a strength carries him to those who believe themselves to be orphans, not knowing the good tidings.

Even though he knows himself to be the bearer of this most precious message, the priest approaches men with trembling. To speak of God, what a responsibility! will he find the words to evoke the true face of the Father? These men to whom he speaks have been so often beguiled by false prophets and deceived in their quest for happiness and the search for the Absolute. . . . Won't they be sceptical and leave?

At the sight of hearts open, thirsting for the grace of the sacraments and of the word of God the priest feels a mysterious joy which resembles no other. The sacraments and the word of God are an answer to anguishing questions, a rule of life, nourishments of souls. They are his to communicate; life is in him and he communicates it. If he tried to express what transpires in words, he could only say, with St. Paul, "I have begotten divine life in you . . . Without doubt you will have many teachers, but you will only have one father."

Thus the priest who has renounced human paternity experiences a spiritual paternity whose joy and sorrows mothers and fathers certainly can glimpse. Like all paternity, that of the priest is soon beset with anxieties. The divine life in the heart of neophytes is fragile and menaced; after giving life he must protect it, nourish it, and guide it. It is a difficult mission! At certain times, the priest is overwhelmed by his task. But then he is reminded that a paternal love watches over him, too. If he can find in his poor human heart such resources of love for sinners, how can he doubt the solicitude and mercy of God?

Prayer has a large place in his life. He has recourse to it to renew his courage and to rediscover the first impulse. He seeks it as the factory worker seeks out the peace of his home. He has gone to men, his hands bearing divine graces; he returns, his heart full of questions, the distress, the good actions and the sins of his brothers. At night, when men and beasts rest sleeping in the city, a light shines at the window of the presbytery; the pastor keeps watch and prays. He pleads, intercedes, and offers himself for all the inhabitants. Like Moses, to whom Yahweh offered another kingdom, he refused to give up the responsibility of "a stiff-necked nation."

St. Ambrose admirably explains what the priest's prayer must be: "Lord, if you deign to cast a favorable regard on these offerings, I give you the tribulations of the people, the perils of the nation, the lamentations of captives, the misery of orphans, the needs of travelers, the destitution of the sick,

the despair of the infirm, the exhaustion of the old, the sighs of the young, the desires of virgins, the tears of widows.”

But it is at the altar that the priest is fully mediator. The Mass is the culminating point of his priestly life. Truly, all his ministry has no other end but to lead all those in his care to this rendezvous with God. At the Offertory, when he presents the bread and wine of sacrifice, it is not only something that he offers in the name of the faithful, but they themselves. At the Communion, it is wholly God who gives Himself by the hands of His servant; it is here that God and man finally meet in intimate union. For the moment the mediator is no more than a witness, marveling before these men and women who have found their Father, who carry God away in their soul, and whom God in turn carries away in His heart.

Now that we have examined the mystery of the priest and his mission, it is time to consider what place the Christian family must give to the priest in their thoughts, devotions, and prayer. But isn't it up to you, rather than to me, to answer this question?

What does a family think of the priest who often comes to visit them? There are homes in which the adults have a polite and easy manner with the priest which sometimes conceals their real opinion of him, but the childrens' attitude is revealing.

There are other homes where he is received with a true cordiality—not very different, however, from the manner in which any good friend of the family is welcomed. Leaving them, he often experiences an uneasiness. They have called upon his human gifts and not his supernatural gifts. It is to his person, and not to the ministry of the Lord that they are attached. They do not have a true understanding of his priesthood.

By contrast, when he reads confidence and respect in the direct gaze of the children, he knows that the parents have a profound comprehension of the priesthood and that they have



inculcated it in their sons and daughters. In a farmer's home, the head of the family before the meal asks one of his three sons to express a welcome to the envoy of the Lord; in another home the priest is invited to bless the table and to lead the evening prayer; as the priest departs from a professor's home, parents and children kneel for his blessing.

If he has a closer association with these families the priest will see that they follow with attentive sympathy the efforts of the clergy to establish the reign of Christ in the parish as well as in the mission lands, that they never miss an occasion to take the children to see a missionary depart or to be present at the profoundly instructive ceremony of an ordination, usually ignored by so many Christians.

If he reads their hearts, he will discover that the fathers and mothers ardently wish that Christ come under their roof to recruit his apostles. It is a humble desire, with a certain resignation, for they well know that it is the choice of Christ and not that of the parents. But they also know that it is their task to create a climate where vocations can germinate and flourish. Perhaps one day they will have the happiness of receiving the first blessing from a newly ordained son. Then, kneeling before him, they will render homage to that higher paternity which has just invested the fruit of their love.

When the priest leaves such a family to return to his apostolic task, he feels himself to be stronger, he knows that the retreat he is going to preach is sanctioned by them, he knows that the dangerously ill mother of whom he had spoken will be prayed for by them. They are associated in his ministry and he in return adopts the family in his prayers and his Mass.

Because he knows that these families practice a Christian hospitality, the priest will not hesitate to send people to them—a catechumen who must be helped in his preparation for baptism, a lost person who will only find equilibrium in a healthy family, an engaged couple who seeks counsel. Often the success of his actions is precarious when they are not

supported and completed by the devotions of a family. He fears for the new convert, the isolated young family, the vocation menaced by a hostile environment.

To esteem, welcome, and aid the priest is good. But it is not everything. The families must also pray for priests, and most of all, for the parish clergy. Isn't it logical to offer this help to those who have consecrated their heart and time to you? Why is it that the faithful too often are estranged from their clergy, more prompt to criticize them than to serve? And when a priest fails they are indignant. First of all they should ask themselves what their part of the responsibility should be.

Do they help him and protect him by their prayers? Do they ignore the fact that every leader is a man especially marked by the enemy?

Still rarer are those who pray for their bishop, in spite of the invitation to do so in the memento of the Mass. They speak of him as a functionary, an administrator, yet he has received the plenitude of the priesthood; almost everyone seems to ignore the fact that he is the spiritual head and father of the diocesan church, the authentic successor of the apostles, responsible for them before the Father.

In conclusion, I ask you to remember always the Holy Father, the priest in whose face Catholics can contemplate "the solicitude of all the churches." Jesus Christ, on the mountain top, wept over the city: "How often would I have gathered my children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings. . . ." A similar sorrow tears the heart of the Pope as he regards a humanity divided and menaced by catastrophe.

### **NO ONE AS MUCH A FATHER**

It is December 20, 1950. The Pope has just entered into the basilica, which is filled with the faithful. From my place I cannot see him. But at the rear of the Church an enthusiastic cheering begins. He advances on his sedia. The hurrahs

multiply as he approaches. I imagine him solemnly blessing the crowd with a Papal gesture. Finally I see him. How could I have imagined him solemn and unmoved, this Father who sees and hears—and I assure you he couldn't help hearing—these 45,000 faithful assembled from all corners of the earth? He bends to the right, to the left, extends his hands to those around him. This alive, eager, repeated gesture is almost impossible to describe: he at once greets, blesses, embraces; he welcomes all their sorrow, their appeals, and their hopes.

He arrives near my place: I wish I could convey to you each feature of his face. A smile, as alive as his hands, as vibrant as his whole person, reveals his ardent paternal love. But sometimes a sudden expression of poignant gravity betrays how the terrifying responsibility with which he is invested weighs on his soul.

*Nemo tam pater*, no one is as much a father, they say of God. After God, don't these words fit the Pope? No one is as much a father as he. . . . And you to whom I speak know what the word "father" means, that four or five children are already a heavy responsibility for the heart of man. You must not only nourish them but lift them up, protect them against themselves, and against the evil which roams about the world. And there is no way to divest yourself of the burden; it is not simply on your shoulders, it is lodged in your heart. Contemplate the soul of this father whose children are counted in millions!

In the evening at the family table amidst brothers and sisters recounting their day's exploits, calling to each other, interrupting each other, a young girl of pure heart, gifted with that marvelous power of perception which is the privilege of those who have no care themselves, fixes a steady gaze on her father's face, which seems graver than usual. A little girl cannot understand the secret agony of this man whose life is wasting away with a mysterious illness which the doctors refuse to name. She cannot understand. Nevertheless,

when his eyes meet this softly insistent look, the father is miraculously relieved. The impression of terrible solitude in the mist of his noisy children is dissipated.

Watching the Pope pass through the crowd cheering him, I thought: Can there be a man more alone? Nowhere in the world could he find another man with a task the same as his, whom alone like himself God will ask to account for the whole human family. I wondered if at least occasionally his gaze did not meet that of some marvelously understanding soul?

I hoped his always increasing family, aware of his prodigious mission, would not let him do prayer and penitence alone for the humanity which had been entrusted to him.

When the ceremony ended, the Pope remounted the sedia and passed down the long central nave. At the end, the sedia was halted and turned half way around. The Pope stood to give his blessing one last time—a small white silhouette dominating this sea of humanity. When I saw him extend his arms in this expressive gesture so characteristic of him, I understood how one must always be crucified to bless, that the Holy Father is not only the representative of Christ among us, but that in him Christ prolongs His passion for our sake.

## VIRGINITY

Vocations, and notably feminine vocations, are becoming rarer. Virginité, that very pure homage of humanity to the transcendence of God, is losing its prestige. Is this due to all that has been said and written on the Christian grandeurs of love and marriage? Some think so. If I thought so I would close up shop.

But a consecrated life and a married life are not two opposite, contrary and competing realities. They are marvelously complementary, and the truly Christian families know this very well.

Doubtless the young family has some difficulty remember-



ing the superiority of the dedicated virgin and celibate, but the Church has never ceased to point it out. It is normal that the young husband and wife should meditate first of all on the wealth of the sacrament of marriage. Seek them out fifteen or twenty years later and if their love has survived the rude test of time it will be the same and yet different. The springtime fervor, that almost foolish enthusiasm, is gone. The joys and sorrows experienced together, the laborious apprenticeship, the giving of self, the uphill struggle, have markedly matured them; they are more or less peaceful and strong. Were we to open a conversation about virginity we would be struck more by the tone with which they speak of it than by what they say. It is almost as though their union were allied to virginity. It is even more notable that their love had to open itself to the charity of God to grow, to surrender to its purifying and transforming action. There is a mysterious affinity between their love and virginity, which is the triumph of divine charity.

Despite its vagueness, affinity is the word which seems best to me. But it is not all easy to analyse what this affinity is.

First of all it is a feeling of security—a light in the dark. If it is missing the couple would give the impression of being abandoned, and that hope had escaped them. For they know the “tribulations of the flesh.” And so this luminous presence of virginity in the Church is necessary and helpful in defending them from discouragement, assuring them that the spirit aided by grace can triumph over the flesh. No, you don’t hear families question the value of the celibacy of the priest.

The life consecrated to God seems to them to be at the same time a hope and a pressing invitation to union with Christ. They know enough about life to understand what is essential. Certainly they do not regret being in the married state; their vocation was not to go to God by the more direct route of virginity. But the time has come when the love of Christ—his unique grandeur, His primacy—has a new clarity for them. It is not a question of loving less (one never

loves too much or enough) but of loving Christ first and above all, and others with the heart of Christ.

A hope and an invitation of love still exists outside the family. For virginity is present at the very heart of love; love aspires to virginity as the plant aspires to flower, or the tree to bear fruit. If one of their children tells them one day that he has been called by God, the mother and father are not tempted to regard it as a disavowal of the vocation of marriage which they hold in such high esteem. Rather they see there a confirmation: the tree that bears good fruit is good. Marguerite Sarto, a peasant used to hard work, and the mother of the future Pius X, well understood this. One day her son, consecrated a bishop, came to pay a visit under the humble family roof; he showed her his episcopal ring. "Look, Mama, at the beautiful ring they gave me."

"That is true, my son, but you would not have had yours, if I had not had mine," she said, kissing her old wedding band.

No, marriage and virginity are definitely not two contrary, competing vocations. There is no need to exalt the one above the other. And I believe those who present the true role of Christian marriage, its grandeur, and its exigencies to our generation work hard for the honor of virginity.

"Married lives which do not betray the honor residing at the heart of love are fountains of virginity," wrote Coventry Patmore.

### MARY AND HER VOCATION

Woman is unimportant in history they say. This is a very superficial view. It is true that the great names of history, conquerors, empire founders, and chiefs of state are almost always men, and that the history of politics, diplomacy, the military, economics, literature and art appear as the work of men. Just the same, if one looks to see who inspires, sustains and stimulates them in their passions, ambitions, enterprises and conquests, woman has a primary and often decisive role.

But there is another history, the great religious history of humanity. Here women play a leading role. Two figures dominate: Eve and Mary. An act of the first had turned history away from its source. One yes to God by the second had oriented humanity toward salvation.

Let us oppose Eve and Mary: purely and simply on one side there is the woman who believes the words of the fallen angel and doubts the divine word, who disobeys in the hope of becoming like God, and finally causes the flood of suffering and sin which submerge the world; the other who believes what is said to her on the Lord's part, has no other ambition than to be his humble servant and become a gushing spring of all graces. Mary is in a sense the living antithesis of her unhappy ancestor; but she is first and foremost the glory of Eve, the daughter of the Promise, of that mysterious promise made by God to the sinful couple in the form of a curse on Satan. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head and you shall lie in wait for his heel."

Exiled from happiness, Adam and Eve carried this promise with them. It was their hope during their labors, in the suffering of childbirth, at the most dramatic moment of all when they weighed the gravity of their sin before the body of their son, Abel. But even then their distant granddaughter was the hope of these first sinners.

Thousands of years had passed, generations had succeeded generations before the promise was accomplished. God was not in a hurry. God is not in the habit of forcing His creation. Certainly even a worn-out people could have given rise to Mary Immaculate, that admirable exception, the flower in the middle of thorns. But that is not His way. He never demands fruits out of season from His creatures; He respects the laws of maturation.

Mankind raises itself little by little, step by step, under the impetus of this powerful ferment of divine grace, toward more love, toward more sanctity, toward Mary.

Amongst all the peoples of the earth, God chose one that He blessed and with whom He made an alliance. But Israel multiplied her infidelities, then God "swept his house with a great breath of war" and reserved his blessing for the "few" who came back purified by exile. But they quickly forgot the catastrophes and the lessons which they taught. The divine blessing was withdrawn from the powerful, the proud, the grasping, and was concentrated on a small Jewish elite without pomp or power who were called "anawim"—the poor, the humble, the hungry. It is among them that God discerns the one whose whole spirit is conveyed in the words, "I am the handmaid of the Lord."

It is Mary, the crowning glory of Israel, the crowning glory of humanity.

She is the Woman. Her destiny was to tie together the three aspects of the vocation of woman—virginity, marriage, and maternity—and to bring them to an unequalled perfection. We can say with Leon Bloy: "The more saintly a woman is, the more a woman she is." To examine the meaning of this destiny we will meditate on Mary in her relation to God, to Joseph, to Jesus, and to humanity.

To profit from this meditation, we must rid it of all false intellectualism. The mystery of Mary escapes those who want to imprison it in formulas and concepts. It reveals itself only to the pure of sight. It is first of all a question of rediscovering "the eye of innocence."

### *The Virginity of Mary*

We would be badly mistaken were we to represent the interior life of Mary as lofty but immobile. A thriving spirit is never immobile; an incessant dynamism pushes it from within toward progress and new power, and an always greater perfection. And so it was with the spiritual life of Mary, whose intimate source is charity—that love which comes from God and goes to God. From her birth, Mary loved her God with an unrivaled love which never knew



hesitation. Stage by stage this love grows and intensifies, until the day when she leaves the earth, having acquired such an unimaginable perfection that we have only a hint of her radiance in space and time. Thus the true history of Mary's assumption in the love of God will never be written because it is the secret of God. However, the Lord does allow us glimpses of the great stages of this evolution.

It is safe to say that meditation on the Word of God was the great factor of Mary's progress in love. This meditation was familiar to all young Jews. But Mary possessed, above all others, purity of heart, insight, and attention. Thus when, years later, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and called to Jesus: "Blessed be the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee," He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it," wishing by that to call attention to the fact that the glory of His mother is not so much in the order of the flesh as in the order of faith.

Frequent recourse to the Scriptures initiated Mary to the high idea of God which dominates the whole history of her people. He is the Transcendent, the Almighty, the Holy, He who must never be represented in images, He whose Lordship is recognized by the sacrifice of the firstfruits, from the time they are consecrated to Him until the victim is entirely consumed by the holocaust. It is the God who prefers the completely interior sacrifice of a pure and penitent heart to the immolation of goats and bulls. This theology is the spiritual nourishment of Mary.

It should not be astonishing then that her soul, marvelously childlike and pure, had looked for a secret sacrifice she could offer to the Lord. She resolved to consecrate her virginity in order to render homage to the sanctity of God, to offer witness of her love to Him, which she was impatient to prove. The originality and the scope of this gesture is made clear if you recall that with the Jews maternity was not only a human glory for woman, but the best proof of God's blessing on her. Virginity was the invention of a higher love.

How old was Mary? Authors dispute the point. Some think she made this vow at an early age, others that she had the desire very early but did not make the vow until her marriage. I would support those who believe it was in the adolescent years, when every young girl has a fervent desire "to be something for someone." When she discovered the aspiration to marriage and maternity in her heart, Mary doubtless understood that she could renounce it and sacrifice by that very fact the chance to give birth to the Messiah, that by this renunciation of the human vocation of woman, it would become more truly the gift of God, the thing by which He could do His will.

An Italian painting creates an intense image of the moment of this gift of the young Mary. She mounts the imposing steps of the Temple by herself, at the foot of which her parents whom she had left watch her, while at the top the High Priest awaits her.

We could never emphasize too much what initiative, decision, and joy there was in this act of the Virgin, as in others throughout her life. There is no passivity in her; all is readiness to act. In a climate of peace, cheerfulness and flexibility, from which the least trace of tension is absent, she is intensely alive. That tension which is a weakness of the flesh is not present in her in whom everything is purely spiritual. It is the least visible flames which are the most intense.

By this offering Mary pledged much more than herself: she pledged the people of Israel and in a larger sense, the humanity of which she was the miraculous child. She represents them, leads them, commits them. In her and by her they are consecrated to the living God. "The old world," writes Bernanos, "the painful world, the world before grace, hoped for her a long time in its sorrowful heart, for centuries and centuries—in the obscure, incomprehensible hope of a *virgo genitrix* . . . for centuries and centuries with its old hands heavy with sins, it protected the marvelous girl whose

name was unknown to the world." And now these hands have just presented a spotless offering to the Lord.

In this girl we find new meaning in the great Law of solidarity. Eve, the mother of the race, disobeyed and the whole race was exiled from God. Mary gives herself and in her this same human race offers itself entirely to saving Love. Now God can realize His ancient promises.

The state of consecrated virginity was inaugurated—one might say invented—by Mary. Henceforth, a multitude of women following Mary, the Virgin par excellence, the Holy Virgin, will be bound in this state which maintains in the Church a reserve of purity which benefits all the faithful. But it is important not to confuse Christian virginity with the temporary situation of the girl whose virginity has no spiritual significance. We must also point out concepts which are inexact if taken individually: one is limited to a physical and sociological point of view of virginity (the renunciation of marriage), the other exclusively conveys the point of view of a consecration to God which is purely interior or spiritual. These two conceptions must not be separated; they are complementaries. By the vow of virginity woman solemnly consecrates her body to God and renounces marriage, but this consecration has meaning in the measure that it is the sign of a consecration of the soul to God, with the hope of a perfection of love. The state of virginity may not be the vocation of all women, yet this perfection to which virginity gives witness is the end which every Christian soul must seek. Consecrated virgins have a mission to recall this goal to the faithful, who are always tempted to forget it. It is an essential aspect of their vocation and the reason the Church holds them in such high esteem.

### *Mary and Joseph*

Today the girls who vow their virginity to God find protection and companionship in various institutes. The state of virginity was unknown in Israel; there was no other solu-

tion for Mary than marriage—a marriage which would be a guaranty of virginity.

The Father had chosen Mary above all women to be the mother of His son and He had formed Joseph by His grace, above all men, to be her husband. I say husband, and not in the sense of a legal guardian, an octogenarian as the past generation imagined, incapable of conceiving a young heart at the same time respectful and tender, chaste and ardent. The priests of today who have heard the confessions of many young men do not share this difficulty; they know that continence and virility are not incompatible.

When did Joseph meet Mary? We do not know. Since they were both descendants of David and perhaps both originally of Nazareth, it is not improbable that they knew each other for a long time. Our ignorance of the exact nature of the meeting invites us to recall the marriage of the Just in the ancient law: an Isaac of whom it is said: "He welcomed Rebecca and made her his wife and found comfort over the loss of his mother in his love for her"; Jacob who for long years had to serve his brothers-in-law to acquire Rachel, "but these seven years were as several days because he loved her"; Tobias and Sarah . . .

But at least we can imagine the marriage ceremony: thanks to the gospel parables: When night fell Joseph, with his companions carrying the torches, walked to the home of his fiancee. Mary, adorned, awaited, surrounded by young maids with lighted lamps. The arrival of Joseph was greeted with cheering—which contrasts with the discrete and grave joy of Mary. The procession festively crosses the village to the sound of flutes and tambourines, conducting the young fiancee to her husband's home.

Great silence envelops this union and yet we can say without paradox that it is better known than many others for we have the certitude that they love each other. They love each other with a love which ours cannot approach. Never-



theless we can imagine it is an extension of the transport of our own hearts.

Joseph must have felt something of the wonder of the first man before the first woman. All that in him is made for admiration, love, and homage, awakens and turns itself to Mary. He knows that a blessing of God has been delivered into his hands and that he must wait upon her with an earnest solicitude. He knows that this girl who entrusted herself to him with such a perfect trust and submission is his master in the ways of God. "Beatrice looked on high and I looked to her": it is truer still of Joseph and Mary than of Dante and Beatrice. The life of man is fixed, it has found its center. "Mary is in his possession and he surrounds her on all sides. A woman conquered his heart bit by bit and now it is prudent and paternal. Once again he is in paradise with Eve! The face of her whom all humanity needs is turned with love and submission to Joseph" (Paul Claudel: *St. Joseph*).

It is still more daring to try to say what the love of Mary for Joseph was. Without risk of error one can imagine her fervent gratitude toward him to whom it had been so easy to confide the vow made to the Lord. He did not speak much that day but his glance had been ample reassurance to the young virgin. From that time on she looked to him, to his person, and to his family with great joy. He is her strength. She is his peace. While abandoning herself to him like a happy child, a maternal love for him grew in her, eager to see the grace of the Lord fructified in his human heart.

Yes, a very perfect conjugal love binds them. What differentiates it from other such loves is much more than the exclusion of carnal relations; it is that rare quality which is the very perfection of conjugal love: a scrupulous desire not to take even the slightest place apportioned to the Lord in the other's heart, an anxious concern to offer the loved one a motive to praise and seek God always more perfectly. Joseph and Mary are only married to aid each other to perfect virginity.

Was the annunciation and the visit to Elizabeth after Mary entered the house of Joseph? Exegetes are divided on the question. But what does it matter? One thing is certain. Joseph and Mary were already engaged when Mary received the visit of the angel, and the Jewish engagement was equivalent to marriage, with the exclusion of cohabitation. For want of knowledge some hazard a contrary meaning: Mary had first conceived Jesus and only after that had wed Joseph to "cover up" everything. This is a grave misunderstanding because it reduces Joseph to a role of chaperon and makes the marriage of Joseph and Mary a pious mystification. The reality is so much richer: it is to their union, to their love—at the same time virginal and conjugal, that the Father gives His Son.

Can we go so far as to say that Joseph is the father of Jesus? A reflection on paternity will tell us. Human paternity, precisely because it is human, is not only an affair of the body but first and foremost an affair of the heart, of free consent. Thus the man who adopts a child truly has the right to the title of father—it is quite different from legal fiction. For Joseph is much more than an adoptive father to Jesus: Jesus is given to the marriage of Joseph and Mary; He is in some manner the fruit of their virginal union. It should be noted also that Mary, the resting place of the hidden treasure, is concerned with Joseph. There are many reasons to indicate the paternity of Joseph and give him his unique character. Mary herself will proclaim this paternity the day that she finds her Son in the temple. "*Your father* and I have sought you, sorrowing."

Jesus is the center, the love-knot of their love. "They only love each other well in a third person," writes Kierkegaard. This will never be as true as in the family of Nazareth. They are given to each other only in order to better give themselves together. But let us distrust sweet images. The presence of Jesus amongst them is at once their great joy and a merciless question asked of their faith. Truly they cannot see that

their child is the Son of God; they *believe* it, with a faith often subjected to severe trials. Think of the birth in a stable, the exile, or the loss of Jesus for three days. To help one another believe was one of the forms of their love.

All Mary's maternal instincts are expressed in relation to her Son. Humble, yet without a shadow of false humility, this little Jewess who has renounced her maternity dared to believe that the child in her arms is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. She dares to call God Almighty "my Son," and the day comes when "He by whom all things have been made and without whom nothing that was made was made," calls her "my mother." The love of God has its divine revelation and Mary adores.

Those who saw them together in the little house at Nazareth are struck by the resemblance of the young boy and his mother. Was it not from her and her alone that he had received His humanity. And it was not only His face but His interior life which is allied to Mary's. His intelligence and His heart are awakened in response to His mother. The voice that had lulled Him and the love which had nourished Him, the beauty which had gladdened His eyes and quickened His heart—all the subtle structures of His psychological life, He receives from Mary.

Yet for all that, I do not underestimate the influence of Joseph: I have always wondered at the touching manner of Jesus when he speaks of the fathers of the earth, "A man had two sons" . . . . "If you, evil as you are, give good things to your children" . . . . is not explained by the memory of that silent and vigilant father who looked after Him in those early years.

Then one day Joseph died, almost as though he wished to remove himself, to leave Mary alone with Jesus, as though he wished the symbol to give place to reality. The union of Joseph and Mary, as all marriages, was truly a sign, the image of the union of God and His people, of Christ and the Church. Joseph gone, Mary is in the presence of Jesus: it is Israel in

the presence of Jahweh, it is the Church in the presence of Christ.

### *Mary and Jesus*

The circumstances of Joseph's disappearance are unknown. This intervention of death was a poignant moment in the life of these three persons so strongly bound by love. For sanctity never renders the heart insensible—the Evangelist speaks to us of the tears of Christ before the tomb of Lazarus. At the death of Joseph there was great sorrow in the house at Nazareth . . . and a great change.

Jesus took over the paternal direction of the household.

One would have to be a mother to describe Mary's contemplation of her now adult Son, and the new expression her love for Him took. For maternal love changes throughout the years. It passes imperceptibly from one nuance to another, as the sky at dawn. One phase of this evolution is precious above all others in the eyes of mothers: the phase of friendship. Moreover, it seems that few know how to keep the confidence of their sons until this time, and those who live to see this hour cherish it. It is an ephemeral time, a climax in the history of their relation: their sons soon must leave them to cling to their wives. Jesus will not leave His mother. When we imagine the friendship between them we marvel at it and it defies description. The friendship will evolve toward a still more profound union, toward a total communion of life and destiny, in the material order, yes, but above all in the spiritual order.

Mary is of the race of those who "seek God," of which the Psalms speak. In her faith is an insatiable hunger for knowledge of the Lord. We can be certain that her Son did not deny her the bread for which she hungered. He is this bread, it is in giving Himself that He is satisfied. And to give oneself first of all means to tell one's secret thoughts. If Jesus confided to His disciples: "I do not call you my servants but my friends, because I have told you all that I have learned



from my Father," would He not first have revealed everything to her who is His most avid and receptive disciple? Would he not have spoken of His Father to His Mother? Mary listens attentively to the Son who has become her teacher and "she keeps all these things in her heart."

Doubtless she was struck by the awesome tone with which Jesus spoke of the Father—the tone that amazes us even in reading the Gospels. She let herself be introduced always further into the love her Son had for the Father. She associated herself always more perfectly with His praise, with His prayer, with His impatient desire for the glory of the Father. The secret of the strength of their intimate union must be found in their common love of the Father and in their will that His kingdom come. The Father is the first subject of their talks, it is He who is present between them in the silences which consummate the union of their hearts.

Between Mary and Jesus that frustrated dream of human love is realized: they are one. Not only in the sense that they live together under the same roof, that they love and pray together, that between them sorrows and joys are common, but in that stronger sense that they are open completely to one another interiorly. I remember having heard a friend speak of his wife! "She is more and more interior to me." Human love is a foretaste of the divine identification in love. Mary is interior to Jesus. Jesus is interior to Mary. Understand what that means: He communicates His life superabundantly, that mysterious divine life which burns in Him under the veil of the flesh. But it is impossible to imagine that divine life in Mary which makes all her grandeur, unless perhaps we begin with the experience of the great mystics: "The soul is full of the rays of divinity and completely transformed in its creator: God supernaturally communicates His being to it. . . . By that participation the soul seems to be more God than itself even though it keeps its being and is distinct from the divine being, as the glass is distinct from

the ray which illuminates it" (St. John of the Cross: *Ascent of Carmel*, Book 2, Ch. 5).

Various terms have been proposed to designate this union of Mary and Jesus: companion, associate, spouse. They are deceptive. But how could it be otherwise? How could a term borrowed from a usual relation suit this unique relation? Perhaps that of spouse would be at the same time the most unlikely and yet the least imperfect. The liturgy gives this title of spouse of Christ to every consecrated virgin, the Bible gives it to the Church. Doesn't it best suit her who is the model of virgins and the figure of the Church? But one must see what is essential in the married relationship: the exclusive and definitive gift of love of two persons to each other in an unbreakable union. Doubtless Mary has no other ambition than to be the servant, but Jesus wishes her to be spouse and queen. She has given everything to Him; He gives Himself and all that He has.

But not primarily for the joy of Mary was Jesus made man, but for the salvation of men. The life of Mary side by side in the small house was good for a time—a long time to be sure, in proportion to the duration of the life of Jesus. The day came, however, when the carpenter refused further commissions, arranged everything in the shop, and took leave of Mary. From the threshold she watched Him who was her whole life walk away and disappear at the turn of the road.

We should not be fooled by appearances here, for the separation was only exterior. Mary is no more absent from the acts of Jesus than she is from His inner life. St. John suggests it very well when he shows her at His side at the beginning and at the end of His apostolic mission: from Cana to Calvary. Note that at the marriage feast a mysterious allusion is made to the rendezvous at the cross: "My *hour* has not yet come." Mary knows what He means. She has heard of this hour of the life of Jesus; she knows that He counts on her, that He will need her. He does not mean to do without her to accomplish His mission anymore than He did

without her to be born. If it is true that for the spouse there is no greater happiness than to serve, then there is no greater unhappiness than to be unnecessary.

We find Mary, then, present and waiting on Calvary. And it is not only her body but her soul which is there. And she is not found at the side of the sacrifice but perfectly associated with that sacrifice. In the "yes" of the Annunciation she had consented not only to the birth but also to the whole mission of Jesus, and therefore, implicitly, to the cross. The hour has come to renew that consent with full knowledge of the matter, to offer on Calvary Him whom she had received in her arms at Bethlehem, to hold out to the Father at arms length Him who is her flesh and blood. She knows the significance of everything that happens and while the apostles—"men of little faith"—fled, she believed. Once more she was faithful to the divine plan with all her grief-torn heart. She knows that she is the first one saved by the blood of her Son, that all the graces which she has received she received because of that hour. She knows that an immense people of the children of God are born and that these children are hers because it has pleased Jesus to associate her with the sacrifice, to incorporate His offering and His sufferings to her in the mystery of the redemption.

When she hears the "Woman, behold your Son," by which the dying Jesus confides St. John to her, and in St. John, all humanity, it is like a new annunciation to her: a new maternity is proposed, to which she gives a new consent. But how different from the first is this new annunciation! All had been gentleness in that far off morning at Nazareth, but now when it is a question of begetting in grace unwieldy humanity it is excruciating. All was serene in her maternal activity near Jesus; all will be labor in raising her sons of Eve to be sons of God. And it will be that way throughout time.

Did Jesus appear to His mother on Easter morning? We do not know. Anyway, one thing is certain: Mary lived the Paschal mystery in her soul.

The Ascension, like the Resurrection, is for her a joyful mystery: Mary returns to the Father what the Father has given to her, but she well knows that nothing can separate Him from her.

### *Mary and Humanity*

On the day of Pentecost the apostles and disciples are reassembled in the Cenacle. The mother is in the midst of her children. Suddenly the tongues as of fire appeared, rested on them, and made them new men. Carried forth by gladness and love, they hurried to announce the marvels of God.

That scene irresistibly evokes another: at Nazareth, thirty-three years earlier, Gabriel spoke to Mary: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore the Holy one to be born shall be called the Son of God." As at the birth of Christ, so at the birth of the Mystical Body, Mary is there. She has given herself, she has consented, and the Holy Spirit intervenes to accomplish the work of God with her concurrence. The Acts of the Apostles traces for us an idyllic picture of the young Church: "And all who believed were together and held all things in common, and would sell their possessions and goods and distribute them among all according as anyone had need. And continued daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread in their houses, they took their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and being in favor with all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their company such as were to be saved."

There is no mention of Mary but we sense her humble and discrete presence in the midst of all the children who live in the joyous exaltation of the days after Pentecost. Isn't the best proof that miraculous union between all the disciples: "They continued daily in one accord." Mary does not preach. She is simply there. The witness par excellence of the life of her Son.

The Evangelists questioned her at length about the events



of the past. Luke diligently takes notes on the stories of the infancy of Christ to transmit them to us. The Apostles have recourse to the light of her wisdom. She tells them what she knows of the mysteries of Christ; she is their soul. She inspires in them the ambition of greater missionary conquests. And her happiness is profound when she witnesses the “explosion” of primitive Christianity beyond Galilee and Judea and the Jewish nation, for it is no longer limited to her heart but to that of Jesus. Her eyes follow her children as they set out on the roads, her prayers accompany them: she knows what awaits them . . .

How many hesitant, timid persons, sick in body and soul were among that multitude of converts! Her affectionate spirit took note of them, and she was ardently devoted to them. To her, it was good to be able to still serve her beloved Son in all His little ones: “Whatever you do for one of these little ones you do it for me,” He had said.

Jesus has finished suffering but His members continue to be troubled and struggle. The first persecutions, the first imprisonment, the first martyrs: Mary is plunged ever further into the redemptive mystery.

However the essential part of the mission of Mary is not grasped when one speaks only of her contacts with those around her. Her action is at the same time more interior and more universal. One page of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus helps us to grasp it. The young Carmelite was conscious of all vocations—the priest, the missionary, the martyrs—and suffered to find herself powerless to help. Looking for an answer to her desire in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, she was at first discouraged to learn that in the Mystical Body each member has a different function than that of his neighbor. Then suddenly she was enlightened: she understood that if the Church was a body it would surely not lack the most important organ, the heart, and that heart is burning with love. If it would be extinguished the Apostles would no longer announce the Gospel, the martyrs would refuse their blood.

And Therese cried out: "My vocation is to love." And what is true of the little Carmelite is truest of Christ's Mother. The function of Mary in the Church is to be the heart from which all the members receive life.

Nor should we forget the secret of the life of the heart itself. Mary is only perfectly mother because she is perfectly the "spouse" of Christ. This union with Him was sustained and deepened by the Eucharist she received from the hands of the Apostles. When you think of the Communion of Mary you cannot help envying those who could kneel down beside her.

These two loves, of Christ and of men, are made one in her heart: because she loves Jesus she loves all those around her that He saved by His sacrifice: because she loves all these she comes close to them to speak of Him to each one, and to draw forth the life that she wants to transmit to them. Yet the two loves are separate. I borrow the words of St. Paul to Philippians: "And I do not know which to choose. Indeed I am hard pressed from both sides—desiring to depart and to be with Christ, a lot by far better yet, to stay on in the flesh is necessary for your sake. And with this conviction I know that I shall stay on and continue with you . . . !"

It had to be that one day the mother would leave the children. We do not know all about her hours among them. There is only one thing certain: her body which had given life to the Son of God did not know the corruption of the tomb.

After living so many years in faith Mary finally had access to the Beatific Vision. Having believed without doubts she was happy all through her terrestrial journey. Finally she sees the glory of God resplendent in her glorified Son, she sees the fruitfulness of Calvary, she sees the fruitfulness of her own life. And all her children whom she had just left, and all those that her maternity will engender until the end of time, she learns to know with the very eyes of God and to call each by name. She knows their needs, their weaknesses, their

aspirations and she intercedes with Christ with all the strength at her command. Isn't it the role of the mother to be mediator between the children and the father? We must understand the import of those words which so often we address to Mary, *Ora pro nobis*. Intercede for us before God, we ask her, who never refused Him anything. Of course, "the Queen does not act upon the assemblies nor peoples. But she reigns over the heart of the King."

Thus she who wished to be simply the servant of the Lord, and because she wished only to be a servant, Our Lord made her Queen at His side. She rises like the sun and does not cease to mount in the heavens of the Church. Ever since St. Paul wrote in an episodic fashion to the Galatians: "God sent His Son born of a woman," there has never been an age which has not discovered and proclaimed a new glory of Mary. Isn't it the same in human families: it is only as the children advance in age that they take notice of the place that their mother holds in the life of the family; often it is not until after she is gone that they know the extent of her irreplaceable love.

All that we know makes us think that the radiance of Mary is always becoming greater, that her influence, so strong in our Christian civilization, will extend to the whole world. Nothing makes us understand the benefit of that influence better than to examine the civilizations which are deprived of it. Mary *virginizes* Christian peoples, their thoughts, tastes, and customs. She teaches us what the creature's attitude must be before God: an offering, a welcome, a joyous submission. To pretend to be self-sufficient is an intolerable pride. Only the humble who depend completely on God are given full measure. To women she transmits her love and esteem of little ones, the suffering, and the disinherited, so that they will protect them in a world which is always inclined to blame the weak. To men, so quick to believe that everything is won by strength and money, she teaches that there are things that are only obtained on one's knees, and that to

promote them one sacrifices one's life. When the West was closed to her influence it did not take long for a cruel barbarism to reappear. Our generation knows from experience what this means.

We have come to the end of our meditation. We have followed the destiny of Mary, step by step. Each step seems to be the summit. Yet each time there is still a higher peak.

Mary, the young girl, renounces maternity as a sign of her will to serve the Lord. What can there be above and beyond that consecrated life, vowed to prayer? Precisely because Mary is given to Him, God is going to use her body and soul to realize the great plan of the incarnation. Nothing is changed, and everything is new in the life of the Virgin. Consecrated to God, she is as she was before, but in a manner wonderously unexpected: God is made her child. For long years she watches His growth . . . But one day all mothers must accept the fact of their son's detaching himself and going on his mission. Is Mary now going to go back to her solitary life? No. There is no other person that Jesus asks to be His companion, the associate of His action and His passion. And it is a new stage, brief, but fruitful. Then when everything is consummated, when the life of Mary seems to be perfected in the offering of her Son, a new mission is entrusted to her. This maternal mission prolongs her mission close to Jesus and will be without end as long as a child of God on earth has need of His Mother.

These stages in the life of Mary reveal to us an essential law of the spiritual growth of the Christian soul—and also of the People of God. Each stage breaks with the preceding stage and at the same time surpasses it. It seems to be the definitive stage, and then there is a new spiritual adventure. The new consent that this adventure demands disposes the soul to a new ascension in love and opens it to the ever more wonderful largesse of God.





