St. Anthony Mary Claret

COUNSELS TO A PRIEST

Avisos a un sacerdote

From the Spanish of the first edition (Vich, 1844), with the additions of 1846

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Translated from *Avisos a un sacerdote que acaba de hacer los ejercicios espirituales de San Ignacio, a fin de conservar el fuego que el divino Espíritu haya encendido en su corazón* (Vich, 1844), with the additions of the Barcelona edition of 1846. The translation is complete.

The notes give the references to Claret's sources and the notes he printed himself; the modern editors' commentary and the translator's own remarks are not reproduced.

Counsels to a Priest Who Has Just Made the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

so as to keep the fire that the divine Spirit has kindled in his heart

1. The first of the counsels I am going to give you, O my dearest brother in Jesus Christ, is that you love God, both because he is infinitely lovable and because he loved you first;[1] and this love must not be only in word, but in deed and in truth.[2]

2. Remember often your vocation to the priestly state; for you have received from God so great a dignity,[3] which raises you above the angels of heaven and the kings of the earth and makes you venerable to all. You must, then, give due thanks to so most generous a Benefactor.

3. Consider the divine power that has been given you over the real and the mystical Body of Jesus Christ; for a threefold power has been entrusted to you, and a most sublime one: namely, the ministry of the sacrifice, the ministry of the reconciliation of sinners with God, and the ministry of the divine word. In this lies your greatest glory; but from this flow your obligations as well.

4. To carry out your ministries worthily, any sort of holiness will not do; an excellent holiness is indispensable. Since, then, by holy orders you are raised above the people, you must surpass the people in merit and holiness.

5. Holiness presupposes two things: cleanness from sin and eminence in virtue. To acquire it, you must take as your model Jesus Christ, the first Priest and Pontiff, meditating on his life and striving to keep him always present in your thoughts, in your affections, in your words, in your works, and in suffering for love of him.

6. Hate every kind of sin intensely, for in the priest it is more hideous and more criminal, since he is bound to greater holiness than others, and to be richer in graces and to shine more in virtue than they.

7. None will be crowned except one who has fought lawfully;[4] therefore arm yourself with fortitude in temptations, whether they come from your own nature or from the devil or the world. And when you feel yourself tempted, have recourse to God at once, with humility and with filial trust.

8. Fight the disorder of your passions, especially pride, avarice, intemperance, incontinence and sloth, etc. For this it is very much to the point \[*muy del caso*\] that you know the means you must use to win; they are prayer, penance, and multiplying acts of the opposite virtues.

9. Root out of your heart all pride, which is the root and beginning of all sins.[5] The priest must make profession of humility, since to no one does that saying of the Wise Man fit better than to the priest: *Quanto magnus es, humilia te in omnibus, et coram Deo invenies gratiam.*[6]

10. Do not aspire to ecclesiastical dignities and benefices unless God calls you to them, as he called Aaron;[7] and if divine Providence has placed you in them, consider very often the great weight that rests on your shoulders, both with respect to God and with respect to yourself and to those others who are your subjects. Keep in mind the day of reckoning, and that perhaps it is nearer than you think. Remember that, though called by God to the priesthood, Nadab and Abihu were lost;[8] and Judas, also called by God, lost the great dignity of the apostolate.[9]

11. Flee every occasion of sin, above all against purity, avoiding especially the proximate occasions, and even the remote ones. Never go to suspect houses, nor visit others often, except out of necessity or charity, for much familiarity breeds contempt. Beware of conversing with women to pass the time, even if they are relatives or spiritual daughters; and if courtesy sometimes obliges you to it, be brief and grave and very guarded in your glance.[10] Do not trust in your virtue and learning, for women bring down virtuous Davids and wise Solomons.[11]

12. Do not grow familiar with the followers of the world, nor take part in their customs and amusements, such as theatres, dances, banquets, games of chance, noisy hunting parties, etc.; in a word, keep away from everything the sacred canons of the Church and the statutes of your diocese condemn.

13. Let your modesty shine before God and men;[12] and understand that if it does not accompany you in the exercise of your ministry, even though the ministry be holy, it will be a snare for you. Therefore guard your bodily senses with the greatest diligence, especially the eyes, the ears and the tongue. Love silence, and when you must speak, let your words be for edification. Take care of the composure of your face and of gravity in your walk, and let every movement of your body correspond to the holiness of your rank.

14. Be moderate with your body and flee all worldly softness and refinement, for a delicate member under a head crowned with thorns is most unbecoming, and even monstrous. Yet be prudent, lest many mortifications hinder other things that are of greater service to God. Let your room be decent, simple and clean, and your dress, in quality, cut and colour, modest, grave and canonical.

15. Abhor avarice, for the avaricious man falls into temptation and into the snare of the devil, says the Apostle.[13] Do not be too rigid about your rights, nor meddle in secular business, for these ill become a soldier of Christ, says the same Apostle.[14] See that the people do not see you acting as agent, secretary, steward or attorney for the great, or going about the squares, markets and fairs, unless a great and certain necessity of your office obliges you.[15]

16. In adversity keep your soul in peace. The just man lives by faith,[16] and God tests the one he loves.[17] This life is a time of warfare,[18] of tribulation and of weeping; in its turn the most happy and tranquil immortality will come. Then whoever has suffered most for justice will receive the greater consolation from the Lord's generosity,[19] and his light will shine much more for all eternity.[20]

17. Do not let yourself be carried away by too much affection for your relatives or your household; what you must help them in with the greatest care is the spirit: watching over their souls, setting up and keeping good order in the house, and above all being a model of every virtue for those who live in it.[21]

18. Be readier to give than to receive,[22] for the gifts and presents one receives often stain the cleanest hands. Love to help the poor little ones of Christ, for they have a right to what you have left over of food and clothing. If you help the needy, besides fulfilling a strict obligation, you will add lustre to priestly honour, you will have great peace and joy of heart, you will grow rich in treasures for heaven, and you will have great esteem and love among the people.

19. Honour Holy Mother Church as a true son; love her visible head, the Supreme Pontiff, and acknowledge him as the rock and foundation of the faith; obey him and your bishop or vicar general in deed and in heart, whether they command you or admonish or exhort you.

20. Love the beauty of the Lord's house in its vestments and sacred vessels,[23] and above all gravity in the divine offices, in the administration of the sacraments, of the divine word, etc., doing everything with such reverence that it quickens faith and fosters piety in the people.

21. Let zeal for the salvation of souls burn in your heart; it will be the fruit and proof of the love of God in yours. "Do you love me?" said Jesus Christ to St. Peter; "feed my lambs, feed my sheep."[24] That this fire of holy zeal may grow in your breast, think often how much God has loved souls and loves them still; how

much they cost Jesus Christ; how torn the sins of men leave him every day, crucifying him again, as far as lies with them; how much he grieves at their loss; the greater accidental glory God would draw from their salvation; and the pains that the devils, their agents and wicked men take for their ruin and eternal perdition, turning everything upside down and stirring everything up so long as they can get what they want.

22. Your zeal must be effective, for if it does not act, it is not true zeal. Come, let your heart expand; let it desire always the glory of God and of the Most Holy Virgin, and strive to save the whole world! Every day you must pray, between the porch and the altar, with sighs of the heart, for the souls held captive by vice and error.[25] Keep watch over books, as far as you can, by day and by night, for the instruction of the ignorant and for the confusion of the proud ungodly man who, like another Goliath, challenges the ministers of the sanctuary,[26] even if only with sophistry, shamelessness and insolence.

23. In the exercise of your zeal always conform yourself to the divine Master, and so you will have the qualities that the Apostle requires when writing to the Corinthians.[27] It will be simple and pure in its end, universal in its object, gentle in winning hearts while strong in opposition, beneficent towards souls and bodies, tireless in labours, prudent in its means, steady in events and persevering in its duration.

24. In God's presence there is no respect of persons,[28] since he does not stop at the appearances or the clothes of his children, but looks at their souls,[29] all of which he created equal, redeemed with the same infinite price of his passion and death, and wills that all be saved.[30] If the divine Master made a difference in anything, it was in loving with special affection sinners,[31] the sick, the poor[32] and little children.[33] Follow, then, in his footsteps: love these by preference; seek them out, as far as you reasonably can, in the confessional, in the teaching of Christian doctrine, in hospitals, in prisons, etc.

25. If charity, necessity or the command of your superior calls you to the ministry of the divine word, first withdraw, like your divine Master, to pray a little in solitude,[34] so as to acquire, by meditating on the sufferings of Jesus crucified, that science of the heart without which your word would be like the sound of a bell.[35] Beware of adulterating the word of God by putting your care in preaching more into loftiness of style, into flourishes and other persuasive words of human wisdom[36] (of which only one who preaches himself makes pomp and vanity), than into the sensible effects of the spirit and of the power of God, as the Apostle did: *in ostensione spiritus et virtutis*;[37] and not as if to please men, but God alone, who searches the heart. On those words of the Apostle, *Non sumus sicut caeteri, adulterantes verbum Dei*,[38] St. Anselm says: "This is the difference between the father and the adulterer: the father seeks children, but the adulterer only pleasure and delight."[39] You must imitate God himself, who says through Isaiah: *Ego Dominus Deus tuus docui te utilia*[40] — *non subtilia*, adds St. Jerome — and Fr. à Lapide says on this same verse: *Notent hoc praedicatores, si velint esse praecones veritatis et non vanitatis.*

Likewise you will keep in mind what grave doctors think of those preachers who care more for the ornament of the discourse than for the reform of morals, preaching futile, airy things without substance, plays on words, resounding periods and choice and scarcely intelligible terms. Fr. Miranda calls them "scourges of the Church"; Fr. Jerónimo López, "the plague of Christendom"; Fr. Díez, "executioners of the Gospel"; the Venerable Gaspar Sánchez, "the greatest persecutors of the Catholic Church"; and of the same opinion is Fr. Vivaldo, who adds that in the last times of the world such preachers will abound more and will serve to lend authority to the abominable doctrines of Antichrist. And what ought to frighten most is what Fr. à Lapide concludes: *Praedicator, qui ex concione sibi plausum quaerit, non conversionem animarum, atque hanc vanam gloriam suae concionis, velut fructum et mercedem, praestituit et captat, hic damnabitur.* Therefore, if you do not want to be lost, but rather wish to merit much, imitate the divine Redeemer; read the holy Gospel and you will find the subjects he treated and the style in which he put them, not only in the villages but also in the city and before the learned of Jerusalem, to whom he makes the comparison of the hen, how she gathers her chicks under her wings;[41] and if he spoke so to the learned, how much more is it owed to the common people! That is why Chrysologus says: *Populo populariter est loquendum.* From this you will

understand that you must take care in preparing your subjects, and that the style and manner of treating them must be intelligible, adapted to the capacity of the hearers and, above all, pleasing. Strive to instruct in faith and in the law; paint virtue as most lovable and vice as abominable, studying to move the hardened heart of poor sinners with every kind of argument from reason and from faith, and still more with the flame of love and of holy zeal. After the sermon you must, with fervent prayers, beseech the Lord of the harvest[42] to guard and make fruitful by his divine grace the seed he has been pleased to sow through you in the hearts of your brothers; and above all, confirm by the example of a holy life what you have said in words, teaching them in this way to make their works match their words.

26. In a spirit of charity, offer yourself freely to hear sacramental confessions whenever you reasonably can; and let the people see that, like a good shepherd, you seek and wait for the little sheep to gather them in at the divine tribunal, as in a place — which it is — of grace; and you will see how through your charity the frequenting of the holy sacraments will increase and how many souls will be saved.

27. As one chosen by God for that refuge of mercy, put on fatherly compassion. The poor penitent calls you "Father", and as to a father he uncovers to you with full confidence the wounds of his soul. Oh, what pleasure and joy you will give him if you behave as his father in his plight! If he comes into your presence like another prodigal son, stripped of every spiritual good, ugly, filthy and abominable, for God's sake do not drive him away; on the contrary, the more wretched he is, the greater must be the affection with which you welcome and embrace him,[43] bearing patiently with his roughness, his ignorance and his imperfections; embracing him and pressing him to the bosom of your soul; washing away his filth; clothing him in the robe of divine grace and seating him at the table of our common heavenly Father.[44]

In this way it will often happen, as the Supreme Pontiff Leo XII wrote to all the bishops of the Catholic world, that those not disposed for absolution will become disposed through the charity of a confessor who knows how to deal with them with all love, meekness and patience.

28. A shepherd who is good only in heart, but not in understanding, will help the sheep little. He must join to a father's charity a physician's skill. You must be very skilful, but more cautious still, seeking out your penitent's spiritual illness and watching that the devil, who with his arts will join hands with human pride and try to hide it, does not succeed. Once you have found the evil, judge it with right and mature judgment, distinguishing one leprosy from another,[45] one fever from another, one wound from another; and, according to the nature of the evil and the quality and condition of the sick man, pour on his wounds the balm of oil and wine[46] in greater or lesser strength as you know it to be more or less needed; that is, applying remedies and imposing greater or lesser penances.

29. If the penitent is ignorant of the doctrine of the faith and of the law, of the obligations of his state, of his faults, their sources, and the necessary and useful means of avoiding them, you, who are a teacher, must dispel the darkness of his understanding with the light of holy doctrine, so that sin may thus be removed and falls prevented. With strong impressions and vivid images suggested by faith you must try to move his heart to compunction, stirring him to hatred of vice and sin and encouraging him with Christian comforts, while giving him a method of life suited to his state. The unction of the Holy Spirit, the consulting of ascetical and moral books, industrious and beneficent zeal, and the counsel of those learned and experienced in the ministry must be your guide for these instructions, exhortations and counsels. Thus those confessors do not fulfil their obligation, but rather make themselves guilty of a very grave offence, who without any care, having heard their penitents' confession, without asking them anything or warning them of anything, give them absolution straight away.

30. As judge, you will pronounce the judgment and sentence of God and not of man, following with all uprightness the middle way, which turns neither to the right, towards rigour, which drives to despair, nor to the left, towards laxity, which breeds presumption. You will be very much on your guard \[*te guardarás muy*

mucho\] against thoughtlessness, impatience, haste and crooked or less pure aims, such as respect of persons, tender inclination towards persons of the other sex and towards relatives; lest, not curing yourself of these and other like human weaknesses, you should come out guilty by your own judgment before that divine Judge who searches the most hidden depths of our heart.[47] You will behave, yes, as one guided by a sound and right doctrine which, looking to the honour of God and the health of souls, tempers your sentences to that uprightness and purity of intention which is holily joined to a prudent and enlightened charity. If the poor soul at your feet is a habitual sinner, a relapser, or in a proximate occasion, whom for the present you cannot absolve, do not scold him, for God's sake, nor exasperate him; rather, try with kind manners and much love to make him see how ardently you desire his salvation; let him know the unhappy state he is in and the means he must use if he wants to get out of it; and so you will see how he comes back and how you have won him for heaven.

31. You must be a good minister not only of the sacrament of penance but also of the other sacraments, putting every care into the administration of each of them, so that God may be glorified and the one who receives them sanctified. Thus those present will be edified, and you, as a good minister, will be full of merit.

32. Finally, you will remember that you are the vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, placed among men to continue that divine mission which he began when he came down from heaven, not only with the threefold ministry entrusted to you but also by good example. Present yourself, then, to the faithful, in imitation of your divine Master, as a perfect pattern of holiness and virtue. Let the followers of the world see in you a living image of that divine Exemplar, and so they will be ashamed of their dissolute and sensual life; the good will feel encouraged and spurred to perfect themselves in virtue; and the enemies of the Christian name, if they are not converted, will at least respect our priestly state. *O quanta bonorum et malorum seges a clero!* The words *reform* and *Protestantism* would perhaps never have been heard in the world, at least in the heretics' sense, had not the scandal of some churchmen brought them in with the rebellion of many thousands of Catholics separated from the bosom of their mother, the true Church of Jesus Christ, the Roman Catholic; for where the priesthood was a model of virtue and religion to the people, there, as a rule, the pure deposit of the faith was kept intact, morals did not degenerate, and rather all that splendour was shown which shines so brightly in the moral virtues.

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

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[1] Cf. 1 Jn 4:19.

[2] Cf. 1 Jn 3:18.

[3] Cf. 2 Tim 1:6.

[4] Cf. 2 Tim 2:5.

[5] Cf. Sir 10:15.

[6] Sir 3:20.

[7] Cf. Heb 5:4.

[8] Cf. Lev 10:1–2.

[9] Cf. Acts 1:25.

[10] Cf. St. Isidore of Pelusium, bk. 2, ch. 284. Quoted by St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Selva de materias predicables*, in *Obras ascéticas* (BAC, Madrid 1954), vol. 2, p. 214.

[11] Cf. 2 Sam 11:4; 1 Kgs 11:4.

[12] Cf. Phil 4:5.

[13] Cf. 1 Tim 6:9.

[14] Cf. 2 Tim 2:4.

[15] Cf. the Fourth Council of Carthage, held in the year 398.

[16] Gal 3:11; cf. Rom 1:17.

[17] Cf. Tob 12:13.

[18] Cf. Job 7:1.

[19] Cf. Mt 5:10–12.

[20] Cf. Dan 12:3.

[21] Cf. 1 Tim 3:4–12.

[22] Cf. Acts 20:35.

[23] Cf. Ps 25:8 (Vulgate; Ps 26:8).

[24] Cf. Jn 21:15–17.

[25] Cf. Joel 2:17.

[26] Cf. 1 Sam 17:8–10.

[27] Cf. 2 Cor 6:1–18.

[28] Cf. Rom 2:11.

[29] Cf. Ps 7:10.

[30] Cf. 1 Tim 2:4.

[31] Cf. Lk 7:34.

[32] Cf. Lk 4:40.

[33] Cf. Mk 10:14.

[34] Cf. Lk 5:16.

[35] Cf. 1 Cor 13:1.

[36] Cf. 1 Cor 2:4.

[37] "With the sensible effects of the spirit and of the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4).

[38] 2 Cor 2:17.

[39] *Moralia* 16, 25.

[40] Is 48:17.

[41] Cf. Mt 23:37.

[42] Cf. Mt 9:38.

[43] Cf. Lk 15:20–23.

[44] Cf. Lk 15:22–23.

[45] Cf. Deut 17:8.

[46] Cf. Lk 10:34.

[47] Cf. Ps 7:10.

Fruit of the Exercises: Rule of Life

Fruit that the Reverend Priest Don N. N. drew from the exercises of St. Ignatius which he made in the year 18.., proposed as a model for imitation, in what each can reasonably manage, to the Reverend Priests who have withdrawn for a few days to make them

> *Omnia… honeste et secundum ordinem fiant (1 Cor 14:40).*

One of the chief reasons why so many souls fall into hell is living haphazardly \[*vivir al acaso*\]; that is why the saints, and especially St. Gregory Nazianzen, think a rule of life so important and necessary that they call it the foundation and basis of good or bad habits and, consequently, the cause of salvation or damnation.

Seeing this need, a good priest desirous of his salvation made the holy exercises of St. Ignatius, and in them his rule of life, to the following effect.

Rule of Life, or Resolutions Made in the Holy Exercises

1. *Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore.*[1] I will always give thanks to the Lord for the benefit of having allowed me to make the holy exercises, and I am so taken with them that I will make them every year, if I can.[2]

2. Each month I will have a day of spiritual retreat and will read these resolutions.

3. Three times a week, that is, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, I will take the discipline or do some other penance on the advice of my confessor.

On Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday I will wear the hair shirt or the little chain, with my confessor's approval.

On Friday and Saturday I will fast, and each day I will deprive myself of something.

4. Every day I will make an hour of mental prayer in the morning, or half an hour in the morning and half in the afternoon, or when I can.

5. For this, every day I will rise at a fixed hour, according to the season, and immediately offer to God all my thoughts, words and works.

Then I will give myself to mental prayer; after that I will celebrate holy Mass with all the gravity and devotion I can, make my thanksgiving, and go to the confessional.

I will say the Hours with all devotion and will study until midday.

A little before dinner I will make the particular examen.

6. At midday, dinner and rest until two, when I will say Vespers, and at its proper time Matins, before some image, so as to keep my attention.

In the afternoon and evening I will study.

Every afternoon, an hour's walk and visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Virgin Mary.

Every day I will have a time of spiritual reading from Rodríguez's *Exercises*, except on Saturdays, when it will be from the *Year of Mary* or the *Glories of Mary*.

At nine I will say the holy Rosary and have supper.

At midday and at night I will make the particular examen on the virtue of humility, and at night, besides, the general examen of all the faults of the day.[3]

7. I will try always to walk in the presence of God, doing everything *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, suffering everything that gives pain for love of him and in remission of my sins; thinking that if God had cast me into hell, as I deserve, I should have much more to suffer, and without merit, whereas if I suffer now with patience, I shall merit great glory.

8. I give myself wholly as son and priest of Mary, and so every day I will say to her the crown of antiphons *Gaude Maria*, etc.; *Dignare me*, etc. Mary will be my mother, my teacher and director, and everything I do will be hers.

I will give myself entirely to hearing confessions, catechizing and preaching, publicly or privately, as occasion offers.

9. Jesus is and will be my Captain; I want to follow him, and with his grace I will follow him clothed in his own livery of the virtues: poverty, contempt and humility.

Poverty: dressing decently and cleanly, but as poorly as I can.[4] I will not complain, but rather rejoice, if I lack anything, and, as far as it lies in my power, I will choose for myself what is meanest and most despised in clothing, in food, in place and in everything.

Contempt: if they despise and persecute me, I will suffer, keep silent, rejoice at such good fortune, and commend my persecutors to God.[5]

Humility: doing whatever I do solely for Jesus and Mary; therefore I will not praise myself, nor speak of myself or of what I have done, nor of my homeland, relatives, studies, books, etc. If they praise me, I will keep silent and say inwardly: *Non nobis, Domine*, etc.,[6] and I will try to change the conversation.

10. I also resolve never to lose an instant of time, but to spend it all in prayer, in study, and in works of charity towards my neighbours, living and dead.

With the help of the Lord and of the Virgin Mary I will fulfil all I have resolved, and if I should ever fail in anything, which God forbid, for penance I will say the Hail Mary with my fingers under my knees.

Day. Year.

N. N.

Note. These counsels have been set down so that each one, like a clever bee, may draw honey from these flowers and form the honeycomb to his own taste, and write it out and sign it so as not to forget it; for, as St. Augustine says, *quod os loquitur sonat et transit; quod scribitur vero permanet.*

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[1] "I will bless the Lord at all times" (Ps 33:2 Vulgate; Ps 34:1).

[2] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 107, 138, 306, 611, 644, 740, 780.

[3] *Aut.* n. 341. *Aut.* n. 351.

[4] Cf. *Aut.* n. 432. Cf. *Aut.* nn. 361, 456, 460–465.

[5] Lk 23:34.

[6] Ps 115:1.

Prayers to Mary

Prayer to Most Holy Mary

O Most Holy Mary, conceived without original stain, Virgin and Mother of the Son of the living God, Queen and Empress of heaven and earth! Since you are the Mother of pity and mercy, deign to turn those tender and compassionate eyes of yours towards this unhappy exile in this valley of tears, anguish and miseries, who, wretched though he is, has the blessed good fortune to be your devotee.[1] O my Mother, how I love you, how I prize you! Oh, how great is the trust I have in you that you will give me perseverance in your holy service and final grace! At the same time, my Mother, I beg and ask of you the destruction of so many heresies that are devouring the flock of your most holy Son. Remember, most loving Virgin, that you have power to put an end to them all; do it out of charity, for the great love you bear Jesus Christ, your Son. See how these souls, redeemed at the infinite price of the blood of Jesus, are falling back again into the power of the devil, in contempt of your Son and of you. Come then, my Mother! What is lacking? Do you perhaps want an instrument through which to remedy so great an evil? Here you have one, who, while he knows himself to be the vilest and most despicable, considers himself the most useful for this end, so that your power may shine the more and it may be seen plainly that it is you who act and not I. Come, loving Mother, here I am; dispose of me; you know well that I am all yours. I trust you will do it out of your great goodness, pity and mercy, and I beg it of you by the love you have for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Another Prayer

O immaculate Virgin and Mother of God, Queen and Lady of grace! Deign, out of charity, to cast a compassionate look on this lost world; see how all have abandoned the way your most holy Son deigned to teach them; they have forgotten his holy laws and have become so perverted that one can say: *Non est qui faciat bonum, non est usque ad unum.*[1] The holy virtue of faith has been extinguished in them, so that it is scarcely found on earth. Alas! With this divine light put out, all is darkness and shadows, and they do not

know where they are falling; and yet, crowded together, they go at a hurried pace along the broad road that leads them to eternal perdition. And would you have me, my Mother, a brother of these unhappy ones, look with indifference on their fatal ruin? Ah, no! Neither the love I have for God nor the love of neighbour can bear it; for how can it be said that I have charity or love of God if, seeing my brother in need, I do not help him?[2] How shall I have charity if, knowing that on a certain road there are thieves and murderers who rob and kill all who pass, I nevertheless do not warn those who are heading there? How shall I have charity if, seeing the ravening wolves devouring my master's sheep, I keep silent? How shall I have charity if I stay dumb on seeing them steal the jewels of my Father's house, jewels so precious that they cost the blood and life of a God, and on seeing that they have set fire to the house and estate of my most beloved Father? Ah, it is not possible to keep silent, my Mother, on such occasions; no, I will not keep silent, even if I knew they would tear me to pieces; I will not keep silent; I will call and cry out, I will shout to heaven and earth so that so great an evil may be remedied; I will not keep silent; and if from so much shouting my throat grows hoarse, I will raise my hands to heaven, and the blows I strike on the ground with my feet will make up for the lack of my tongue.

Therefore, my Mother, from now on I begin to speak and cry out; already I run to you; yes, to you, who are the Mother of mercy; deign to give help in so great a need. Do not tell me that you cannot, for I know that in the order of grace you are all-powerful; deign, I beg you, to give all the grace of conversion, for without it we could do nothing; and then send me, and you will see how they are converted. I know you will give this grace to all who truly ask for it; but if they do not ask for it, it is because they do not know their need, and their state is so fatal that they do not even know what is good for them; and this is just what moves me still more to compassion. Therefore I, as the first and chief sinner, ask it for all the others and offer myself as the instrument of their conversion. Though I am destitute of every natural gift for this purpose, no matter: *mitte me*;[3] so it will be better seen that *gratia Dei sum id quod sum*.[4] Perhaps you will tell me that, like delirious sick men, they will not listen to the one who wants to cure them, but will rather despise him and persecute him to death. No matter: *mitte me*, for *cupio esse anathema pro fratribus meis*.[5] Or you will tell me that I shall not be able to bear so many hardships of cold, heat, rain, nakedness, hunger, thirst, etc. No doubt that of myself I can bear nothing; but I trust in you and say: *Omnia possum in ea quae me confortat.*[6] O Mary, my mother and my hope, consolation of my soul, remember the many graces I have asked of you, and you have granted them all; and now, of all times, am I to find that perennial spring dried up? No, it has never been heard, nor will it ever be heard, that any devotee of yours was rejected by you.[7] You see, Lady, that all I ask of you is directed to the greater glory of God and yours and to the good of souls; that is why I hope to obtain it, and I will obtain it; and to move you to grant it to me sooner, I will not allege merits of mine, for I have none but demerits. I will say, rather, that as Daughter of the Eternal Father, Mother of the Son and Spouse of the Holy Spirit, it is most fitting that you be jealous for the honour of the Most Holy Trinity, of which the soul of man is a living image, bathed in the most precious blood of a God made man. After Jesus and you have done so much for it, will you now abandon it? It is true that it deserves this abandonment; but out of charity I beg you not to abandon it. I ask it of you by all that is most holy and sacred above heaven and earth; I ask it of you by that very One whom I, though unworthy, lodge every day in my house, to whom I speak as to a friend, whom I command and who obeys me, coming down from heaven at my word. This is the very God who preserved you from original sin, who became incarnate in your womb, who crowned you with glory in heaven and made you the advocate of sinners; and he, in spite of being God, hears me and obeys me every day. Then hear me, you at least this once, and deign to grant me the grace I ask; I trust that you will do it, because you are my mother, my relief, my consolation, my strength and my all after Jesus. Long live Jesus! Long live Mary! Amen.

Ejaculation

O Jesus and Mary! The love I have for you makes me long for death so that I may be united with you in heaven; but so great is this love that it makes me ask for a long life so as to win souls for heaven. O love! O love!

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[1] *Aut.* n. 154.

[2] Ps 52:4 Vulgate; cf. Rom 3:12.

[3] Cf. 1 Jn 3:17.

[4] "Send me" (Is 6:8).

[5] "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10).

[6] Rom 9:3.

[7] Phil 4:13.

[8] *Obras completas*, BAC, Madrid 1953, vol. 1, p. 723.

Appendix: Explanation of the Gospel Parable

The first servant signifies an apostolic missionary to whom the Lord, besides the talent of the priestly dignity, has entrusted four others, which are the four corners of the earth, when he said: *Euntes in universum mundum, praedicate evangelium omni creaturae*.[1]

The second signifies a parish priest to whom the same Lord, besides the talent of the priestly dignity, has entrusted the other talent of the parish.

The third is any priest to whom the Lord has handed over the single talent of the priestly dignity. Woe to him if he does not trade with it! Woe to him if he hides it out of fear or sloth! Woe to him! As a wicked servant he will be cast into the outer darkness,[2] that is, into hell, as the sacred commentators say. *Sufficit mihi anima mea*, says St. Augustine, putting the words in the mouth of this bad priest: "What I want is to save my own soul, lest I lose it by wanting to save other people's"; and the same holy Father answers him: *Eia, non tibi venit in mentem servus ille qui abscondit talentum?* Woe to you, for if this tree of the priestly dignity bears no fruit, it will be said to you: *Ut quid terram occupat?*[3] and it will be ordered cut down and thrown into the fire of hell.[4]

The Council of Cologne calls this priest a wolf and a thief, assuring him that he will infallibly suffer a great punishment: *Quod ingens ultio tandem certo subsequetur.* Clearly such a priest is a wolf to the little sheep of Jesus Christ, since he kills them directly by his scandals or vices, the inevitable consequence of his idleness, or indirectly by letting them die of hunger, like the rich glutton who left poor Lazarus a victim of want.[5] The little ones ask for bread, and there is no one to break it for them;[6] this bread is holy instruction in the law of the Lord and the administration of the sacraments. Moreover, such a priest is a thief, because the Church maintains him and he does not work for her; just as that servant is a thief who, maintained by his master so that he may work, sits with his hands folded \[*se está mano sobre mano*\]. We know that Jesus Christ has called us into his holy house to work as he did: *Sicut misit me Pater, et ego mitto vos.*[7] Yes, we must all work according to the talents and graces we have received from the Lord,[8] and whoever cannot, because of infirmity or old age, let him make up for it with prayer.

The work of each one according to his talent is so important that without it everything is lost. For example: what will become of the fruit of the missions if, after sinners have been convinced and, with the Lord's help, placed in the state of grace, the priests who live in each parish do not work? As the missionaries cannot always be there, the priests of the place must keep feeding with the fuel of the sacred ministry the divine fire the missionaries have kindled; otherwise the holy flame will naturally and imperceptibly go out. Good seed sown in a field, if it is neglected, will be choked by weeds.[9] Of what use will it be for the missionaries to beget many in Christ[10] if afterwards the other priests do not take care, like good nurses, to keep and increase the spiritual life of these children with breasts full of holy zeal?

I will copy here the thundering words of the Apostle St. Paul to Timothy: "I charge you before God and Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead, by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the divine word in season and out of season; reprove, entreat, exhort with all patience and doctrine. For the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, but, having an extreme itch to hear doctrines that flatter their passions, they will heap up for themselves a crowd of teachers suited to their disordered desires, and will close their ears to the truth and turn them to fables. You, meanwhile, be watchful in all the things of the ministry; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; fulfil all the duties of your ministry."[11]

On this doctrine of the Apostle I wish to add the following counsels, especially for parish priests.

1. You will make it your chief aim to take good care of your own conscience and that of your parishioners, and for this you will spend some time during the day thinking about a matter of such importance.

2. You know that *nemo dat quod non habet*; certainly you will not be able to give light to your parishioners unless you first ask God to enlighten you, nor kindle them in charity unless God first kindles you with that fire which he communicates in meditation,[12] prayer and spiritual reading; and for this you will not lack time if you have it distributed by a prudent method and everything in order.

3. You will try to catechize and preach to your parishioners not only by good example but also by the divine word, using gentleness more than rigour, and entreating and persuading more than commanding.[13]

4. You will try to kindle in your parishioners the flame of divine love; for this, have mental prayer held in the parish every day, or at least on Sundays; instil this divine science into them, showing them its excellence, usefulness, necessity and ease, since they can practise it in the midst of their occupations; teach them how to make ejaculatory prayers. Inspire them with devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to the Most Blessed Trinity, to the most pure Virgin, to the patron saints and to the guardian angels. Exhort them to frequent the holy sacraments, and for this you will give them the opportunity by being in the confessional very early in the morning; if they do not come one day, they will come another, seeing the chance you offer them every day. Hunters, though birds do not pass at every hour, do not move from their place, but wait for them to come. Ah, if we priests were all very fervent, how different the people would be!

5. You will fulfil what you say to the Lord every day at holy Mass: *Domine, dilexi decorem domus tuae*;[14] love the cleanliness of the church and of the vestments, and always offer the Lord the best, in imitation of Abel; do not be like Cain, who kept the best for himself and sacrificed the most worthless to God.[15] Woe to you if you take more care of the things of your house than of those of the church! Woe to you if you keep the good, precious and clean for yourself, and offer the Lord what is bad, mean and dirty! *Vae tibi!*

6. Not only will you see to the cleanliness and neatness of the church with every care, but you will also keep, and have others keep, a religious silence in it. Learn from the zeal of the divine Master, who bore calumnies, scourges, thorns, nails and death on the cross upon himself, but did not bear or tolerate those who profaned the temple.[16]

7. You will banish from yourself those vices which you reprove or must reprove in your parishioners, and, adorned with the virtues you urge on them, behave in such a way that you can say to them with the Apostle: *Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi*.[17]

8. Never treat your parishioners badly in word or deed, choosing rather to suffer than to give them cause to suffer; and when you have to reprove, always mix sweetness with correction, keeping in mind that more flies are caught with a little drop of honey than with a barrel of vinegar;[18] that the oil and wine of the Samaritan have healed more wounds than all the sour wine of the Pharisees;[19] and that those harsh and strong words that sometimes come from the mouths of some priests may seem to them to come from pure zeal, but in truth do not come from zeal but from passion; they do not know what spirit they are of,[20] and how little they imitate the meekness of Jesus Christ, our divine Master: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess earthly

hearts and, in the end, the promised land, or glory."[21]

9. You will see to it that at Mass they see you devout; at table, temperate; in the street, modest; in your words, prudent; in your works, chaste; in the operations of the holy ministry, diligent; and in everything concerning the service of God, fervent. You would ill fulfil these duties if your house were not well ordered: *Si quis autem domui suae praeesse nescit, quomodo Ecclesiae Dei diligentiam habebit?*[22]

You will, then, take every care to choose good people for the service of your house, and if in time one of them becomes a cause of scandal to you or your parishioners, pluck him out, put him out of the house at once, even if he is as useful and necessary as eyes, hands and feet, as the Gospel says.[23] Woe to you if, instead of edifying, you should give scandal! It would be better for you to have a millstone hung round your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.[24] Therefore you will see to it that all your household dress modestly, do not speak ill, and do not go about in dealings, dances and other worldly amusements, but rather love retirement, prayer and spiritual reading; that they frequent the holy sacraments; in a word, that they have those virtues you urge on others, and that none of them has the vices you reprove in your parishioners. *Si quis autem suorum, et maxime domesticorum curam non habet, fidem negavit et est infideli deterior.*[25] On no account allow your household to meddle in parish business or with the persons you direct; nor be quick to speak with them of such matters. Look well at what people come to your house. Receive with all courtesy and love those who come on business of the ministry; if you ought to do what they ask, do it as soon as you can and as well as you know how; if you cannot do it, do not get upset over it or scold them; console them with good reasons, and so you will not offend them. If those who come to your house are idle people, get away from them \[*húyeles luego el cuerpo*, literally "dodge them with your body"\] at once, saying that you have things to do, for some of these publish everything they see, to no small harm to the edification of the faithful;[26] such people, besides, are very often the cause of suspicions, jealousies and rivalries and other very grave evils, as I have seen in some parishes.

10. Go very carefully as regards visits, social gatherings or meetings, banquets and similar occasions, which prudence, courtesy or charity may from time to time require; all extremes are vicious. If a priest grows too familiar with some, he will draw on himself their contempt and the hatred of the rest; and if he never lets himself be seen even on indispensable occasions, he incurs the charge of being rude and uncivil. I would wish you not to fail in any of those attentions that prudence and the discharge of the sacred ministry require; but I beg you, by all that is most holy and sacred, do not be quick to pay visits, especially to persons of the other sex. Ah, what evils and misfortunes I have seen follow from this! Ah, what scandals! Nor is it enough to say: "They are good people, they are pious persons"; to which St. Augustine answers: *Nec tamen quia sanctiores sunt minus cavendae: quo enim sanctiores sunt, eo magis alliciunt, et sub praetextu blandi sermonis immiscent se vitia impiissimae libidinis: crede mihi, episcopus sum, in Christo loquor, non mentior; cedros Libani, id est, altissimae contemplationis homines sub hac specie corruisse reperi, de quorum casu non magis praesumebam quam Hieronymi et Ambrosii.* The same warning is given by St. Thomas,[27] St. Ignatius,[28] St. Francis de Sales[29] and St. Bonaventure, with whom I conclude: *Sequamur consilium B. Hieronymi dicentis: foeminam quam vides bene conversantem, mente dilige, non frequentia corporali, quia initium libidinis est in visitatione mulierum.*

11. Beware also of games of cards, dice, etc., keeping in mind what the sacred canons and holy Fathers say of them; in particular the Second Council of Constantinople and the Fourth Lateran forbid clerics games of chance. St. John Chrysostom says: *Diabolus est qui in artem ludos digessit*; and St. Ambrose writes: *Non solum profusos, sed omnes iocos declinandos arbitror… licet interdum honesta ioca sint, tamen ab ecclesiastica abhorrent regula.*[30] No less improper for priests is the pursuit of hunting. St. Jerome says: *Nullum sanctum legimus esse venatorem*;[31] I would wish them to hunt souls and not beasts. Someone will say: "I do it to pass the time." Good heavens! \[*¡Válgame Dios!*\] They do not know how to pass the time, and I do not know how mine passes. Another will plead that it is to refresh himself or relieve himself a little

of the burden of the spirit; in that case, let him go for a walk for a while or occupy himself in some other honest recreation, and give up visits, games and hunting parties.

12. You will take particular care, in all you say and do, to look to the good of your parishioners, showing them the desire you have for their spiritual and temporal good and how much you feel their troubles, while you try to relieve them; thus you will so win them that they will look on you as their esteemed father and watchful shepherd, and you will be so much master of their hearts that you will earn all their confidence. Quite the contrary will happen to you if you behave otherwise; believe me, I know it by experience.[32]

13. You will always be armed with temperance and modesty against any incident that might give you something to suffer, bearing in mind that you will be greatest when you bear most, and that patience conquers and convinces with double force compared with anger; what your parishioners will refuse when you tell them angrily, they will afterwards do gladly when you put it to them patiently and gently.

14. Do not be disheartened or lose confidence even if you do not obtain what you desire in the spiritual progress of your parishioners; for even if you do not succeed in benefiting them, you gain much by doing your duty, and if you do not save them, you save yourself.[33] Let us do what is fitting, and God will do what is best for us; to the last moment of life we must strive to the utmost \[*agonizar*\] for the good,[34] leaving the rest to God.

15. Keep death before you in life; in what you do, the reckoning that awaits you, an eternal crown or an eternal punishment; the things of this world last a breath, and enjoying God or suffering lasts for ever and ever.

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

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[1] Mk 16:15.

[2] Cf. Mt 25:30.

[3] Lk 13:7.

[4] Cf. Lk 13:9.

[5] Lk 16:21.

[6] Cf. Lam 4:4.

[7] Jn 20:21.

[8] Cf. Mt 25:27.

[9] Cf. Mt 13:7.

[10] Cf. 1 Cor 4:15.

[11] 2 Tim 4:1–5.

[12] Vulgate; Ps 39:3. *Aut.* n. 227.

[13] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 372–383. *El colegial*, LR, Barcelona 1861, vol. 2, p. 445.

[14] Ps 25:8 Vulgate; Ps 26:8.

[15] Cf. Gen 4:3–5.

[16] Cf. Mt 21:12.

[17] "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1; cf. 4:16).

[18] Cf. Anon., *El espíritu de San Francisco de Sales* (LR, Barcelona 1856), p. 39.

[19] Cf. Lk 10:34.

[20] Cf. Lk 9:55.

[21] Cf. Mt 5:4.

[22] 1 Tim 3:5.

[23] Cf. Mt 18:9.

[24] Cf. Mt 18:6.

[25] 1 Tim 5:8.

[26] Cf. 1 Tim 5:13.

[27] St. Thomas, *De modo confitendi*, art. 2.

[28] St. Ignatius of Loyola, Letter to Fr. Emerio de Bonis, Rome, 23 May 1556: *Obras completas* (BAC, Madrid 1977), 3rd rev. ed., pp. 1002–1003.

[29] Anon., *El espíritu de San Francisco de Sales* (LR, Barcelona 1856), pp. 95–96, 190–191.

[30] St. Ambrose, *De officiis* 1, 23.

[31] *Commentaria in Michaeam* 2, on 5: PL 25, 1204.

[32] Cf. F. Aguilar, *Vida*, p. 416.

[33] Cf. Is 49:4–5. Quoted in *Aut.* n. 119.

[34] Vulgate; Sir 4:28.