St. Anthony Mary Claret

SUNDAY HOMILIES, VOLUME III

Colección de pláticas dominicales, segundo año

From the Spanish of the first edition (Barcelona, 1858)

English translation

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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About this translation · 5
Front Matter of Volume III · 5
35. Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: On Adoration and True Worship · 5
First Part · 6
Second Part · 8
36. Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precept of Almsgiving, and the Benefits of Giving Alms · 10
First Part · 11
Second Part · 13
37. Ninth Sunday after Pentecost: On Sin, and How Worthy of Our Sorrow and Tears Are the Effects It Produces · 15
First Part · 16
Second Part · 18
38. Tenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Seventh Commandment · 20
First Part · 20
Second Part · 22
39. Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: On the Ceremonies of Baptism, and the Remembrance of Them We Must Keep for the Christian Life · 24
First Part · 25
Second Part · 26
40. Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precepts of the Decalogue, and the Contempt Men Show for Them in Following Those of the Devil · 28
First Part · 29
Second Part · 31
41. Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On Gratitude for God’s Benefits · 33
First Part · 34
Second Part · 36
42. Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Fourth Petition of the Our Father · 38
Single Section · 39
43. Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Eleventh Article of the Creed, the Resurrection of the Flesh · 43
First Part · 44
Second Part · 45
44. Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Capital Vice of Envy · 47
First Part · 48
Second Part · 49
45. Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Second Article of the Creed · 52
First Part · 52
Second Part · 54
46. Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On Rash Judgment · 57
First Part · 57
Second Part · 59
47. Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Fifth Article of the Creed: He Descended into Hell · 62
First Part · 62
Second Part · 64
48. Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Last Petition of the Our Father: Deliver Us from Evil · 66
First Part · 67
Second Part · 69
49. Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precept of Forgiving Injuries · 71
First Part · 72
Second Part · 73
50. Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost: On the Duties of a Subject towards His King · 76
First Part · 77
Second Part · 79
51. Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost: On the Honour Children Owe Their Parents · 82

First Part · 83
Second Part · 84
52. Twenty-fourth and Last Sunday after Pentecost: On the Angels · 87
First Part · 88
Second Part · 90
53. The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: On the Third Article of the Creed: Born of the Virgin Mary · 93
First Part · 94
Second Part · 96
54. The Circumcision of the Lord: On the Mystery · 98
First Part · 99
Second Part · 100
55. The Epiphany of the Lord: On the Mystery · 103
Single Section · 103
56. The Ascension of the Lord into Heaven: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Fifth Article of the Creed: He Ascended into Heaven · 107
First Part · 108
Second Part · 109
57. Corpus Christi: On the Institution of This Feast, and the Ways to Celebrate It · 112
First Part · 112
Second Part · 114
58. The Most Pure Conception of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Dogma of Original Sin · 116
First Part · 117
Second Part · 119
59. The Nativity of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and the Blessings That Came into the World with Our Lady's Birth · 121
First Part · 122
Second Part · 124
60. The Annunciation: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Hail Mary · 127
First Part · 128
Second Part · 130
61. The Purification of Our Lady: On the Mystery, and the Virtues Most Holy Mary Practised in It for Our Imitation · 133
First Part · 133
Second Part · 135
62. The Assumption of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and on the Reward of Humility and the Punishment of Pride · 138
First Part · 139
Second Part · 140
63. For a Parish Priest's First Appearance before His Parishioners in His Church · 143
First Part · 144
Second Part · 146
64. For a Parish Priest's Farewell When He Is Transferred to Another Parish, or Leaves His Own for Another Reason · 149
Single Section · 150
65. For the Day of the Publication of the Bull of the Holy Crusade · 153
Single Section · 153
66. Rogation for Lack of Water, or Drought · 160
First Part · 160
Second Part · 162
67. On Plague, Whether Feared or Already Suffered: Rogation to Some Patron Saint of the Town · 165
First Part · 166
Second Part · 167
Third Part · 169
68. Rogation in Time of War · 171

First Part · 171
Second Part · 173
Index of the Pláticas in This Third Volume · 176

About this translation

The *Colección de pláticas dominicales* (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1858–1859, seven volumes) was compiled and published by St. Anthony Mary Claret, then Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, for the use of parish priests. Its title page says that he “formed and gathered” it “from the most classic authors”: the sermons are drawn from other preachers, who are not named, and are given here as sermons of Claret's collection, not as his own compositions. Translated from the edition of 1858–1859. This is Volume III, which completes the “Second Year”, complete with its index.

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.

Front Matter of Volume III

Half-title (p. \[1\]):

COLLECTION OF SUNDAY PLÁTICAS.\ VOLUME III.

Notice (p. \[2\]):

Various Prelates of Spain have granted 2,400 days of indulgence to all who read, or hear read, a chapter or page of any of the publications of the LIBRERÍA RELIGIOSA.

Title page (p. \[3\]):

COLLECTION OF SUNDAY PLÁTICAS,\ which, for the ease and relief of the venerable Parish Priests and Curates,\ has been formed and gathered, from the most classic authors, by\ D. ANTONIO MARÍA CLARET Y CLARÁ,\ Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Primate of the Indies, etc.\ With the approval of the Ordinary.\ Barcelona: Librería Religiosa. — Printing house of Pablo Riera,\ calle de Robador, nos. 24 and 26.\ 1858.

Opening of the text (p. 5):

COLLECTION OF SUNDAY PLÁTICAS.\ SECOND YEAR.

35. Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: On Adoration and True Worship

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 35, pp. 5–14. Gospel: Matthew 7:15–21. Original preacher not named.

> *Pater tuus, qui videt in abscondito, reddet tibi (Matth. 6:18).*
>
> *Your Father, who sees what is most hidden, will reward you.*

The Gospel of this day is from chapter 7 of St. Matthew, and reads thus:

1. “Beware, said Jesus, of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So every good tree bears good fruit, and every bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. You, then, will know these false prophets by their fruits, by their works, without regard to their words; for not everyone who says Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he will enter the kingdom of heaven.” This is the Gospel.

2. All of it is directed to making plain to us what worship must be paid to the Supreme Being. Under the name of false prophets the Saviour indirectly rebukes the scribes and Pharisees, who, with an outward show of virtue, were full of crimes, and so led the unwary astray. Those who cried Lord, Lord: that is, who praised God with their lips while their heart was very far from keeping his commandments; who attended the temple, offered their vows and their sacrifices, and at the same time ignored the weightiest precepts of the law, as if

the service of God consisted only in outward things. Jesus Christ today commands us to flee this kind \[*casta*\] of men as a contagious plague, for dealing with them is all the more dangerous because, under the cloak of the sheep, of religion and of virtue, they are carnivorous wolves and bring into the soul the most concentrated \[*acendrado*\] poison. The sign he gives for knowing them is to look at their works: if, when they praise God, glorify his holy name and adore him with outward actions, their works are contrary to what that same God whom they seem to venerate has ordained, it is proof that their religion is only apparent, and that they are virtuous of tongue but not of heart: false prophets. When I hear this, I turn my eyes to many Christians, and I find them very like those whom our divine Master rebukes today. I am a Christian, they say; and in fact they go to church, make novenas, hear Mass, light up the altars, prostrate themselves before the images of Jesus, of Mary and of the Saints, say various prayers, take part in processions, say Lord, Lord; but if we look at their conduct, we see it lax, contrary to the will of God and his precepts. Considering all this, I have resolved to show today, first, what adoration and worship we pay to God and his Saints; second, what this adoration and worship must be like to be profitable and true.

First Part

3. The virtue of religion, which is the first and most excellent of all the moral virtues, and by which we pay God due worship as the first principle, has various acts. Some are interior, like devotion and prayer; others exterior, so called either because they bow the body before God, like adoration, or because they offer him victims, like sacrifice, especially that of the altar, tithes, first fruits and any other offering; or because they take the name of God, whether to confirm the truth they assert, like the oath, or to make firm what they promise, like the vow, or to praise and bless him, like the divine office or other prayers. All these are acts of the virtue of religion, and a plática would be needed to explain each of them well; but some have already been explained individually in this work, and here I mean to speak only of adoration, which is a virtue by which there is given to God and to the Saints the worship proper to each, according to their own excellence. This adoration can be of three kinds, *latria*, *hyperdulia* and *dulia*; and this distinction arises from the different excellence of the persons adored, which is of three kinds. The first is an uncreated excellence, and this belongs to God alone, and so he alone is adored with *latria*. The second is proper to most holy Mary, by reason of her eminent dignity, grace and perfections above all the Saints, and her adoration is called *hyperdulia*. The third is that proper to the Angels and Saints, by reason of the holiness and gifts they received from the Lord, and they are adored with *dulia*.[1]

4. This adoration, so explained and divided, can be either absolute or relative. Absolute adoration cannot be given to any inanimate thing, as incapable of holiness and virtue, but only to God and to whoever shares in his grace. Relative adoration is that given to some thing, not for its own sake but with reference to another. This adoration can also be interior and exterior. The first is an interior act by which we submit ourselves to God, Lord of all created things and supreme principle of all things; the exterior is an interior act, but shown by some outward signs, such as bowing the head, genuflecting and the like. The principal act is the interior one, and without it the exterior is of no use, as I shall say later. There is a precept to adore God, and it is expressed in chapter 20 of Exodus, where the Lord says: *You shall have no foreign gods before me*; and although this is a negative or prohibitive precept, it includes this affirmative one: *You shall adore me alone, and give me worship as your true God.* Therefore this precept, as negative, binds us always, for we may never adore what is not the true God; but as affirmative it binds us at fixed times, especially on feast days, which we must devote in a special way to the worship and adoration of the Lord. By natural and divine law no place is appointed for adoring God; but the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has raised temples, which are the house of the Lord and the proper place of prayer; and although God is present everywhere and everywhere deserves our adoration, it is more acceptable in his temple, which is his own house: this is the teaching of my angelic master St. Thomas Aquinas.[2] Having explained this in general, it will be well to set out distinctly the three kinds of adoration we mentioned, *latria*, *hyperdulia* and *dulia*.

5. *Latria.* This is the adoration that pays to God the worship proper and due to him for his uncreated excellence, of which no mere creature is capable. It is given to the Persons of the most holy Trinity, together or separately. The proper and special act of this adoration is the sacrifice of the Mass, which is offered to the Lord in profession of the supreme dominion he holds over us; and the vow, which must be made to God alone; and the singing of the *Gloria in excelsis*, the *Te Deum* and other canticles, prayers and acts of homage are acts of *latria*, according to the intention of the one who makes them, directing them to the Godhead alone. To Christ our Redeemer belongs the adoration of *latria*, not only as God but also as man, by reason of the hypostatic union, which unites the humanity with the divinity of this Lord; although we can also, in our consideration, abstract the humanity from the divinity, and then adore it with *hyperdulia* for the fullness of gifts it received from the Father; and so his most holy humanity can be adored with both kinds of adoration, with *latria* and with *hyperdulia*. To the cross on which the Saviour died is owed the adoration of *latria*, both because it is the instrument by which Jesus wrought our redemption and because of its physical contact with his most sacred body. The same applies to the other crosses made in the likeness of the first, because they are regarded as images of our Redeemer, to which is owed the same adoration, though relative, as is given to their original. But if these lose the shape of a cross, the reason for their adoration ceases; not so the first, on which Jesus Christ died, whose particles, however tiny, deserve the adoration of *latria*.[3] To the other instruments of the passion, if they are inanimate, such as the crown of thorns, the scourges with which they whipped the Lord and others, is also owed *latria*, because of the physical contact they had with the Lord, not as instruments of his disgrace; that is why other crowns, scourges, etc., that did not serve in the passion are not worthy of adoration. The animate instruments, like the lips of Judas which gave him the kiss of iniquity, the hands of the Jews who crucified him, that of Malchus who struck him,[4] are not worthy of veneration because of their detestable deicide. And although the most pure hands of most holy Mary and of glorious Joseph touched the body of Jesus Christ many times, and touched it in holiness, they do not have the worship of *latria*, because they have another proper to them, which is the one that follows, as regards most holy Mary.

6. *Hyperdulia.* This is the worship and adoration given to Mary our Lady for the fullness of gifts with which the Most High enriched her as the favourite daughter who came forth from his mouth, firstborn before every creature, in the expression of the Canticles. This Lady, whom the stain of original sin did not touch, like a privileged Esther;[5] who joined the happiness of being a mother with the laurel of virginity; whom God raised up among all women to be mother of her own Creator; who was the mediatrix of our salvation, offering for it, as a heavenly priestess, that peaceful victim in whom the Father is lovingly well pleased; in short, this Lady, who for her virtues and eminent gifts was crowned empress of heaven and queen of all the Angels and all men, has an undeniable title to receive an adoration which, while not equal to that due to God, exceeds beyond all measure that given to the other Saints, not only because she is the Mother of God, but because her merits surpass those of all the just. This is what we call *hyperdulia*, and it is expressed by the prayer of the *Ave Maria*, the *Salve*, the Litany of Loreto and other prayers in themselves indifferent, which the one who venerates her can direct to this special worship owed to our Lady.

7. *Dulia.* This is the adoration paid to the Angels and the other blessed. The reason for this adoration is the dignity, excellence, grace and glory which, by the mercy of a rewarding God, they enjoy and will enjoy eternally, and which make them superior to us. They have already left the world, and as friends of God they enjoy his presence, and are appointed to be our advocates and intercessors. Prayers, litanies, commemorations and other religious acts signify the adoration we pay them. This adoration is also owed to their relics and images, but it must be relative: that is, we may not adore the wood, gold or silver of which images are made, directing our adoration to that, but to the original they represent. And with this the objection of the heretics is answered \[*se tapa la objeción*, the mouth of the objection is stopped\], who take us for idolaters because, against what God commanded in Exodus, we adore images of plaster or stone. It is not so: by means of these material things we adore the Saints who are in heaven, or rather that God to whom

all adoration is due, and who wills to be venerated in his Saints. This is adoration; this is the worship we owe to the Supreme Being and to his just. And shall we fulfil this worship by performing it only outwardly, without the heart moving it? We shall see in the

Second Part

8. I have said that adoration of God, of Mary and of the Saints can be interior and exterior; that is, a man can sometimes adore God in the secret of his heart without outwardly expressing his adoration, and at other times show his worship outwardly. On this there are two errors we must avoid. The first is to persuade oneself that the worship we owe to God and the Saints is fulfilled by interior adoration, of the heart, alone: an error into which various heretics fell, and even many modern philosophers, who would rather see no outward show of religion at all. What an absurdity! Man, my brethren, is made up of soul and body; both were formed by God, and so not only the soul but soul and body must serve and adore him. If man consisted of soul alone, the soul alone ought to adore the Lord. Such is the worship and adoration paid him by the heavenly spirits, occupied only in adoring the Lord in spirit and truth, contemplating the divine perfections, and uniting themselves with the supreme Majesty by a pure love, in praise, blessing and thanksgiving. But we are carnal; our soul, wrapped in the body, cannot perform its operations except through the ministry of the senses, and needs sensible objects to help its interior faith and to awaken its love, so as to give God his true worship. This error of which we are speaking is not very common among us. But there is another which tends to reign even among those who boast of being Christians: they think that by outward actions alone, for example hearing Mass, saying the Rosary, kneeling on the ground \[*hincar la rodilla en tierra*\], crossing themselves, saying prayers from various prayer books, they already fulfil the worship due to God, even though they do not think of his divine Majesty in all they do, nor fulfil the general and particular obligations incumbent on them.

9. An enormous error! All outward worship that we pay to God and to his elect is ordered to the renewal of our heart. Any holy exercise that coexists with our passions, that leaves us stuck to vice, that does not correct our envies, our grudges, our scandals, our ambition, our crimes, is not true worship: it is a mockery of Religion. And all the display of feasts, processions, Stations of the Cross \[*Vía crucis*\], novenas, however grand it may look in the eyes of the world, if it is not united to our interior worship and ordered to serving God and keeping his commandments, is nothing: it is no more than a sounding brass, or an empty bell that makes a noise, as St. Paul said; and a religion that is content with outward actions alone is a religion of pagans. In this sense, and not in the sense our innovating philosophers give it, all worship is born of the heart: that is, our worship must begin in the heart, and then be expressed outwardly with the acts that Religion prescribes.

10. But ah, my brethren! Every day we see the churches full of the faithful, many lights on the altars paid for by the piety of the townspeople, many bows of body and head, many prayers public and private; and seldom can there have been fewer true Christians. And why? Solomon answers already: *Because there is*, he says, *a way that seems right to a man, but its end is perdition.* There are men who imagine that with outward devotions alone they have fulfilled the whole law and all their duties, although they are implicated in the greatest crimes. Let us make this practical, to be better understood.

11. There are persons who frequently attend the celebration of the divine mysteries, who never let a solemn feast go by without approaching the holy table to partake of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in Communion. All this is holy, all acts of religion, but only if they are adorned with sincerity within and the desire to profit by them and fill the soul with virtues. But as a rule we see that many of those who practise this are not free of their infamous passions; that their life, far from being virtuous, is always lax; that they do not deprive themselves of worldly amusements, however harmful; they keep up the same gambling, the same taverns, the same finery and the same pleasures. False prophets, wolves in sheep’s clothing, virtuous outwardly but impious at heart: their worship is not true.

12. There are others, especially ladies, who will stay glued to the floor of a church for many hours, hearing Masses and going through a certain set \[*categoría*\] of devotions they have laid down for themselves. All this is good, and an act of veneration to God and to his Saints, if at the same time the essential obligations are fulfilled. But if, while the wife is at prayer in church, the husband fills the air with curses because he has no one to give him his dinner, and the sons run loose, the daughters are taken up with flirtations \[*devaneos*\], the household is gratifying its criminal passions because there is no one to watch over and look after their actions: that is false devotion, for it hinders duty, and under an appearance of virtue this woman is worse than an infidel for not caring for her household, says St. Paul.[1] There are others who, on seeing the arm of God raised to punish their son, their wife, their fields, their property, with sickness, persecutions, thunderstorms or other tribulations, at once have recourse to the Saints, imploring their intercession; they make vows and pilgrimages to those sacred places famous for the wonders the Lord works there through the prayers of his most loving Mother and of his servants; they prostrate themselves at our Lady's feet, saying to her, like the people of Bethulia to Judith: *Pray for us to God, for you are… holy.* In short, they leave nothing undone so that the Lord may deliver them from the trouble they are suffering or fear. This is right, and these acts of adoration are acceptable if done as they should be. But if, while doing everything for their relief, they leave out the main thing, which is to confess their sins rightly and reform their life, which is the end God has in view when he afflicts us; if there is no attempt to leave their vices; if in the very hermitages or shrines where we make these supplications God is offended still more with drunkenness, feasting, lewdness and gambling: if this is so, it is not true adoration, this worship is vicious, and God will refuse our petitions and the Saints will not hear our prayers. There are others who, either in thanksgiving to the Saints who have done them good, or to implore their patronage, wear outwardly the habit of Carmel, of St. Anthony, of the Sorrows, or some other. A virtuous action, as a profession of the adoration and worship of God, of most holy Mary and of the Saints; but if at the same time they do not adorn themselves with the habit of the virtues which those outward signs signify, and which those whom we wish to imitate in dress practised; if rather, under the religious exterior, they cover a soul black with sin: it is feigned adoration, they are false prophets, and their worship is contemptible. There are others…

13. But let us not weary ourselves: a great part of those who boast of being Christians are so only in appearance, like that altar of the tabernacle of which Exodus says that, for all its brilliant exterior, it was not solid: inside it was hollow. My brethren, it is an error to presume that we are virtuous and true worshippers of God, and that we pay him due worship, with outward acts of religion alone. The religion of Jesus Christ, though it is a sweet yoke and a light burden, does not lack difficulties; and the kingdom of heaven, says the Saviour, suffers violence, and only those who do violence to themselves take it by force. If our worship, then, consisted only in certain works of outward piety and devotion, the way that leads to eternal life would not be narrow; it would be easy to walk on it. But what costs effort is to mortify the appetite, overcome a dominant passion, root out a vicious habit, separate oneself from an alluring occasion that hurls us into sin, restore what belongs to others, forgive injuries and do good to whoever has harmed us. This is hard, no doubt; it is costly, nature resists it; but this is to be true Christians; this is what must of necessity accompany our adoration of God and the worship we pay him. The contrary is to be false prophets, of whom Jesus Christ speaks today and whom he so detests, commanding us expressly to flee from them as from a contagion that can infect us: who, saying continually Lord, Lord, never having divine praise off their lips \[*no cayéndoles de la boca*\], busying themselves with works of charity, of mercy, of religion, are transgressors of the precepts of the very Lord whom they magnify so much outwardly. They praise him with their lips, as Isaiah said, but their heart, their treacherous heart, is very far from God.

14. This was my subject. Would that those whom we see so eagerly engaged in adoring God, attending church, holding feasts for the Saints to whom they are devoted, saying novenas and practising other works of religion, may not lose the merit they would gain by them, if to such outward acts of worship they joined the interior acts of the spirit, loving the God whom they adore and fulfilling his commandments with all

exactness: in this consist true adoration and true worship, paying to the Supreme Being, to Mary our Lady and to the other elect the adoration that belongs to each, with soul and with body; for so shall we adore God in blessedness for all eternity!

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[2] *adoración*. *ST* II-II q. 84, q. 103.

[3] Source note: 2, 2, q. 84, a. 3 \[*Summa theologiae* II-II\].

[4] Thomas, *ST* III q. 25 a. 4.

[5] John 18:10.

[6] Esther 15:13 Vulgate.

[1] 1 Tim. 5:8.

36. Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precept of Almsgiving, and the Benefits of Giving Alms

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 36, pp. 15–25. Gospel: Luke 16:1–9. Original preacher not named.

> *Facite vobis amicos de mammona iniquitatis (Luke 16:9).*
>
> *Make friends for yourselves with the money of iniquity.*

The Gospel of this day is from the sixteenth chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. “Jesus said to his disciples: There was a rich man who had a steward, and this steward was accused before him of having squandered his master’s goods. And calling him, he said to him: Give an account of your stewardship, for from today I do not want you as my steward any more. And the steward said within himself: What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship from me? I cannot dig, for I am not used to bodily labour, and I shall be ashamed to beg. I know what I will do, so that there may be some who will receive me into their houses when I am removed from the stewardship. So he called his master’s debtors one by one, and said to the first: How much do you owe my master? And he said: A hundred barrels of oil. And the steward said to him: Take your bond, or note of hand; sit down at once and write another for only fifty. Then he said to another: And you, how much do you owe? And he answered: A hundred measures of wheat. He said to him: Take the bond you had made and write another for eighty. And the master praised this unfaithful steward, not for his unfaithfulness, but because he had acted prudently; for by means of this alms he had given he had sheltered himself from the troubles about to come upon him. For the children of this age, the lovers of this world, are more prudent, or shrewder, than the children of light. And I say to you: Win friends for yourselves with the temporal riches you possess, which are commonly occasions of iniquity, by pouring them out on the needy, so that when you come to fail they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.” This is the Gospel.

2. This parable speaks to you, rich of the world, and to all who possess goods not needed for the first necessities of your houses. The Lord, whose is the whole earth and all that fills it, is the rich man whom Jesus Christ puts before us in this Gospel. He has given you the goods you possess as if in administration; you are stewards to keep them and to give them the use your Lord has commanded you. But he warns you that on the day of judgment, when your stewardship ends, he will ask a strict account of what he has entrusted to you and of how you have distributed it. Woe to you if you have squandered your goods by making them serve to feed the passions! Eternal damnation: this will be the punishment, as holy Scripture announces in many places. The means you have of being admitted by the Lord to his grace on that day is shown by the present Gospel: to share your superfluous wealth among the poor, to give alms; this is the means. Almsgiving binds those who are able to give by the precept of charity, or love of neighbour, whom we are obliged to help in his needs; unless we say that this precept is included in the seventh commandment, which says, Thou shalt not steal, since in the judgment of the holy Fathers it is robbery to deny alms to a poor man. Hear St. Ambrose in

the eighty-first of his sermons: You will say, What injustice do I do, robbing no one, if I keep well what is mine? O imprudence! says the Saint. Do you call yours what you possess? From what store did you bring it when you came into the world? It is no less a crime to take from one who has than not to give to the needy when you have.[1] I am going, then, to speak today of almsgiving; and in what way? In the way the Gospel suggests to me. In the first place it gives the precept of almsgiving, saying: Win friends for yourselves with temporal riches; and in the second place it sets out the reward for keeping this command, saying: so that when you come to fail they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. That is, I am going to prove that there is a precept to give alms to the poor: the first part; and that the gain and profit we receive by giving them is great: the second part.

First Part

3. To explain the first part of this plática I must show what alms is, what precepts there are to give it, who is obliged to it, from what goods, and with what conditions. Let us set it all out briefly. What is alms? It is an act of the virtue of charity by which we relieve our neighbour's need, moved by compassion for his miseries. An act of charity: charity obliges us to love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves. One must be stripped of the love of God not to shelter and help creatures who are his image, and to rescue whom from the distress to which the sin of the first father had brought them he came down from heaven to earth and died crucified on a tree. He who has the goods of this world, said St. John, and sees his brother in need, and closes the bowels of his compassion without helping him, how can we say that charity, or love towards his God, is in him? Further, it says we must love our neighbour as ourselves: in no way shall we love a poor man as ourselves if we do not shelter him when we see him in need, giving him what we should wish others to do for us in a like case. But the definition says that this must be done moved by compassion for another's misery: these words exclude the vainglory with which this act of charity is often performed. That is why Jesus Christ commands us, when we give alms, not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing; that is, not to give it for display and vain human regard, but moved by love of neighbour, which is followed by compassion for his troubles; for, as St. Augustine says, The alms of the hand without that of the heart is nothing.

4. And is there an express precept to give alms? Yes, my brethren, countless ones. Ecclesiasticus speaks in this way:[1] Because of the commandment take the poor man into your charity, and because of his poverty do not send him away empty. These brief words show that almsgiving is of divine and natural precept. Divine, because this moral precept, which binds in the new law, is many times urged in the holy Scriptures; natural, because the very law of nature moves us to do for another what we want others to do for us. And besides, our brother is of better condition, nobler, more worthy of esteem than corruptible money; that is why the same Ecclesiasticus in the place cited adds: Lose your money for your brother's sake. St. Luke expressly commands it when he says: Give alms. And St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy: Charge the rich of this world to be ready to share their alms with the needy. And the same Apostle makes this precept clear when, writing to the Ephesians, he says to them: Let him who used to steal steal no more; rather let him labour, working with his hands at what is good, so that he may have something to relieve the need of him who suffers it.[2] A precept, says the Father St. Jerome, which shows that we must acquire not only for ourselves but for the relief of the needy.

5. And who is obliged to give alms? As alms can be given in different ways, as the fourteen works of mercy explain, there is no one exempt from this precept. He who enjoys temporal goods must from them relieve the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, and so on; and he who through his poverty sees himself unable to pay out money, clothes or valuables to relieve another's misery does not lack means of practising charity and mercy, whether by comforting the sorrowful, or visiting the sick, or counselling him who needs it, or by many other means that bring with them both the fulfilment of the command and its unspeakable fruits. Sons under their father's authority, married ladies and religious are not obliged to give alms without the consent of their

superiors, unless it be a modest amount which is presumed not to go against the will of those to whom they are subject. Perhaps a lady will say: I have property of my own; may I, and even must I, give alms? Certainly not, without her husband's express consent. Hear St. Augustine: Let her not say, that is, the married woman, I do what I like with what is mine; no, for she is not even mistress of herself, but her husband is, who is her head, according to St. Paul.

6. And from what goods must alms be given? To answer this it is necessary to know how many kinds of goods and of needs there are. There are superfluous goods and necessary goods. The very name of the superfluous shows that we need them for nothing. The necessary are of two kinds. Some are absolutely necessary: those we cannot part with without endangering our life, our health, or the fulfilment of our obligations. Others are relatively necessary: those that contribute to the dignity and display required by our class or office. Needs, too, are either urgent or common. Urgent or extreme needs are those of a wretch who will perish if he is not helped; and common needs are those that beggars ordinarily suffer. There is no doubt that from superfluous goods we are most strictly obliged to relieve the needy, whatever their need; for since all goods are God's, he has distributed them to the rich, making them as it were their administrators, so that they may meet their own needs and, these being met, relieve those of others. That is why the holy Fathers say that the superfluous of the rich is the necessary of the poor, and call those who do not so relieve them thieves, because they do not use God's goods for the ends for which he dispensed them. From goods absolutely necessary for the preservation of life and the obligations of his house a man will seldom be obliged to help his neighbour, for charity begins with oneself; and only when it was seen that an unfortunate was certainly about to die should something of what is necessary to us be cut off to help him; for otherwise there would be fulfilled what St. Augustine says: If you did not feed him, you killed him.[3] But from what is necessary for the luxury or display of our state we must relieve the grave needs of our neighbour, reducing our establishment \[*el tren*: one's carriages, servants and household state\], the finery of our dress and the costly furnishings of our house; for there is no reason why some should live in extraordinary splendour while others perish, all having come from one and the same earth, which bears fruit indifferently for all, as the Father St. Gregory said. In such a case they must imitate their divine Master Jesus, of whom St. Paul says:[4] You know the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich he became poor for our sakes, so that by his poverty you might become rich. If a God made himself poor to relieve our miseries, with how much more reason must a powerful man despise the vain display of the world, and cut back a little even on what his rank demands, to help his gravely needy brother? But ah, my brethren! If we heed the maxims of a corrupt world, if we want to follow its criminal ideas, how little you will find superfluous to relieve the poor! Everything will seem necessary to you; and at the very moment when you are going to spend your money on a play, a bullfight, gambling or a prostitute, you will despise an unfortunate who asks you for a small alms. I do not know whether that expense will be necessary or superfluous: think about it yourselves.

7. The conditions with which alms must be given are many and very important for its merit; I shall mention some. Alms must be given from one's own goods, not from stolen goods nor from what is owed to a creditor, which comes to the same thing. He who offers sacrifices from the substance of the poor, said the Lord, is like one who kills a son in his father's presence. This is what he does, said St. Gregory, who wants to fulfil charity while failing gravely in justice. Alms must be given with joy and gladness of heart, not as if under compulsion and by force. God loves a cheerful giver, says St. James:[5] a joy that must be founded on the extraordinary favour the Father of mercies does us in choosing us as his instruments for distributing his goods, and assuring us an unspeakable reward for carrying out this ministry. Alms must be given in proportion to our means: so Tobit said to his son: Son, be merciful to the poor according to what God gives you; if he gives you much, give much, and little if he gives you little. Alms must also be given with great respect and reverence for the needy: they are as it were God's agents to receive us into the eternal tabernacles by means of our works of mercy, as it were images that represent Jesus Christ himself. We must also look to whom we are helping. That maxim, Do good and do not look to whom, has never suited me. It is true that we

must do it without considering the person of the poor man, but rather that of Christ, who is helped in the needy; but in my judgment great care must be taken not to give alms to one who does not need it, defrauding a truly poor man of it. Often alms only increase the number of the idle, the lazy, and who knows what other vermin. Alms is for him who cannot earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. This is enough for my first part.

Second Part

8. When you pour out your soul into the bosom of the poor, said the prophet Isaiah, then your light shall rise in the darkness.[1] Words which, according to the holy Fathers, have this sense: When you give alms to the needy, placing in his hands not only the temporal goods with which you benefit him, but much more your loving, compassionate and generous heart, then the beautiful light of divine favours will shine in you, to console you amid the shadows of the troubles of this world. Body and soul will be rewarded in you, since soul and body contributed to showing mercy to your needy brother. Indeed, bodily and spiritual fruits are the effects of almsgiving. Let us speak of them separately.

9. Bodily fruits. See what the Psalmist says, as the Apostle explains his words in the ninth chapter of his Second Letter to the Corinthians: He who sows in blessings shall reap blessings… to him who gives seed to the sower bread will be given to eat; and so the Lord will multiply the harvest of your sowing… so that in all things you may be enriched. That is, the God who leaves not the least service done to him unrewarded, and who will not leave without reward a cup of cold water given in his name to one in need, is the one who fills with temporal goods those who give alms to the poor. Alms, in the expression of St. Basil and St. Clement of Alexandria, can be compared either to a well or to a woman's breasts. A well that is not used, whose waters are not stirred, usually dwindles, or dries up, or goes foul; but let water be drawn from it continually, and this very thing calls other waters and as it were draws those in the veins of the earth to fill the well. A woman who stops giving the child the nourishment nature provided for the infancy of the fruit of her womb will soon find her breasts dry, while on the contrary the very drawing the infant makes with its mouth keeps filling those fountains of nature. See, my brethren, the effects of almsgiving. Goods, riches hidden in a drawer, unused, unmoved, without the poor needy ones drawing on them, are useless, idle; they dry up, they are lost. Ah, how many examples of this history shows us! But poured into the hands of the poor, God, who gives the increase to all things, multiplies them wonderfully: that is, he arranges that their fields bear fruit, their trade is profitable, their undertakings succeed; in short, that by every means they draw gains they would lack if they were not givers of alms. The Wise man says it in few words in the twenty-eighth chapter of Proverbs: He who gives to the poor will not know want; but he who despises him who asks will have to bear scarcity and penury: *Qui dat pauperi non indigebit; qui despicit deprecantem sustinebit penuriam.*

10. St. John, patriarch of Alexandria, called the Almsgiver, used to say: I have seen by experience that the more I give to the poor, the more God gives to me. And so he often said to his Majesty: Lord, we shall see who outdoes whom: you by filling me with goods, or I by distributing them to the needy. This is why the great Father St. John Chrysostom said that he who relieves the poor must thank God, because he receives more from God by his alms than the poor man does when he receives it. Jesus Christ our Saviour as a rule gave thanks to his eternal Father when he did a work of kindness to the needy, for he knew well the great reward that awaited it.

11. In countless ways the Lord rewards almsgiving even in temporal things. So we see that he did it with the midwives of Egypt, giving them fruitfulness to enlarge their families, because against the wicked decree of Pharaoh they preserved and fed the children of the Hebrew women.[2] How useful almsgiving is for obtaining the offspring one desires! Abraham and Sarah, distinguishing themselves in hospitality to the poor and to pilgrims, obtained, besides countless blessings, the most virtuous and estimable maiden as a wife for their son Isaac. How much giving to the needy helps towards a happy settlement in life! Elijah and Elisha obtained from heaven the health and life of children whom the hosts who had charitably lodged them in their houses

were mourning as dead. Ah, even the health of the sick is often a fruit of almsgiving.

12. But this is little. Nothing temporal is of use if heaven is not won. What does it profit a man, says the Gospel, to gain the whole world if his poor soul suffers loss? Nothing. Spiritual goods are, and must be, more highly prized by us; and these especially are the reward of the mercy we show to our unfortunate brethren. He distributed, he gave to the poor, says Psalm 111; therefore his virtue and justice shall endure for ever. For ever. Yes, my brethren: it seems that God has as it were entailed \[*vinculada*: settled as an inalienable inheritance\] glory on those who give alms. In holy Scripture alms is called seed. See the circumstances that go with seed, and you will see how, metaphorically, they designate the spiritual fruits of alms. Seed is hidden and buried under the dust: so alms is hidden in the bosom of the poor, as Ecclesiasticus says. Seed, when it is cast on the ground, seems about to be lost; but it is not so: it grows green, bears fruit and multiplies a hundredfold at harvest time. Alms too seems, when it is given, to be lost to its owner; but it is a seed of eternal blessing that multiplies a hundredfold, that is gathered on the day of judgment to be stored in the heavenly granary, after the cockle of sinners has gone to be fuel for the flames of hell. Seed is sown one year and its fruit gathered another; alms is sown in this life, which is the day of grace, and its hundredfold is received in the other, which is the day of glory.

13. A hundredfold: there is no doubt of it. A holy bishop was preaching this in his church, and a philosopher called Evagrius gave the prelate sixty pounds to distribute among the poor, and made him draw up a deed that God would give him in heaven a hundred for each one he gave. When this Evagrius died, he ordered his children to bury him with that deed, or note of hand, in his hands. And on the third day after his death, appearing to the holy bishop, he bade him go to the grave. The saint did so with all the clergy, and on uncovering the body it handed him the deed with a paper that said: The philosopher Evagrius to his bishop. I would not have you ignorant, Father, that all the money I gave you in life for the poor I have already received a hundredfold in glory. Take back your note. There is no doubt that alms by itself does not justify the soul nor forgive sins: this belongs only to those Sacraments Jesus Christ instituted to give us grace, which is what excludes all guilt. And so to think that merely by being merciful to the poor, while abandoning ourselves to transgression of the divine commands, we shall obtain heaven as the reward of our acts of kindness, is an error: this is not the voice of Religion. But ah, how many lights, warnings and inspirations does the Lord pour out on a charitable soul, moving it to sorrow for and confession of its sins! How much does almsgiving move the Lord to have mercy on such a one, so that, leaving sin, he may attain blessedness! Blessed are the merciful, says the Gospel, for they shall obtain mercy.[3]

14. In this sense, then, must be understood that saying found in the fourth chapter of the book of Tobit: Alms delivers from death and from sin, and will not suffer the soul to go into the darkness of hell. Words which the Father St. Jerome explains by saying: I do not remember having read that anyone who gladly occupied himself in works of charity came to a bad end. Such a man has many intercessors who plead for him to obtain a happy end. Alms, according to St. Ambrose and St. Leo, is a second baptism, by means of which God disposes a soul to the reform of its life and to purification from the stains of sin by the means the Lord has ordained. Give alms, said the Lord through St. Luke, and behold, all things are clean to you. It is like a sacrifice of propitiation for sin, which, sin having been forgiven in confession, makes satisfaction for the remnants with which it left the soul stained. That is why St. Paul, writing to the Hebrews, said to them: Do not forget to do good and to share; with such sacrifices God himself is merited: *Beneficentiae et communionis nolite oblivisci; talibus enim hostiis promeretur Deus.*[4] Almsgiving is even more for our soul: it is, according to the Nazianzen,[5] what above all makes us like God, deifies us in a certain way with him who glories in being the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation.

15. What more? I have neither room nor words expressive enough to show you how far the spiritual goods reach that our soul heaps up by generosity in relieving the poor. And if the whole life of a Christian must be directed to acquiring virtues, so that on the day of judgment he may see himself seated at the right hand of

the eternal Judge, full of blessings, what means is more suitable than almsgiving? It, said the apostle St. James, exceeds, that is, overcomes God in the supreme judgment: *Superexaltat misericordia iudicium.* Indeed, turn your mind to the valley of Josaphat. There you will see the Judge of the living and the dead, who, seated like a good shepherd separating his flock, will look with an angry and inflexible face on the goats at his left, and will say to them: Go, you cursed, into the eternal fire. And why? He gives no other reason than this, which includes all the rest: Because I was hungry and you gave me no food; thirsty, and you gave me no drink; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and you did not visit me; a prisoner, a captive, and you gave me no help. For though I did not ask alms of you in person, when you did not give it to those poor ones of the world who are my images, through whom I was asking you, it was to me you denied it. O unhappy ones, the Lord has overcome you in his judgment! But on the contrary, the merciful will overcome the judgment by their charitable offices. Hear what he says to those who, like sheep, will be at the right hand of Jesus: Come, blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I was hungry in my poor ones and you gave me food; thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was naked and you gave me clothing to warm me; I was sick (that is, I was in those shelters of suffering humanity), and you visited me (and with your alms you gave me there food, medicines, a bed, clothing, temporal and spiritual relief); in short, you fulfilled towards me, in the person of those poor ones, all the works of mercy I have required of my children. Come, then, now, full of blessings, to share the reward due to your charity; come, for so many unfortunates whose lives you made less wretched by your kindnesses are waiting for you in gratitude. Come: the prayers of the poor relieved by your generosity, these friends you won for yourselves with money that for others has been an idol of iniquity, are about to bring you into the eternal tabernacles, as my Gospel promised. Come: I gave you temporal goods for what you gave to the poor, but now I want to give you eternal joy. Come…

16. My God, most loving God, rewarding God, what shall I give the poor that is not yours? And if it is yours, what merit have I in restoring it to you, its owner, in your poor? How shall I look with indifference on those who represent you to me, poor and full of troubles from your very infancy? I will give you, Lord, all I enjoy, for you repay me with the treasures of earth and heaven. And though my soul is full of sins, though for them I expect nothing but eternal damnation, I hear your Prophet, who says to me as to Nebuchadnezzar: Redeem your sins with alms.[6] So I promise to do. Surely my mercy will obtain for me helps to true repentance; it will purify me of the stains that sins leave in my soul; and so I shall soon enter your glory. Amen.

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[7] *Homily on "I will pull down my barns"*, 7.

[8] The printed margin gives chapter 29: Ecclus.

[9] Luke 11:41 and 12:33; 1 Tim. 6:17–18; Eph. 4:28 (the printed margin gives chapter 4).

[10] *si non pavisti, occidisti.*

[11] 2 Cor. 8:9 (the printed margin gives chapter 8).

[12] The saying is St. Paul's (2 Cor. 9:7), not St. James's.

[1] Isa. 58:10.

[2] Exod. 1:15–21. Then Gen. 18 and 24 (Abraham's hospitality and Rebecca), 1 (3) Kings 17:17–24 and 2 (4) Kings 4:18–37 (the children raised by Elijah and Elisha).

[3] Matt. 5:7.

[4] Tobit 4:11 (Vulgate; 4:10 in modern numbering); Luke 11:41; Heb. 13:16.

[5] St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 14, *On Love for the Poor* (the printed margin gives *Orat. XVI ad p.*). 2 Cor. 1:3.

[6] Dan. 4:24 (Vulgate; 4:27 in modern numbering).

37. Ninth Sunday after Pentecost: On Sin, and How Worthy of Our Sorrow and Tears Are the Effects It Produces

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 37, pp. 26–33. Gospel: Luke 19:41–47. Original preacher not named.

Videns civitatem flevit super eam (Luke 19:41).

Seeing the city, he wept over it.

The Gospel of this day is from the nineteenth chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. "As Jesus drew near the city of Jerusalem, he wept over it, saying: Ah, if you had known, at least on this day in which you are invited to penance, the blessings that would come to you from the peace you must make with your God! But no, you do not know them; your eyes are closed. But days of bitterness will come upon you: your enemies will surround you with batteries, they will level your ground, they will lay low you and your children, and they will not leave in you stone upon stone, because you did not know the day on which you were visited by your Deliverer." So far the principal part of the Gospel. God, whose will is our sanctification, and who created us so that, knowing, loving and serving him in this life, we might enjoy him eternally in the next, seeing that, moved by our disordered passions, we break his law, ourselves closing the heaven he opened to us with his precious blood, continually calls us by his mercy, so that, turning back to him with tears of true penance, we may recover what was lost by sin, or avoid committing it, so as not to be eternally unhappy. Today we have the proof of his compassion, as he shows us the gravity of sin and the terrible effects that follow it in the figure of Jerusalem, foretelling the misfortunes that were to come upon that sinful city for the crucifixion and death it was about to inflict on the very Author of life. At the thought of this Jesus Christ shed so many tears, to teach us the sorrow our heart must have at the sight of the misfortunes that come upon the Jerusalem of our soul through sin. From this I take occasion today to stir you to the knowledge of sin, so that you may weep for it with tears of penance. I shall show doctrinally in my first part what sin is; and in the second, how worthy of our sorrow are the effects that follow it.

First Part

2. Sin is something said, done, thought or omitted against the eternal law of God. These words, which are St. Augustine's,[1] make us understand that sin consists in breaking the law, by word, deed or thought, whether the law be natural or positive, divine or human, ecclesiastical or civil; for all laws flow like streams from the abundant fountain of the eternal law of God, by whom lawgivers decree what is just, and all are directed to the honour of the Supreme Being and the good of our neighbour, which are the foundations on which every law must rest. All this is the doctrine of St. Thomas, my master.[2]

3. Sin is either original or actual. Original sin is the one Adam committed when he disobeyed the precept the Creator laid on him not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, to show him the dominion he had over him and to test whether he would use well or ill the freedom he had granted him at the time of his formation. We all committed this sin, says St. Paul, all of us who descend naturally from this first father; for the Lord had placed in him, as the father of all, the will of all men. And just as, had he not sinned, we should all have inherited the multitude of gifts with which the Most High enriched him, so, since he sinned, we are all heirs of his punishment as well as of his guilt. Adam, then, was deprived of original justice, which consisted in the subordination of the lower parts of man to the higher, of these to reason, and of reason to God. What a happy state we should have enjoyed! A life that time could not destroy was the wonderful effect that went with it; and toil, death and hell would have respected, as by right, this perfect work of the Lord's hands. But Adam sinned, and as we all sinned in him, we lost everything at once. All that ordered and harmonious machine fell apart \[*se descuadernó*: came unbound, like a book falling out of its binding\]; the passions rebelled against God, and we became children of malediction and of wrath.[3] Adam at once knew his crime on finding himself naked, not so much because of what his eyes saw (says Chrysostom) as because of what his lust suggested to him; and by an efficacious help from the Father of mercies he wept for his sin with faith in a deliverer from his ruin, who had been promised him in the very sentence pronounced against him; and the Lord brought him out of his sin, says the tenth chapter of the Wise man.[4] This is the mind of the Fathers of the Church. The sin was forgiven him in so far as he had committed it personally (this is the common opinion of the Church, says

St. Augustine); but as original, that is, in his descendants, this crime remained as an inheritance that is blotted out only by Baptism, a most sweet Sacrament enriched with the blood of a God-Man who died, says St. Paul, to save all. But even when original sin has been forgiven in this Sacrament of regeneration, certain remnants of it remain in us which we drag with us to the grave: ignorance and concupiscence remain, the will of the flesh contrary to that of the spirit, the whole heart of man inclined to evil from his youth; adversities, sickness and death remain; all the passions remain. But none of this is sin, for there is no condemnation for those who are buried with Christ in Baptism, says the Apostle. We only have within ourselves a tinder \[*fomento*: the *fomes peccati*\], or incitement to sin, which is given us for our combat and to be overcome by the grace of Jesus Christ, as the children of Israel overcame the serpents by looking at the bronze one set on a pole, though the beasts were not destroyed, says Scripture.[5]

4. Actual or personal sin is the one we commit by our own will, either by doing what is forbidden by the law or by omitting what it commands us to do. This may be mortal or venial, a distinction drawn from the holy Scriptures, the holy Fathers and the tradition of our Church. Mortal sin is that by which we gravely offend God; and it is called mortal because it gives death to the soul, deprives it of grace, makes useless the virtuous works it had previously done, disinherits it of heaven, and makes it the Lord's enemy. Venial sin is that which, although it does not deprive of grace, displeases God and, to speak in the words of St. Paul,[6] grieves the Holy Spirit, darkens the conscience, deadens the fervour of charity, and is the step towards committing grave sins, according to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who says: He who despises small things shall fall little by little into great ones. Many venial sins will never make a mortal sin; but what does that matter? That indifference with which we look on offences, though slight, against a God whom we ought to love with all our heart, gradually takes from us the horror we ought to have of grave breaches of his law. That is why our most lovable Saviour commanded us to repress the slightest movement of anger, to guard us against the hatred, insult or homicide that commonly arise from it; and he forbade us to swear lightly without need, to keep us from perjury. A small spark often sets a forest on fire.[7]

5. Mortal sin is forgiven in the law of grace only by means of the sacrament of Penance, which according to the Councils is the second plank left to us who have wrecked the ship of Baptism by sinning after receiving it, to save us from the flood of sin. Only confession, either actually made or intended in sorrow for sins when it cannot be made, is what justifies us, as will be said again. Venial sin, since it does not deprive a man of grace, does not need this remedy to cure it, and so it is forgiven by what we call sacramentals, which according to St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine[8] are the Our Father, the general confession, striking the breast, almsgiving, blessed bread and holy water, and the like. But the stain they leave in the soul even after they are forgiven will be blotted out in purgatory, if it has not been done by penance in this life.

6. And how shall we know whether a sin is mortal or venial? It is difficult to define. I, so St. Augustine speaks,[9] have not been able to find it out, seeing frustrated the efforts I have made all my long life to attain it. I only say that to be sure which is grave and which slight we must not weigh it with human judgment, but with divine. So only three rules can be given for coming in some measure to know it. The first: to see the force the precept that is broken has in itself, and the obligation it imposes. This can be gathered from holy Scripture. If Scripture threatens the breakers of a law with grave penalties, for example saying, He who does this is guilty of death; those who do this will not possess the kingdom of heaven, we must rank such an offence as mortal, for a grave penalty supposes grave guilt. But if it lays down a precept in milder words, for example, Of every word men speak they will give account on the day of judgment, we may hold it venial. The second: although the precept be grave by its nature, the sin may well be venial by smallness of matter, when the obligation is divisible. For example, the precept not to steal is grave, and not to lie, and to hear a whole Mass on feast days; but to steal very little, to tell a helpful lie without harm, to miss a small part of the Mass, will be venial. The third: since sin, according to St. Augustine, must be voluntary in such a way that we commit it with our will, so that if there is no will there is no sin, when a man commits some fault without

full deliberation and knowledge, this lessens and even removes the gravity of the offence, unless he has voluntarily brought himself into that lack of knowledge or deliberation; for he wills the sin who wills what may probably occasion it.[10] This being so, sirs, what ought our aversion to sin to be? How we ought to flee, especially from mortal sin, as from the face of a serpent, as the Wise man said! And if we have committed it, how great ought our sorrow and weeping to be, considering the terrible effects which, as I have said, it causes in our soul? I shall explain it briefly in the

Second Part

7. Our adorable Saviour already gives us today an instruction on the tears of true penance we must shed over the mystical Jerusalem of our soul when we consider the havoc sin works in it, in the tears he himself shed from his eyes as he foresaw those that would come upon the material Jerusalem for its crime, and much more because its inhabitants did not consider it, making use of the time granted them for repentance. Let us not, then, my Catholics, be reproached with a lack of reflection on the unhappy state of a sinful soul and the fatal consequences of sin. Consider and see, I shall say to you with the Prophet, how evil and bitter it is to abandon your Lord God by sin.[1] Reflect how your soul is left by sin! The destruction the Saviour announces today to the city of Jerusalem is a very small comparison with that of our poor soul when it sins. At the very moment when a man, yielding to the sweet attractions of vice, departs from right reason and the law of God, he loses all the good he had previously done. If the just man, said the Lord through Ezekiel, turns away from his justices, from his virtues, I will remember none of them any more. What sorrow! Masses, rosaries, penances, fasts: everything, everything is blotted out of the book of life;[2] and the Sion of our soul, said the Prophet, will be seen destroyed and plundered like a city in a hostile devastation. What cause for our sorrow! If David and all his army, on seeing the city of Ziklag laid waste by their enemies, wept, says the Holy Spirit, until they had no more tears, what ought ours to be, seeing that in one instant we lose all the virtues, both infused and acquired, that had been given us and that we had gained with such labour, and that those we perform in sin lose their merit?

8. The sinner loses more: he loses grace, which gave life to his soul, and the man is left dead to God, though with the appearance of life. What a loss! Even if at one blow you killed the most holy Pontiff who rules us, and the Catholic Monarch for whose preservation we have made so many sacrifices, and your own parents and children, you would not do as much havoc as by killing your soul. The life the soul receives from grace is born of God's mercy, and this, says David, is of greater price than all lives together. Now: if a doctor (this is a comparison of St. Cyprian's), if a doctor told you that, in view of the fatal symptoms of your illness, you were going to die very soon, what would your sorrow be? Well, we, the Saint goes on, who are doctors of your soul, tell sinners that they are already dead, and that of their own body they make a bier for their dead soul. What tears will suffice for this misfortune!

9. He loses more: the sinner loses the glory for which he was created. This patrimony, which Jesus Christ acquired for us at the inestimable price of his blood, making us heirs of God and his co-heirs, is snatched from us by sin. What a pity! Esau wept bitterly when he saw himself deprived of his birthright for having sold it for a handful of lentils. What, then, ought our sorrow to be when we consider that for some passing pleasures we have lost having our lot among the saints for eternity? To deprive ourselves, for some perishable goods, of seeing God, Mary Most Holy and his Saints! To see Jesus Christ, who in the form of a very beautiful child let himself be seen in a consecrated host in the time of St. Louis, king of France, all Paris went out of the city, and he thought himself happy who obtained that singular vision. St. Dionysius the Areopagite came sailing many leagues of sea only to see the Queen of heaven, who was living in Jerusalem.[3] And shall we voluntarily deprive ourselves of the beatific vision, of the sight of the fairest of the children of men, and of that Lady clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and crowned with stars? Let our heart feel this misfortune, and let weeping and penance avert it.

10. But all this is little. By sin a man loses his God: God withdraws from him and becomes his enemy. It is to be noted, says the Council of Trent, that God does not depart from his creatures until they depart from their God.[4] But a man sins gravely, and sin, says Isaiah, is now a dividing wall that cuts off communication between the offended Majesty and the guilty creature.[5] To lose God! Ah! With God at his side, with God as his friend, Jacob overcame his adversary and was refreshed with the vision of his ladder; Moses triumphed over Pharaoh and freed the people from their slavery; the Kings of Israel were crowned with the humbling of their foes. But when God is lost by sin, all creatures seem to turn against the man who transgresses his law, and they fight, says Scripture, on the side of their Creator against foolish sinners. Samson lost God, and he lost his strength, his sight and his life. Solomon lost God, and he lost his wisdom, his fame, and please God he did not lose his soul for ever.[6] Well, my sinner, this same God, whose presence by means of grace is the fountainhead of all happiness, is the one you have lost by your sin. Everything, even in this world, turns against you. God has forsaken him, says Scripture; then persecute him, all of you.[7] From this arise, according to St. Bernardine of Siena, storms, droughts, the flooding of rivers, famine, plague, war: all calamities. Sin, sin causes them. Even the elements conspire against the sinner, through the innate aversion they have to his sin. And above all, a man forsaken by God is unhappy in this world and eternally wretched in the next.

11. In view of all this, how great ought our sorrow and our tears to be? Ah! We often shed them for the loss of property, of bodily health, of passing fame, of a wife, of parents, of children; but our heart is insensible and our eyes dry in view of the inexpressible effects sin causes in our soul. All this comes from not considering these spiritual evils.

12. Yes, my God, there is no one, I shall say with the Prophet, who considers this in his heart.[8] Now I seem to hear you reproaching me as you did Jerusalem: Ah, if you knew, sinful soul, the evils that will come upon you for your crimes, and the blessings that would follow you if you accepted the peace to which you are invited this day! Yes, God and Lord of my soul, I do know it now; and I promise with David that tears will henceforth be my bread day and night while you are absent from me through sin. I have wept much for temporal losses, tears that perhaps have been sinful; but just as the same water led into a foul pond breeds filth and poisonous creatures in it, but led into a garden of delights makes it produce flowers and wholesome fruits, so the same tears that, directed to weeping for worldly losses, will have filled my soul with sins, now directed to grieving for the loss of grace and of my God, will produce in me fruits of honour and holiness, will restore grace to me and give me the inheritance of glory. Amen.

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[9] St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22.27.

[10] The printed margin gives *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 91 (a slip for I-II q. 91–93, on the eternal and the other laws).

[11] Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:3.

[12] The promise in “the very sentence” is Gen. 3:15.

[13] 1 Tim. 2:4; Gen. 8:21; Rom. 6:4 and 8:1; Num. 21:8–9.

[14] The printed margin gives Eph. 4 (4:30) and Ecclus. 19 (Sirach 19:1).

[15] Matt. 5:22 and 5:34–37; James 3:5.

[16] The printed margins give St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. LX in Genes.*, and St. Augustine, *Epist. CVIII*.

[17] The printed margin gives *Lib. de Civit. Dei* (St. Augustine, *City of God* 21.27; the same admission is in the *Enchiridion* 78).

[18] Matt. 12:36.

[1] Jer. 2:19.

[2] Ezek. 18:24. St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III q. 89 a. 5.

[3] Gen. 27:34–38 (Esau); Ps. 44:3; Apoc. 12:1.

[4] Council of Trent, Session VI, ch. 11 (God “does not forsake those once justified by his grace unless he is first forsaken by them”).

[5] Isa. 59:2.

[6] Gen. 28 and 32 (Jacob); Exod. 14 (Moses); Wisd. 5:21 (creation fighting against the foolish); Judg. 16 (Samson); 1 (3) Kings 11 (Solomon).

[7] Ps. 70:11 (Vulgate; 71:11 in modern numbering).

[8] Jer. 12:11.

38. Tenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Seventh Commandment

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 38, pp. 34–42. Gospel: Luke 18:9–14. Original preacher not named.

Non sum sicut ceteri hominum: raptores (Luke 18:11).

I am not like the rest of men: thieves.

The Gospel of this day is from the eighteenth chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. "Jesus told this parable to certain men who, flattering themselves that they were just, put their trust in themselves and despised others: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a publican, or collector of public dues. The Pharisee, standing, prayed within himself in this way: I thank you, Lord, that I am not like the rest of men, thieves, unjust, adulterers, nor like this publican. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, on the contrary, standing far off, did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, saying: God, have mercy on me, a sinner. I assure you that this man went back to his house justified, quite unlike the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." This is the Gospel.

2. Our divine Master gives us much doctrine in it. In the first place he condemns hypocrisy, that is, feigning virtue where there is none, a thing which, besides being contrary to the candour that must reign among Christians, makes use of God and virtue to cover one's disorders. Second, he teaches us how in our confessions we must avoid disclosing the faults of our neighbours while lessening our own, as the Pharisee did. Third, how necessary sorrow for sins is in order to be justified in the Lord's presence, acknowledging ourselves, like the publican, sinners and transgressors of the law. Fourth, the efficacy of prayer, if it is made not with haughtiness and pride but with submission and humility, after the example of the publican, who obtained by his prayer all he asked. All this, and each of these circumstances, which follow naturally from the Gospel as consequences of its teaching, would deserve a plática of its own if they had not already been explained in others. One thing calls my attention today, because it touches a point of which I have said nothing so far, and which takes in one of the most frequent crimes, namely theft. The Pharisee, although he was a criminal man, seemed ashamed of this sin, and said he was not like other men, thieves. But not everyone will be able to boast of not being one; for though they do not go out on the highway to rob other people's purses, many use other devices to defraud their neighbour in his goods, without considering that, apart from the most grievous sin they commit against the seventh commandment of the Decalogue, which says, Thou shalt not steal, there remains to them the strictest obligation to restore what was stolen or ill-gotten; for a man must vomit up what he has wrongly eaten and has as it were over and above in his stomach. Therefore I am going to show today, first, what is forbidden in the seventh commandment; second, the gravity of theft, and how what was ill-gotten is to be restored.

First Part

3. Our great God, full of love for men, who created us in his likeness so that, loving him in this life, we might enjoy him in the next, omits no means that contributes to our preservation, and has given us certain safeguards to protect us from the malice of some unnatural men who might snatch from us those goods his mercy granted us for working out our eternal salvation with them. So, of the ten commandments he gave us in the Decalogue, that we might serve him by keeping them, he directed seven to the benefit and advantage of our neighbour, all of them turning also to our own advantage, since what he commands us to do to our brethren he enjoins on them to do to us. The first of these seven commends honour to our parents and superiors, as his images on earth. In the second he forbids us to kill our neighbour, or even to harm him in his body. In the third he commands us not to use another man's wife, nor to stain our flesh with lewdness. But

not content with this, in the fourth, which is the seventh of the Decalogue, he forbids us to harm our neighbour in those temporal goods his generosity gave him for his sustenance and other ends; and he did so with these express words: Thou shalt not steal.

4. And what is stealing? It is, says the catechism, unjustly taking from one's neighbour any of his goods against his will. It is rightly said "against his will", because no wrong is done to one who wishes or consents to have something taken from him. This taking of another's goods may be done secretly, and then it is properly called theft; or one's neighbour's goods may be taken in his very presence, using violence against him for it, and this is called robbery \[*rapiña*\]: a greater crime than simple theft, because it adds a new offence against one's neighbour with the violent seizure of his property. And though it seems that this crime is not expressly forbidden in this commandment, it is not so; for whoever in one command forbids the lesser, which is theft, includes with greater reason what is a greater crime in the same line. So St. Augustine. Theft may also take on other circumstances that place it in another species of sin, such as stealing chalices, ciboria, monstrances and other sacred things; or stealing in a sacred place, even if what is stolen is not sacred, as if someone stole a purse of money from a person in church. Though the purse has nothing sacred about it, it is enough that it is stolen in church, which is the house to which holiness belongs, and where God, far from harming us, enriches us with his gifts and graces. This offence is called sacrilege, and this sin, which is against the virtue of religion, is added to the simple theft forbidden in this seventh commandment. Theft may also be grave or slight. It will be grave when the amount stolen is large, and according to common opinion two pesetas is reckoned such; and slight if it is less than this. But if the thing stolen, however small, harms one's neighbour gravely, the theft will be grave. As stealing from or harming one's neighbour in his goods can be done in many ways, it will be well to explain the chief ones, for the better understanding of the faithful.

5. This commandment includes three things. First: not to take another's goods unjustly. Second: not to keep them unjustly either. Third: not to cause him any harm in them. Let us take them in order.

The first way of taking what belongs to another unjustly is when it is taken secretly, without the owner's knowledge and against his will, or when it is seized from him by violence; so that, whether by simple theft or by robbery, one's neighbour is deprived of what is his. Second: goods are taken unjustly when the taxes, contributions or tithes owed to the ministers of the sanctuary, to the king or to the secular magistrates are not paid; or when someone appropriates these dues to himself. Third: judges or their officers who shamefully sell justice, letting themselves be bribed, burying the cases or lawsuits of the helpless, or giving unjust sentence against them, a thing condemned by natural reason and by the Holy Spirit in Psalm 81 and in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs. Fourth: those who do not pay their debts when they can, or do not do so at the time or term appointed, fulfilling what David said: The sinner shall borrow and not pay back. Fifth: those who proceed harshly against their poor debtors, extorting from them and selling even their own clothes and bed to recover the debt: an execrable crime if it is done to those wretches who, wishing to satisfy their debts, are made unable to pay by poverty. Whatever is seized from these unfortunates is a theft, or else the Lord must be lying when he says in Exodus: If you take your neighbour's garment in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is all he has to cover his flesh and to sleep in at night; and if he cries to me I will hear him, for I am merciful. So such seizures of what a debtor strictly needs for his food, clothing and bed must be given up; and to take them is a theft. Sixth: those who in time of famine and dearth hide food in order to sell it more dearly later, making the articles of first necessity more costly by this; against whom Solomon pronounces this sentence:[1] He who hides grain shall be cursed among the peoples. Seventh: those who make usurious loans, demanding or receiving more than was lent, whether money or an equivalent thing, unless some notable loss follows to them from lending it: a thing condemned by natural reason, by divine law and by human law, both ecclesiastical and civil. Let us say no more on this than what the prophet Ezekiel says in the eighteenth chapter: Do not take usury, nor more than you gave.[2]

6. Concerning the unjust retention of one's neighbour's goods, which is also a fairly common way of stealing, I must say, first, that they are unjustly retained when debts are not paid although the creditor asks for them and one is able to pay; when by superfluous spending one makes oneself unable to pay them; and when some fraudulent means is used to frustrate the creditors' rights. Second: when administrators, stewards, guardians and trustees do not give faithful accounts of what has been entrusted to them. Third: when, having found something, one does not try to find out the person it belongs to; or when, having made every possible effort and not found the lawful owner, one does not use it for alms and suffrages for his intention, so that it may benefit him in the best way possible, bearing in mind the maxim of St. Augustine that says: If you found something and did not give it back, you stole it.[3] Fourth: when ill-gotten goods are not restored; and, even if acquired in good faith, when they are not restored as soon as the owner to whom they belong is discovered.

7. Lastly, harm is done to one's neighbour in his goods, first, when through malice or negligence we let our neighbour's goods be lost when we are charged with keeping them. Second, when one shares in the sin of someone who harms another, which can happen in many ways: by commanding, counselling, not preventing, encouraging or consenting to the injustice, or by sharing in what was ill-gotten. In all these is fulfilled what the royal prophet David said: If you saw a thief, you ran with him.[4] In all these ways and many more, which are omitted for brevity, theft can be committed; and in this account I have done no more than copy the teaching of the catechism of the Council of Trent.[5] And this is enough for the first part.

Second Part

8. But we must now show the gravity of this crime, and the obligation and manner of restoring what was stolen or ill-gotten. There is no doubt that theft is of itself a mortal sin, for it is forbidden in the Decalogue, whose precepts bind us gravely; and in this and some other precepts only smallness of matter can excuse from grave sin. And it is to be noted that when God forbids stealing, this prohibition covers not only the outward act of taking what is another's but also the will and desire to do it; for, being a spiritual law, it must be directed to the spirit and the heart, which is the source of theft and of the other crimes, as Jesus Christ said in his Gospel according to St. Matthew.[1] This sin is among the most abominable in the Lord's sight, who excludes thieves from the kingdom of heaven. It is opposed to the charity we owe our neighbour; and he will hardly wish God to multiply his neighbour's goods, as we are obliged to, who takes from him what he already has. It is opposed also to justice, which gives to each what is his. It is opposed to the law of nations, which requires that each should live in safety in the peaceful possession of the goods that belong to him; otherwise the order of human society is overturned, and the honest man would always live uneasy and fearful, seeing himself and his property in the greatest uncertainty. And above all, the malice and ugliness of theft is shown by considering the fatal consequences that commonly arise from it. For from it come rash judgments, distrust, detraction, calumny, hatred, discord and even killings; and these evils last as long as the sin does, because of the difficulty of restoring what was stolen. The gravity of this crime is increased by the harm that follows from it to one's neighbour. How painful it is, my brethren, for a man to be robbed of the goods he has set aside for the support of his family and the settlement of his children, reducing him to poverty and perhaps to having to beg his bread, as has often happened!

9. How grievous, that a poor day labourer who has borne the weight of the heat or cold all day, in the hope, as Scripture says, of receiving his wage or pay at night to feed his children and his wife, should see himself defrauded, his wage withheld on frivolous pretexts! This is a crime the apostle St. James weighs in the fifth chapter of his letter, saying: Behold, the wages of the labourers who reaped your fields, and whom you have not paid, cry out, and their cry has reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. That is why Tobit advised his son, saying to him: If anyone has worked for you, give him the wage for his work at once.[2] What harm follows to the public when merchants, for example, grow rich at the expense of the poor by weighing or measuring badly the goods they trade in! A crime Solomon condemns in express words in Proverbs, saying: It is an

abomination before God to have different weights; that is, as he says elsewhere, one heavier for buying and another lighter for selling; a false balance is not good.[3] So we could go on showing the gravity of this sin, which, as it shows itself in so many ways, cannot all be brought into one short plática.

10. And what? Do thieves and those who unjustly retain goods make them their own? Certainly not; and salvation is impossible for them if they do not restore what they stole or wrongly retained, says St. Augustine.[4] Natural reason itself dictates the obligation of restoring to one's neighbour that in which he has been harmed; for if no one may possess anything except that to which he has a lawful right, it follows naturally that what is enjoyed without title of ownership must be returned to the one who actually has it, and that he must be compensated for the damages that have arisen to him from the unjust action. But ah, how difficult this restitution is! If it is so difficult to overcome a ruling passion, how much more will it be to overcome avarice, on which theft is usually founded, when it is like an idol to which a man pays his worship, in the expression of Hosea?[5] For this reason Jesus Christ said in the Gospel: Truly I say to you, it is as hard for a rich man to enter heaven as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. We must consider three things about restitution and the repair of damages.

11. The first is: who must make restitution? There is no doubt that he who robbed or harmed his neighbour must make restitution himself. And if many have had a share in the injustice, they must all make it good jointly and severally \[*sólidamente*: in solidum, each liable for the whole\]; and if some cannot or will not, those who remain are obliged to the whole. If these first persons responsible die without having done it, the obligation passes to their heirs, for each thing, wherever it is, always cries out for its owner. Sons under their father's authority are not exempt from this law with respect to their own parents; and although a larger amount is required in their case to constitute theft than with strangers, nevertheless, when they come to have property of their own, they must restore to their parents that in which they harmed them. In short, all must make restitution. Only one who was in extreme necessity, and would have perished if he had not fed himself, is not obliged to restore what he took from his neighbour in that emergency strictly to relieve the straits he was in. This is the common teaching among the Doctors.

12. The second is: to whom must restitution be made? It must be made to the one who was robbed or harmed in his property. It often happens that restitution cannot be made to the very person who was wronged, because he died before it was made; but in this case it must be made to his lawful heirs. And may it not be given to the Church, to pious works or to the poor? It may not, when it is certainly known who has the right to it; but it may when this is not known, in which case it may be used for pious purposes, for the intention and benefit of the lawful owners. This is the soundest teaching. But how can this restitution be made while saving the honour of the one who makes it, since in the very act he makes his disgrace public? Ah, there is no lack of means of doing it without the reputation and credit of the usurper suffering. There are confessors, and other prudent persons, who can make restitution without naming the person who handed them the money or the valuable that had been stolen. And above all, it is an indispensable obligation, and if it is not fulfilled eternal salvation is in danger, as I have said.

13. And what must be restored? This is the third circumstance we must examine regarding restitution or the repair of damages. Everything that has been taken or unjustly acquired must be restored, if this can be ascertained; and if it cannot, what a wise and prudent man judges, taking account of the circumstances. If it cannot be restored in the same kind as was stolen, it must be compensated in whatever way is possible. And since it may happen that someone acquires in good faith an estate, a jewel or any other property, when he discovers that what he possesses is not his, he is obliged to return it to its lawful owner. But if this case should arise, let him consult skilled, learned and virtuous persons about the amount and the manner in which he must hand it over, for to explain all this now would take too long.

14. Lastly, restitution must be prompt, that is, as soon as it can be made. This is the teaching of my angelic master St. Thomas.[6] The reason is that the precept Thou shalt not steal is negative, and binds always and at

every moment. So that he who, being able to, does not restore what he stole, or does not make good the damages he has in any way done to his neighbour, is in continual mortal sin. Ah, how many there must be of these! How many, judging perversely that they have no obligation to make restitution until the judge orders it by sentence, remain at peace enjoying goods that do not belong to them, and know it! How many live in comfort, luxury and delicacy on what they have usurped from others, while these others, to whom the goods belong that those enjoy, are weighed down by need and poverty! What sorrow! For all the harm that follows to these from the delay in making good their loss, those are responsible who voluntarily keep in their power what belongs to those unfortunates. Enough.

15. I have explained what theft is and the many ways in which the seventh commandment of the Decalogue, which forbids it, can be broken; and I have tried to explain it with the greatest clarity and simplicity, so that even the most unlettered cannot plead ignorance. All this teaching is taken almost word for word from the catechism of the Council and from the doctors who have explained it. It only remains, my brethren, for you to consider the gravity of this crime of theft, so as to keep yourselves from committing it and to restore to your neighbours that in which you have defrauded them. To detest this abominable crime, it is enough to consider the penalties with which it is frequently punished; for apart from the disgrace it brings on him who is branded with it, we see the prisons, the penal garrisons and even the scaffolds full of thieves. This is little: we know by faith that an eternal fire awaits those who usurp what is another's, and that the Lord, who is the avenger of the wrongs done to his children, will take away for ever the inheritance he offered, which is glory.

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[7] Ps. 81 (Vulgate; 82); Prov. 31:5, 8–9; Ps. 36:21 (Vulgate; 37:21); Exod. 22:26–27. The printed margin gives Prov. 11 (11:26).

[8] Ezek. 18:8, 13, 17. *damnum emergens*.

[9] St. Augustine, Sermon 178.8.

[10] Ps. 49:18 (Vulgate; 50:18).

[11] The *Roman Catechism* (Catechism of the Council of Trent), Part III, on the seventh commandment.

[1] Matt. 15:19; then 1 Cor. 6:10 ("nor thieves… will inherit the kingdom of God").

[2] James 5:4; Tobit 4:15 (Vulgate; 4:14 in modern numbering). Cf. Deut. 24:14–15 andon the just wage.

[3] Prov. 20:10, 23; 11:1.

[4] *non remittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum*.

[5] Then Matt. 19:24.

[6] The printed margin gives *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 62 (on restitution, esp. a. 8).

39. Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: On the Ceremonies of Baptism, and the Remembrance of Them We Must Keep for the Christian Life

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 39, pp. 43–50. Gospel: Mark 7:31–37. Original preacher not named.

> *Adducunt ei surdum et mutum (Mark 7:32).*
>
> *They brought to him one who was deaf and dumb.*

The Gospel of this day is from the seventh chapter of St. Mark, and it reads thus:

1. "Jesus, going out from the borders of Tyre, came by Sidon towards the sea of Galilee, passing through the midst of the country called Decapolis because of the ten cities it contains; and they brought him a man who was deaf and dumb, and begged him to heal him by laying his hands on him. And Jesus, taking him aside from the crowd of people, put his fingers into his ears, and spat, and touched his tongue with spittle; and looking up to heaven he groaned and said: Ephphatha, which means, Be opened; and at once his ears were opened, and his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. And he charged those present to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more they made it known, and the more they wondered, saying: He has done all things well; he has made the deaf hear and the dumb speak." So far the Gospel.

2. The holy Fathers give many interpretations of this Gospel; but I find that the Lord, who often spoke and acted in figures so that we might experience the reality, here prefigured for us the ceremonies performed when the holy sacrament of Baptism is administered; for in many of them the same is done as the divine Saviour did to this deaf and dumb man, and some of the very words are said that he spoke in healing this unfortunate sick man. The sacrament of Baptism was instituted by Jesus Christ, the author of all the Sacraments, when in the Jordan he had St. John baptize him.[1] It is a Sacrament by which, through the outward washing with water, with certain words said by the minister who confers it (and in case of necessity anyone can do so), we are forgiven original sin, which as children of Adam we all contract at the time of our formation and the union of the body with the soul; all the personal sins we may have committed before receiving it are forgiven us; and through it the whole punishment we should have had to suffer in the next world for the sins whose guilt is forgiven in Baptism is most fully remitted. There will be no condemnation, said St. Paul, for those who have been buried with Christ in Baptism.[2] Grace is infused into us, and faith, hope and charity with the other virtues. A character, or indelible mark, is imprinted on the soul by it, which will last for all eternity, by virtue of which this Sacrament can never be received again. In short, the devil is cast out of us, we are made children of God, and the gate of heaven, closed by the sin of our first father, is opened to us.

3. But this Sacrament, as you will have observed, is administered with many ceremonies, which those who receive it, if they are infants, do not see performed so as to understand them, and which those present at its administration do not understand so as to draw from them the unspeakable fruits the Church intends to produce in our souls by each of them. Serious reflection on the meaning of these ceremonies would continually spur us to practise what is enjoined on us there, and to become perfect Christians. See why it has seemed fitting to me to treat of this subject today. I shall show in my first part what all the ceremonies performed in the sacrament of Baptism signify; and in the second, how present we must always keep them, so as to carry out what is given us to understand by them.

First Part

4. There is no lack of enemies of Religion who think useless and even ridiculous many of the ceremonies we use in administering the Sacraments of the law of grace. It is not surprising. Darkness has never known the light, nor the flesh the works of the spirit. Jesus Christ himself, our master and our guide, performed actions at the time of their institution, and miracles that symbolize them, which would seem pointless to the eyes of carnal men. When he raised Lazarus, when he ordained his Apostles, when he multiplied the loaves, when he instituted the Eucharist, and above all in healing the deaf and dumb man of our Gospel, he did things that seemed to have little relation to what he was doing, but that were all full of mysteries worthy of our knowledge. Such, my brethren, are the ceremonies of Baptism of which we are speaking.

5. They are of three kinds: some that precede the administration of this Sacrament, others that accompany it, and others that follow it. Let us speak of the principal ones separately. Preceding ceremonies. The first thing the priest does to the one to be baptized, while he is still outside the church, is to breathe on his face, looking with contempt on Satan, who possesses him and whom he is about to cast out of that creature. We may say that, just as in creating the first man the Maker breathed into him the breath of life, so in creating a new man according to Christ, the priest breathes on him to communicate the Holy Spirit to him, which is the way Jesus communicated him to the Apostles. Second, he is signed with the holy cross on the forehead and on the breast. This is the sign of the true Christian. It is done on the forehead, the seat of shame, so that he may never again blush to confess it, even in the presence of tyrants; on the breast, so that he may love Jesus, who died on it for him, with all his heart, soul and strength. Third, blessed salt is placed in his mouth, with certain prayers asking God to lead the child to the grace of Baptism and to make him taste the salt of divine wisdom. Every sacrifice you offer to the Lord, said the second chapter of Leviticus, season it first with salt; and so the

priest does when he is about to offer a new creature to the Saviour. Fourth, he says several exorcisms against Satan, that he may give honour to the living and true God and to Jesus Christ his Son, and depart from that soul, the image of God, making room for the Holy Spirit to occupy the dwelling that belongs to him. Fifth, he anoints the ears and nostrils of the one being baptized with his spittle, after the example of what the Saviour did to the deaf and dumb man of our Gospel, and his very words are said: Ephphatha, which means, Be opened. And this is done so that his ears may be open to hear the precepts of faith, and his sense of smell may perceive the good odour of Jesus Christ.[1]

6. Ceremonies accompanying Baptism. First, the one to be baptized is asked whether he renounces Satan, all his works and all his pomps. For this Jesus Christ appeared in the world, says the Gospel, to destroy the works of the devil;[2] and so from those whom he incorporates into himself, their head, by Baptism, he rightly requires this renunciation, so that the children of God may be distinguished from those of Satan. Second, he is anointed with the consecrated oil on the breast and between the shoulders, to show him that, like the ancient wrestlers who anointed themselves before the contest, he is to become an athlete of Jesus Christ to wrestle against the world, the devil and the flesh. Third, he is asked the Creed, and the mysteries and dogmas it contains. It is the Sacrament of faith, and the express profession of faith is necessary; and so he is required, or his godparents if he is incapable, to confess it before being baptized. He who believes and is baptized, said Jesus Christ, will be saved: before Baptism the confession of faith is required. And so adults who are converted to our Religion are catechized before they are washed with the water of our regeneration; that is, they are taught the mysteries they must believe, so as to confess them in Baptism. Fourth, he is asked whether he wishes to be baptized. The Church forces no one to receive him into her fold; and until he answers yes, himself or through his godparents, he is not given the Sacrament that brings him within the walls of the Jerusalem militant to share in the goods of the sanctuary. In this the Church imitates the Saviour, who, before healing the paralytic, said to him: Do you want to be healed?[3] This done, the priest at once pours the water on the head of the one being baptized with these words: I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; words that no one should be ignorant of, because all can baptize, and the case of necessity can easily arise.

7. Ceremonies following Baptism. When the child or the adult has been baptized, he is anointed with the sacred chrism, to make him understand that he is now a member of Jesus by Baptism, and has become entitled to the anointing of the grace of the sovereign Spirit, and from then on he is, and may be called, a Christian. Then a certain white garment is put on him, which signifies the purity of his soul, free from the stain of sin. This white garment also denotes the inward joy that this spiritual change merits for him, just as black clothing denotes mourning, affliction and sadness. The neophytes, that is, the newly made Christians, wore this garment from Holy Saturday, when they usually received Baptism, until Low Sunday, when they took it off; and that is why that day was called *Dominica in albis*. Immediately a lighted candle is given to the one baptized, denoting the three virtues that have been especially infused into him: faith is denoted in the light, charity in the heat, and hope in the straightness of the taper given him. A Christian name is given him, so that, leaving the old Adam with his ways, he may be adorned with the new, who was created in justice and holiness.[4] Of the godparents, their obligations and the spiritual relationship they contract, the parish priest will be able to inform his parishioners, for this account would grow too long. This is enough for the first part of my discourse.

Second Part

8. When King Clovis was to be baptized at the hands of St. Remigius, the whole route from the palace to the baptistery was richly adorned; everything shone with exquisite hangings, everything was perfumed with aromatic ointments. God poured such grace into the people who witnessed it that they thought they were enjoying the sweet odours of paradise. The Gospels were sung, the crosses went before, hymns, canticles and

the litanies of the Saints were intoned, and the holy Bishop, taking the Monarch by the hand, walked towards the font, followed by the Queen, the court and the subjects. The King, amazed at such pomp and ceremony, said to the Prelate who was leading him: Father, is this the kingdom of God you promise me? It is not, answered the saint, but it is the beginning of the road that leads to it.[1] In truth, all the ceremonies of Baptism are an imitation of the glory offered us in the Jerusalem triumphant, and remind us that Baptism is the gate by which we enter it. But they must stir our consideration, so that we meditate on what is given us to understand by them, so as to carry it out in a way that lets us experience the wonderful effects they show us. Consider, then, the principal ones.

9. The one to be baptized is not brought into the church at once, because he is still stained with sin, and so is unworthy to enter the house of God, to which, according to David, holiness belongs. If we considered this, how great would be our veneration for the Lord's sanctuary! How great our reverence for the mysteries represented in it, especially in the august sacrifice of the Mass, the image of the one our divine Master offered for all on the cross! What respectful silence in this house, which is not one of worldly traffic, as the Saviour said of the temple of Jerusalem, but of prayer, the house of God and the gate of heaven![2] Does holiness alone belong to it? Then I must not enter it if I am stained with sin, unless it is to wash it away with penance. We are signed with the holy cross in many of the ceremonies of Baptism. Ah, this is the banner of our captain Jesus; by it we enlist in his holy army. With this thought we must arm ourselves with the virtues the most loving Jesus taught us, which are the weapons of his army. Otherwise the words of Nazianzen may be turned against us: Why then, he said, should you call yourself a Christian, enlisting under the banner of Christ, if no action proper to your captain is found in you?[3] The cross placed on us is the sweet yoke of the law we are about to embrace in Baptism, whose light burden, in the Saviour's expression, we must never throw off our shoulders by breaking his precepts.

10. If salt, which preserves from corruption, is put on us, it is so that we may reflect that all our life we must flee the vices that corrupt our soul, keeping in mind what Jesus Christ charges us through St. Mark: Have salt in yourselves;[4] that is, always keep the purity of soul given you in Baptism, freeing it from the rot of sin. Our eyes and ears were anointed with the priest's spittle, while he said to us: Ephphatha, be opened. And what does this give us to understand, but that we must open the eyes of our understanding to believe the Catholic truths God revealed to his Church, which is the foundation and pillar of the truth, and which she proposes to us? And at the same time we must listen gladly not only to the divine inspirations by which God tries to bring us back to the way of truth when we have strayed, but to the voices of our pastors, who teach us the path of salvation by their admonitions; certain that, as the Lord said, He who hears them hears me, and he who despises them despises me.[5]

11. We are asked whether we renounce Satan, his works and his pomps, and we answer yes through our godparents. Ah, what a renunciation this is! How much it binds us to! No one can serve two masters, says the Gospel; by force, loving the one, he must hate the other. By the renunciation we make in Baptism we separate ourselves from the devil, who ruled us, and unite ourselves to Jesus Christ, that he may be our master. We must, then, hate whatever the devil prompts us to, which is the breaking of the Saviour's laws. We must also renounce all his pomps, which according to St. John are lust, pride and ambition: the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.[6] This is like a common vow we make to the Lord. Take care, then, says St. Ambrose. See that, just as when you give your creditor a note of hand he will demand its value of you, and if you refuse to pay it he will take you to court, so the priest before whom you bound yourself to serve Christ and renounce the devil will be your prosecutor before the Judge of the living and the dead, if you do not fulfil it.[7]

12. And what does that white garment signify, which, as I have said, is put on the one just baptized? It gives us to understand that in that Sacrament of our sanctification the soul was left pure and spotless, and that we must present it to God so at the time of our death. This does not mean that we must necessarily keep our

baptismal innocence; this is not given to all. But as penance is a second Jordan where the stains the soul contracts are cleansed, once the whiteness of Baptism is lost, we must present it pure before God, whether by innocence or by penance; so that we may in some way say to Jesus Christ what Joseph's brothers said to Jacob: Lord, see whether this garment is your son's or not.[8] See, Lord, whether I have kept that purity which the grace of your Baptism gave me, which made me your beloved son.

13. Lastly, we must reflect on the meaning of the burning candle or taper put into the hand of the one baptized. The words the priest says in this ceremony are worth noting. Take, he says, take this burning lamp, and keep your Baptism blamelessly, and fulfil the commandments of your God. As this taper signifies, as I have said, the three theological virtues, it is given into the hand to denote that the faith we receive in Baptism must be animated by charity and strengthened by hope; that faith must not be dead in us, but shining with the works it dictates to us. If we do not do this, the sentence given to a bishop in the Apocalypse will be given us at the judgment: You have a name, they told him, that might give you life, but you are dead; I do not see that your works correspond to your character.[9] Enough.

14. From all this it follows how mystical is the creation of a new Christian by the sacrament of Baptism; and that the ceremonies performed in it were not established without cause by the Church, spouse of that Lamb who by so many and such sacred means takes away the sins of this world. Everything done in the administration of this Sacrament of faith, besides not being without mystery, is an admonition to the Christian people, that by doing what these sacred rites show we may lead a truly Christian life, which is what we then signed up to. May God in his infinite mercy give you his grace to keep spotless the garment that was put on you, burning with the lamp of virtue in your heart, the cross he engraved on you, so that, fulfilling the promise to renounce the works of Satan, you may serve Jesus; and may he who brought you into the Church militant lead you to the triumphant, which is eternal glory.

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[10] Matt. 28:19.

[11] Rom. 8:1 with 6:4 (the printed margin gives Rom. 8).

[12] Gen. 2:7; John 20:22; Lev. 2:13; 2 Cor. 2:15.

[13] 1 John 3:8 (the preacher says "the Gospel").

[14] Mark 16:16; John 5:6.

[15] Eph. 4:22–24.

[1] The story comes from Hincmar of Reims's *Life of St. Remigius* (9th century).

[2] Ps. 92:5 (Vulgate; 93:5); Matt. 21:13 / John 2:16; Gen. 28:17.

[3] Then Matt. 11:30.

[4] Mark 9:49 (Vulgate; 9:50).

[5] 1 Tim. 3:15; Luke 10:16.

[6] Matt. 6:24; 1 John 2:16.

[7] *cautio*.

[8] Gen. 37:32.

[9] Rev. 3:1 (to the angel of the church of Sardis, understood as its bishop).

40. Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precepts of the Decalogue, and the Contempt Men Show for Them in Following Those of the Devil

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 40, pp. 51–59. Gospel: Luke 10:23–37. Original preacher not named.

> *Diliges Dominum Deum tuum (Luke 10:27).*
>
> *You shall love the Lord your God.*

The Gospel of this day is from the tenth chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. “Jesus said to his disciples: Blessed are the eyes that see what you see; for I assure you that many prophets desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. And then a doctor of the law stood up and said to him, to test him: Master, what shall I do to gain eternal life? And Jesus answered him: What is written in the law? What do you read in it? And he answered: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself. And Jesus said to him: You have answered very well; do this, and you will live eternally. But he, wishing to make it appear that he was just, that is, that he desired to be instructed in the precepts of the law, said to Jesus: And who is my neighbour? And Jesus, taking up the word, said: A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who robbed him, covered him with wounds, and went off leaving him half dead. Now it happened that a priest passed by the same road, and seeing him, went on. In the same way a Levite, who came near that place, having seen him, also passed by. But a Samaritan, that is, one of a nation hated by the Jews, who was on a journey, came near him, and when he saw him was moved with compassion; and coming closer, he poured oil and wine into his wounds and bound them up, and setting him on his own beast, took him to an inn, where he took great care of him. And the next day he took some coins from his purse and gave them to the innkeeper, saying: Take care of this unfortunate man, and whatever more you spend on him I will repay you when I come back. Which of these three seems to you to have acted as neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The doctor answered him: The one who showed mercy to him. Go, then, Jesus said to him, and do likewise.” This is the Gospel.

2. All that is written in the law comes down to loving God and one’s neighbour, said the doctor mentioned in the Gospel; and Jesus Christ approved it, who said on another occasion that the whole law is summed up in these two commandments. Our law is the Decalogue, that is, the ten commandments of the law of God: a law the Lord gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, founded on the natural law he imprinted on man at the time of his creation. And these precepts of the Decalogue Jesus Christ renewed in his law full of grace, for he came, he said himself, not to abolish it but to fulfil it. He enjoined these precepts on his disciples, and in them on all of us, engraving them not on tables of stone as for the Jews, but in our very hearts. These, then, are our law. But the devil, whose envy would ruin all men, also wants to be their lawgiver, laying down certain precepts contrary to God’s so that we may break God’s. Now according to the Gospel we cannot serve two masters at once without hating one and loving the other.[1] Whom, then, do you want to serve, my brethren? Which precepts do you want to keep, God’s or the devil’s? But first I want to show you what each comes to. I shall show you in my first part that the precepts of the Decalogue are a law full of sweetness and mercy; and in the second, the injustice we do to God by preferring to his laws those of Satan, full of harshness and tyranny.

First Part

3. A law full of sweetness and mercy is the one that contains the precepts God gave us in the Decalogue, and Jesus Christ in his Gospel. It was love alone that moved God to give us his only-begotten Son as lawgiver and master; and so this Teacher of justice appeared in the world with all that character of kindness and mercy the Prophets had announced. This divine Lawgiver began to promulgate his law by calling sinners, entering their houses, eating their bread, blessing their bodies and sanctifying their souls; and if his enemies taunted him with dealing with publicans, he said to them: I have not come to seek the just but sinners, and the physician has only to do with the sick, not with the healthy.[1] What laws could come from the mouth of so lovable a Prince? Ah, precepts easy to fulfil, given the help of God, who gives it to whoever asks; precepts for whose fulfilment he offers and gives incomprehensible rewards.

4. Easy precepts. The precepts I give you, said the Lord in Deuteronomy (and they are the same Jesus Christ enjoined on us), are not far from you, nor set in heaven so that you should say, Who will go up to fetch them?[2] No, my brethren, their fulfilment presents no difficulty. Let us cast our eyes for a moment over the Decalogue. Its commandments are ten. The first three concern the honour of God; that is, in them we are

commanded to honour God with faith, hope, charity and religion; not to profane his holy name with false or needless oaths; to keep his feasts holy and render him due homage in acknowledgment of the supreme dominion he holds over us. All this is something to which nature itself inclines us. There is no nation that does not acknowledge this tribute to its gods, said the pagan Cicero.[3] How much more is it owed to that God in whom we live and move and have our being, who created us, preserves us and redeemed us with his blood? Nature inspires all this, and nothing nature inspires can be hard for us to fulfil.

5. In the seven that concern the good of our neighbour, we are commanded to honour those who gave us our being in this world; not to kill or wound anyone; not to stain his body with impurity; not to rob him of his property; not to slander him; not to deceive him with lies; not to covet either his goods or his wife, so that the desire may not pass into the act of usurping them. Is this hard to fulfil? It is an easy thing to wish all this for ourselves; and in commanding us to do it to our neighbour, our neighbour is commanded to do it to us. And so he says to all: Let them not kill me, nor rob me, nor slander me, nor deceive me, nor do to me what I may not do to my brethren. The Lord's laws, looked at without prejudice, we can easily fulfil.

6. What more does he command us? Through his Church he directs certain precepts to us, which are: to hear the whole of Mass on feast days; to confess once a year, or when in danger of death, or when about to receive Communion; to communicate at Easter; to fast on certain days; and to pay tithes and first fruits. These precepts, being given not for our destruction but for our benefit, excuse us when we cannot conveniently fulfil them. God behaves as considerately in what he commands us as David did in the requests he made of the priest Abimelech, when he came to him lacking arms and food. See, he said, if you have a few loaves at hand, or anything, give it to me; if you have a spear, I need it, for I came without weapons.[4] So God asks through his Church for the works of his service. Christian, if you can fast on the days the law commands, do so; but if your strength fails, if your employment or occupation is not compatible with fasting, do not do it; for the Israelites too ate the forbidden loaves of proposition out of necessity. If you can hear Mass on the days the Church orders and abstain from work on them, do so; but if by hearing Mass you have good reason to fear losing your life, your health, your livelihood, do not; if by not working you would perish, work; for the Maccabees too fought on the feast day of the sabbath, because urgent need compelled them.[5] Can you confess your sins at the feet of a minister of penance? Do it. But if there is no priest and necessity presses, say with David, Lord, I have sinned, and you are forgiven.[6] Well… but what am I saying? The laws of the Lord and of his Church, looked at without prejudice, are easy to fulfil.

7. I do not doubt that some precepts of the law seem to exceed our natural strength, and that our weakness resists fulfilling them. But this proves no more than that we need God's help to observe them. And how many supernatural lights the Lord pours on us for this! The ark of the Covenant seemed very heavy, and the Levites unable to carry it; yet it was a common tradition among the Hebrews that either God lightened it or the Angels held it up, such was the ease with which the ministers carried it. So, my brethren, the precept that commands us to confess the faith even at the risk of our life, not fearing those who kill our bodies for that reason, will seem hard and difficult; difficult the law that commands us to forgive our enemy, to do good to whoever injures us, to pray for those who persecute us; and so with some other command. But we can say with St. Paul: I can do all things in him who strengthens me.[7] Was it costly for the Martyrs to give themselves up to torments in profession and defence of their faith? If it had been difficult, neither an Agnes nor a Eulalia, nor Justus and Pastor, delicate boys, could have triumphed over the gridirons, the racks, the knives, the fires; but they triumphed, not they alone, but the grace of God with them. Was it costly for the just to forgive injuries? Let David say, and St. Stephen, and above all the Apostle, who confesses that he overflowed with joy at seeing himself afflicted and persecuted.[8] God's law is easy, and he himself helps us to overcome any difficulty its fulfilment presents.

8. And what reward does the Lord offer us for observing these laws? We shall see briefly. God, all goodness, never turns his eyes from the services his children render him, so as to reward them. He enjoins laws on man,

but in their very fulfilment lies the ground of man's hope for the reward. If you keep my commandments, said the Lord, they will preserve you and give you life.[9] God needs none of our goods. All our homage makes no difference to his glory; yet he lets no small service done to him pass without rewarding it. Let us search the history of the just. The Israelites form the plan of leaving Egypt, a land of idolaters, and going to sacrifice in the desert. A terrible persecution by the Egyptian attacks them; they find themselves forced either to throw themselves into the waters of the sea or to be victims of their enemies. God rewards their service: he divides the waves, they cross the sands dry-shod, and Pharaoh and his army perish in the waters. Susanna defends her virtue and chastity against some lustful old men; for serving God she already sees herself on the scaffold, awaiting the stones that were to punish her as an adulteress. God rewards her virtue, and through the young Daniel makes her innocence and the treachery of her slanderers plain. Ananias, Azarias and Misael refuse the worship and superstition of Nebuchadnezzar's court; he throws them into the flames; God repays their religion by quenching the fury of the fire and bringing them out of the furnace unharmed. An innumerable multitude of believers follow Christ into the desert; for three days they listen to his heavenly teaching, and from following it they almost faint with hunger; God rewards their faith, and by multiplying five loaves he feeds them. Zacchaeus… Let us not weary ourselves: even in this world God rewards the children of his law, and even a cup of cold water given to a poor man in his name will not go without reward.[10] The Gospel cries it aloud.

9. But the chief reward the Lord keeps for glory. He has prepared a crown of justice, says the Apostle, for those who keep his faith, finish their course with virtues, and fight manfully against worldly passions.[11] Let the beatitudes be read, and there we shall find eternal rewards for momentary labours; and an eternal weight of glory is the payment and fruit of a few brief actions, labours and sufferings borne for my God. These are the commandments of God, and the reward given us for fulfilling them, which was my first part.

Second Part

10. But this beneficent Lawgiver is despised; and men, like those wicked subjects of whom the Gospel tells, say in their hearts: We do not want this man to reign over us; we would rather have the rule of Satan.[1] My Christians, do you not know whom you want to serve? In the promises with which he enlists men in his service he holds out to you the golden cup of the woman of Babylon, brilliant and alluring outside; but at the bottom are poison, tyranny and terror.[2] Do you know who the prince of darkness is, to whom you want to pay homage, trampling on the sweet laws of Jesus Christ? Ah, how contrary his character is to that of Jesus Christ was made plain, says St. Jerome, in the title which Pilate, by divine disposition, set over the cross in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, showing the purpose of his coming into the world, which was to save us, to redeem us. But in the same way, says my angelic Doctor, God ordered the devil's name and offices to be written in the Apocalypse in the same languages, so that all might know him to be a treacherous, cruel and bloodthirsty chief. His name, it says, in Hebrew is Abaddon, in Greek Apollyon, and in Latin Exterminans.[3] Let the world know that his office is to destroy, to ruin, to exterminate. He is a cruel spirit and death, so Proverbs; the hammer of the whole earth, so Jeremiah; a raging lion who goes about us seeking to devour us, so St. Peter.[4]

11. What does he do with a man when he submits to his standards? What he did with that possessed man of whom St. Luke tells, whom Jesus Christ set free. Entering into him, he put everything out of joint: he left him blind, deaf and dumb, disturbed his senses, threw his whole frame into disorder. Entering his body, says Chrysostom, he laid everything waste, he destroyed everything. This he does with us when we give way to him, submitting to his rule by transgressing the divine commandments. He turns the throne of God into a den of thieves; he makes the citizen of heaven an infernal dragon. He robs us of the riches of the virtues, takes away the life of grace, separates us from God, casts us into the abyss. In short, he turns the whole spiritual building grace had raised in us into a workshop of iniquity, hateful to God and to men. Cruel lawgiver! But

what laws does he enjoin on us, if he already appears with the character of ruin and destruction?

12. We shall see. God asked only one costly thing of Abraham, the sacrifice of his son, and even this was not carried out. God saw his servant's fidelity in making the victim ready, stopped the sacrifice by means of an Angel, and as a reward for the mere disposition of his heart to obedience blessed his whole posterity. But for this one thing God asked at cost, what cruel and hard sacrifices has the devil not demanded of men! The Canaanites, Girgashites, Jebusites and other barbarous nations at every step bathed the altars of idols with the blood of their own children. The very inhabitants of the people of God offered these horrible victims to the devil, as the Fourth Book of Kings relates of Manasseh and Ahaz.[5] Who can read in the histories of paganism, without humanity shuddering, of the countless multitude of children sacrificed by the hand of their own parents in homage to the devil? Yet this barbarous and bloodthirsty prince of darkness was punctually obeyed, and is still obeyed, to our misfortune, when he demands of us, if not these bloody sacrifices, at least other painful ones, and actions that are burdensome and hard, surrounded with unrest and bitterness.

13. If not, tell me: what does he ask of the sinner? It is true that, to draw us to his liking, he charms us with flattering hopes; he offers us riches, pleasure, independence; but he lays down as an indispensable condition falling not only from the state of virtue but from that of tranquillity and peace. What does he demand of the sensual man in return for the pleasures, as filthy as they are momentary, that he offers him? Ah, if he cannot obtain the object his carnal and corrupt heart craves, what longings, what anguish, what unrest! This happened to Amnon while his sister refused to prostitute herself to incest.[6] And if the lustful man succeeds in carrying out his desires, what losses! Money, reputation, honour, health and even life are little to pay for a voluptuous pleasure that vanished like smoke; the prodigal will confess this truth at the cost of his misfortune. What does the devil ask of the miser for the riches he shows him? What sleeplessness, toil, journeys and voyages to acquire them; what frights, what anxieties, what vigils so as not to lose them! The rich fool of the Gospel is a good witness.[7] What does he ask of the vindictive man for the satisfaction of avenging an injury that he procures for him? Before carrying it out he does not live, does not rest, everything is tasteless to him; if he takes his revenge, what costly consequences! Exile, troubles, prisons, sentences, scaffolds. So it happened to Haman. He did not know how to show Zeresh his wife his grief at not being able to avenge himself on Mordecai; he plans the revenge, and loses the monarch's favour, his peace and his life on the very gallows he had prepared for his rival.[8] What does he ask of the office-seeker in payment for that prebend, that post, that position? What of the gambler for a few contemptible coins he offers to give him without work, and with amusement besides? What of that lady of the world for the excessive adornment of her body, and for keeping at her command that unwary man who keeps up her pleasures, and even the luxury she craves? The histories are full of the costly sacrifices with which all this is bought from the devil; and many could answer, if their hearts were not prejudiced. In short, honour, money, authority, pleasures, Satan offers everything to his worshippers; but he asks a fall, unhappiness and toil to obtain it. How contrary are these harsh laws to those Jesus Christ proposes to us in his service! But what reward does the devil offer us as the prize for commands so costly to fulfil?

14. Do not expect that, after you have been dragged along serving him, he will give you a reward capable of making you happy. The rich Epulo served him, and, buried in hell, received there the payment for his work. The traitor disciple of Jesus Christ served him, and from the halter to which his despair led him passed to the devouring fire.[9] When he sees you most afflicted, then, mocking your folly, he will redouble the efforts of his tyranny and fury. After Jesus, son of Josedech, had served him with the greatest fidelity, he asked God for justice against him and plotted his eternal ruin. Jesus, said the prophet Zechariah, was clothed in filthy garments, and Satan at his right hand to accuse him.[10] So it will happen to you who, shaking off the sweet yoke of the law of Jesus Christ, followed the laws of the devil. Your soul, covered with the most shameful blemishes of sin, will appear at the judgment, and the devil will be the most terrible prosecutor against you. This is he, he will say, who defiled the beautiful robe of grace by following my suggestions, as flattering as

they were criminal; it is just that, cursed by you, he should come into my company to share my torments; that is what my designs aimed at. If you call on him for help, as you often do, to the horror of Christian piety, he will answer you what the princes of the Synagogue answered Judas when he brought back the money, grieved at having sold the blood of a just man: What is your ruin to me? the devil will say; see to it yourself \[*allá te las hayas*\]. You followed me; at my voice you sold your divine Lawgiver and Master for contemptible goods; now you pay for it, there is your reward. I am now doing my duty by redoubling the snares that choke you, and they will ruin you eternally.

15. Well then, my brethren, what do you answer, in view of this, to the question I put to you at the beginning? Do you want to follow and keep exactly the commandments of the law of God and of our holy mother the Church, or those the devil imposes on his followers so that they may break these and be cast into hell? What are we to answer? I seem to hear you all say: There is no choice, none. We have a kind and merciful Lawgiver, who, if he has given us precepts for serving him in this world, has given precepts, commandments that are brief and easy to fulfil, aided by the grace he grants us for it if we ask him in spirit and in truth; and for this he afterwards bestows on us countless benefits even in this world, and in the next the heaven for which we were created. What does the devil give me to reward the costly sacrifices I make to serve him, forsaking my sweet and loving God? Troubles, weariness, sickness and dishonour on earth, and eternal pains in the abyss. Until now I have walked in hard ways, I will say with the Prophet; I have strayed from the way of truth.[11] But, my God, give me your help, so that, following the path you marked out for me in your commandments, I may obtain the reward of keeping them in beatitude. Amen.

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[12] Matt. 22:40; Matt. 5:17; 2 Cor. 3:3 and Jer. 31:33; Matt. 6:24.

[13] Matt. 9:12–13.

[14] Deut. 30:11–12.

[15] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.13.30 and *De natura deorum* 1.16.43. Then Acts 17:28.

[16] 1 Sam. 21:3, 8 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[17] Matt. 12:3–4; 1 Macc. 2:41.

[18] 2 Sam. 12:13.

[19] Matt. 10:28; Matt. 5:44; Phil. 4:13.

[20] 1 Sam. 24 and 26; Acts 7:60; 2 Cor. 7:4.

[21] Prov. 4:4; 7:2.

[22] Exod. 14; Dan. 13; Dan. 3; Matt. 15:32–38 (the feeding after three days, there with seven loaves; the five loaves are the other multiplication); Luke 19:1–10; Matt. 10:42.

[23] 2 Tim. 4:7–8; then Matt. 5:3–12 and 2 Cor. 4:17.

[1] Luke 19:14.

[2] Rev. 17:4.

[3] John 19:19–20; Rev. 9:11 (where St. John gives only the Hebrew and Greek names; the Latin *Exterminans* is the Vulgate's gloss).

[4] Prov. 17:11 (Vulgate: *angelus crudelis*); Jer. 50:23; 1 Pet. 5:8.

[5] Deut. 12:31; 2 Kings 16:3 and 21:6 (Vulgate 4 Kings).

[6] 2 Sam. 13:1–2 (Vulgate 2 Kings).

[7] Luke 15:11–32; Luke 12:16–21.

[8] Esther 5:13–14; 7:10.

[9] Luke 16:19–31; Matt. 27:3–5.

[10] Zech. 3:1–3 (Joshua the high priest, "Jesus" in the Vulgate). Then Matt. 27:4.

[11] Wis. 5:6–7.

41. Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On Gratitude for God's Benefits

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 41, pp. 60–68. Gospel: Luke 17:11–19. Original preacher not named.

Regressus est, cum magna voce magnificans Deum (Luke 17:15).

He came back, giving thanks to God with a loud voice.

The Gospel of this day is from the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. "One day, as Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he was passing through the midst of Samaria and Galilee; and as he entered a village, ten lepers of those two nations came out to meet him, who, standing far off, lifted up their voices, saying: Jesus, master, have mercy on us. As soon as Jesus saw them, he said: Go, show yourselves to the priests, to whom by the law the judging of leprosy belongs. He commanded them thus to test their faith and submission. And it happened that as they went they were healed. One of them, as soon as he saw himself healed, turned back glorifying God with a loud voice, and fell on the ground at Jesus' feet to thank him; and he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus said: Were not all ten healed? Where, then, are the other nine? There was no one to come back and give glory to God except this foreigner. Then he said to him: Rise and go, for your faith has saved you." This is the Gospel.

What instruction the Lord gives us in it! What a rebuke to the ungrateful, who do not give thanks for favours received! There was no one to come back and give glory to God except this foreigner. A tenth of those who received the benefit of being healed of leprosy gave the Lord thanks for so extraordinary a favour. With how much more reason can God complain of the ingratitude of Christians, of whom not a tenth, but perhaps a hundredth or less, are grateful to him for the countless benefits his merciful hand is heaping on them every day! Seneca, pagan though he was, said of this: He is ungrateful who pretends not to have received benefits; more ungrateful, he who does not give thanks for them; and most ungrateful, he who forgets them.[1] And I add that he who offends his benefactor exceeds all these in ingratitude. Gratitude is a virtue which, as a part of justice, one of the four the catechism calls cardinal, inclines a man to repay favours and give thanks to his benefactor.[2] This virtue belongs to justice because a benefit is a debt we contract, which calls for restitution or repayment. But alas! Although all men long most eagerly to receive favours from others, they either act as though they had not received them, or do not respond to them, or forget them entirely, which is what Seneca says, or persecute and offend the very one who has benefited them: like the clouds which, raised on high by the influence of the sun, afterwards rob it of its light with their shadow. It is to God, then, my brethren, that we must be especially grateful; for since every perfect gift comes from the sovereign Father of lights, author and dispenser of all the graces we share, to him, says St. Paul, we owe acknowledgment, praise, blessing and thanksgiving.[3] Not to do so, to offend the Lord, and even to use the very things he mercifully grants us so as to insult him much more, is an execrable crime; it is an injustice; it is to dry up the veins of his mercy; it is to go against justice by ingratitude. I mean today to speak of a point as important as it is forgotten by men. What benefits of God require our gratitude? I shall say in my first part. What is man's response to God's benefits? I shall say in the second.

First Part

2. Every man, whether he considers himself as a member of the human race or as this or that particular man, cannot reflect a little without there at once appearing before the eyes of his reason a countless number of benefits that the Father of mercies and God of all consolation is continually bestowing on him. He gives general benefits to all men, and special ones that each of us receives in particular. For all of them he requires our gratitude in justice; and for all and each we must give him thanks, says St. Paul.

3. General benefits. In the first place, the love he has for all men is a benefit beyond all reckoning: a love which, as he tells us through Jeremiah, is an everlasting love.[1] He rightly calls it so, says St. Bonaventure, because he loved us before we existed. Before man, angel, heaven and earth were made, he already loved us. Oh, how wonderful is the love God has for us, exclaims Father St. Cyril; it is eternal, as God himself is! Next follows the benefit of creation, which was the work of divine love. To weigh this benefit, consider: what

being did you have four hundred or a thousand years before your creation? None; you were wrapped in the shadows of possibility. How many, then, did God leave in the nothingness where you were, who have never existed as you do, when perhaps, if they had been put into the world, they would have loved and served him better than you do? What did you do to deserve this existence? God gave you life; and what a life! Ask the stones, says Father St. Gregory, and they will tell you they have being but no life; ask the plants, and they will tell you that though they have life, it is only vegetative; ask the beasts, and they will tell you they have life but lack reason.[2] To you, man, the supreme Being gave a life not only vegetative like the plants' and sensitive like the brutes', but a rational life. He made you a little lower than the Angels, because he gave you a being which, if not purely spiritual like those blessed spirits, at least has a spirit which, though now united to the flesh, will one day live eternally.

4. And he not only created you in his image and likeness, but went further in his favours. He would have done little in creating you if he had then destroyed you; but he preserves you, and continually gives you means to sustain the life with which he has freely blessed you. Look, man, at the stars of heaven, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the animals of the earth: all exist for and belong to the benefit of your preservation. Gold, silver, herbs, plants, all come from this benefit, and God made everything to preserve you. Take a piece of bread in your hand. How much has gone into forming it so that it might nourish your life! The ground was prepared, the wheat was sown, watered, tilled, reaped, threshed, winnowed, ground, sifted, kneaded, baked in the oven. How many hands for what seems a trifle! Yet all is a benefit of the Lord to preserve your life. And we could reason the same way about clothing, footwear, bed, and everything we need in this wretched life to preserve it.

5. But man, created and preserved, was lost by the sin of the first father. Unhappy we, if there had been no one to break the chains with which the devil had held us prisoners ever since! We should all have been victims of the eternal fire. But to meet this need he did us the inestimable benefit of the redemption. Oh, what a favour! It cost God little to create us, and little afterwards to preserve us; whatever he willed he did in heaven and on earth by his word alone, says David.[3] But how much did it cost him afterwards to redeem us? To become man, to lose his comfort, his rest, his honour, his blood and his life, and this he offered to the Father for our salvation on a shameful gibbet. Next, in Christians, follows the benefit of the call to the Catholic Church. What merits had we before we were born, that he should have given us the light not among Jews or pagans, but in Spain, in the heart and centre of the religion of Jesus Christ, where so many means are afforded us to attain the end for which we were created? A great benefit, exclaims St. Augustine, that God made me be born at that time and among those people through whom I came to receive the faith and the Sacraments of grace.

6. These, briefly explained, are the general benefits with which the Lord has enriched us. But how many others do we enjoy as our own in particular? God's granting some the nobility of blood, is it not a singular favour, when they might have been born children of common or even disgraced people? Nobility is a good worth esteeming, which the Son of God valued, willing that his forefathers according to his humanity should be the princes of Judah. To give another beauty of body is also a benefit, and the bridegroom of the Canticle extols his beloved bride for the beauty that shone in her face; Father St. Augustine calls it a gift of God. To grant others courage and bodily strength, what advantages it brings them, making them fit by it for work, for defending themselves against their enemies' attacks, and so for benefiting their country! Bodily health is also a special favour which the Lord is wont to deny to whom he pleases and grant to those he chooses. And God grants men countless other benefits in particular, which it would be tedious to relate, and which only the one who enjoys them can count. And so that those who lack these goods may not complain to the God of mercy, he makes a benefit to us result from the very denial of them. Being blind was a benefit for Tobit, to try his virtue; and in Isaac, so that he would not err in choosing Jacob as his heir. Job gained more on the dunghill than Solomon in the grandeur of his throne. And Leah's plainness won her a numerous offspring, which her

sister Rachel lacked.

7. If we look at the goods of fortune, what thanks must those give God to whom he has granted property, honour, education, means to pursue studies, posts and dignities! How many with merit and labour lack these goods, which the hand of the Most High has granted to others! How is it, said St. Leo, that of the children of one father some are rich, others poor, some placed, others without a position? All is God's benefit, who wills to distribute his gifts so, without anyone being able to say to him, according to his Prophet, Why is this so?[4] But sometimes it is still a benefit, and a great one, to deny some people these temporal goods, which, if they possessed them, would perhaps lead them to their eternal ruin. How good it has been for my soul, said David to God, that you humbled me! Now I shall learn to practise your commands.[5]

8. Lastly, it is a most special benefit of the Lord when he grants us the goods of grace. Inspirations, warnings, books, the examples of your companions: all are benefits, because they are means to attain virtue and through it heaven. That the Lord sought you like the shepherd the stray lamb, calling you to penance; that he inspired the preacher with a certain text, a certain thought that moved you to change your life; that he delivered you from the dangers of sinning; that he waited for you in mercy to give you pardon for your sins: all, all is an inexpressible benefit, and for all you owe God the most loving gratitude. This was the first thing I proposed.

Second Part

9. In view of the countless benefits that the Lord's merciful hand has poured on us in general and in particular, the apostle St. Paul never stops telling us: Be grateful, *grati estote*.[1] This doctor of the gentiles knew very well how far human ingratitude goes, which not only does not repay God's favours with the tribute of thankfulness, but returns them with injuries. This was seen in the first father, from whom we have inherited his blood and his ingratitude. God had just created him in his own likeness and set him over all the works of his hands, and at once he turns his back on him, tramples on his laws and offends him by transgressing the one precept he laid on him. This man does in imitation of his first father, and repeated offences against the Lord are the payment he gives for his favours. Would that I had time to show this truth at the length it deserves! I shall do it, though briefly, going through the most special benefits the Lord has bestowed on us.

10. He loved us eternally. And what does this ask? St. John answers: Let us love God, since he first loved us. This is what Jesus Christ himself gave us to understand when he said: I came to cast fire on the earth, and what do I will but that it burn?[2] But far from loving the one who loves him with an infinite love, man repays him with unspeakable offences. A monstrous thing! It seemed a marvel to Moses to see a bush surrounded by flames that was not burned up; but it would be stranger to see men surrounded by the flames of divine love without being kindled in his love and service. He created us in his image, and gave us a soul with three powers, so that with them and with all the members of which he formed our body we might adore him and fulfil our obligations, using them all to work out our eternal salvation. But we repay this singular benefit by using the very powers and senses with which he endowed us to increase our offences against him. If not, tell me: how do we use the freedom with which he ennobled our soul? Ah, we could do good or evil at our choice; but we, despising the good by which we should have pleased our benefactor, usually follow the evil by which we displease him. All the noble members and senses he gave us, making us the most excellent creatures that came from his hands, we have used to our own shame and against the Creator's intention. We could now ask the question Jesus Christ once asked the Jews: Whose image is this?[3] Whom does this soul represent, formed with so many perfections, as being God's image? The proud man's represents Lucifer; the miser's, Mammon; the lustful man's, Asmodeus; the glutton's, Belphegor; the vindictive man's, Baal-berith; and so with others.[4] God, when at his judgment he asks us to account for his benefits, will say to us, says Father St. Ambrose: I do not know these colours; I do not recognize my image here.[5]

11. He redeemed us at the cost of his most precious blood; and we show our thanks for this by forgetting his sorrowful passion and how much he suffered to bring us out of Satan's slavery, looking with the greatest indifference on the images of the Saviour that represent to us his sufferings on the cruel gibbet of the cross. He called us to his Church, making us be born where, by holy Baptism, we could enter within the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem to share in the goods of the sanctuary; but we forget everything. We give ourselves up to Satan and his pomps, which we renounced in that Sacrament, and we do not fulfil the laws our faith dictates, which we professed there; unless indeed, with the new doctrines that have been taught in these latter times, we contradict with unbelief and apostasy the truths we vowed to believe and adore.

12. But let us come to the special benefits we have received from a God of clemency and mercy. My Christian, how have you responded to the natural goods he granted you? He made you noble, so that virtue might shine the more with the lustre of your blood. But you used the distinction of your rank to subjugate your brethren and make yourself like an idol that demanded their adoration and their incense. He made you beautiful in body, so that a flesh full of beauty might be the precious shell holding a virtuous and innocent soul; but you harboured lust in it, making your beauty a net in which you caught the unwary; and even in the very temple, where the name of the Lord is invoked, you laid snares with your brazen beauty to capture the young, robbing Jesus of his worshippers and modesty of its jewels. He gave you courage and strength to use in God's service, for your own good and your brethren's profit; but the use you made of this was for brawls, duels, outraging your neighbour, oppressing the helpless, and boasting of a gift that is not yours but from the beneficent hand of your God. This and no other is the gratitude with which you respond to the natural goods with which your Maker enriched you.

13. And what shall we say of the goods of fortune? How did you repay God for those riches, honours and posts with which of his free will he adorned you, so that you might put them to Christian use, such as supporting your family, giving alms to the needy, and benefiting the society you live in with the very gifts you have perhaps received without merit? Ah, my brother! You have used the very instruments meant to promote God's glory and work your soul's salvation to offend him more easily and to lose yourself eternally. Riches have been for you a bait to which your self-love stuck, and in gold and silver you made a false god, to which alone you paid your homage. They have helped to buy your vices and satisfy your disordered passions; and if you had been less rich you would also have been less criminal. In this way you have repaid the Lord for all the goods of fortune with which he has honoured and distinguished you.

14. But you have given him no better payment for the countless gifts of grace he has been pleased to bestow on you. They cry out against you: the inspirations by which he called you to forsake sin; the remorse he put into your conscience so that you might return to the way of virtue; the voices of the preachers who invited you in his name to enter glory by your good conduct; the warning examples in others by which he wished to frighten you into giving up iniquity; and the time he granted you to weep for your wanderings. All these voices were benefits God did you so that your soul might not be lost, but might rather weave with merits the crown that was to honour it eternally in his presence; and all of them will be prosecutors at his divine tribunal, because, far from being grateful for them, you have despised them, and have mocked all he provided for your good and salvation. I conclude, my brethren. In view of the singular benefits God has done you, both the general ones that include all men, such as his love, creation, preservation, redemption and the call to the Church, and the particular ones of nobility, riches, beauty, health and natural strength, goods of which he has deprived many of your brethren, who would perhaps have made better use of them if they had enjoyed them, have you not been inflamed with love of so beneficent a God, repaying so many favours with actions proper to his service? Will you have the heart to return sins for benefits, forcing him to repeat what he said through his Prophet: I hoped that my vineyard, which I planted with such labour, and to which I failed to give nothing it needed, I hoped, I say, that it would yield grapes, and I gathered from it nothing but thorns?[6] I do not believe this of you, my brethren. Engrave, then, gratitude to your God on your hearts; give him

continual thanks for his continual benefits; and above all show him the greatest proof of thankfulness, which is to live holily, so as afterwards to enjoy the greatest of his benefits, which is glory. Amen.

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[7] The printed margin gives Seneca, *De beneficiis* book 3 (3.1.3).

[8] *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 106; q. 80.

[9] James 1:17; Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18.

[10] 2 Cor. 1:3; Jer. 31:3 (the printed margin gives ch. 31).

[11] Then Ps. 8:6.

[12] Ps. 134:6 (Vulgate; 135:6); cf. Ps. 32:9.

[13] Rom. 9:20; Isa. 45:9.

[14] Ps. 118:71 (Vulgate; 119:71).

[1] Col. 3:15.

[2] 1 John 4:19; Luke 12:49. Then Exod. 3:2–3.

[3] Matt. 22:20.

[4] *Mammona*.

[5] St. Ambrose, *Hexaemeron* 6.8.47 (said originally against painted faces): *non agnosco colores meos, non agnosco imaginem meam*.

[6] Isa. 5:2–4.

42. Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Fourth Petition of the Our Father

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 42, pp. 69–77. Gospel: Matthew 6:24–33. Original preacher not named.

> *Quaerite primum regnum Dei et iustitiam eius, et haec omnia adicientur vobis (Matt. 6:33).*
>
> *Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things will be given you besides.*

The Gospel of this day is from the sixth chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. “Jesus said to his disciples: No one can serve two masters who command contrary things; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will bear with the one and despise the other. You cannot, then, serve God and money at once. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious and troubled about having something to eat to sustain your life, nor about having clothing to cover your body. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? He, then, who gave you life and body, will he deny you food and clothing? Look at the birds of the air, which neither sow nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them; are you not more loved by him than the birds? And besides, what will your anxiety avail? Which of you by his cares can add a cubit to his stature? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin; and yet I tell you that Solomon himself in all his glory was never clothed with such beauty and splendour as one of these. If, then, God takes care so to clothe the grass, the herb, which is today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he take care to clothe you, men of little faith? Do not be distressed, then, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or with what shall we cover ourselves? as the gentiles do, who, not knowing divine Providence, seek these things anxiously. Your heavenly Father knows the need you have of them. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all other things will be given you besides.” This is the Gospel.

2. The whole of it is a sermon in which eternal Truth himself instructs us in the confidence we must have in the Lord for the relief of our needs, and at the same time rebukes us for excessive solicitude and anxiety in acquiring temporal goods. Indeed, our adorable Master clearly gives us to understand that the God who is rich in mercy to all who call on him in spirit and in truth omits no means of giving all it needs for its preservation to the creature he created in his image and likeness; in vain would he have formed man only to abandon him to poverty and death. And on the other hand he reproves those men of little faith who, trusting only in their own strength and industry, live anxious and restless to obtain goods that will perhaps not be

necessary to them, sometimes without considering whether the means by which they seek them are lawful or not. All this the Saviour had already shown in very few words in the prayer he taught us, called the Our Father, in which he tells us what we must ask of God and how we must do it, speaking of this matter especially in the fourth petition, which says: Give us this day our daily bread. Therefore, to harmonize this petition with the letter of the Gospel, I have thought of the most suitable means, which is to explain the sense of this petition of the Our Father, showing in each of its words what we must ask of God concerning temporal goods, and what the Lord forbids us to ask concerning them. I shall vary my usual method somewhat, as the subject requires.

Single Section

3. In this plática I speak only of the temporal goods we may ask of God, although I am not unaware that in this fourth petition several spiritual goods we need are included in the same words. For example, we ask that we may not lack the word of God announced by his ministers, for man does not live by bread alone, said Jesus Christ, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. We also beg God to sustain our soul with the sacred Eucharist, which is the living bread that came down from heaven, a bread far superior to the manna our fathers ate in the desert, which did not preserve them from death, whereas he who eats this sacred bread will live for ever.[1] But since all this is treated elsewhere, I confine myself here to asking for the goods of the earth. What, then? Is it lawful to ask for these from a God who commands us to hate the world and all that is in it? Yes, my brethren, it is lawful, and we even must ask for them, but only in so far as they help us to serve God while we live; for the first thing we must seek is the kingdom of God, that is, our salvation, says the Gospel. We must work out our eternal salvation in this world; and as being comes before acting, we could ill labour in God's service if we lacked what is necessary for our existence. Jesus Christ himself commands us to ask the divine Majesty for them, saying: Thus shall you pray… Give us this day our daily bread. Let us explain these words.[2]

Bread

4. By the name of bread, in the manner of speaking of holy Scripture, is understood not only the common bread with which we usually feed ourselves, but everything that goes to our food, clothing and medicine; in a word, relief in all the needs we contracted through the sin of the first man, for which we were condemned to hunger, nakedness, thirst, cold, heat, sickness and other pains. This is a heavy yoke, says Scripture, laid on the children of Adam.[3] So, Lord, we say, give us protection against all these calamities; this is what we beg of you under the name of bread. By it we also ask the Lord that the elements may serve our preservation, that the clouds may give us rain in due season and the earth bear fruit; in short, that as he has put all other creatures under our feet, he may make them all provide what we need for our preservation. This in sum is what we ask in asking God for bread.

5. But although we must ask for and desire everything under the name of bread, to show that we want only what is necessary for us, we want and ask for the abundance and superfluity of temporal riches, so as to feed our criminal passions with them. Give me, Lord, said Solomon, neither poverty nor riches; give me only what is necessary for my living.[4] But many mortals, who ought to say with the Apostle, Having food and something to cover our bodies, with this alone we are content, are content neither with ordinary food nor with modest clothing. Those whose god is their belly always long for a variety of delicate dishes, which usually serve only gluttony and drunkenness and inflame the concupiscence of the flesh.[5] Our belly, these might say with Seneca, is an insatiable grave: all the birds that fly, all the animals that graze, all the fish that swim, are seen buried in our bodies; we live on the dead, and even so we are not satisfied.[6] Others, not considering that clothing was invented by necessity only to shelter us from the harshness of the seasons, seek it eagerly, anxiously and with solicitude, so that what ought to be called a *sambenito* \[the penitent's garment of shame\], or the badge of the first sin, may serve as finery, spending on adorning a dirty body their own

wealth or other people's, which was needed for real necessities.[7] All this the Lord forbids us to desire when he wants us to ask only for bread, which includes only what is needful.

Our

6. This bread, these goods we ask for, we call ours, not because we have any right to them, for God owes us nothing, but because, being necessary to us, God gives them to us as if they were our own. So St. Augustine said: We do not ask for temporal things as our goods, but as goods necessary to us. We also say our bread, not because we can acquire it by our industry and labour independently of God, for everything in the universe is his, and poverty and riches are in his hands, but because it is destined for us by that universal Father whose providence clothes the mountains with grass for the animals, and brings forth vegetables for the use of men, as David said. It is also called ours because, with God's help, we must acquire it by just means; for what is obtained by injustice is not ours, and besides being a criminal acquisition it must be restored to its owner. Lastly, it is said ours and not mine, because the goods the Lord gives us, whether by inheritance, by labour, by the bounty of princes, or in any other way, we must not appropriate to ourselves in such a way as not to make the needy sharers in them.[8] God, said St. Augustine, saves the rich man through the poor, testing whether he is a good steward of the goods he has given him. This, and in this way, Jesus Christ commands us to ask.

7. But ah, my brethren, how many things he forbids us by this one word "our"! Brevity prevents us from naming them all. By this word alone we are forbidden the misuse of riches, enjoying them in superfluities and pleasures as if they were our own, making God's gift serve sin. If we say not my bread but our bread, it is to condemn those who desire the goods of the earth only for themselves, without considering that if God makes someone abound in riches, it is so that with a charitable hand he may share them with the poor and needy, for whom we must desire food and clothing, which are as much theirs as ours. Let God have no part in me, said Job, if I ate a morsel of bread without the orphan eating of it… and if the poor man was not warmed with the wool of my sheep.[9] This just rich man knew that neither the bread nor the clothing was his alone, but also the needy's. How small a part God will have in the souls of many of the powerful! We are also forbidden the desire for another's bread, that is, to try to heap up goods by usury, injustice, theft and deceit; for goods acquired in this way are not ours, and they cry out for their lawful owner. Ah, how sweet is bread to the fraudulent man, said the Wise Man, but afterwards his mouth is filled with gravel;[10] as if to say: the gain acquired by duplicity and fraud is pleasant to the unjust man, for he acquired it with no labour; but afterwards it will be bitter and harsh to him, like one chewing sand, because of the remorse of his conscience and the punishment his crime deserves.

Daily

8. We call it our daily bread because every day we need to eat and be clothed, as distinct from that bread of glory that will be given us in beatitude, where, according to Scripture, the elect will have no hunger, thirst, heat, frost, weariness or toil.[11] Divine Providence is shown here too, says St. Augustine, no less wonderful than in the desert, where with five loaves he fed more than five thousand men; for every day he feeds and nourishes so many millions of creatures who live in the world: a miracle cheapened, through want of reflection, more than that of the loaves with which Jesus fed the crowds.[12] It is called daily so that we may repeat this petition to the Lord every day, declaring that we depend on his beneficent providence. Beneficent, yes, my brethren. How many examples holy Scripture shows us in which is fulfilled what David said: I have not seen a just man forsaken, nor his children seeking bread;[13] for the just man who asks God every day for his help is supplied by him every day with what is needed to preserve life. Every day the manna came down to feed the children of Israel; every day the Lord sent Elijah his food by means of a bird, which snatched it from the table of King Ahab, who so persecuted that man of God; every day a raven brought half a loaf to the holy hermit Paul for sixty years, doubling this ration when St. Anthony Abbot went to visit him.[14] So far does the beneficence of our most lovable Father reach.

9. But ah, how this word condemns, though tacitly, those men, as ungrateful as they are distrustful, who, expecting to enjoy a long life, try to pile up goods for many years, thinking these are the only things from which they can receive their living and not find themselves in want in their needs! These do not do what the Psalmist enjoins, saying: Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will sustain you.[15] They do not do it, and so they trust more in the multitude of their riches than in the providence of their God. This comes to a kind of idolatry, and the first chapter of the prophecy of Habakkuk shows it, which, speaking figuratively of certain wicked men, says that they sacrificed to their fishing tackle and offered sacrifices to their nets, because by them they grew fat and received their choice food;[16] as if to say: men, distrusting the providence of their God, worship as idols their fortune, their positions, their fields, their industry, the tools of their trade, having more confidence in them for acquiring goods than in a God who sustains us every day, and without whose help all our efforts would be fruitless.

Give Us This Day

10. These words, which Jesus Christ commands us to say in the prayer of the Our Father, in the fourth petition of which we are speaking, serve to make us acknowledge the infinite power and providence of the Lord, whom we venerate piously and holily as the author of every good we receive, and the sovereign Father from whom every perfect gift comes down. All of us, says St. Augustine, are beggars of God when we pray. We stand before the door of the great Father of the household, and we even prostrate ourselves, weeping over our need, like petitioners who wish to receive some favour.[17] All; there is no distinction; even the richest must continually ask God for the bread we are speaking of, for our intention is not only that he give it to whoever lacks it, but that he preserve it to whoever already enjoys it. In this sense a powerful monarch said to the Lord in one of his psalms: I am a beggar and poor;[18] for if God did not every day pour his blessing on our goods, they would perish at once.

11. We say give us, and not give me, because, as we have already said under the word our, the divine Master teaches us in our prayer that, as an effect of Christian charity, we must desire goods for our neighbour as for ourselves; we are members of one body. And even when the Lord, whose judgments are inscrutable, does not give this bread to many of our brethren, he gives it to us to distribute among them; and so, giving it to me, he gives it to us all, and that is why we say give us. We also say it so, to give the Lord to understand that we wish all we receive from his hand to be blessed and sanctified by it, so that it may be wholesome and profitable to us; hence comes the praiseworthy custom of blessing the table and the food when we sit down to eat. It says further that he give it us this day: that is, in this temporal life, until we eat the bread of the elect in the other. This day, the present day; for if each day we ask and obtain food and clothing and all else that is necessary, there remains nothing more for us to desire in this respect.

12. These same words, give us this day, rebuke two kinds of men, who for opposite reasons contradict their true meaning. There are some who, rashly trusting in the Lord’s infinite mercy and providence, give themselves up to idleness, trusting that he will give them what they need for their preservation, without on their part using the means to obtain it. This is an error, and a tempting of God to work miracles without necessity. The Gospel, which condemns anxiety in seeking temporal goods, sends the avaricious to admire the divine goodness with which he feeds the birds without their sowing or storing in barns; but it does not say that they do not fly to seek their food. God does not put food into their mouths while they sit still in their nest; he gives them food, yes, but while they labour to seek it. So the Lord’s offer to give us the bread of our subsistence goes on the supposition that we work to obtain it. Man, said Job, is born to labour, and the bird to fly.[19] Even in the state of innocence man would not have eaten in idleness; the Lord created him, but put him in paradise to keep it and till it. But after Adam sinned, it is part of the sentence pronounced against us to eat bread in the sweat of our brow. Then, say the impious, does God not give it in this way? He gives it; and when we say here give us, we beg him to bless our lands, our crafts, our labours, so that they may yield us what we need, and especially that he may provide us with a post or position in which we may lawfully earn

our living.

13. There are others who, on the contrary, trust so much in the goods they enjoy that, seeing the abundance of their houses, they seem ashamed to ask God to give them this day their bread, since they have it stored up for many days; and they even labour sinfully to add house to house, field to field, money to money, so that nothing may be lacking to themselves and their descendants, not only of what is necessary, but of luxury and the superfluous abundance of everything.[20] Unhappy men! How vain are their hopes! Unless the Lord builds the house, says David, those who build it labour in vain.[21] If today he does not preserve the goods of the powerful, which is what these men must ask, tomorrow they will find themselves beggars and needy. On the one hand, perhaps a sudden death frustrates their plans, as happened to that rich fool of whom St. Luke tells, who, when he was delighting in the goods he could enjoy for many years, at that very moment God called his soul, and he left all he had piled up. On the other hand, even while they live, the Lord often punishes this proud solicitude. God, as I have said, gave the manna to the Israelites every day; but if they kept any part of it for the morrow, he punished their distrust by making it rot.[22] How many granaries have been seen eaten today by the weevil, where yesterday their owner trusted to have his profit in his wheat! How many buildings of splendour and greed have been seen burned or destroyed, which their masters thought to make everlasting! What is not forbidden here is that wise prudence and foresight which lays up stores in time of plenty for the time of barrenness; no, the Lord himself commands us to do it, giving us the ants as our teachers in it.[23] But what he wants is that even those with the most treasure should ask him to give them this day their bread, that is, the preservation of what they enjoy, humbling themselves before God, and acknowledging that the power to feed them lies in him and not in the fickle goods of this world. Everything perishes. The Apostle said so in these words he spoke to Timothy: Tell the rich not to be proud in their thinking, nor to put their hope in the uncertainty of their riches, but in the living God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy.[24] This has been my aim: to show you the true sense of these words, Give us this day our daily bread.

14. My God, I will say to you with the Prophet, all creatures look to you to give them their food in due season; you give it to them, and they gather it. You open your hand, and they are filled with your goods. But if you turn away your face, they are at once troubled. All living things set their eyes on you, hoping that you will help them in their needs, and you give them their food in due time.[25] This is what we wish to ask of you in saying, Give us this day our daily bread. But for this, give me your help to ask only for what is pleasing to you. First the kingdom of heaven, and then whatever helps us, with your grace, to attain glory.

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[1] Matt. 4:4; John 6:31–58.

[2] 1 John 2:15; Matt. 6:9, 11, 33.

[3] Sir. 40:1.

[4] Prov. 30:8 (the printed margin gives Prov. 30).

[5] 1 Tim. 6:8; Phil. 3:19.

[6] A paraphrase in the spirit of Seneca, *Letters* 60.2–3 and 95.

[7] Cf. Gen. 3:21.

[8] The printed margins give St. Augustine, *On the Sermon on the Mount* 2.16 (2.7.25 in modern division), and Ps. 146:8–9 (Vulgate; 147:8–9). Cf. Sir. 11:14.

[9] Job 31:17, 20.

[10] Prov. 20:17 (the printed margin gives Prov. 20).

[11] Rev. 7:16.

[12] St. Augustine, *Tractates on John* 24.1.

[13] Ps. 36:25 (Vulgate; 37:25).

[14] Exod. 16; 1 Kings 17:6 (the detail that the food came from Ahab's table is a later legend); St. Jerome, *Life of Paul the First Hermit* 10.

[15] Ps. 54:23 (Vulgate; 55:22); the printed margin gives Ps. 54.

[16] Hab. 1:16.

[17] The printed margin gives St. Augustine, Sermon 15 *de verbis Domini* (now Sermon 61.8).

[18] Ps. 39:18 (Vulgate; 40:17); 85:1.

[19] Job 5:7. Then Gen. 2:15; 3:19.

[20] Isa. 5:8.

[21] Ps. 126:1 (Vulgate; 127:1). Then Luke 12:16–21.

[22] Exod. 16:19–20.

[23] Prov. 6:6–8.

[24] 1 Tim. 6:17 (the printed margin gives 1 Tim. 6).

[25] Ps. 103:27–29 (Vulgate; 104:27–29) and Ps. 144:15 (Vulgate; 145:15); the printed margins give Ps. 103 and 144 (misprinted "114").

43. Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Eleventh Article of the Creed, the Resurrection of the Flesh

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 43, pp. 78–86. Gospel: Luke 7:11–16. Original preacher not named.

> *Adolescens, tibi dico, surge (Luke 7:14).*
>
> *Young man, I say to you, arise.*

The Gospel of this day is from the seventh chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. "Jesus was going to the city of Galilee called Nain, and his disciples went with him, and a great multitude of people. And when he was near the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out to be buried, and he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and many people of the city were with her. And the Lord, seeing her full of tears, was moved with compassion for her, and said to her: Do not weep. And he came up and touched the bier; and those who carried it stood still. And he said: Young man, arise, I command you. And at once he who was dead sat up and began to speak; and Jesus gave him to his mother. And they were all filled with fear, and glorified God, saying: A prophet has appeared among us, and God has visited his people, sending them the Saviour he had promised." This is the Gospel.

2. It would be very much in keeping with it if I were to show today the mystical resurrection that takes place in the sinful soul through the sacrament of Penance, or sacramental confession. That young man represented the man dead through sin, who is deprived of all his spiritual goods, and even of the life grace gave him; just as the young man of whom St. Luke tells had lost all his goods, all his senses were left without use, and he lay stiff on the bier. At the commanding voice of Jesus Christ, who said to him, Arise, he recovered his life and all he had lost in death, and this resurrection was a cause of joy for himself and for all his family. So too the sinner who comes with the proper disposition to the most sweet sacrament of Penance, at the voice of the priest saying I absolve you, recovers all the losses he had suffered through sin; and the grace he receives there animates him again, and from one spiritually dead he is transformed into a man spiritually alive. This teaching could be very useful; but I have already explained it elsewhere. Now the resurrection of the flesh, which we are commanded to believe in the eleventh article of the Creed, deserves to be considered, with allusion to the one the widow's son experienced. It is certain that we must all die, and also that we must all rise again one day, and that the bodies that have long lain buried in the land of forgetfulness will live again, either happily or unhappily. The young man of the Gospel rose again, but the life he then recovered was not eternal; he died again, Jesus granting him life for a time. But in the general resurrection of the flesh we shall rise never to die again. What a consolation this is for true Christians, considering that, once the sentence of death pronounced on Adam and all his descendants has been fulfilled in them, the day will come when we shall recover life again, to live eternally in glory! This is what I am going to explain today. What is the resurrection of the flesh that we are commanded to believe in the Creed? I shall say in the first part. What reflections can the Christian draw from what this article teaches? I shall say in the second.

First Part

3. To rise again is for a dead man to return to life. Many have risen by divine power and the intercession of the just; but this resurrection is like that of the son of the widow of Nain, temporary and passing, because all who were raised in this way died again. Only on the last of days shall we all rise with a resurrection that will be eternal. All men will experience it, so that they may be judged in body and soul, and receive either reward or punishment, as the works they did in the world while they lived deserved: so said St. Paul.[1] What day that will be is unknown; only the heavenly Father knows it, said Jesus Christ; and though the Son knows it, it is not his to disclose or reveal to another.[2] What is certain is that the general resurrection will precede the judgment; but when either will be cannot be known. It is called the resurrection of the flesh and not the resurrection of man, because not the whole man has to rise. Man is a compound of soul and body. The soul does not die; it is eternal, it is immortal; and it could not be otherwise, says St. Augustine, being the image of an immortal and eternal God. That is why, properly speaking, the whole man does not die. In the separation of soul and body, which is what we call death, only the body dies, not the soul; and therefore the body or flesh is what alone rises again. And man is also said to rise again in so far as the soul, which was alive, is reunited to the body, which was dead, and the body is seen a second time animated and alive. All men must experience this resurrection, as I have said, because all must die. And the reprobate too, that is, those who died out of God's grace, must they also rise? Yes, my brethren: all will rise, though not all in the same way; for those who did good, says St. John, will rise to eternal life, and those who did evil will rise to judgment and eternal condemnation.[3] Some will rise to be vessels of honour, and others vessels of shame. For those who died sinners, the life they receive in the resurrection will be unhappy, and may be called a true death. So St. Paul gave us to understand: Truly, he says, we shall all rise, but we shall not all be changed.[4] That is, the just will be changed, passing from the mortal to the immortal and glorious state, receiving the four endowments of impassibility, brightness, subtlety and agility that belong to the glorified body; but the reprobate will rise ugly and abominable, remaining capable of the torments they must suffer eternally.

4. All must rise in their own bodies, with the same flesh, skin, bones and members they had before dying. This is the view of the Apostle, who says: This which is now mortal must put on immortality. In the word *this, hoc*, St. Paul means that the same body is the one that will rise.[5] And even if it had been turned to dust, burned in a furnace and its ashes scattered to the winds, that almighty God who made everything from nothing will command, by a miracle of his right hand, that all the parts of our body come together again, even though they had already been turned into other substances. So holy Job said: In my flesh I shall see my Saviour, whom I myself shall see with my own eyes, and not another for me.[6] What is certain, says St. John Damascene, is that the resurrection is man's return to the same state from which he fell. And will each rise in the sex he had in the world, that is, the man as man and the woman as woman? There were not lacking some who, on the strength of St. Paul's words in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians, which say, all will rise as perfect men, *in virum perfectum*, held that all would rise in the male sex, just as at the beginning of the world the Lord drew only the man from the clay; and since in the other life there will be no marrying, but all will be like the Angels of God, according to Scripture, the female sex would then be useless, they say. But St. Augustine says the contrary. The reason is that the female sex is not a defect of nature but a natural condition; and as God will restore to man what belongs to him according to nature, each will rise in his own sex.[7]

5. And at what stature will the dead rise? St. Augustine, in the same book cited, says that all will rise at the age of thirty-three, at which Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, and with the stature belonging to that age when there is no defect or irregularity in the person. This agrees with what St. Paul says, that all will rise to the measure of the age and fullness of Christ. So children as well as the old will all be alike at the age of thirty-three, and with the stature belonging to that age, whether they were giants or pygmies.[8] And as all the works of the Lord are perfect, as is said in Deuteronomy, whoever had any imperfection in his body in the

world will rise without it: so there will be no lame or maimed there, no blind or crippled. The shape and features of the face will be those one had in life, each appearing so that he can be recognized and distinguished. In short, the same one will rise who was dead and decayed.

6. This is the resurrection of the flesh, which, for better understanding, can be shown by various comparisons or figures. Every day we see the sun hide from our sight; it sets, as if dying before our eyes, and hides in another hemisphere and remains as if buried in the shadows of night. But we also see that the next day it is as if reborn, and comes out again to gladden those regions it had saddened by its absence. Trees in autumn dry up, grow ugly, die to all appearance; but spring comes, and the life they had hidden shines again before our eyes, and the flowers, leaves and fruits that had withered appear once more, as if they had found their resurrection. A little grain of wheat or of any other seed, thrown into the ground, is buried, decays and is left dead; but quickened then by the rain and the influence of the stars, it is born again and produces the stalk, the ear and the grain. So that, says the Gospel, for it to bear fruit and be born again it must first die: If the grain of wheat, it says, falls into the ground and dies, then it will bear much fruit.[9] So, then, our flesh, which withered, died and lay buried in the tomb, by the power of God flowers and lives again; with this difference, says St. Paul, that a carnal and corruptible body is sown, and it will rise incorruptible and spiritual.[10] Good God! What considerations the Christian can draw from this for his profit! We shall see them in the

Second Part

7. We can draw many Christian reflections from all the teaching explained above, which can help us to strengthen our faith and virtue, and to detest certain erroneous maxims that the enemies of our Religion spread. I shall give some for your instruction and teaching.

8. In the first place, we must confirm ourselves in faith in the immortality of the soul. Separated from the body in death, it still lives, either in the state of happiness if it was good, or in that of damnation if it was evil; and it will be reunited to its own body on the last of days. On that day, says St. Paul, the trumpet will sound, which all who are in the tombs will hear, and those who hear it, who will be all, will rise alive.[1] This being so, do not listen, my brethren, to those irreligious voices that say our souls die when our bodies die, and will be buried in the same tombs. This is heretical, as opposed to this article of the Creed we have explained; but it is said only by those who, to walk more freely in the ways of iniquity, deny or pretend to deny another life after death, so as to live without the remorse that troubles the man who expects to come back to life in the common resurrection and to be punished then. We must also consider with how much respect and decency the bodies of Christians are to be treated, looked at and touched; for they were like the deposit where their soul was kept, which lives in the Lord’s presence, and which we must suppose already enjoys his glory. Let us not look at them with the indifference and contempt with which the bodies of brute beasts are commonly regarded, of which in their death nothing remains but those loathsome remains. To prevent this, the Church gathers them into her churches, gives them ecclesiastical burial, celebrates funerals for them and applies sacrifices for them, especially that of the Mass, which is the sacrifice of expiation, in case their souls are purging the remnants of their sins in holy purgatory.[2] The Church looks on dead bodies with respect not so much for their own sake as for the souls that were lodged in them, which came out of that prison of flesh to appear before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul says. Consequently, the bodies and relics of the Saints, declared such by the Church, and even the clothes that touched them, are objects worthy of our veneration and our cult.[3] These members helped them practise the virtues that have crowned their souls with glory; and if their souls are in the hands of the Lord and enjoy his divine presence, why should we not venerate their relics, which one day will also be glorified? These bodies, which we now see decayed or broken, without movement, without action, and as it were victims of death, will on the day of their resurrection shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, fly like eagles without weariness, pass through the most solid things, as Jesus Christ passed through the stone of the tomb, and be free from pain, from labours and from death: so

says Scripture.[4] They are worthy, then, of all our respect. And though they now seem contemptible, being perhaps dry bones, withered and wasted flesh, or a horrifying skeleton, we must lift our consideration to heaven, where their souls reign happily. At the same time these sacred remains of the just departed are incentives to imitate the virtues they practised; and this is the reason why the enemies of the true religion would like to see all the relics of the Saints burned in the flames, to remove them from the sight of Christians, whom they call idolaters for this veneration. If the histories are read, the devices of heretics and pagans to draw us away from the cult of the holy bodies of the just will be seen.

9. Another consideration we can draw from this teaching, which may console us not a little amid the tribulations we must inevitably experience in this life as punishment of the first sin, is the remembrance of our future resurrection. Poverty, persecution, sickness and other troubles, which now seem to us a heavy yoke and a very weighty burden, will all be turned into joy, satisfaction and gladness. If we suffer with Christ, said St. Paul, we shall also be glorified with him in Christ.[5] You will have noticed that a farmer works the whole year cultivating his fields; he sweats, goes without sleep and suffers a thousand fatigues, but he bears them all gladly in the hope that autumn will come, and that, gathering his harvest, he will be pleased to see the fruit of all his labours, and that for what he toiled and sweated over he has enough to keep himself and his beloved family. This, then, is a very slight likeness of the joy the just will receive when on the day of judgment they see that the labours that overtook them in the world are rewarded beyond measure in heaven, and that the members that were weighed down by pain, insult and misfortune will be filled with beauty and glory. All the sufferings of this world are not to be compared with the future glory that will be given us for them, says St. Paul. Now we see nothing but reasons for weeping, from cold, heat, hunger and pain; but in the resurrection of the flesh, the flesh will go where, according to St. John's Apocalypse, there is neither cold nor heat nor any weeping, because those adversities have passed away.[6] The winter of the waters of bitterness is over, and the spring of the flowers of immortality and rejoicing has come to them. Oh my brethren, what a consideration this is for bearing all the adversities of the world gladly and with esteem! I am to rise again, and then I shall receive an incomparable reward for momentary labours.

10. But we can draw yet another consideration, which I think very necessary. A father dies, a mother, a wife, children, friends; and, given over almost to despair, grief and desolation, no one is able to console us. Neither the words of our confessors nor the reflections of our confidants, nothing restrains our disordered feelings. What is this? What can it be, but that they have no faith in the resurrection of the flesh? If anyone seemed to have reason to drown herself in tears, it was the lady spoken of in today's Gospel. She was a rich woman, a widow; the son she saw dead was her only one, and the object of all her delight and affection. Yet when Jesus saw her given over to weeping, he said to her: Do not weep, *noli flere*; that is, do not be crushed by excess of grief. Excess, yes, my brethren. The Lord does not forbid us to feel the deaths of our relatives and friends. Tears shed with moderation in sad events are not sinful, says Father St. Gregory; but excessive tears are, which are commonly produced by lack of faith. That is why the Apostle said: I do not want you to be ignorant, my brethren, about what happens to our dead, so that you may not grieve like the gentiles, who have neither faith nor hope. If we know that Jesus died and rose again, the same will happen to those who follow him.[7] Ah, if we considered that the absence of our dead from us is very short, and that one day we shall see them risen and glorious, the grief we show at their deaths would not be so extraordinary: they lose a toilsome life to receive one full of delights. With this consideration Jesus consoled Martha at the death of Lazarus her brother: Your brother will rise again.[8] This last consideration can be of much use to you.

11. I conclude, because this subject would be endless. You have now seen what the resurrection of the flesh is, and the way it will take place on the last of days, when God will reward body and soul together, or give them punishment according to their works; for in death the soul alone was brought to account. I have proposed various considerations you can draw from this article of faith that we are commanded to believe in the Creed, which can be of much use and profit, both to console you in the adversities of this life and to guard

you against various heretical doctrines that are spreading too widely. Would that you would engrave on your hearts the maxims I have announced to you! Try to live in accordance with the laws of Jesus Christ by fulfilling all his precepts, so that on the day of judgment you may rise not to the resurrection of judgment and eternal death, but to that of the life that will be given you in beatitude. Amen.

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[9] 2 Cor. 5:10.

[10] Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36.

[11] John 5:29. Then Rom. 9:21.

[12] *omnes quidem resurgemus, sed non omnes immutabimur*.

[13] 1 Cor. 15:53 (the printed margin gives 1 Cor. 15).

[14] Job 19:26–27 (Vulgate).

[15] The printed margins give St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 4.28 (4.27 in some editions), and St. Augustine, *City of God* 22.17. Then Eph. 4:13; Gen. 2:7; Matt. 22:30.

[16] St. Augustine, *City of God* 22.15–16, with Eph. 4:13. Then Deut. 32:4.

[17] John 12:24–25.

[18] 1 Cor. 15:42–44.

[1] 1 Cor. 15:52 and 1 Thess. 4:16, combined with John 5:28.

[2] Then 2 Cor. 5:10.

[3] *adoración*.

[4] Matt. 13:43; Isa. 40:31; Rev. 21:4.

[5] Rom. 8:17.

[6] Rom. 8:18; Rev. 7:16–17; 21:4. Then Song 2:11–12.

[7] 1 Thess. 4:13–14.

[8] John 11:23.

44. Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Capital Vice of Envy

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 44, pp. 87–95. Gospel: Luke 14:1–11. Original preacher not named.

> *Homo quidam hydropicus erat ante illum (Luke 14:2).*
>
> *A certain man who had the dropsy was before him.*

The Gospel of this day is from the fourteenth chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. “It happened that when Jesus was in the house of one of the leading Pharisees to eat on a sabbath day, those who were there were watching him, to see whether he failed in any of their rites and observances, which they regarded with more respect than the law of God, so as to accuse him. And behold, a man with the dropsy was before him. And Jesus, addressing the doctors of the law and the Pharisees who were present, said to them: Is it lawful to heal the sick on the sabbath day? But they were silent. Then he took the man with the dropsy by the hand, healed him, and sent him away. Then, turning to them, he said: Which of you, seeing that his ass or his ox has fallen into a well, will not pull it out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him to this. Meanwhile Jesus, seeing that the guests were choosing the first places, put this parable to them and said: When you are invited to a wedding, do not sit in the first place, lest among the guests there be someone worthier than you, and he who invited you and him come and say to you, Give place to this man; and then you suffer the shame of being put in the last place. But when you are called to a banquet, go and sit in the last place, so that when he who invited you comes, he may say to you, Friend, go up higher; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who are at table. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” This is the Gospel.

2. All the Pharisees were watching Jesus Christ, says the Gospel. If they had watched him with good intention, they would have learned much from his teaching and example; but what moved them to watch him

was not the desire to profit, but their very malice, says St. Bonaventure. They watched him, moved by the envy that tormented their treacherous hearts at seeing the Saviour's ministry so successful, and the discredit that was going to fall on their persons and their teaching through the teaching Jesus preached. They watched him to see whether he said or did anything contrary to the law of Moses and the traditions of their elders, so as to accuse him to the authorities, so that by an exemplary punishment they might remove from their sight the one who tormented them so much with the credit he was winning among the people. They succeeded, by having him die on a cross. Pilate himself, who sentenced him to it more from weakness than from justice, declared that it was the envy of the Jews that had brought him before the tribunal, though innocent.[1] Ah, these envious Pharisees have many companions. To see a man full of the gifts of heaven, whether of nature, of fortune or of grace, and for another to be tormented with envy, are one and the same moment. And the worst is that he not only torments himself with this disordered passion, but makes the person whose happiness he envies suffer much. Of this crime, as common as it is harmful, I mean to speak today, as it is one of the vices the catechism calls capital. What envy is, and how grave it is, I shall explain in the first part. What are its consequences? I shall say in the second.

First Part

3. Envy is a sadness we conceive at our neighbour's good: that is, when a man is saddened because he sees another surpass him in goods or prosperity, which the envious man judges to be an evil to himself, or to lessen his own interests. If this sadness comes from seeing that a man who enjoys goods from the Lord's hand misuses them to offend him, this is not envy. The same if he is saddened at the prosperity of an unworthy man in so far as he is unworthy; or if he is saddened at another's happiness in so far as it harms him or causes him grave damage. This last is rather fear of his own misfortune than envy. This passion is properly directed at equals or inferiors, but not at those greater, unless they are not far from one's own rank; for, as my angelic Master says, the commoner does not envy the king, nor the king the commoner: only those are envied who, being close to one's own rank or condition, one would like to equal or surpass.[1] Envy has several daughters, which are hatred, detraction, and joy at others' misfortunes. Envy is, as I have said, one of the capital vices, and of its kind is a mortal sin, because it is directly opposed to the charity with which we must look on our neighbour. And if the envy is of the grace and helps God is wont to grant to some creatures, it is a most grievous sin, contrary to the Holy Spirit, who is the giver of gifts. But often envy, considered in the individual case, will be a venial sin through smallness of matter, unless some notable and fatal consequences follow from it.[2]

4. Envy is one of the gravest evils, and perhaps the greatest, according to St. John Chrysostom, and all the evils experienced in the world find their origin in it. By it the devil brought death into the whole world, says the second chapter of the book of Wisdom.[3] Satan, envious of man's happiness, tried to cast him down from the Lord's grace, and succeeded by making Adam fall into a sin that is the origin of all our misfortunes. For although, as I have said at other times, holy Baptism forgives us this stain we contract from the first father, a sin we all committed, yet certain remnants of it remain in us, which are very painful to us, and in them we experience the effects of the devil's envy. Indeed, those rebellions, my brother, that your flesh feels against the spirit; those tribulations, sicknesses and troubles; that sweat in which you eat your bread; those pains, ladies, that you suffer when you bring your children into the world: all are fruits of envy, and through it Satan has brought on us so many misfortunes.

5. The evils that arise from this detestable passion are countless, as we shall say presently; but in my judgment one of the greatest ravages it causes, and which we experience every day, is the torment it causes the very person it dominates. The eye is a most noble part of our body, which cannot bear the least thing in its pupil without showing its pain outwardly; yet the brightness of light, if moderate, far from harming it, illuminates and enlivens it. Only the eyes of the envious man are dazzled and dulled at seeing the light of his

neighbour's happiness; and so the Wise Man said: What is more evil than the eye of the envious?[4] Because of this torment that envy gives to the very one who has it, it seems to me that it will most often be a mortal sin, especially when the sadness that grips a man at the goods he sees in another is such that it drags him into the deepest melancholy, and makes him gradually lose his health and even his life, as countless examples show. And so the envious man becomes a true suicide when he gives himself up to this passion to excess; and as many are the daggers that pierce his heart, said St. John Chrysostom, as are the prosperities he sees in all men. And the worst is that, far from finding relief from his ailment by envying the happiness of others, God increases it in those he envies, and by this punishes the envious all the more. I, said the Lord to the priest Eli, I will punish you, and make you see, while you lose, your rival exalted and prospering in Israel.[5] Let us see what feeds this passion of envy in man, and how at the same time it torments him.

6. God, whose providence is not deceived, distributes the goods of nature and fortune at his will among those he pleases; but all of them, given to some, are a poison that chokes others who do not have them. Let us take some in particular. Bodily beauty: this is a valuable gift of nature, but it is, according to St. Bonaventure, a sword that pierces the breast of an envious man. We have an example in the Joseph of old. Moses in Genesis paints a picture of his beauty and comeliness, saying that he was handsome of face; and immediately he sets him up as the target of his brothers' envy: they envied him, it says, holding arrows.[6] I do not know whether the bodily beauty with which God has adorned some persons of our time will also have its envious. What is certain is that there are many, especially ladies, who, seeing others courted and applauded for the natural gifts they enjoy, are inwardly filled with the most active poison. Ah, if they could transfer the others' beauty to their own faces, how little charm the poor envied women would have left!

7. Riches: these too are a torment \[*torcedor*\] to the envious. So it happened with the Philistines as soon as they noticed that Isaac was growing rich: with the greatest ignominy they drove him out of their country, giving him no other reason than that he had become more powerful than they.[7] How many, if they could, would banish many from the world for no other reason than seeing that fortune favours them, that their harvests are more plentiful, that their trade prospers better; in short, that they are richer and more powerful! Posts and positions, how they wound an envious man who sees his rivals placed in them! This was seen in Haman. One day he goes home full of anguish and tears, and tells Zeresh his wife and his friends of a misfortune that has just befallen him: and it was that King Ahasuerus had raised Mordecai until he made him the second person in his kingdom, and ordered Haman himself to set Mordecai in his chariot and lead him through the whole city, with a herald crying: Thus shall be honoured every man whom the King wishes to honour.[8] And was this a misfortune for Haman? Did he lose by it either his post or his favour? Nothing of the sort; but envy tormented him. And for the envious man, says St. John Chrysostom, it is not enough to be happy if he does not see others unhappy. Haman has many imitators. There are men who, when they see that one has been named mayor, another alderman, that another has been given a stewardship, and in the great towns that someone has had a great promotion, are at once finished off and consumed by envy, which in the phrase of Scripture is rottenness of the bones,[9] considering themselves despised by the very fact that someone else is exalted. We could reason in the same way about many other motives of envy; but those mentioned are enough. I will only add what St. John Chrysostom says, though it may seem an exaggeration: that if it were possible for God to take to heaven an envious man persevering in his vile passion, he would do him a great wrong, because from the happiness he would see in the blessed he would receive more torment than from hell itself. A supposition that cannot come true; but it shows the malice and torment of envy. The Wise Man compares it to hell: *dura sicut infernus aemulatio,* envy is hard as hell.[10]

Second Part

8. If the envious man were content with only the torment he receives from others' prosperity, we could be glad, and even wish, according to several Fathers of the Church, that the envious might be on a high

watchtower from which they could see all the happiness of men, for their greater anguish. But the pity is that, as David says, the envious man conceives sorrow for himself and iniquity for others.[1] He is indeed the first victim, it is true, but he omits no means of sacrificing others. I read the histories, sacred as well as ecclesiastical and profane, and I see nothing but the plots of the envious against their rivals, breaking the most sacred bonds to wound and torment them. Cain kills his brother Abel, because God favoured him; Absalom persecutes his father, coveting his crown; Korah, Dathan and Abiram plot death against Aaron, Joab against Abner, Romulus against his brother Remus, and so many others. But this is nothing; the envious man causes another, more fatal harm. Greater than attempting the life of those he envies? Yes, my brethren. I would rather, says St. Paul, they took my life than my honour; and this is what the envious man takes away, by detracting from his rivals, thinking that by lowering their credit and esteem he will receive the people's good opinion and applause. Detraction is the natural offspring of envy.

9. What infamy! Jacob's sons used it, calling their little brother a dreamer, a teller of tales, a liar, envying him the greatness that had been revealed to him. The Babylonians spoke against Daniel to eclipse his wisdom and his interpretation of mysterious dreams; Joshua against those who prophesied in the camp of Israel; Miriam and Aaron against their brother Moses…[2] But let us not cite ancient testimonies, when the universal conduct of the world confirms this effect of envy, so harmful to the country.

10. I grant that there are persons with enviable gifts who do not fail to have some defect; for who is the man who does not sin? says the Holy Spirit.[3] But to these unfortunate people happens what happened to the ancient statue. It was wrought of precious metals, but its feet were of clay. A stone fell from the mountain, without hands to throw it, and it did not strike the gold or silver or any other precious part of the statue, but the weak pedestal; and at once it fell to the ground and was reduced to ashes.[4] You see, my brethren, that learned priest, that upright judge, that careful and hard-working father of a family, that retiring and modest lady \[*de recato*\]. Well, there will not be lacking some envious slanderer who will let fly a stone, and it will be without hands, for his poisoned tongue will throw it; and it will not be aimed at the precious virtues of the person envied, but at the clay, that is, at his defects or his faults. He censures them and slanders them in his absence, without Christianity or religion, and at once his credit and esteem fall and are reduced to dust. No grave fault is found in the rival? No matter: his defects are magnified and distorted, twisting even his very virtues into vices, so as to make him lose his good name. So the Pharisees did, raging at the successes of the Apostles and disciples of the Lord. They spoke against them because they did not wash their hands before eating, judging them transgressors of the law for this, though this was no more than a lapse in a ceremony, perhaps a superstitious one among them.[5] Ah, how much of this we see! A person is praised at a social gathering or a party, and another who envies this good fortune exclaims: True; but that man is so vain he thinks it beneath him to raise his hat to anyone; that woman is so proud and ill-mannered that she does not send a message to wish anyone a happy name-day or feast, nor does she do what good breeding requires. And so the person's merit is already made to lose much.

11. If even this is not found, crimes are invented, calumnies are raised. Breaking the most sacred laws matters little, so long as the loss of honour of those who are envied is achieved. So the Jews did with St. Stephen: not content with that furious grief they conceived at the sight of his wisdom and eloquence, which made them gnash their teeth with rage, they sought hired witnesses to say they had heard him speak against Moses and the Prophets, and so they succeeded in seeing him stoned to death.[6] It happens even now: the envious see a person full of virtue, whose conduct condemns their scandals and whose piety condemns their irreligion; they see him frequent the Sacraments and offer sacrifices to the Lord; and at once they censure him as a hypocrite, saying he spends in church the hours he ought to devote to his duties, and lays out on Masses and offerings to the Lord the money with which he ought to support his family and give alms. Judas did this; for when Magdalene anointed the Saviour's feet, envious of the esteem he showed that devout woman, he grumbled, saying: Why this waste? It would have been better to sell this ointment and give its

price to the poor.[7] Another sees a minister of God speaking with a woman of bad repute, perhaps for the good of that unfortunate woman's soul, and to separate her from her licentiousness; and at once some man or woman who for some reason envies that acquaintance censures him as criminal and guilty. This the Pharisee did with Jesus Christ, seeing him speak kindly to Mary when she threw herself at his feet. He said, grumbling: If this Jesus were a prophet, as they say, he would know that this woman is a sinner, and would not let her touch him.[8]

12. What more? When nothing can be imputed to the person envied, recourse is had to his lineage, to lower him from the esteem he receives for his own merit. We see this clearly in the first book of Kings. Saul was hearing the praises they sang of David for the victory he won over the giant Goliath; and unable to bear the torture he felt within at this applause, he asked David himself in the presence of his court: Of what family are you?[9] Saul was not ignorant of it, for he often had him in his palace, and with the sound of his harp the little shepherd gave him relief in his illnesses; but he asks the question so that, when David answered that he was the son of Jesse, all who praised him might know that he was of a poor family of the least tribe of Israel, and he might lose their esteem. How much of this there is in the world! On hearing someone praised, either for his honesty or for his personal merit, natural or acquired, at once an envious man says: Who is she, or he? He is the son of that poor artisan. She is the daughter of that… What a pity that a person of such merit should come of such a low and wretched family! He smears everything with his blood. As if a man did not deserve his chief praise for his own works! But in the end the loss of honour is achieved, especially with those who are dazzled by mere tinsel. Let us undeceive ourselves, my brethren: according to my angelic Master, detraction has hardly any other origin than envy.[10]

13. I have dwelt at some length on this subject because I think it very important. I have told you all I judged suitable to show what envy is, its gravity and the motives that stir it, and above all the fatal consequences that follow from it for the country and for individuals. In Jesus Christ you have the example of all of it, for he was the target of the most terrible envy. At the sight of his perfections, his wisdom, his virtue, his zeal and the applause he received from the people, the scribes and Pharisees raged with envy, and did not know what to do with that man who tormented their hearts: *Quid facimus, quia hic homo multa signa facit?* What are we doing, for this man works many signs?[11] From their inward torment they passed to wishing his death; from this to slandering him as possessed, a drunkard and an impostor; from this to seeking false witnesses against him; in the end they succeeded in removing him from their eyes by putting him on a gibbet as cruel as it was shameful. Flee this vile vice; guard yourselves against it with Christian charity, which is the antidote to this poison, and which alone obtains eternal life. Amen.

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[12] Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10.

[13] St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 36 a. 1 ad 2 (citing Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.10).

[14] *invidentia fraternae gratiae*.

[15] Wis. 2:24.

[16] Sir. 31:15 (Vulgate 31:15; 31:13 in modern numbering).

[17] 1 Sam. 2:32 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[18] Gen. 39:6; 37:4; 49:23 ("they envied him, holding darts").

[19] Gen. 26:12–16.

[20] Esther 6:9–13.

[21] Prov. 14:30.

[22] Song 8:6 (*dura sicut infernus aemulatio*, in the sense of jealousy).

[1] Ps. 7:15 (Vulgate; 7:14).

[2] Gen. 37:19–20; Dan. 6:4–5; Num. 11:28–29; Num. 12:1–2.

[3] 1 Kings 8:46; Eccl. 7:21 (Vulgate; 7:20).

[4] Dan. 2:31–35.

[5] Mark 7:2–5.

[6] Acts 6:10–14; 7:54–58.

[7] John 12:3–6; Matt. 26:8–9.

[8] Luke 7:39.

[9] 1 Sam. 17:55–58 and 18:6–9 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[10] St. Thomas, II-II q. 36 a. 4 (detraction as a daughter of envy).

[11] John 11:47. Then Matt. 12:24; Matt. 11:19; Matt. 26:59–60.

45. Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Second Article of the Creed

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 45, pp. 96–104. Gospel: Matthew 22:34–46. Original preacher not named.

> *Quid vobis videtur de Christo? (Matt. 22:42).*
>
> *What do you think of the Christ?*

The Gospel of this day is from the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. “The Pharisees having gathered together to see whether they could catch Jesus out, one of them, who was a doctor of the law, asked him, to test him: Master, which is the great commandment of the law? Jesus answered him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole law and the Prophets. And while the Pharisees were still gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying: What do you think of the Christ, or the Messiah? Whose son is he? They said to him: He is a descendant of David. How then, he said to them, does David in the spirit call him his Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet? If, then, David calls him his Lord, how is he his son or descendant? And no one could answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.” This is the Gospel.

2. Who do you think the Christ is, or whose son is he? This question that Jesus Christ put to the Pharisees today might be put to many Christians who, boasting of being disciples of Jesus, joined to his law through holy Baptism, and knowing that they are called Christians after Christ himself their head, neither know who Christ is, nor what this name means, nor how worthy of respect are the attributes he possesses. From this ignorance, which is unfortunately rather common, come the little respect for this sacred name, the contempt for his most holy law, and the failure to render him the adoration he deserves. The answer to this question is set out in the second article of the Creed, which is proposed to us as the object of our indispensable belief. After we are commanded to believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth, the Creed goes on to say: And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord. By the confession of this article alone we are told who Christ is, and the respect he requires of us. Let us not, then, my brethren, close our eyes to the light as the Pharisees did, through not knowing whom they had before them. I shall try to enlighten your understanding, so as to move your will to love and adore our Saviour as you ought. In the first part of this plática, following the words of this second article, I shall show you who Christ is; and in the second, considering each of the titles it contains, you will see what our veneration and gratitude to this second person of the most blessed Trinity must be.

First Part

3. I believe in Jesus Christ: these are the first words of this article of our faith. We believe in them, first, that the Messiah sent by God for our remedy, and promised from the beginning of the world, was called Jesus. This is a proper name, given him by heaven before he was conceived in Mary’s womb, when an Angel said to this Lady on the day of the Annunciation: You will conceive and bear a son, who will be called Jesus. This name means Saviour, and it fits ours, for he saved and redeemed us at the cost of his most precious blood, as

the same Angel announced to the Lady.[1] How excellent this name Jesus is, and how inestimable the fruits of its meaning, we shall say later in another plática. To the name of Jesus is added that of Christ, which means Anointed, and is like a surname of honour and of office. Jesus Christ was anointed, not by the act of any mortal man, but by the power of the sovereign Father of heaven; not with a material ointment, but with a spiritual oil; for the Holy Spirit was poured into his most holy soul with all the fullness of his gifts and graces, in a way no created nature can share. This anointing by the sovereign Spirit was given to Jesus invisibly from the moment of his conception, through the hypostatic union and the fullness of grace consequent on it; but visibly it took place in the Jordan as soon as John baptized him, and the Holy Spirit appeared over him in the form of a dove, the Father saying from heaven: This is my Son. And so, shortly after being baptized, and having fasted forty days and overcome the tempter in the desert, he entered the synagogue and showed those present that the prophecy of Isaiah had been fulfilled in him, which said: The Spirit of the Lord has come upon me and has anointed me; and to prove it he healed the sick and worked the other wonders the same Prophet had foretold of this Anointed of the Lord.[2] The grace Christ received by his anointing was not that of a private or individual believer, but the grace of the head, to be communicated to all his members, as head of his Church. And so to the other just the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are infused; but to Christ was given the Holy Spirit himself, and with him the fullness of his gifts.[3]

4. And why was Christ anointed? It should be noted that from our ancient fathers it was the custom to anoint with holy oil priests, kings and prophets. Priests, because they are dedicated to commending the whole people to God with their prayers, to offering sacrifices and imploring his mercy. Kings, because to them is committed the government of the peoples, and on them chiefly lies the establishing of laws, defending the life of the innocent and restraining the audacity of the wicked. Prophets, because they were the interpreters of the immortal God of the ages, and through them the heavenly secrets were revealed to us. So that they were anointed because of the dignity and excellence of their ministry, and so they used to be called christs. Do not touch my christs, said the Lord,[4] to show the respect due to these anointed ones. Now, as Jesus Christ came to exercise these three offices of priest, king and prophet, it was fitting for him to receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit in a singular way, as his ministry was also singular.

5. He was a priest: on the one hand after the order of Aaron, because he offered himself to his eternal Father with the shedding of his blood on the tree of the cross, to blot out the writ of condemnation that destined us to eternal death through Adam's sin;[5] and on the other, as David says, he was a great priest according to the order of Melchizedek, for on the night of the last supper he offered himself to the Father under the species of bread and wine, and he does not cease to offer himself every day under the same species, through his priests.[6] He was a king: Christ is the King of kings and Prince of the kings of the earth; both because by his almighty power he brought us out of the power and tyranny of the devil, making us his kingdom and casting into the abyss the prince of darkness who held us subjugated; and because he exercises with wonderful providence the offices of a king towards his Church, ruling and governing her, giving her laws and defending her from her enemies. He is king not only as God, but also as man and sharer in our human nature, because the Father so granted him. All power has been given me in heaven and on earth, he himself said in the twenty-eighth chapter of St. Matthew. That is why all the kings of the world are subjects of Jesus Christ; from him they receive the power to reign and the authority to make laws, and to him they will give an account of their government on the last of days.[7] He is also a prophet: he came to earth to show us the will of God; and all the others who have enjoyed this title are his disciples, and if they were prophets, their office was none other than to announce him who came to save all men. That is why the Jews said: This is the great Prophet who was to come into the world.[8] He was anointed as priest, king and prophet, and that is why he is called Christ.

6. This Christ, the Creed continues, is the only Son of God. We are all children of God, for God is our father; but we are adopted children, and Jesus by his sorrowful passion and death acquired for us the adoption we had lost through sin; and especially those who believe in this our Lord and Redeemer have power to be and

to be called children of God, says the evangelist St. John.[9] But Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, because he is the only natural son God has or can have, for in him his whole generative power is already fulfilled. He is the natural Son, consubstantial with God, God himself: equal to the Father in essence, in attributes and perfections. The Father is not greater for being father, nor the Son less for being son; this happens only in the natural manner of human generation. Christ as God is begotten eternally by the Father, and so both are equal, and differ only in that the one is father and the other son. This is hard to understand; but it is a mystery, and only faith can make it known. Some comparisons the holy Fathers use give some idea of it, though incomplete. You look into a mirror, and at once you produce in it an image of yourself with all your features and movements. God, then, looking eternally at himself, a spotless mirror, produces a perfect image of himself, which is the Son, with his very substance and attributes. Your understanding thinks of something, and at once forms in itself an idea or concept of the thing thought, which represents it as you have formed it. God, then, who from eternity thinks of himself, and cannot think otherwise, contemplating himself conceives what is consubstantial with him; and this is the generation of the Son, who is the idea or Word of the Father. Again: the sun produces its brightness, and if the sun were eternal, its brightness would be eternal too. So Christ, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, comes forth from his bosom as a most pure emanation and most vivid brightness of the eternal light, says the Wise Man:[10] eternal brightness, because the light is eternal. Christ, then, is the only Son of God.

7. The second article of the Creed concludes by saying that Jesus Christ is our Lord. Yes, my brethren, he is our Lord by countless titles worthy of being engraved on our hearts. Lord by reason of having created us, and having created the whole universe for us. All things were made by him, says St. John, and without him nothing was made. I was with him arranging all things, he himself tells us in the book of Wisdom.[11] But he is especially our Lord, even as man, because when we were slaves of the devil he bought our freedom with the inestimable price of his blood. Our Lord, because, if God is Lord as absolute owner of all creation, the Father put all things into the hands of his Son, appointing him heir of all things, according to St. Paul to the Hebrews.[12] See, though very briefly, this second article of the Creed explained; and with it you will be able to know what Christ is, and to those who ask you, as Jesus asked the Pharisees, you will be able to say: Christ is the anointed of the Lord as priest, king and prophet, the natural and only Son of God, and our Lord. Oh, what magnificent titles! The reverence, gratitude and acknowledgment they require of us we shall see in the

Second Part

8. The confession of this article of our faith is most useful to us, and shows the abundant fruits of eternal life the coming into the world of that Son of God produced, who, made man for us, was called Christ. So St. John declares in his first epistle, when he says: Whoever confesses and believes that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. And Jesus Christ himself calls the apostle St. Peter blessed because he confessed that his Lord Jesus was the Son of God.[1] The greatness of the benefit set forth in this article can easily be known from the unhappy state to which the first transgression of our parents reduced us. By it we were disinherited of heaven, deprived of the justice and holiness in which we were created and of the title of children of God, and made wretched slaves of the devil. The Lord, then, remembered his ancient mercy, and, sending his only-begotten Son, restored us to the rights we had lost; and by the grace of his plentiful redemption we became again children of God, heirs of his kingdom and co-heirs with Jesus. All this the name of Christ given to our Redeemer shows us. Oh, how great must be our gratitude to the Lord who by means of his Anointed repaired all our ruin! Let us consider, though very briefly, what this sacred name shows and signifies, as we have said above, and we shall see the infinite titles that make Jesus Christ worthy of all veneration, greatness and respect.

9. Christ is anointed as priest. Every day he actually exercises this ministry, and in the adorable sacrifice of the Mass he is the minister and the offering he offers to the Father for the remission of our sins. And though

it is true that our priests offer the sacrifice on the altar stone, they do it in the name of Jesus Christ, and use the very words with which the great Priest instituted the Sacrament, and it is he who consecrates through the mouth of his ministers.[2] This calls in us for the greatest veneration for the sacrifice of the altar, imagining ourselves present in the Upper Room at the institution of this mysterious Sacrament. It also calls for the most submissive respect for all priests, as being anointed of the Lord, his christs, who all share in the fullness of the anointing of the Holy Spirit that was given to Jesus, as the Apostle said. I have spoken much about the priestly dignity in another plática, and I do not think it necessary to enlarge further on it.

10. Christ is king, and was anointed as such; but he is King over all kings, and his kingdom will have no end. If, then, an earthly king deserves all our attention, love, respect and obedience, because he is the visible image of God, his vice-god \[*vicediós*\], his vicegerent on earth,[3] what must be our submission, affection and adoration for the Lord by whom kings reign and lawgivers decree what is just? If in the presence of the kings of the earth we prostrate ourselves, kiss their hand and make other demonstrations of respect, because they are the Lord's anointed, with how much more reason must we adore Christ in our hearts and venerate his images, before whom, according to St. Paul, all creatures of heaven, earth and hell bend the knee![4]

11. He was also anointed as prophet and teacher of the law. He is that Teacher of justice whom Isaiah announced, who gave us holy laws when the old ones were abolished. But what laws? The most just, the most equitable, the best suited to our life and the most fitting for serving him sweetly and lightly. The Gospel is his law, and it requires of us its most exact fulfilment. The eternal Father himself, on Mount Tabor, where our Saviour was transfigured, commanded us to hear the teaching his Son, the object of his good pleasure, should enjoin on us, and to follow his commands. Hear, then, my brethren, with submission the laws our divine Master promulgated in his Gospel. Hear him; for his law, being founded on charity, on love, is the best suited to the good order, peace and tranquillity of us who must of necessity live in society, and the most fitting to make us holy and attain the end of our creation. Listen to no voices that are not those of our great prophet Jesus. Do not listen to the teaching of the false prophets, that is, the heretics, atheists and impious philosophers who come to you, as Jesus Christ himself said, in sheep's clothing, pretending to belong to the divine Shepherd, but who are ravening wolves trying by their teaching to rob you of your innocence, and by maxims that flatter your passions seek to draw you away from the Saviour's law.[5] Do not listen to them. Listen only to the catechism of Christian doctrine, where everything Jesus, the great prophet and teacher of the nations, taught you is set down. Outside this there is no salvation; and the greatest homage you can pay to Christ, God's anointed, is to follow with care and vigilance his teaching, which cannot deceive us, for it was given by the eternal Wisdom, the Son of God, God himself.

12. And see here another point this second article of the Creed explains: that Christ, anointed as priest, king and prophet, is the only Son of God. A dogma we must undoubtedly believe, not listening to the voices of some heretics who asserted that Jesus was a mere creature. Christ, as I have said, is true God and true Man. So the eternal Father said to the three apostles St. Peter, St. James and St. John when they saw Jesus transfigured: This is my Son;[6] as if to say: this man whom you see in the world as a despised and afflicted man, the target of persecutions, is at the same time God; he is my natural Son; and if he put on human nature, it was because he willed by this means to make himself capable of suffering and dying to free the human race from the eternal death to which it had been condemned through sin; but he is also God, and my son. Ah, how much veneration this idea of the Saviour that faith proposes stirs in us! Christ is God; then I must render him the same respect and adoration as God. Even if the eternal Father had not declared the divinity of Jesus Christ to us on Tabor, we could not doubt it if we considered attentively the wonders and marvels he worked while he lived among men. So many unprejudiced people recognized Jesus as true God and Man, being led to this knowledge, not without divine inspiration, by the signs with which the Messiah presented himself to them. The shepherds revered him as God, though they saw him wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. The Kings of the East, with the gifts they offered him, adored him not only as a mortal man but as King and

as God. The Jews themselves, at the sight of his wonders, exclaimed: This man could not do what he does if God were not with him. His very executioners, seeing the upheaval all nature suffered at his death, cried out, striking their breasts: Truly this was the Son of God.[7] To this belief, then, the Creed stirs us in this article, saying to us: I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son. This divinity of Jesus we must believe and defend constantly against those who without foundation say the contrary.

13. Lastly, we confess that this only Son of God is also our Lord. Our Lord? Yes: he is so by the titles of Creator, Preserver and Redeemer. He is master of the whole universe, and all of us men are no more than his slaves. Consequently all our works must be consecrated to his service alone; all our words must be employed in his praise; all our thoughts must have no other employment than pleasing him. He is our Lord, and so he can chastise us with troubles and adversities. Our body and our soul are his; and so when he afflicts and troubles us we must say with a spirit of resignation and patience: We are the Lord's; all is done according to his divine good pleasure. He is our Lord, and so we must fear him; and if we do not, it seems we renounce being his slaves. If I am the Lord, he said through Malachi, where is the fear shown me? The Saviour himself enjoins this fear on us, in acknowledgment of the supreme dominion he holds over us, when he says in his Gospel: Do not fear those who kill the body, for they have no dominion over your souls to kill them; but fear him who can cast soul and body into hell, because he has dominion over all.[8]

14. Most lovable Redeemer of my soul: the first article the Creed presents for my belief as belonging to you, the second person of the most holy Trinity, presents to me the inestimable benefit I have received from your goodness and mercy. I believe in Jesus Christ, it says to me; and in the name of Jesus alone I see the whole mystery of my redemption summed up. You are Christ, that is, anointed; and from the moment of your conception you were anointed with the fullness of the sovereign Spirit as priest, king and prophet: titles all meant to enrich my soul with gifts and to stir my spirit to venerate you with the greatest respect and gratitude. You are the Son of God; and though you called yourself the son of man, it was because you united yourself hypostatically to human nature; but no man is your father; God alone is, and God alone formed your human body in the womb of a Virgin. You are my Lord, and you rule in my soul, body, senses and powers. All this I believe in my heart, confess with my lips and will defend with my life. Grant, Lord, that I may live grateful for your favours, which procure me eternal life.

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[9] Luke 1:31; Matt. 1:21.

[10] Matt. 3:16–17; Luke 4:16–21, citing Isa. 61:1. Cf. Acts 10:38.

[11] St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III q. 7 a. 9–11 and q. 8 (the grace of Christ as head); John 1:16; 3:34.

[12] Ps. 104:15 (Vulgate; 105:15); 1 Chron. 16:22.

[13] Col. 2:14. Heb. 7:11–17. Heb. 9.

[14] Ps. 109:4 (Vulgate; 110:4); Heb. 5:6.

[15] Rev. 1:5; 19:16; Col. 1:13; Matt. 28:18. On Christ's kingshipand Pius XI, *Quas primas* (1925).

[16] John 6:14; cf. Deut. 18:15 and Luke 7:16.

[17] John 1:12.

[18] Wis. 7:25–26; Heb. 1:3.

[19] John 1:3; Prov. 8:30 (the preacher says "the book of Wisdom", meaning the sapiential books).

[20] Heb. 1:2.

[1] 1 John 4:15; Matt. 16:16–17.

[2] Then 1 John 2:20, 27.

[3] Then Prov. 8:15.

[4] Phil. 2:10.

[5] Joel 2:23 (Vulgate: *doctorem iustitiae*); Matt. 17:5; Matt. 7:15.

[6] Matt. 17:5.

[7] Luke 2:16; Matt. 2:11; John 3:2; Matt. 27:54; Luke 23:47–48.

[8] Rom. 14:8; Mal. 1:6; Matt. 10:28.

46. Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On Rash Judgment

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 46, pp. 105–113. Gospel: Matthew 9:1–8. Original preacher not named.

Offerebant ei paralyticum jacentem in lecto (Matt. 9:2).

They brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed.

The Gospel of this day is from the ninth chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. "Jesus got into a boat, crossed the lake again, and came to his own city, that is, to Capernaum. As soon as he arrived there, they brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed; and Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic: Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven you. On hearing this, some of the Pharisees said within themselves: This man blasphemes, claiming the power of forgiving sins, which belongs to God alone. And Jesus, seeing their thoughts, said: Why do you think evil of me in your hearts? Nothing is more unjust than the judgment you are making of what I have just said. For which is easier: to say effectively to a sinner, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say effectively to a paralytic, Rise and walk? Both are reserved to omnipotence. But that you may know that the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God, has power on earth to forgive sins, he then said to the paralytic: Rise, take up your bed, and go to your house. And he rose and went to his house. And when the crowds saw this, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such power to men." This is the Gospel.[1]

2. The most notable thing in it is the rebuke that Jesus Christ gives to the Pharisees for the rash judgment they had made of his person. Within themselves they judged him a blasphemer because he said to the paralytic: Son, take heart, your sins are forgiven you. It is true that God alone can grant poor sinners the pardon of their offences, since it is God who is injured by sin; but Jesus Christ, in whose person the two natures, divine and human, were hypostatically united, enjoyed this power of forgiving sins. The Pharisees, judging Jesus to be a mere man, formed the judgment that he was blaspheming against God by claiming acts proper to the Divinity alone; and this judgment was rash, since they had enough grounds, as we have explained elsewhere, to know that he was true God and true Man together. This, my brethren, is one of the most frequent and common vices among men: making rash judgments about the conduct of our neighbours. A person believes himself innocent if he does not go on to carry out the evil thought he has had, however much he has dwelt on it willingly and even with pleasure. The great mass of the people \[*el torrente del pueblo*, "the torrent of the people"\] is persuaded that only evil words and deeds fall under the rigour of heaven's censure and the judgments of God, without considering that one also sins in thought, even when the offence does not come out into the open. When the eighth commandment of the Decalogue is recited, some live persuaded that it forbids only bearing false witness against one's neighbour, slandering him, gossiping with others about his conduct, and deceiving him with lies. But besides all this, the prohibition also includes not forming judgments within ourselves against our brethren, judging their deeds or words to be evil without grounds, which is the same as judging rashly. Today, therefore, I am going to set out the nature of this sin and its remedies. I will show in the first part what rash judgment is and the gravity of this sin; and in the second, the means we must adopt to avoid it.

First Part

3. We can wrong our neighbour within ourselves with regard to his actions in three ways, which are doubt, suspicion and judgment. Doubt is when, having weighed the reasons for and against that we find in our neighbour's conduct, we do not dare to decide with certainty whether it is bad or good. In suspicion, without deciding, our will is likewise not inclined to pass sentence against it. Neither suspicion nor doubt as to whether a person is bad goes beyond the bounds of venial sin, unless some circumstance makes grave harm

to the neighbour follow from it: this is the teaching of all the theologians, with St. Thomas their master. And if the suspicion or doubt is founded on just and reasonable motives, it is not called rash and is no sin at all; on the contrary, such acts are governed by prudence, which, directing us by its light, makes us act with discretion and caution, and so avoid certain consequences that could be harmful to us and even to our neighbours. Such was the imprudence of David when at Nob he took the loaves of proposition and the sword of Goliath from the hands of the priest: he ought to have suspected that Doeg the Edomite, who was present, would at once report it to Saul, and that Saul would wreak havoc because of it, as in fact happened, so that David had to repent of not having suspected Doeg's faithlessness. All this is recorded in chapter 22 of the First Book of Kings.[1] A father of a family, a master, a teacher and others like them sometimes act prudently in suspecting or doubting the actions of those under them, in order to forestall certain painful results.

4. But let us now confine ourselves to rash judgment alone. Judgment is a sentence we form within ourselves, by which we affirm as certain, for example, that this man is a sinner. If this judgment is made without grounds or on very slight indications, it is called rash, or a judgment made with rashness. To understand this, it must be noted that a judgment can be false without being rash. For example: you see a man in disguise entering a house by night, hiding from the sight of those who live there, and you judge that he is a night thief. This judgment is not rash, for there is much ground for forming it; but perhaps it will be false, because he has no intention of stealing anything. There you see a false judgment that is no sin, because it was not rash. On the other hand: you see a man of honour and of proven conduct who looks very attentively and furtively at a jewel you have in your house, and you judge that he means to steal it. This judgment is rash, because that person's character gives you no reason for such a judgment; and yet his intention really is to steal that jewel. Then that judgment is true, but it is criminal all the same, because it was made rashly and without grounds. From this it follows that rash judgment is a sin, and often a mortal one when it concerns grave matter, as St. Thomas says.[2] And we do not claim that the grounds on which we form our judgments must be certain with an infallible or evident certainty in order to excuse them from sin; for if that were so, a judge could not judge particular facts that are proved by trustworthy witnesses. They must be only such as the matter allows, so that one never judges without sufficient cause or legitimate ground, according to the rules of prudence and of Christian charity, which always dictates that we judge well of our neighbour. We must keep in mind that saying of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew: Judge not, that you may not be judged; and with the same measure with which you have measured, you shall be measured.[3]

5. To judge one's neighbour rashly is an execrable offence, since by it the neighbour is wronged, and even God himself in his rights. The neighbour: no one is bad until he is proved to be so. Before he is sentenced, an accused man has the right to have his offence investigated, to have it established by sufficient proofs, to be given time to defend himself against the charges laid against him, and to have the one who is to judge him hold legitimate authority to do so.[4] None of this takes place in a rash judgment that we form of our neighbour's actions. Those actions may be evidently bad, and to judge that they are bad is not rashness; but there are others that are good or indifferent, and that are vitiated only by the intention with which they are done. What, then, would be needed for us to judge them bad in the tribunal of our own mind? We would have to sound the human heart, says the Father St. Gregory, penetrate its intention, and weigh together all the circumstances with which actions can be clothed. And who but God can do this? The heart of man is unsearchable, says Holy Scripture, and God alone is the one who penetrates it.[5] Who are you, St. Paul tells us on this point, that you dare to judge another's servant?[6] As if he said: Who are you? Who has given you the authority to form judgments on the actions of your brethren, when you are incapable of knowing the intention with which they do them? Not even Christ as man, he himself tells us in his Gospel, would have power to judge men if the heavenly Father had not conferred it on him.[7] God alone can judge what is hidden in men, and it is only in the presence of their Lord that they stand, or have fallen from his grace.

6. If this is so, how greatly do we wrong God when we rashly judge his servants! When it is a question of the interior, the Lord alone must be our judge. He knows for certain whether the word I speak or the action I perform, which can be understood in various ways, bears the character of good or of evil; but not man, to whom this knowledge has been denied. God said this plainly to the prophet Samuel when it seemed to him that David was unfit for the office the Most High was entrusting to him. Look, Samuel, he said to him, man judges only by the bark, by the outside; but the Lord looks at the heart.[8] If, then, God is the only one entitled to judge rightly, if he alone sees the depth of virtue or of crime that our words and deeds carry, we wrong the Lord by usurping the right of judging us, which belongs to him alone. This, says St. Bonaventure, is to snatch the sceptre from the hand of the Almighty, who knows whether his children are worthy of honour or of reproach. Even in this world it is an affront to an earthly judge to sentence an accused man before the one who holds authority given by God pronounces his verdict; but it is much greater to usurp the power of the supreme Judge of the living and the dead. So says the same Saint. And not only is his authority usurped, but it is usurped rashly, since God, when he judges, judges with knowledge of the case, and, being no respecter of persons, gives to each what in justice is due to him according to his works and the way in which he has done them. What a lesson Jesus Christ himself gives us to avoid this offence in the parable of the cockle! The servants of a householder, he says, said to their master: How is it that, having sown pure wheat in your field, so much cockle has come up? Do you want us to go and pull it up? No, answered the master, I do not want that; now it is green, you will not recognize it, and perhaps in pulling up the cockle you will pull up the wheat too. Let it grow until it is dry, until the harvest: then I will tell the reapers to separate the wheat from the cockle, the latter to be burned, and the former to be put in my barn.[9] What a fitting comparison! Now, in this world, the wheat of virtue is mixed with the cockle of iniquity. We do not know how to tell them apart, and we expose ourselves to branding as criminal \[*capitular por criminal*\] what will perhaps be virtuous. Therefore judge not before the time, says St. Paul, until the Lord comes to judge the world.[10] Then, that is, at the universal harvest, he will say to his Angels, his reapers: Separate the wicked from among the just;[11] and then each one will be seen for what he is in reality. See, my brethren, what rash judgment is, and how grave an offence.

Second Part

7. Given the gravity of rash judgment, which, as I have said, is a mortal sin when it concerns grave matter and rests on slight grounds; and given the wrong done to the neighbour by our judging him when we have no authority to do so, and much more to God, whose exclusive right of judging man we usurp as far as lies in us, it remains now for us to explain the means we must use to avoid so grave an offence. Once the illness is known, the most suitable remedies must be applied for its cure. Let the first, and in my judgment the chief, be to arm ourselves with the sacred virtue of charity towards our neighbours. One of the roots from which the judgments we rashly form on others' consciences spring is hatred and envy. As a rule we never judge well of the person we hate and whose gifts we envy. All that he says, all that he does, we interpret in a sinister way, and we pass sentence against deeds or words that are perhaps clothed in virtue. This the Pharisees did against the adorable person of our divine Saviour, branding him possessed, a Samaritan and a wine-drinker, when with his infinite wisdom and goodness he was healing the sick, raising the dead and working other wonders for the benefit of the unfortunate.[1] This the Jews also did with the Apostles: seeing them filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking various tongues by his power, they attributed it to the strength of the wine that had mastered them.[2] At the sight of the wonders that the Apostles, like their divine Master, worked everywhere, they conceived hatred and aversion against them, and raged with envy at the prosperous success of their ministry; and so they judged their holiest actions with a frightful rashness. We, then, must extinguish these passions with a spirit of Christian charity, which, according to St. Paul, thinks evil of no one,[3] but rather finds in itself a sacred veil to hide and cover the offences of our brethren. With this holy virtue we will never set up within ourselves a detestable tribunal to sentence our neighbours' actions as evil, nor will we enlarge

by our passion the slight faults they may have committed, making them seem very criminal.

8. The second means is to consider the punishments with which the just eternal Judge avenges himself, in this world and in the next, on those who make groundless judgments about their neighbour's conduct. As a rule, as the sacred Books record, those guilty of this offence have suffered the Lord's condemnation and punishment. The sister of Moses, who rashly judged the conduct of that leader of Israel, at once saw herself covered with a foul and loathsome leprosy.[4] Michal, the wife of David, who put down to madness and folly the humility with which that Monarch danced in a white garment before the ark of the covenant, the Lord punished with perpetual barrenness.[5] The king of the Ammonites, who without grounds took King David's ambassadors for spies, God deprived of his crown. And Job's friends would have felt the rigours of divine justice for the rashness with which they judged as impatience or pride the resignation with which that hero bore his trials, had he not interceded for them to be forgiven.[6] Who, keeping in mind these punishments from the Lord's hand, will not refrain from judging his brethren?

9. But the most special remedy against the crime we are speaking of is, in my opinion, for a man to turn to himself, and to look at and judge his own faults continually. If you are perhaps laden with sins, will you forget yourself and go and judge your neighbour? This is what our Saviour meant to teach in the Gospel of St. John, when a woman taken in adultery was brought to him in the temple so that he might judge her and apply the penalty due to such offenders: Let him who is without any sin, he said to them, be the first to stone her.[7] Let him judge another's error, said St. Ambrose, who has nothing in himself that can be condemned; let him judge who has not committed what he rashly judges in his neighbour, lest in condemning another he pass sentence on himself. Oh, how hard a thing it is, said the Father St. Gregory, that one who cannot govern his own life should be judge of the lives of others! He who is weighed down by the burden of his own faults ought in no way to judge those of his neighbour. That is why the book of the Fathers of the desert relates that the abbot Moses, called to judge certain faults of his brethren, arrived carrying a sack full of sand; and when asked what he was carrying, he answered: I am carrying my sins; and if I cannot manage my own, how am I to judge another's? A maxim worthy to be engraved on our hearts: it alone will be enough to banish from within us the judgments we rashly form.

10. But ah! if we go and ask these judges of men's actions, they will tell us that they do not fail to form these sinister judgments because they have sufficient and solid grounds for forming them. There may be such grounds, no doubt. But how many that seem justified to us are full of error and deceit? How many grounds that seem solid to us give way? How many judgments are buildings founded on sand? Sometimes there are appearances of vice that contain heroic virtues. That is why the Saviour exhorts us in his Gospel, saying: Judge not according to the outward appearance.[8] Our heart, my brethren, is full of illusions, as the royal Prophet said of his own,[9] and we easily brand in our thoughts some poor soul for whom we feel a certain antipathy; and if we cannot blacken his actions, at least we criticize the intention with which he does them. The sacred Books are full of events that outwardly seemed criminal, and that the intention with which they were done made worthy of the highest praise. Esther adorns herself with the greatest care and splendour and presents herself in extraordinary luxury. There would be no lack of people to judge this act full of vanity and pride; but they would err in their judgment, for she did all this with the greatest repugnance, Scripture says, and only to please her husband and for reasons of state.[10] Judith leaves her house clothed in adornments unbecoming her widowhood, and, surrounded by officers of the Assyrian camp, she enters the tent of Holofernes and stays there night and day alone with a barbarous and licentious man. Anyone would judge by this action that Judith was shameless; but he would err, for she went to deceive that general who was besieging Bethulia, in order to cut off his head, as she did, setting the people of God free.[11] The people of Malta, seeing that St. Paul, scarcely landed in their harbour, was bitten by a viper, judged him a sinner whom God would not let live on the earth; but they erred, and they themselves soon recognized his virtue. And that bite was the reason why, to this day, through the Apostle's intercession, the serpents in that island are not

venomous; and so they call this privilege the grace of St. Paul.[12]

11. We err, yes, my brethren, we often err in our judgments, however much we consider them founded on certain signs; and the same action or word, said or done by one in whom we know it was sinful, will be holy in another, according to the intention they have had, which we cannot grasp. Tyrants and surgeons both wound and cut men. See one and the same action, but done with how different an intention! The tyrants did it out of hatred for the Martyrs, and the physicians to give them health. Let us, then, refrain from forming judgments, so as not to expose ourselves to erring in our sentences. When our neighbour's actions seem evidently bad to us, it is true that our judgments will often not be culpable, because they are not rash; but even so, charity can in some way excuse them. We see an accused man, sentenced by legitimate authority, being led to the gallows: what grounds for judging his offence certain! Yet we can still judge that he is innocent. Justice will have acted rightly in its sentence according to the evidence of the trial; but what if the trial went wrong through some incident without the foresight or fault of the judges? Whoever had seen all the people of Babylon with stones in their hands to punish Susanna as an adulteress, with the most respected men of the people as witnesses to her offence, would he not have judged, without rashness, that her offence was certain? Yet Daniel, inspired by God, examines the witnesses again, finds them false, and Susanna goes free, innocent.[13] Let us not go on any longer: all this, considered, will serve us as a bridle so as not to commit the offence of judging rashly. I conclude with the words with which the Gospel exhorts us to keep from rash judgments: Judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.[14] We must without fail undergo a judgment; but if those we made of our brethren were made with mercy, with mercy will be the one in which God judges us, and he will lead us to eternal glory.

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[15] Matt. 9:1–8.

[16] 1 Sam. 21:1–9 and 22:6–23 (Vulgate 1 Kings). 1 Sam. 22:22.

[17] Source note: "2, 2, q. 60, a. 1", i.e. *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 60.

[18] Matt. 7:1–2.

[19] Source note: "2, 2, q. 60, art. 2" (the conditions for lawful judgment, including authority).

[20] Jer. 17:9–10.

[21] Rom. 14:4.

[22] John 5:22, 27.

[23] 1 Sam. 16:7 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[24] Matt. 13:24–30.

[25] 1 Cor. 4:5.

[26] Matt. 13:41–43, 49.

[1] John 8:48; Matt. 11:19.

[2] Acts 2:13.

[3] 1 Cor. 13:5; cf. 1 Pet. 4:8.

[4] Num. 12:1–10.

[5] 2 Sam. 6:14–23 (Vulgate 2 Kings).

[6] Job 42:7–10.

[7] John 8:3–7.

[8] John 7:24.

[9] Ps. 37:8 (Vulgate; Ps. 38:7): *lumbi mei impleti sunt illusionibus*.

[10] Esther 15:4–8 and 14:16 (Vulgate additions; Greek Esther C and D).

[11] Judith 10–13.

[12] Acts 28:3–6.

[13] Dan. 13 (the story of Susanna).

[14] Luke 6:37.

47. Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Fifth Article of the Creed: He Descended into Hell

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 47, pp. 114–122. Gospel: Matthew 22:1–14. Original preacher not named.

Mittite eum in tenebras exteriores (Matt. 22:13).

Cast him into the outer darkness.

The Gospel of this day is from the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. “Jesus, speaking in parables to the chief priests and the Pharisees, said to them: The kingdom of heaven is like a king who, wishing to celebrate the wedding of his son, sent his servants to call those invited to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent other servants with orders to say on his behalf to those invited: Know that I have prepared my banquet, my bulls and the beasts I had fattened are killed, and everything else is ready: come to the wedding. But they paid no heed to this, and went off, one to his country house, another to his ordinary business; and the others seized the servants and, after treating them with great outrage, killed them. When the king heard of it he was angry, and sending his troops he seized those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants: The wedding indeed is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to attend it. Go, then, to the crossroads, and call to the wedding all whom you find. And his servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, good and bad; and the wedding hall was filled with men who sat down at table. Then the king came in to see those who were at table, and saw there a man who had no wedding garment, and he said to him: Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? But he was struck dumb. Then the king said to his attendants: Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness: there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth; for many are called, but few are chosen.” Thus far the Gospel.[1]

2. The holy Fathers interpret the parable it contains in various ways; but the common understanding is that this wedding signifies the espousal that the Son of the supreme King, our adorable Saviour, made with his Church, enriching her with his gifts, graces and Sacraments. To her he has called everyone by means of his servants, who were the Prophets and the just, many of whom they stoned and put to a terrible death, refusing the favours to which God was inviting them. The supper he had prepared is eternal glory, full of delights and pleasures, which he denies to none of those who wish to enjoy it. The king’s coming in to see the guests who were present signifies the examination he will make at his judgment of whether even those who are in the Church, that is, whether all who attend it as called, are clothed in grace and charity, which is the wedding garment needed for it. And the unhappy man who, for not being so clothed, was cast into the outer darkness represents the sinners who, dying in sin, did not show themselves worthy of the heavenly table; and his being bound hand and foot denotes the impossibility of escaping from the pains to which the damned are sent, because in hell there is no redemption at all. No redemption? But does not the fifth article of the Creed say that Jesus Christ descended into hell and brought out the souls that were held there? To answer this question I am going to explain in my first part the meaning of the fifth article of the Creed, He descended into hell; and in the second I will make some reflections on the dogma that this article proposes.

First Part

3. This fifth article contains two parts. Of the second I have already spoken in treating of the Saviour’s resurrection. These words, He descended into hell, are its first part, which is the one I have to set out today. By the name of hell \[*infierno*\], in general, is understood a place situated in the bowels of the earth, where those souls are held that have not been able to enter heaven. There are four of these places that are called hell. The first, and the one to which this name is given in a special way, is an abominable and most horrible prison in which those are punished with perpetual pains and torments who died out of God’s favour, and whose death was most evil in his sight, as David says.[1] There they suffer the pain of loss and the pain of sense in the

company of the devils, being for ever deprived of the sight of the Lord and of his glory, and condemned to suffer unspeakable torments in all their senses, so that the sentence given against sinful Babylon in the Apocalypse is fulfilled: As much as she had of delights, so much torment and mourning give her.[2] The second is the limbo of the children who, dying without receiving the saving waters of Baptism, leave this world with the stain of original sin; and although they have no personal fault, yet, since they are not in the Lord's grace because of the first man's sin, they will suffer eternally the privation of glory and of the Lord's presence, but will have no pain in their senses, because they received no sinful pleasure. The third is purgatory, where those souls are held for a certain time fixed by God, to be purified of the remains of their faults, who, leaving temporal life in the Lord's embrace \[*en el ósculo del Señor*, "in the kiss of the Lord"\], have not made sufficient satisfaction for their forgiven sins; and they will be there until their satisfaction is complete, for the heavenly Jerusalem, as the Apocalypse says, does not allow anything defiled to enter it.[3] Here they suffer the two pains that the damned suffer, with the difference that in the damned they will be eternal and in purgatory temporal. The fourth hell is the limbo of the holy Fathers, commonly so called because this was the place where the just of the Old Testament were received who, dying in grace, had already made satisfaction for their faults. Here they suffered no torment, though they were kept from entering glory until Jesus Christ should open its gates by his passion and death. In this quiet and peaceful dwelling, comforted by the happy hope of their eternal reward, the just were occupied in directing to the Lord the most ardent longings that filled their spirit for the coming of the Messiah promised in the law, who was to bring them out of that pit and beatify them with his divine vision.

4. These are the four places we call hells. And did our Redeemer descend into all of them? There is no doubt that he descended to the bosom or limbo of the holy Fathers, as the Scriptures and the holy Doctors affirm, and as was defined in the Lateran council. This dogma is drawn from chapter 2 of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, where the apostle St. Peter interprets of Christ those words of David, You will not leave my soul in hell, proving by them his glorious resurrection.[4] He descended there to break the chains by which the souls of the just who had died since the beginning of the world were bound, unable to share in the crown of justice that had been prepared for them from the beginning of the world. He descended to show them that divine justice was now satisfied for the debt that Adam and all his descendants had contracted by his transgression. He descended to make them blessed from that moment, so that they might enjoy the beatific vision, turning limbo into paradise. That is why Jesus said to the good thief from the tree of the cross: This day you will be with me in paradise.[5] All these holy souls, now free of their captivity, were with Christ on earth during the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension into heaven.[6]

5. It is also very probable that Jesus Christ descended to holy purgatory. Uncreated Wisdom implies this when, in chapter 24 of Ecclesiasticus, it says: I will penetrate all the lower parts of the earth, and will look upon all that sleep, that is, those who have died, and will enlighten, will give new life to, all that hope in the Lord. And so it is very likely that Jesus Christ, like a monarch who on the day of his triumph opens the prisons and frees the prisoners held in them, brought out not merely some of the souls that were suffering in purgatory but all of them, using his almighty liberality and applying to them the superabundant merits of his plenteous redemption. This is the opinion of St. Bonaventure and St. Anselm.[7] We must not judge in the same way of the hell of the damned, into which, according to the common opinion, Jesus Christ did not descend; for he descended only where there were just souls to whom he could show mercy, freeing them from their captivity. But if we look at the effects of his descent, we can in some way say that he descended also into that place of horror and darkness; for the devils and the damned felt the power and might of Jesus Christ, and were horrified to see how he despoiled hell of its victims, which caused them new torments, since by their own fault they could not enjoy the kindness and clemency of the Saviour of the world. But he brought no soul out of that place, and it is, according to St. Augustine, a heresy to say that he freed some from hell that day. There is never any redemption for a damned soul; and although you may perhaps have heard it said that the soul of Trajan came out of the eternal abyss, raised again through the intercession of

St. Gregory, the Church has held this to be a fable, falsely attributed to St. John Damascene.[8]

6. With this established, it remains to explain how Jesus Christ descended into hell. Jesus Christ descended there by his own power; but he did not descend in body and soul. When the Saviour had died on the tree of the cross, his most holy soul, united to the divinity, descended into hell; and his blessed body, also united to the divinity, after hanging some hours on the gibbet, was laid in the tomb. Although soul and body were separated, which is what death consists in, the divinity forsook neither of these two parts. Some catechisms give a comparison for this. A man holds a sheathed sword in his hand; he draws it, keeping the sheath in his left hand and the blade in his right: they are separated from each other, but both are united to the man who holds them in his hands. So, although at Jesus' death soul and body were separated, they remained united to the divinity; and this is enough for it to be said with truth: Christ descended into hell. And why did he descend to these places? The answer can be given from what was said above. First, to free those held there who had died in charity and the love of God, thus proving himself the deliverer of the living and the dead: so St. Thomas.[9] Second, to give the souls of the holy Fathers the longed-for beatitude, which consists in the vision of God. Third, to triumph over the devil, as had been prophesied by Hosea and Zechariah,[10] and to conquer him like a glorious victor who not only defeats his enemy on the field of battle, but invades him to despoil him even within his own house. Fifth, he descended into hell so that we should not descend to that place of misery. So he said through the prophet Hosea: O death, I will be your death; and I, O hell, will be your bite \[*bocado tuyo*\], taking the prey from your mouth.[11]

7. See, my brethren, what we are commanded to believe in the first part of this fifth article of the Creed, which says: He descended into hell. But ah, what Christian reflections we can make on this for the profit of our soul! I will make some, though brief, in the second part of my plática.

Second Part

8. When Christ came out of hell to rise again, uniting his soul to the body that lay in the tomb, the door of the limbo or bosom of the holy Fathers was closed, so to speak; for from then on there would be no one who could be held there, since it was destined only for the just of the Old Testament. The limbo of children remained open, and will remain so, for into it will be cast those who, dying without receiving the waters of Baptism, have no personal fault. There also remain open the hell of the damned, who die in grave sin, and that of purgatory, to purify the souls which, although they left this world in the Lord's grace, still bear the remains or stains of the sins forgiven by penance. Are there still a hell and a purgatory? Ah, what considerations we must make about this, so as to avoid becoming one day dwellers in those regions of darkness!

9. There is a hell: yes, my brethren, it is certain, there is a hell; and this dogma of our Religion is so well attested that only those can deny it who, closing their eyes to the light, believe neither the Old nor the New Testament. Only those who, degrading the rational soul with which the Most High enriched them, deny its immortality, and so make themselves like the most brutish beasts. In short, the only ones who deny this point of the true faith are those who deny that God is just, which is the same as denying that there is a God. For how could divine justice leave unpunished the crimes of men who, besides having broken the laws of their God, far from receiving an equivalent punishment in this world, enjoyed delights and comforts in it? There must of necessity be another life in which they are terribly punished with an eternal pain, corresponding to the fault, which was infinite because it was an offence against a God who is infinite.[1] Jesus Christ showed this clearly when, presenting himself as Judge, he says that he will say to the reprobate: Depart, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for Satan and his angels.[2] Eternal fire: whatever this fire may be, which it is not for us to inquire into now, it makes the hell to which sinners are sent a place of torments, as Abraham told the rich glutton.[3]

10. This indisputable dogma must be the object of our meditation, not only so as to believe it, but also so as to fear its rigours, and to strive with all the earnestness of our heart not to give cause for the bitter sentence that would condemn us to that ill-fated place. We have only two ways capable of avoiding it, and these are innocence or penance. Innocence, which is to keep baptismal grace all one's life, is granted to few. But we who have sinned after Baptism still have another means of freeing ourselves from hell, which is penance. A confession made with the conditions that make it right, which the catechism explains to us: there you have a second plank, in the expression of the Councils, on which we come out safe from the shipwreck of the abyss when we have broken the ship of the Sacrament of regeneration by committing personal sins. This, my brethren, is the one we must embrace, for there is no other remedy, says St. Augustine, than either to repent or to burn, and to burn eternally. Hell is for ever: these words made my great mother St. Teresa of Jesus tremble from early childhood, and drove her to the most rigorous penances; and we must consider them often, so as to avoid the torment that will never end.

11. There is also a purgatory; and we must never doubt a dogma proposed by the Church, and declared to us again and again by the divine Scriptures. The Lord, says a prophet, will purge the sons of Levi with the spirit of fire, and will set them like silver and gold in the crucible.[4] That is to say, the God who has prepared a crown of justice for those who kept his faith, fought manfully and happily finished their course,[5] if he sees that their souls are stained with the marks or remains that their faults left in them, even after these were forgiven through confession and penance, sends them to purgatory, where they are cleansed with the spirit, that is, with a quintessence of all the torments, pains and sicknesses, and even of all the martyrdoms that men have suffered, so that, thus purified, they may enter to enjoy the most pure delights of glory. What a reflection the Second Book of Maccabees makes to prove the existence of this purgatory! It says that the general Judas, after he had won a victory over his enemies, took up a collection of money throughout the army to send to Jerusalem, so that sacrifices might be offered for the souls of those who had died in the battle, thinking piously and religiously of their resurrection; for if he had not believed that those who had died would rise again one day, it would have been vain and superfluous to pray for the dead.[6] So speaks the Holy Spirit; from which it is proved that those who die will rise again, and that their souls live, since otherwise they would not rise; that they can suffer; and that they need suffrages to come out of their pains.

12. If, then, there is a purgatory, where pains are suffered beside which, according to St. Augustine, all the pains of the world are as if painted, what care must we take to avoid them? The means is, if we have sinned and have already rightly confessed our faults, to strive to give God satisfaction for them by fasts, abstinence, prayers, mortification of the flesh and other penances, so that the temporal pain into which the eternal one was commuted may be remitted in this life, and we need not undergo it in the next. Purgatory is also lessened, or altogether avoided, by means of the indulgences that the prelates apply to us from the treasury of the Church, as the stewards they are of the price of our redemption and dispensers of the mysteries of God. The treasury of the Church, from which indulgences flow, is made up of the superabundant merits of our divine Redeemer Jesus Christ, of his most holy Mother and of the Saints. But for indulgences to bear fruit in our souls, we must carry out the means that the Church herself sees fit to order us. And we must keep in mind that these indulgences do no more than make up for what we cannot satisfy, and in no way favour our inaction and laziness. After we have done what we can to pay our debt with sacrifices and penances, if this is not enough, the treasury of the Church comes in with its mercy to complete the payment we are unable to make. This is the teaching of the Fathers. And if in the way explained we lessen or extinguish the fire that was to purify our souls in holy purgatory, how much can we who are living help those poor souls who are already suffering its heat? Christian charity, the unspeakable pains they suffer, and the laments they continually address to us, saying with Job, Have pity on me, you at least my friends, for the hand of the Lord has touched me:[7] all these demand that we direct our prayers, Masses, alms, penances and sacrifices on their behalf. In this way we shall relieve the pains perhaps of our parents, brothers, spouses and friends. Enough.

13. All this I have wished to set before you, though briefly, in the explanation of this fifth article of the Creed, He descended into hell: both to show you how many places are so called, into which of them the soul of Jesus descended, and what the purpose of his descent was; and at the same time to confirm you in the dogma of hell and purgatory, and to point out to you the means of avoiding their pains. May God in his infinite mercy help us to live in such a way that, without undergoing such rigorous torments, we may enter into the enjoyment of eternal glory. Amen.

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[8] Matt. 22:1–14.

[9] Ps. 33:22 (Vulgate; Ps. 34:21): *mors peccatorum pessima*.

[10] Rev. 18:7.

[11] Rev. 21:27.

[12] Acts 2:24–31, quoting Ps. 15:10 (Vulgate; Ps. 16:10).

[13] Luke 23:43.

[14] Cf. Matt. 27:52–53.

[15] *Summa theologiae* III, q. 52, a. 8.

[16] *De iis qui in fide dormierunt*. St. Thomas discusses it (*Summa theologiae* Suppl. q. 71, a. 5).

[17] Source note: Theol. c. 235", i.e. St. Thomas, *Compendium theologiae* I, 235.

[18] Hos. 13:14; Zech. 9:11.

[19] Hos. 13:14 (Vulgate: *ero mors tua, o mors; morsus tuus ero, inferne*).

[1] Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 87, a. 4.

[2] Matt. 25:41.

[3] Luke 16:28.

[4] Mal. 3:3.

[5] 2 Tim. 4:7–8.

[6] 2 Macc. 12:43–46.

[7] Job 19:21.

48. Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Last Petition of the Our Father: Deliver Us from Evil

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 48, pp. 123–132. Gospel: John 4:46–53. Original preacher not named.

> *Credidit ipse, et domus ejus tota (John 4:53).*
>
> *He believed, and his whole household.*

The Gospel of this day is from the fourth chapter of St. John, and it reads thus:

1. "There was at Capernaum a certain nobleman whose son was sick. Having heard that Jesus was coming from Judea into Galilee, he went to him and begged him to deign to come to his house and heal his son, for he was dying. Jesus said to him: Unless you see signs and wonders, you do not believe. He answered: Lord, come before my son dies. Jesus said to him: Go, your son is well. The man believed what Jesus said to him, and went to his house, persuaded that the sick boy was cured. And indeed, when he was already near, his servants met him and told him that his son was well. He asked them at what hour he had grown better, and they answered him: Yesterday at the seventh hour, that is, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him. And the father then recognized that it was at that very hour that Jesus had said to him: Your son is well. And he believed in Jesus, he and all his family." This is the Gospel.[1]

2. In it the most wholesome instructions are given to us. The first thing shown us here is that the afflictions and calamities of this present life imperiously compel men, even those who seem farthest from God, to have recourse to his divine Majesty, to acknowledge his omnipotence, to fear his justice and to implore his mercy with all their heart. The nobleman of whom the account is given, who was an officer of King Herod's guard,

teaches us these lessons by coming to Jesus Christ. One may well believe that he would never have approached the Saviour or believed in him if his son's sickness had not forced him to have recourse to him in order to beg his son's health; and in this were fulfilled those words of St. Gregory: The evils that oppress us drive us to go to God. And the holy king David shows this by his own example, saying: I found trouble and sorrow, and I called upon the name of the Lord.[2] The second thing this Gospel teaches us is the example of this soldier, who from a worldly man \[*hombre profano*\] becomes a faithful servant of Jesus Christ and draws his whole family to belief in this Lord. This persuades us that we, who have so many proofs of God's goodness in his many benefits, must go to him with a lively faith full of confidence to ask the remedy for all our evils. Jesus himself, our master, commands us to do this when, teaching us what we must ask of God and the way we must do it, he gave us the model in the prayer of the Our Father, placing last among the petitions we must address to him the one that says: Deliver us from evil.[3] For a better understanding of this petition, I am going to show what it is we ask for here, and you will see it in the first part. How we must make this supplication, you will see in the second.

First Part

3. Before we explain the true meaning of this petition of the Our Father, we must consider that the whole life of man is, according to Job, a continual warfare upon the earth.[1] Because our first father lost original innocence and justice, we were all wrapped up in the fault, which would have led us all to hell if Jesus Christ had not instituted for us a Sacrament enriched with his most holy blood, to give us in it the pardon of this original sin. But although it is remitted to us in Baptism, we are left with certain remains and penalties that all men drag along with them. We are left with ignorance, concupiscence and our heart inclined to evil from childhood;[2] we are left exposed to cold, heat, sickness, persecutions, wars, poverty, abandonment and every kind of tribulation, calamity and misery. And just as Scripture says of Egypt, on the day the children of Israel went out, that there was no house where there was not one dead,[3] so we can say that there is hardly a person who has not some cause for grief and sorrow. A hurricane or whirlwind tears up the trees that fed one man, or destroys the building he lived in; a terrible storm lays waste another's harvest that he was about to store in his barn; a malignant illness lays that man low on his bed of pain; death snatches from this one the father who was to support him; a hidden enemy lies in wait for another to take his life; wars… but let us not weary ourselves. We are surrounded by evils; and the world, the devil and the flesh make every effort to bring us to the precipice and to despair, and cause those to lose grace who in tribulation are not made firm by resignation and patience.

4. Lord, we say in the midst of so many tribulations, deliver us from evil: words, says St. Augustine, of such great breadth that they include all that a Christian can ask in any kind of affliction he may have, and all that can be the cause of his tears and prayers.[4] Therefore this prayer, the last petition of the Our Father, is of the very greatest importance. Jesus Christ himself, who taught us to make it, used it at the time of his departure to the Father, when, begging him to watch over the good and salvation of men, he said to him: I pray you to keep them from evil.[5] And although this petition seems to be confused with others of the same prayer, the Our Father, it is not so, for it has something special that the others lack. For example, the second says: Thy kingdom come. And although it is true that this one of which we are speaking asks God to free us from the evils that can make us lose this kingdom of God, which is his grace and even his glory, so that both seem to look to the same end, it is nevertheless in a different way. The second has God as its immediate object, and this one ourselves, inasmuch as we ask the Lord to free us from all those evils that can be an obstacle to our union with his divine Majesty and the enjoyment of his glory. This petition is also different from the fifth, in which we ask that our sins be forgiven, and the sixth, that he not let us fall into temptation: these two petitions are directed to our being freed from the evil of guilt, and this seventh from the evil of the punishment our faults deserve. We may well say that in this last petition we make a kind of summary of all that we had asked of the Lord before in the other supplications. In this sense the Church, our true mother, has

the priest say in the canon of the Mass, after the Pater noster and the people's response, But deliver us from evil, the following prayer, which is as it were a repetition or compendium of the whole Our Father, especially of the last three petitions: Deliver us, Lord, we beseech you, from all evils, past, present and to come, and grant us peace in our days, so that, aided by the help of your mercy, we may never be slaves of sin nor troubled by any disturbance. The past evils are the faults we have committed; the present ones are all that can lead us into sin; and the future ones are all the consequences and penalties of sin.

5. These are the evils that afflict us, and from these we ask the Lord to free us. Deliver us, Lord, we ask, from water, from fire, from lightning, from hail, from scarcity of food, from seditions, from wars. Deliver us likewise from things that men do not consider evil, such as riches, honours, health, strength and even life itself, if all this is to contribute to our perdition and the ruin of our souls; that is, deliver us from all that you, in your infinite wisdom, know to be harmful to us, whether it seems prosperous or adverse. Deliver us also, we say, from a sudden death, lest, being overtaken by it in sin, we be eternally unhappy. Deliver us from provoking your divine justice by our deeds, moving you to let fall on us the blows of your just vengeance. Deliver us (oh, and how earnestly we ask it!), deliver us from the terrible evil of the pains of hell, from that place where, without hope of leaving it, besides suffering unspeakable torments, we shall be unable to praise or bless your most holy name, worthy of eternal praise. Deliver us also from the evil of purgatory, giving us helps to satisfy in this life the pains our faults deserve, so as to avoid that purifying fire made up of the greatest torments.

6. All this and much more we ask with these words alone, deliver us from all evil. And above all, since the devil is the greatest of all evils, and in Holy Scripture is called by antonomasia the evil one, the wicked one, as being the author of all evils and of sin itself (for he brings them all, according to St. John Chrysostom), we ask God to keep him imprisoned with the chains with which the Angel of the Apocalypse secured him,[6] so that he may not tempt us with outward evils that disturb our spirit and hurl us into sin. We do not ask absolutely to be freed from the snares of the devil, because often, as I showed on another day, temptation, and even harassment by this evil spirit, is useful and profitable to us; but we ask the Lord to give us resistance to his attacks so that we may come out victorious over his fury. We ask him also not to allow him to take possession of our bodies, making us demoniacs and exposing us to the countless evils that usually follow from such possession. It must be noted that the devil is a minister of justice whom God himself uses to punish sinners; and in this sense it can be said with St. John Damascene that it is God who gives men all the evils they suffer because of sin. That is why the prophet Amos said: Shall there be evil in a city which the Lord has not done?[7] And so it is God alone whom we must ask to free us from the evils the devil brings on us; for since they all come by the order and disposition of the supreme Being, he alone is able to free us from them.

7. The thought that evils come from God must stir us to have recourse to his divine Majesty for the remedy of them all. This does not mean, as I have already explained elsewhere, that we should despise the human means that God himself has inspired for the relief of our troubles. I will give some examples. The Lord afflicts us with wars: we must fight against our enemies, using all lawful means that may ensure victory; but even so we must ask God, who gives victory to the worthy, to free us from this evil, which is one for the whole country. Although Moses raised his hands to heaven, imploring the Lord to free his people from their adversaries, the armies commanded by Joshua did not for that reason put down their weapons.[8] We suffer hunger and scarcity of necessary food: we must ask our sustenance of the Lord who feeds the birds of the air, which neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns;[9] but we are obliged to sow and work to free ourselves, for our part, from the evils that hunger can bring on us, always looking to God as the only one who can save us from this distress; for neither he who plants is anything, says St. Paul, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase to the plants.[10] We see ourselves laid low on the bed of pain, oppressed by sickness: we must, then, ask him to free us from bodily ills, for in his hand, according to David, are the sickness and health, the

life and death of men;[11] yet we are obliged to use the means for the health of the body, calling the doctor and taking the medicines judged suitable to free us from our ailments, though always with reference to God, who, as the Holy Spirit says, created medicines out of the earth;[12] that is, herbs and remedies have power to heal because the Author of nature himself has given it to them. We could go on reflecting in this way, but what has been said is enough for us to be sure of what this seventh petition of the Our Father includes. And how must we make this supplication? I will say it in the

Second Part

8. Having explained the true meaning of this petition, it follows that we explain the dispositions our soul must have to make it to God in a way that will be fruitful for us. Two things must accompany this supplication: first, confidence in God; second, resignation to his divine will. Confidence in God: we have already treated this at length in speaking of the conditions with which we must pray; so here I will do no more than point out some particulars regarding the prayer made in this petition, Deliver us, Lord, from all evil. God himself, who is the one who can free us from the evils we suffer, is the one who commands us to ask him, and shows us the way we must do it, saying to us: Thus shall you pray: Deliver us from evil. And must this not fill us with the firmest confidence of obtaining it? This confidence grows if we consider the promptness with which the Lord, full of goodness, has helped his servants when they humbly begged him to free them from the evils that tormented them. We have countless examples of this, about which we cannot have the least doubt, because the divine and infallible Scriptures show them to us. The first patriarchs of the old law already began to experience the effects of the Lord's beneficent providence, as he freed them from the evils their enemies caused them. He freed Jacob and his people from the hands of the Shechemites, putting his terror into all the cities round Shechem, so that they did not dare to pursue them in their retreat.[1] When Nebuchadnezzar, out of hatred for religion, had Ananias, Azarias and Misael thrown into the flames, the Lord freed them from the fire, and in the midst of the flames of a furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated, they walked about freely praising God and blessing the Lord.[2] Susanna, unjustly accused of a crime of which her accusers alone were guilty, the Lord delivers from the stones of the people of Babylon, to which she had been sentenced.[3] Daniel, condemned by an impious monarch to be devoured by lions: the Lord hears his supplication and frees him from that evil, and protects him in a miraculous way, sending an Angel to shut the mouths of the beasts so that they should not harm him.[4] This would be endless. God is kind and merciful to all who call upon him as they ought; and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, in short, all the just cried out, and the Lord heard them and delivered them from all their troubles.[5]

9. All these examples, and countless others that could be set out, must fill our souls with a great confidence in the goodness and infinite mercy of God, who, using his mercies of old, will deliver us from all evil when we ask it of him in a spirit of religion. He is the same God yesterday as today, the God of past ages as of the present and future; and if he freed from the evils they were suffering, or feared to suffer, his servants who called upon his name in earlier ages, why should we doubt of receiving the same consolation? Is he not our Father? By this title Jesus Christ commanded us to call him at the beginning of the prayer of the Our Father. If, then, he is a father, will he look with indifference on the evils of his children? What father, says Jesus Christ, will give stones to the son who asks him for bread, or scorpions to the one who asks him for fish?[6] That is, if we ask a father with confidence to free us from miseries, not only temporal but much more spiritual ones, will he turn a deaf ear to the echo of our cries and leave us crushed under the weight of our evils? Certainly not. Therefore, in making this supplication to the Lord, we must make it with a firm confidence of obtaining what we ask.

10. But this is not enough: we must be resigned and conformed to the divine will, even when we do not obtain what we ask. God, who penetrates the most hidden and secret depths of our hearts, knows better than we ourselves what is really good for us. The end for which he created us was to save us, that is, to reign with

him eternally in glory; and to this our whole temporal life must be directed. We do not know the means the Lord has arranged for us to reach our last end, which is eternal life; and often he wishes us to fight manfully by rough and unpleasant roads to win the crown of justice. This being certain, let us suppose that God, whose providence does not fail, has decreed that a man is to attain his salvation by seeing himself, like Job, covered with loathsome sores, despised by his friends and even by those most bound to him; or by seeing himself as poor as Lazarus, with everyone made insensible to his need; or by seeing himself, like the innocent David, always persecuted and slandered by his enemies. Do you think, my brethren, that however much this man continually asks God to free him from sickness or poverty or persecution, the Lord will grant it, knowing that these trials are the instrument with which he is to fashion his eternal happiness? This is the very thing that Jesus Christ our Saviour said to those two disciples who on the road to Emmaus were complaining to their risen Master, without recognizing him, of what the chief men of the Synagogue had made him suffer, even to crucifying him on a tree. Was it not fitting, he said to them, that Christ should suffer all this, and by this means enter into his glory?[7] In view of this, then, the servant must not be above his Master.[8] He prayed to the eternal Father to free him from the bitter chalice he was about to drink to the dregs in his sorrowful passion; yet the Father does not hear him, does not free him from this evil, because it was fitting only that he should suffer. But the Saviour himself gave us an example of what we must do in such cases, which is to conform ourselves to the divine will and to say with Jesus himself: Not as I will, Lord, but as you will.[9]

11. A great joy must fill our soul when, asking God to relieve us of some evil, he does not hear us or does not grant the supplication to our liking; for it is a sure sign that the evil from which we wish to be freed is useful to us for the happy end for which he has destined us. That is why the apostle St. Paul said: I cannot contain my joy when I see myself full of tribulations.[10] What is certain, according to the same Apostle, is that whoever is predestined to heaven is predestined also to be conformed to the image of Jesus:[11] poor, discredited, persecuted, tormented, and even tempted to evil (though without sin) by Satan in the desert. In short, our Lord Jesus Christ was the man of sorrows, and knew infirmity by experience.[12] What glory, then, for a Christian to resemble his head, Christ, by gladly suffering those evils that the Lord sends him, and from which for his good he does not wish to relieve him, however earnestly he asks it!

12. This does not mean that we must not ask God to free us from them; certainly not: he himself commands us to ask it. But we must of necessity join to this petition a holy conformity with the divine good pleasure, and, when we see that he denies what we beg of him, live persuaded that his refusal is very profitable to us. Far be it from us, my brethren, to kick against the goad that mortifies us,[13] still less to rebel against the Lord, who, if he strikes us, does not wish to harm us; and the evils he allows to afflict us are most precious jewels with which he is fashioning our crown. For no evil on earth must we cease to love God with all our heart; for if he permits them, it is not for our destruction but for our happiness. St. Paul teaches us this when he said to the Romans: I am sure that neither death nor life, nor Angels, nor Principalities, nor tribulation, nor any creature will ever be able to separate us from the love of God.[14] Engrave this teaching on your souls; and however much the Lord refuses to free you from the evil that saddens and dismays you, submit gladly to his divine will, without turning aside on that account from his love and the keeping of his law. With confidence in the Lord’s goodness and mercy, and resignation to his divine will, your supplication will become worthy of his attention; and even when you do not obtain what you ask, it will be because obtaining it would be harmful to you.

13. This, my most loving Father, is what I will do from now on. If I see myself oppressed by poverty, sickness, contradictions or any other earthly evil, I will come to you with the greatest confidence, for I know that all my good must come to me from you. But I will ask for nothing more than that you free me from what you know to be bad for my soul. Let me lose the whole world, so long as my soul suffers no harm; and let all evils rain down on me, if you deign, my God, to give me patience to bear them, and your divine helps to attain eternal glory. Amen.

[15] John 4:46–53.

[16] Ps. 114:3–4 (Vulgate; Ps. 116:3–4).

[17] Matt. 6:13.

[18] Job 7:1.

[19] Gen. 8:21.

[20] Exod. 12:30.

[21] Source note: “Epist. CXXX, c. 11” (Augustine, Letter 130, to Proba, 11, 21).

[22] Source note: “Joan. xvii” (John 17:15).

[23] Rev. 20:1–3.

[24] Amos 3:6.

[25] Exod. 17:8–13.

[26] Matt. 6:26.

[27] 1 Cor. 3:7.

[28] Cf. 1 Sam. 2:6–7; Deut. 32:39; Wis. 16:13.

[29] Source note: “Eccli. xxxviii” (Ecclus. 38:4).

[1] Source note: “Genes. xxxv” (Gen. 35:5).

[2] Dan. 3:19–24.

[3] Dan. 13.

[4] Dan. 6:16–22.

[5] Source note: “Psalm. xxxiii” (Ps. 33:18, Vulgate; Ps. 34:17).

[6] Matt. 7:9–10; Luke 11:11–12.

[7] Luke 24:26.

[8] Matt. 10:24.

[9] Matt. 26:39.

[10] 2 Cor. 7:4.

[11] Rom. 8:29.

[12] Isa. 53:3.

[13] Acts 9:5; 26:14.

[14] Rom. 8:38–39.

49. Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precept of Forgiving Injuries

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 49, pp. 133–141. Gospel: Matthew 18:23–35. Original preacher not named.

> *Nonne ergo oportuit et te misereri conservi tui, sicut et ego tui misertus sum? (Matt. 18:33).*
>
> *Ought not you also to have had compassion on your fellow servant, as I had compassion on you?*

The Gospel of this day is from the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. “The kingdom of heaven, said Jesus to his disciples, is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle them, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents, which are equal to two hundred million reales of our money; and as he had nothing to pay with, his lord ordered that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, to settle this debt. But the servant, throwing himself at his feet, begged him, saying: Lord, have a little patience, and I will pay you everything. And the lord, moved with pity for that servant, let him go and forgave him the debt. Scarcely had this servant gone out when he found one of his fellows who owed him a hundred denarii, which is equal to some hundred and sixty reales of our money; and seizing him by the throat he almost choked him, saying: Pay me what you owe me. His fellow threw himself at his feet and begged him, saying: Have a little patience, and I will pay you everything. But the other would not listen to him, but went and had him put in prison until he should pay the whole debt. Seeing this, the other servants, his fellows, were extremely saddened, and went to tell their common lord all that had happened. Then the lord called him and said to him: Wicked servant, I forgave you

all that you owed me because you asked me; ought not you, then, also to have had compassion on your fellow, as I had on you? And the lord, angered, handed him over to the officers of justice to be tormented until he should pay the whole debt. So, added Jesus, explaining this parable, will my heavenly Father do to you also if, after having forgiven you so many sins, each one of you does not forgive his brother the injuries he has received from him." Thus far the Gospel.[1]

2. See made known in it the precept that Jesus Christ our Saviour lays upon us, telling us through St. Matthew: Love your enemies, do good to him who injures you, pray for those who persecute and slander you.[2] This precept is likewise laid down in the Decalogue, founded on the love of God and of neighbour. But it is a precept forgotten or not kept in the world. The world's law, said Cardinal Hugh, inspired by the devil, has hindered the express precept of forgiving injuries laid on us by the peaceful King. The law of the world is the one that urges us to hatred, to vengeance, to fury, to slaughter and to murder, breaking the sacred bonds of the love by which we must all be united. And so love for a persecutor, tenderness towards an enemy, and the forgiveness of an affront or injury are hardly to be found among us. In this plática, then, I am going to show you how far our charity or love of neighbour must reach, which is one of the most essential points of our Religion. In the first part I will set out the precept the Saviour lays on us to forgive our neighbour's injuries. In the second I will propose some reasons that may make the fulfilment of this command easier for us.

First Part

3. Charity, says the catechism, is a supernatural virtue that inclines us to love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves. On these two commandments the whole law and the Prophets depend, said Jesus Christ.[1] The one is a consequence of the other. We cannot love God with all our heart, nor can we avoid offending him, if we do not love our neighbours, who as his creatures are his image and likeness. I, said St. Augustine, learn to love God by loving creatures. Especially in the law of grace, built on love, we must all be bound together by the bonds of fraternal charity. By this all will know that you are my disciples, said our divine Master, if you love one another.[2] This love, says St. Gregory, must not be idle; it must show itself in works. He who sees his neighbour poor or in need and shuts up the bowels of his compassion without helping him, how can we say that the charity of God dwells in him? So St. John reasons.[3] Read the works of mercy, and you will see in detail the actions by which we must prove our love for our neighbours.

4. This charity must be universal. No one must be a stranger to our love: not the foreigner who lives in the most remote countries, nor the unbeliever who professes a religion contrary to the Catholic one we profess; in short, no one; for God, for whose sake we love everyone, says St. Augustine, suffered a shameful death for all. No one is, or should be, exempt from this general love of neighbour; for we see that Jesus Christ rebukes the insensibility of a priest and a levite who did not help a poor man wounded by robbers on the road to Jericho, and praised the mercy of the Samaritan who shelters him and does him good.[4] All, all have a claim on our love. And if they are our enemies? If they do not love us, if they hate us, if they persecute us? The same. Hear what the Saviour commands us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: I command you to love your enemies. Does he command this? Yes, sirs, and he adds: Do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and slander you.

5. And who commands it? Ah, the one who imposes this law, which is nothing but a clarification of the law of charity towards our neighbour, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God himself, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Almighty, your Creator and the Creator of all things, whom even insensible creatures obey in what seems contrary to their nature: like the sea that divided its waves, the fire that held back its heat, the sun that stops or turns back at his command.[5] But how does the supreme Lawgiver impose this command? Ah, in the most decisive and precise words. Never did God command with such authority. By request and exhortation he moves us to keep other commandments; but the forgiveness of injuries he enjoins in words of majesty and

sovereignty, no doubt foreseeing man's resistance. I, he says, I command it. To you… he speaks to all, to all. I command it to you, great and noble ones of the world, as proud of your rank as you are touchy on the point of honour. I command you to love your enemies; for if by your nobility, money, learning or office you stand above your brethren, you stand equally under my dominion and must obey me. I command it to you, men of war, soldiers; for if the King has put the sword in your hands, it is so that you may defend him from the attacks of his enemies, not so that you may use it on your fellow citizens, avenging injuries by yourselves and usurping what belongs to a legitimate authority that acts in my place. To you, ladies, I command it; for if a lapse in courtesy that another lady has shown you, a message misunderstood by a maid, or other trifles inflame you to fury against your companions, and you wish to take revenge, I condemn this revenge and enjoin reconciliation on you. He commands this forgiveness to all of us in general; and at the very moment when we are about to satisfy our revenge, he seems to say to us what he said to Laban when, furious, he was going to take revenge on Jacob, thinking Jacob had stolen his idols: Take heed not to speak harshly to Jacob.[6] This was enough, even in a pagan, for him to restrain himself out of regard for the authority of the one who commanded it. What must a Christian do?

6. More: the one who commands is the one who, at the same time as he imposes the law, gives supernatural strength to be able to keep it, says St. Augustine. It is true that forgiveness of one's enemy is a hard law. That is why, when the executioners urged a martyr to work a miracle, he answered them: See the greatest miracle I can work: I love you, I pray to God for you even as you tear my body to pieces; and this is the greatest wonder. But grace, which God gives, softens the rigour of this command.

7. He who commands is our Rewarder, the one who looks after our honour and interest more than we ourselves do. He is our Father, who in no way wishes us to lose either our interests or our reputation and good name. For in enjoining forgiveness, he does not command us to give up what our enemy has snatched from us, no. For this he has established tribunals in the world which see lawfully to our restitution, and prevent each one from taking justice into his own hands. In this way we ask the tribunals for due satisfaction for the injuries we receive, while loving our enemies inwardly and outwardly at the same time. This is the teaching of the holy Fathers. And do not fear that your honour will suffer from the reconciliation commanded of you. On the contrary, honour, praise and greatness accompany the forgiveness of one's enemy, says St. Gregory; and sensible men, among whom we should seek honour, will fill you with praise. Now I know, Saul said to David, that you are to be king of Jerusalem. How do you know it? Because, when you could have taken my life to repay the wrongs I have done you, you did not kill me in the cave where I was defenceless.[7] He who forgives his enemy deserves to be king. Such is the honour prepared for him by the very one who gives the law.

8. This is the precept that charity imposes on the forgiveness of injuries, and that Jesus Christ expressly promulgated. Let us now see some of the motives that can spur us to keep this command gladly.

Second Part

9. The law of forgiving injuries is a just law. God commands it, Religion authorizes it, nature inspires it, and our own interest demands it. And to prove it, I am going at once to set before you in spirit a most irreconcilable enemy. Vengeful man, there before your eyes you have the one who, as Satan did to Job, has taken away your goods and destroyed your wealth, and with the blow of grief laid you on the bed of pain. There is the one who, as was done to Jacob, treacherously took the life of the son who was the object of your caresses and hopes. That one is he who, as Saul did to David, has heaped on you reproaches, slanders and insults, all unworthy of your character and goodness. That other has been for you a second Haman, who, to gain his own promotion by force of slanderous accusations, has had you put in prison and exposed you to the rigours of execution.[1] Do you want more injuries? These are aggravated by the quality of the person, to increase your grief. The one who tried to kill you is your brother according to the flesh, who wished to renew

on you the fratricide of Cain; it is your own wife who has wronged you, and who, like Queen Vashti, has turned her back on you, forgetting your love and disobeying your commands.[2] In a word, your enemy, the one who robbed you, made an attempt on your life, the one who took away your honour, which is even more precious than life itself, is the one you loved most, the one you had done most good to, the one most closely bound to you by the ties of flesh and blood. No more hateful person could be set before you. God, then, commands you to forgive him, to love him, not to take revenge. What do you do with him? It is in your hands. But before you answer me, I am going to make you two brief reflections, and afterwards you will do as you think fit: first, consider who it is you hold as your aggressor; second, who you are, who think yourself wronged.

10. Who is the one you call your aggressor? From whatever angle you look at him, you will see in him only titles that make him worthy of respect. He is a friend of God, a son of Jesus Christ, your fellow heir in the kingdom of heaven. With the same Baptism as you he is freed from original sin; in the same Jordan of penance he washes away the stains of his faults; the same Holy Spirit strengthened you both in Confirmation; the same Gospel ennobles you; the same bread that came down from heaven sustains you. He is flesh of your flesh, bone of your bones, he is one of your members, he is your brother; for you must acknowledge no father but God, said the Saviour.[3] Brother! Oh, what a name, sweet and tender beyond all telling! Brother!… This word alone disarmed Joseph of old of the most just resentment he had conceived against the treacherous sons of his father, who had left no means untried to degrade and persecute him. He had them before him when, placed on the throne of Egypt, his boundless and unopposed power put the revenge of his wrong into his hands. They feared this; and when, most shaken by fear, they were awaiting the punishment their crimes deserved, they hear from that kindly mouth these words: Do not fear, no; I am Joseph, your dear brother; and when I remember that I am, rancour flees from me, and sweetness and kindness take its place. You have only been, in my trials, the instruments of a God who so arranged it for my exaltation. I am your brother… this is the only memory that has remained in me of all your persecution.[4] The same sentiments ought to move all Christians to forgive their enemies, however guilty they may be. He is my brother, he is my brother.

11. But let us say more. Who is your enemy? He is one who has wronged God more than you, even in the very injury he has done you. The Lord regards offences done to his creatures as his own; that is why David, having wronged the innocent Uriah, said to God: Lord, against you alone have I sinned,[5] for the offence I did to your subject and son was most especially an offence against you. And not only will he have offended God when he offended you, but perhaps there will be many other faults with which he has wronged him. Yet, though God is the one most wronged and, so to speak, the one most concerned in your very offence, what does he do? Ah, he bears with him, he waits for him; and not only this, he does good to the one who wrongs him; and the same sun that gives you light gives it to him, and the same clouds that rain on your fields water his too: so the Gospel says.[6] And can dust and ashes not bear without agitation even the sight of this hateful man, when the just Judge holds back the rigour of his punishment? Will you rage bloodily against your brother, while God your Father is preparing for both of you those heavenly mansions so that you may keep each other company for ever, if both of you weep for your faults?

12. Jesus Christ is saying to your heart what St. Paul wrote in a letter to Philemon, in order to reconcile him with a servant who had offended him and whom the Apostle had converted to the faith while in prison. I send you here, St. Paul said to him (and Christ says it to all of us), I send you here this man who has wronged you; but I beg you no longer to regard him as your enemy, but as my son, who received the heavenly light as the fruit of my chains. Forgive him; and if he does not deserve it of himself, look at me, whom you love so much; and if I deserve anything of you, receive him as if he were I. He offended you, it is true: then charge his offence to me, for I will bear it gladly for the love I have for him.[7] What the Apostle says, Jesus Christ says to you with greater reason. If this does not move you to keep this just law; if, insensible to these words in which the person of your aggressor is commended to you, you persist in hating him, go to that altar, take

from that sacred tabernacle the ciborium that holds the body of the Saviour, and avenge on it, though it cannot suffer, your brother's wrong. No, you will say, no; far from me so execrable and sacrilegious an act. Then how does what you are doing to your enemy differ from it? The very sword with which you wish to wound him you are plunging into the heart of the Lord whose member he is. Did not the Lord redeem him with the priceless price of his blood to save him? Do you not kill Jesus by wounding his son? Ah, so it is; and you will not find a single man who is not bathed in the blood of the Lamb, and the Lamb receives the blows with which you avenge yourself on them.

13. Who are you, who think yourself offended? See the second reflection that I beg you to make, to stir you to keep the law that Jesus Christ imposes today, as just as it is important for yourselves. Who are you? A sinner, as we all are. Who is the man that does not sin? says Scripture.[8] A sinner who will perhaps be involved in the same offence as your enemy. There is no sea so calm that it does not sometimes rise up and try to sink an innocent vessel with its furious waves; no man, however clothed in gentleness he may be, who does not at times show bitterness against his brethren and harm them in something. But in short, you are a sinner, that is, an enemy of God; and this being so, between you and the offended Majesty there is a dividing wall, says Isaiah.[9] Well then, if, in view of your many iniquities, God were to demand his rights of you with all rigour, as you demand yours of your adversary, woe to you, you would perish without remedy. What a misfortune! Do you wish, then, to be united to God, and to return to his grace and friendship? Then return first to that of your enemy. There is no other remedy; for this one is sure. Forgive, says the Saviour, and you will be forgiven.[10] What consolation! What an important medicine! After you have given your adversary the hand of sincere reconciliation, not a feigned one, from the very place where you signed the pardon of your wrongs you will be able to go with confidence, though full of faults, to the feet of a Crucifix and say to him, as St. John Gualbert did: Lord, forgive me my faults, as I have just forgiven those my enemy did to me. And although you may not have the good fortune that holy man had, of his Majesty bowing his sacred head as if granting his prayer, at least the consoling Spirit will give your soul inward testimony of the remission of your sins by the outpouring of his graces. I assure you of it, Christians, you will see it; for your lot is in your own hands. By forgiving the one who offended you, you write your name in the book of the elect.

14. But ah, how much the opposite will happen with the rancorous and vengeful man! For him Religion has nothing but anathemas and proscription. Neither the abundance of his tears, nor the austerity of his fasts, nor the blood of a reconciling God, nor even his own blood shed for the faith in martyrdom will be able to save him; nothing is of use to him while hatred and revenge dwell in his heart. He will come to the Lord saying with the priests: Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on me; but because he says it with a poisoned spirit, this terrible voice seems to come from the throne of God: With the same measure with which you measure your brother, with the same shall it be measured to you:[11] hatred for hatred, revenge for revenge, condemnation for condemnation. This is what Jesus Christ meant to teach in the parable of the householder of whom today's Gospel speaks. Ungrateful and wicked man, if I forgave you your debt out of compassion, why did you not do the same with your unhappy fellow? When I forgive you so much, will you not forgive so little? Come, he said, bind this man, and do to him what he did to his brother: let him suffer until he pays my debt. The explanation of this parable is quite plain, all the more when Jesus Christ says: So it will happen to you if you do not forgive your enemies from your heart, when the Lord forgives you so many faults: you will pay for them all in the eternal fire.

15. So it is; and even at the hour of death you will find no consolation if you persist in being divided from your brethren. The priest will not be able, even in those last moments, to reconcile you with God if your heart burns with hatred; nor will the Lamb he gives you be a sacrifice of propitiation for you. That is why Pope St. Gregory ordered his priests not to administer the sacred Viaticum to those who kept hatred and rancour in their hearts. Jesus Christ commanded this same thing in his Gospel, saying: If you come to the altar and know that you bear rancour against your brother, go away, go and be reconciled with him, and when this is

done I will accept your offerings.[12]

16. Vengeful souls, will you still dare to persist in your rancorous desires? You have seen the precept of charity that the Gospel lays on you with regard to your enemies; that your adversary is your brother, whose offences God himself forgives; that you are sinners, and that, needing forgiveness, you will not obtain it unless you forgive the one who has wronged you. See, then, now, that the one who enjoins forgiveness on you is the one who on the sacred tree of the cross asked his eternal Father for pardon for the very men who were crucifying him, excusing their crime as far as he could.[13] What will you do, then? Ah, my God! What am I to do but sign a general pardon for all my enemies? How could I say to you: Forgive us our debts as we forgive, while doing the very opposite? Shall we ask for our own eternal damnation? No, my God: I forgive with all my heart, and I am sure that this will be the means by which, my faults being forgiven, I shall go to enjoy beatitude. Amen.

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[14] Matt. 18:23–35.

[15] Matt. 5:44.

[16] Matt. 22:40.

[17] John 13:35.

[18] 1 John 3:17.

[19] Luke 10:30–37.

[20] Exod. 14:21; Dan. 3:49–50; Josh. 10:12–13; Isa. 38:8.

[21] Gen. 31:24, 29.

[22] 1 Sam. 24:18–21 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[1] Esther 3–7.

[2] Gen. 4:8; Esther 1:10–12.

[3] Gen. 2:23; Matt. 23:9.

[4] Gen. 45:3–8; 50:19–21, freely expanded.

[5] Ps. 50:6 (Vulgate; Ps. 51:4).

[6] Matt. 5:45.

[7] Philem. 10–18, freely paraphrased.

[8] 1 Kings 8:46 (Vulgate 3 Kings); Eccles. 7:21.

[9] Isa. 59:2.

[10] Luke 6:37.

[11] Matt. 7:2.

[12] Matt. 5:23–24, freely paraphrased.

[13] Luke 23:34.

50. Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost: On the Duties of a Subject towards His King

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 50, pp. 142–151. Gospel: Matthew 22:15–21. Original preacher not named.

> *Reddite ergo quae sunt Caesaris Caesari, et quae sunt Dei Deo (Matt. 22:21).*
>
> *Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.*

The Gospel of this day is from the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. “The Pharisees, angered at hearing the parables with which Jesus exposed their offences, withdrew and took counsel among themselves to find a way of catching him in his words. To this end they sent him their disciples with the Herodians, who were officials of Herod appointed to collect the people’s tributes or taxes. They went, then, to say to him: Master, we know that you are truthful, and that you teach the way of God in truth, and that you do not act out of regard for anyone, for you do not look at the rank of persons. Tell us,

then, what you think of this: Is it lawful for us Jews to pay tribute to Caesar, or not? But Jesus, knowing their malice, and seeing that they were asking him this question to set the people against him if he answered yes, or the Sovereign if he said no, said to them: Why do you tempt me, hypocrites? Show me the coin with which you pay the tax or tribute. And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them: Whose is this image and inscription? Caesar's, they said to him. Then Jesus answered them: Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." This is the Gospel.[1]

2. And in view of what is said in it, with what slanders did the Jews accuse Jesus Christ before his judges, saying: We found this man perverting the people with revolutions and forbidding tribute to be paid to Caesar![2] How could he who commands or urges that the due taxes be given to the king be capable of preventing tribute from being given him? How could he who in deeds and words always showed the greatest respect and submission to the authorities stir up the people, raising them in sedition? How could he who came not to break the law but to fulfil it transgress the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, in which, under the name of parents, we are commanded to respect and obey all who govern us? Indeed, in the words the law lays on us, Honour your father and your mother, we are commanded to honour not only those who begot us and gave us an earthly being, but also the masters we serve, the teachers who instruct us, and above all the kings who command and govern us.[3] And so Jesus Christ, who abrogated none of the precepts God gave his people on Sinai, left us, by himself and through his disciples, as an inheritance, respect, obedience and subordination to those whom God has placed over our heads, showing us in his Scripture that giving to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's must be united in a Christian. The one is a consequence of the other: we can neither serve God without respecting the king, nor duly honour the king without obeying the Lord. Fear God, said St. Peter, and honour the king.[4] See here, my brethren, how the Gospel of this day gives me occasion to set before you a duty that is seldom spoken of, although instruction in it is very necessary, all the more in a period in which we have just seen the rights of our monarchs attacked. What we owe to them will be the subject of my plática. In the first part I will speak of the rights a king has over us; and in the second, of what we owe to the king. I will give in summary what is said at length in his royal catechism by a venerable prelate of America, who in my judgment is the one who has written best on this subject.

First Part

3. God is the true King, says the book of Paralipomenon,[1] to whom it belongs to reign and to command all princes, and in whose hand are strength, power, greatness and supreme dominion. He is an absolute and independent king because, as creator of all things, all are subject to his rule. But although he reigns over us, and will always reign, for his kingdom is eternal and he is the King of ages, he willed that we should have a visible head on earth who, receiving power from him, should be as it were his vicegerent, governing in his name those whom he himself should assign to him. As soon as he formed man in his image and likeness, he commanded him to rule and govern the animals, the fish, the birds and the whole earth,[2] leaving us in this an idea of the superiority he would afterwards give to those he should destine to govern peoples as kings.

4. Every king is a man who is born, lives, and will see death after a few days of majesty and glory; but not every man is a king, nor can this glorious title be given to anyone but him who can say with Solomon: You, Lord, chose me among all the sons of my father to be king of all the people and judge of your sons and of your daughters.[3] He alone is called and is king in whom resides a supreme temporal power, given by God to govern the peoples with equity, peace and justice. And although a man can become king in various ways, such as by adoption, by donation, by purchase, by exchange, by election, by right of war and by hereditary succession (which is the way the crown is acquired in Spain), it is always God who gives the power. Hear, O kings, says the Wise Man, and understand… it is God who has given you power.[4] And the Lord himself says in his Scripture: By me kings reign.[5] The emperor, says Tertullian, has his being as emperor from him from

whom he had his being as man before he was emperor; and from there comes to him the power to command, whence came to him the spirit to live.[6]

5. In no way is the greatness of the dignity of kings more clearly revealed than by considering the honourable names with which Holy Scripture calls them, inspiring in the peoples the veneration and respect they owe to their sacred persons. Through David it calls them gods,[7] not because they really are so, but because in their kingdom they are, as it were, vicars of the divine and absolute Majesty and images of his power and sovereignty. In the First Book of Kings they are called christs or anointed ones,[8] because they are so by right, and may be anointed at their coronation on the shoulder or on the arm. Through St. Paul it calls them higher or supreme powers,[9] to distinguish them from other lower or subordinate ones, which must always depend on the royal power. In the Fourth Book of Kings they are called fathers;[10] and so the ancient peoples of Palestine called their kings Abimelech, which means "my father the king", because, although they are not the fathers of all their subjects by nature, they are so in the charge and duty of caring for them, helping them and defending them. These and other names of honour and pre-eminence make us understand how worthy they are of our respect, and from them are deduced the rights they have over the peoples they rule.

6. When, at the request of the people of Israel, God granted Samuel that they should choose a king to their liking, he said to him: But see that, before you name him, you show them the rights that the king who is to reign over them will enjoy;[11] as if to say: either they are to have no king, or they must know what this king is to be for them, what he may do in his government, and the duties his subjects contract towards him. And what rights does the king enjoy over his peoples? First, he has legislative power. The superiority that a sovereign has in the temporal and civil affairs of his kingdom, according to what we have explained, would be useless and of no value without the power to make wise and just laws. A people without a governor, says the Wise Man in Proverbs, will soon be ruined and cease to be a people;[12] and a governor is not one, nor can he govern well, without laws that bind and restrain the multitude. What would become of our property and our lives if the law of the strongest were the rule of our actions? It is necessary, then, that the sovereign, in whom this power resides, keep the scales of justice by wise laws in that just balance which is the soul of public tranquillity. By me kings reign, God says in his Scripture, and lawgivers decree just things.[13] To think, then, that the laws given by the sovereign are nothing but formulas of pompous words, directed only to request or exhortation, and that they do not bind the subject in conscience to keep them, is an error contrary to the sacred Scriptures. In them God says, speaking of every superior: Obey, not only for fear of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.[14] He who hears you hears me, and he who despises you despises me.[15] He who resists the power resists God.[16] These laws bind from the moment they are promulgated at court or in another place appointed for it; and although the subject may lawfully make humble representation to the superior, and not with arrogance, when the law seems hard, he is not exempt from keeping it pending the sovereign's decision. It is not necessary for the law to bind that the people accept it, because that would be not the king giving the law to the people, but the people giving it to itself.

7. Consequent on this legislative power is the coercive one; that is, the king can make penal laws to restrain evildoers. If all men were just, laws would not be necessary, for the Apostle says[17] that the law was not made for the just, but for the one who is not. If men always acted by reason and by honour, penal laws would not be needed. But since there are so many who, if they act well, do so only for fear of punishment, God has granted kings the power to make laws to restrain by penalty those base souls whom honour and conscience do not restrain. The peace of the country, which is placed in the care of the princes who govern it, cannot tolerate or leave unpunished the crimes that disturb religion, which is our fundamental law; likewise those must not go unpunished who attack public order and the private security of subjects in their persons and in all their interests. The king, then, says St. Paul, is God's minister to avenge, by punishment, those who do evil.[18] Thus prison, exile, the penal garrison, flogging, confiscation and death are penalties justly established against a disobedient, unruly or riotous subject, a thief, a murderer, one unfaithful to religion and to his king. We are

all bound to the penalties fixed by the law, according to my angelic master.[19]

8. God grants kings other powers, the explanation of which would be very lengthy. From what has been said, and from what we will say in the second part, the rights the king enjoys over us will be fully gathered. Let us now see the duties we have as his subjects.

Second Part

9. Every king, to be one and to exercise the offices of his dignity, must have subjects; but they are not all of one class. There are some who, by their merit or state or by special privileges, enjoy certain *fueros* \[legal privileges\] and exemptions, and others who do not. The first are the ecclesiastics of both clergies, secular and regular, who enjoy a particular exemption in their persons, their goods and their lawsuits, according to the sacred canons. This exemption, according to St. Thomas,[1] is very much in accord with natural and divine law. But in whatever way they enjoy them, God himself, nature and reason require that, precisely because they are more privileged, they should also be the most bound, loyal and obedient to their sovereign, keeping well in mind that saying of St. Ambrose: If the emperor asks tribute of me, I will not refuse it him, and I will be the first to pay it.[2] And often the sovereign could use the most suitable means to punish an unruly or traitorous ecclesiastic, guilty of high treason, without breaking his *fueros*. All, then, owe the monarch honour, respect, love, obedience, fidelity, the payment of tributes, and prayers in his needs. I will speak a little of each of these duties.

10. Honour. To honour someone, says my angelic Doctor, is nothing other than to think honourably of him and to judge highly of all his gifts and qualities. There is no quality in sovereigns that does not in justice require this high judgment and honourable regard for their sacred persons: their dignity, their pre-eminence, their majesty and sovereignty demand honour and veneration from us. The subject who thinks basely of his king, even in the secret of his heart, is guilty before the God who says through Ecclesiastes: Do not speak ill of the king in your thought, nor curse him in the secret of your chamber, for the birds of the air will carry your voice.[3] However bad a prince might be (and he could be, for he is a man), his perversity never reaches his dignity, which is always good and worthy of all honour. David did not fail to pay it to Saul, though he was a depraved man; but after all, he was his king. The good subject draws a veil over the king's miseries as a man, and venerates in him what he has of God, which is his dignity.

11. Respect. This adds to honour the outward showing, in words and deeds, of the same judgment and idea one has formed inwardly of the greatness of the king and of his government: speaking well of his actions, not grumbling at his measures or at his ministers, according to that of Exodus: You shall not speak ill of the gods, nor curse the prince of your people.[4] They are images of God; and if we must venerate him outwardly, we must do the same with kings. That is why Tertullian calls this respect paid to them the religion of the second majesty.[5] From this comes the custom, so often practised as we read in Scripture, of subjects adoring the king, kissing his hand, kneeling to speak to him, and even swearing by his health and life in matters of truth and importance. So Uriah swore by the health of David, and Joseph of old by the health of Pharaoh.[6]

12. Love. One must be ignorant of what a king is not to love him with the greatest tenderness. To look on him with aversion or hatred is a crime containing two kinds of malice: against charity, as he is our neighbour, and against piety, as he is our superior and father. This title of father, if there were no other, would be enough for subjects to love their king with that tender and natural love of good children for their parents; for although kings did not give them being or life, they preserve it for them by their providence, which is the same as continually producing them. Upbringing and establishment in life, it is true, the son owes to his natural father; but it is also true that the father first owes them to the king's care, who with the greatest diligence strives to promote the progress of letters, of arms, of commerce, of agriculture and of all the useful arts. That is why Scripture says that the wise king is the support and stability of his people.[7] In return, then, for this love with which the monarch watches over his children, they must respond with a tender and filial

love. And not only must we have this affection engraved on our heart, but it must be shown outwardly, as the heroine Deborah did when she exclaimed: My heart loves the princes of Israel; and may God bless those who risk their lives in proof of the love they have and owe them.[8]

13. Obedience. The only law God imposed on man, as soon as he had formed him with his hands, was obedience, commanding him not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.[9] After this obedience, which we owe to the supreme Being on so many titles, there is none more urged in the divine Scriptures than obedience to sovereigns. In one place it says: Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.[10] No one is exempt from this law. In another it says through the Apostle: Admonish them to obey princes;[11] and in another: Obey your superiors.[12] The king, as has been said, enjoys not only governing power but also legislative power, that is, of making laws for us, issuing decrees and publishing *pragmáticas* \[royal edicts\], all directed to the public good and the happiness of the peoples; and in vain would the king have authority to command us if we had no obligation to obey him. Thus, failing to keep his commands in grave matter is a mortal sin. To disobey, or not to do what the king commands, is the same as not obeying God, in whose name he commands. The proposition "the king commands it" is equivalent to this: "God commands it". And since the king cannot be in every part of his kingdom, he delegates his authority to his ministers and tribunals, so that this proposition, "the minister commands it", is the same as saying "the king commands it". Be subject, said the apostle St. Peter, to the king, as to him who has the supreme power, and to his ministers as sent by him.[13]

14. Fidelity. Keep the commands of the king, and observe the oath of fidelity you have sworn to him. So speaks the Holy Spirit in chapter 8 of Ecclesiastes.[14] We have all solemnly sworn to be faithful to the king and not to rise against his person and rights; and so we must keep this fidelity to him even in our thoughts. Whoever is not faithful to his sovereign even in the secret of his heart is very near not being so in his words, for the tongue says what the heart meditates; and of one who breaks out in expressions of rebellion against his king, it is to be feared that he will soon lay hands on the Lord's anointed. Absalom began to resent his royal father in his heart for the just banishment to which he had condemned him; from there he went on to grumble at his government, telling the people, The king has no one to hear your just cause; from this came his stirring up the tribes with flattering pretexts; and from this finally his attempt on the life of his own father the king, which he would have achieved had not God arranged, for his exemplary punishment, that he be left hanging from an oak.[15] In the same way traitors to their monarch must die. Far from every good subject be opinions contrary to the fidelity due to sovereigns, however much they might not be as good as we should wish. The Church already sets a strong curb on rebellion when she condemns this scandalous proposition: It is lawful, by one's own authority, to kill a tyrant king.

15. Taxes. No one is poorer than the king. All the goods of the monarchy are subject to his authority, no doubt; but it is also certain that he does not enjoy them, except the little his subjects contribute to him. All that comes into his treasuries by means of taxes is to sustain his greatness, and it goes out again to benefit the very people who have paid it, maintaining troops, ministers, tribunals and all that contributes to the good and tranquillity of the people in peace and in war. Tributes, says my angelic Master, are paid to the prince for the general government and care he has of keeping the country in peace and quiet.[16] For a subject to refuse them, then, would be the same as refusing him the subjection that God and nature have placed on his neck. To complain of taxes and delay their payment on pretexts is a crime next door to infidelity and insurrection. The complaints of the Israelites about the taxes Solomon imposed on them were soon followed by the stoning of Adoram, superintendent of the royal tributes, and then, in the time of Rehoboam, by the rebellion of ten tribes.[17] Under the name of taxes may also be understood the subjects' coming to the king in person to enlist under his banners, to form the necessary army and defend the kingdom from enemies within and without. A king is seldom without enemies; and having them, he must live watchful and not lay down his arms, in order to preserve a kingdom, subjects and rights that the Almighty has placed in his charge and protection. For this

he will sometimes be obliged to declare war, and war cannot be made without soldiers. Who are to be soldiers but his subjects themselves? They are bound to serve him with their persons and, if necessary, with their lives. Those drawn by lot or enlisted for military service who feign ailments, run away or seek frivolous pretexts in order to avoid the danger to which this profession continually exposes them, besides failing in the obedience and help they owe their king, also fail in justice, harming the third party who comes in to take the lot that did not fall to him before, or to fill a place to which he had not been called.

16. Lastly, subjects must pray for the king. Very notable is the letter that the Israelites captive in Babylon wrote to their brethren in Jerusalem, as we see in the prophecy of Baruch: Pray to God, they said to them, for the life of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, that his days may be as the days of heaven upon earth, and that we, serving him a long time, may live under his protection and find favour in his eyes.[18] See here a model of the prayer we must make for our sovereigns. And if the Israelites did this for a pagan king who held them enslaved, with how much more reason must Spaniards do it for Catholic kings who always look on them as fathers? St. Paul, writing to Timothy and instructing him on the order he was to observe in prayer, puts in first place the princes who govern us, and says thus: For kings and all who are set in high office or dignity, that God may grant them a tranquil and quiet life in all piety and chastity.[19] So we do every day in a collect of the Mass, in which we ask the Lord to free from all adversity the King, the Queen and all the Royal family, their army and the people entrusted to them. And on Good Friday the Church sings: Let us pray for our Catholic King, that God our Lord may subject to his rule all barbarous nations, and that so our peace may be perpetual.

17. These, my brethren, are the principal duties of a subject towards his king, very much in keeping with the dignity and offices with which God has honoured him: I have said it all in summary. To exhort you to fulfil them would be to wrong subjects so faithful and so loving of their King. May God in his mercy grant that, serving, loving and obeying the king of the earth, we may enjoy the delights of the eternal King of glory. Amen.

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[20] Matt. 22:15–21.

[21] Luke 23:2.

[22] Exod. 20:12.

[23] 1 Pet. 2:17.

[24] Source note: “I Par. xxix” (1 Chron. 29:11–12).

[25] Gen. 1:26–28.

[26] 1 Chron. 28:5 and Wis. 9:7, combined.

[27] Wis. 6:2–4.

[28] Prov. 8:15.

[29] Source note: “Apol. c. 30” (Tertullian, *Apology* 30).

[30] Ps. 81:6 (Vulgate; Ps. 82:6).

[31] 1 Sam. 24:7, 11; 26:9 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[32] Rom. 13:1.

[33] Cf. 2 Kings 5:13; 6:21 (Vulgate 4 Kings).

[34] 1 Sam. 8:9–18 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[35] Prov. 11:14.

[36] Prov. 8:15.

[37] Source note: “Rom. 13” (Rom. 13:5).

[38] Source note: “Luc. x” (Luke 10:16).

[39] Source note: “Rom. xiii” (Rom. 13:2).

[40] Source note: “I Tim. i” (1 Tim. 1:9).

[41] Rom. 13:4.

[42] Source note: “2, 2, q. 62” (St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 62, on restitution).

[1] Source note: “2, 2, q. 104, a. 6” (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 104, a. 6). *privilegium fori*.

[2] Source note: Auxent.” (Ambrose, *Sermo contra Auxentium* 33).

[3] Eccles. 10:20.

[4] Exod. 22:28.

[5] Tertullian, *Apology* 35: *religio secundae majestatis*.

[6] 2 Sam. 11:11 (Vulgate 2 Kings); Gen. 42:15–16.

[7] Wis. 6:26: *rex sapiens stabilimentum populi est*.

[8] Judg. 5:9, freely paraphrased.

[9] Gen. 2:16–17.

[10] Rom. 13:1.

[11] Titus 3:1.

[12] Heb. 13:17.

[13] 1 Pet. 2:13–14.

[14] Eccles. 8:2.

[15] 2 Sam. 14–18 (Vulgate 2 Kings); 15:3–4; 18:9–15.

[16] Source note: “In c. xiii ad Rom.” (St. Thomas, *Commentary on Romans* 13, lect. 1).

[17] 1 Kings 12:4, 16–19 (Vulgate 3 Kings).

[18] Bar. 1:11–12.

[19] 1 Tim. 2:1–2.

51. Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost: On the Honour Children Owe Their Parents

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 51, pp. 152–161. Gospel: Matthew 9:18–26. Original preacher not named.

> *Non est mortua puella, sed dormit (Matt. 9:24).*
>
> *The girl is not dead, but sleeps.*

The Gospel of this day is from the ninth chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. “While Jesus was speaking to the people, behold, a ruler or head of the Synagogue called Jairus came to him and adored him, saying: Lord, my daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand upon her, and she will live. And Jesus, rising, followed him with his disciples. And at the same time a woman who had suffered from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the hem of his garment; for she said within herself: If I only touch his garment, I shall be healed. Jesus then, turning and seeing her, said: Take heart, your faith has made you well. And the woman was healed from that hour. And when Jesus came to the house of the ruler of the Synagogue, and saw the flute players and the crowd of people making a great noise with their cries and wailing, he said to them: Withdraw, for the girl is not dead, that is, so as not to rise until the day of judgment, but must be regarded as asleep, and I will easily bring her back to life. And they laughed at him. But when he had put all the people out, he went into the girl’s room, took her by the hand, and she rose; and the fame of this event spread through all that land.” This is the Gospel.[1]

2. The fourth commandment of the Decalogue served as our guide in the previous plática, in which I set out the rights that kings enjoyed over the subjects the Lord had entrusted to them, and what these must do to give them the honour this commandment requires. I said that in the words Honour your father and your mother are also understood kings, teachers, masters and all lords who have authority over us. But it speaks especially of those who, by having given us being after God, have justly acquired the name of parents, to whom children owe the greatest respect, submission and reverence, all included under this word, honour. Today’s Gospel shows us all this. The eagerness with which the ruler or head of the Synagogue sought the health of his daughter, already dead, the anxiety with which he sought the Saviour of the world for this purpose, his prayers, his humbling of himself and his entreaties, give an idea of the care and solicitude parents must have

for the spiritual and temporal good of their children. And by the submission and obedience with which, at her father's desire, that maiden obeyed the voice of Jesus Christ, rising healed from the bed where she lay, we are shown the submission and respect children owe their parents. Of the parents' duty I have already spoken enough in these pláticas. My aim today is limited to the duty children have to honour their natural parents. Honour your father and your mother, says the fourth commandment, that your life may be long upon the earth.[2] But alas, how many are those who make themselves worthy of the rewards the Lord promised to children who are reverent, submissive and obedient to their parents? How many are there at present who, like the girl in our Gospel, respond to the right intentions of their parents regarding their eternal and even temporal welfare? I am going to set it all out. The duties included in the honour children owe their parents will be the subject of the first part. I will show how few children give their parents the honour our holy law requires of them; this I will set out in the second.

First Part

3. As soon as God had written on the first tablet of the law the first three commandments, which concern the honour of God, asking us to love him with all our heart, to exalt his holy name, and to honour him even outwardly by paying him due worship, he goes on to write on the second tablet seven others, directed to the honour and benefit of our neighbour; for in the love of God and of neighbour the whole law and the Prophets are summed up. The first commandment, then, that concerns the honour of our neighbour is the one we owe our parents, who are our first neighbours, being the nearest to us by the flesh. We are commanded to honour our parents, and the Holy Spirit gives us a powerful reason for it in chapter 7 of Ecclesiasticus, saying: Remember that, but for them, you would not have been born.[1] And the commandment does not say you shall love, you shall fear, you shall revere your parents, because all this and much more is included in this one word, you shall honour. One can love another and not respect him; one can fear him and not love him; one can fear and love him and have no respect for him. But when God says to us, you shall honour, he gives us to understand that this honour does not consist in certain bows and outward compliments, but in a true love that does not stay only in the heart, but shows and reveals itself in works. And so, in saying, Honour your father and your mother, he tells us to love them, obey them, revere them, and help them in their troubles and needs. This is how these words are explained in the catechisms, and this is what I am going to set out briefly.

4. We must love our parents inwardly with a filial love of goodwill. For this we must wish them all that we wish for ourselves, considering that there is no one more worthy of our affection than those who begot us. God alone, who is the author of life, who created us in his image and likeness and infused into us an immortal soul full of most precious gifts, God alone must be the first object of our love, and for him we must leave father and mother when they hinder and prevent us from loving God as we ought. But ah! if we do not love the father whom we see, how shall we love God whom we do not see? It does not seem to me that man needs to be much urged to this love, which even the beasts show to those that begot them.

5. We must honour our parents by obeying their commands. Children, said St. Paul, obey your parents in all things.[2] Scripture shows us several examples of this obedience. Isaac does not answer back to the voice of his father Abraham when he commanded him to prepare to be sacrificed, though the obedience cost him so dearly.[3] The Rechabites abstained all their lives from drinking wine, giving those who pressed them to drink no other reason than that their father had commanded them never to drink it.[4] This obedience, in all that concerns the good of their souls, the ordering of their conduct, and the good government and decorum of the house, binds children under pain of mortal sin when the matter is grave. But if the father or mother should command something contrary to what God commands us in his holy law, the children would have no obligation to obey them, because we must obey God rather than men, as St. Peter said to the Jews.[5] Thus, if the father commands the son to go and steal, to harm his neighbour, not to keep holy the feasts by missing Mass and working without necessity on a feast day, he has no obligation to obey him. If the mother

commands her daughter to dress provocatively, to admit flattering suitors and to respond to their impure desires, she must not listen to her, still less carry out her commands. In a word, says the Father St. Jerome: Honour your father, but on condition that he does not separate you from God; and you must respect the bond of blood only so far as you do not forget your Maker.[6]

6. We must also revere them outwardly with signs of respect and homage. Joseph of old gave a remarkable example of this. Knowing that his father Jacob was coming to Egypt, where he sat on Pharaoh's second throne as president or governor of his kingdom, he went out to meet him in a magnificent chariot; and as his father drew near he got down from it, throws himself at his feet, embraces him tenderly, gives him loving kisses, and, placing him in his chariot, presented him to the people so that they might exalt his name.[7] Solomon paid the same homage to his mother Bathsheba. When she came into the royal audience hall, Solomon comes down from his throne, takes his mother's hand, brings her up to the throne, and, seating her at his right hand, says to her in the presence of all: Ask, my mother, whatever you wish.[8] The deference, respect and reverence of children towards their parents is the most precious crown they can have in the world. This is the return for the priceless favour their parents did them in giving them the being they enjoy, and so disposing them to live eternally; and the clearest proof that a son loves and respects God is, according to Scripture, respect and reverence for his parents. He who fears God, says Ecclesiasticus, honours his parents, and serves as a slave those who begot him.[9]

7. Lastly, we must feed them and help them in their needs according to our means. Ah, my brethren, how much we owe our parents! What labours, what sleepless nights, what anxieties to feed us, clothe us and shoe us while we could do nothing, and to give us an upbringing and education in order to set us in a position that could support us honourably in the future! If the son is to repay this debt, he must, under pain of mortal sin, help, assist and aid his father and mother in their needs, not only in extreme but also in grave ones, whenever they need help. So that if God repeatedly commands us to give alms to the needy, how much more must this precept be understood of parents than of other needy people? This is so true that, whereas the help given to other neighbours is given out of charity, the help owed to parents is owed by a most strict obligation of justice, according to your strength and means. To this God obliges us, and the law of nations, and every law of nature. The most brutish beasts do it. Storks, says St. Ambrose, feed, carry and serve their parents when these are helpless.[10] Lions, their fierceness turned to piety, bring their prey to share it with the old father waiting for it, who, being without claws and strength, was unable to catch it by himself. I do not wish to pile up examples of pagans who, with only the light of nature, did this pious work for those who begot them. That Roman woman who for many days fed with the milk of her breasts her mother, shut up in a dark dungeon, since she could do it in no other way:[11] will she not put to shame those unnatural children who will not help their needy parents? And what excuses can they plead in view of what has been said? Many are pleaded, and I will show them when, in the second part, I make you see how few children fulfil the honour due to those who gave them being.

Second Part

8. We have a king who rules us in temporal matters, governs us and has a certain superiority, being placed over our heads. To him, as I said in the last plática, all honour, respect and reverence are due. But he is at his court, he is absent from our sight. Yet we see an image of him, either a sculpture or painted on canvas, placed under its magnificent canopy, and we pay it the same honour as if it were the monarch himself. And do we pay this honour to the colours of the painting? Certainly not: we pay it to the king it represents; and an affront or insult done to his effigy is only one degree less than one we should do to the very person it represents, and would be terribly punished as a crime of high treason. We, then, my brethren, have an eternal and sovereign King, who is God. He created us, preserves us, gives us the fruits of the earth, redeemed us with his blood when he became man, and has prepared his glory and eternal beatitude for us. But this immortal King of ages

we do not see: he is a most pure spirit. Yet since he wishes us to come to the knowledge of invisible things through visible ones,[1] he has left us in the world visible images of himself, so that in them we may pay him due respect and homage. These images are our parents, whom Plato, though a pagan, already called earthly gods,[2] and whom the Roman catechism calls certain images of the immortal King. These, then, we must honour, and God in them; and lack of reverence and respect for these images of God is a crime committed against the divine Majesty himself, whom they represent. But how many crimes of this kind are committed in the world! I will show them, following the order of the duties I explained earlier, and marvelling at how often they are transgressed.

9. We owe them inward and outward love. There are countless children whose soul seems knit to that of their parents, as the Holy Spirit puts it to express the love Jonathan and David had for each other.[3] But there are many who give us no sign of the love they owe their parents. I do not know whether there is anyone so perverse as to hate from his heart those who gave him being; but it is beyond doubt that there are very many who wish their parents sickness and death. And how many continually curse them, speak to them harshly, and deny them speech, company and courtesy? How many, like the wicked son Ham, uncover the faults of their parents, and make their imperfections, even natural ones, the object of their mockery, derision and ridicule?[4] What can these unnatural men expect but the punishment of a God who avenges their outrages, and the same curses with which he punished Noah's unworthy son? But let us leave this.

10. Obedience is owed to parents; and how is it kept by many children? Ah, only in what flatters their passions; in the rest it is either not carried out, or, if it is, only while the father's or mother's whip is raised to punish. Oh, what an example of this obedience a pagan gave to Christians! The emperor Decius named a son of his as his colleague in dignity and in the empire; but the young man would not accept this dignity, giving no other excuse than this: I fear, my father, that if they make me emperor I shall cease to be a humble and obedient son. As if to say: I would rather stay in the state of obeying my father than have the crown and sceptre. Today we see quite the opposite, for people seek nothing but pretexts to evade this precept. Sir, one says, I already have my position; I am out of parental authority; I am old enough to know how to use my freedom; and am I to submit to my father's commands as if I were a child? Yes, my brethren; none of this excuses you from obeying those who begot you. Are you a priest, a magistrate, a soldier? You do not on that account cease to be a son; and although with regard to your office you are not subject to your parents, yet in all that concerns the good of your soul you must observe their commands, and do what they command regarding the government of their households. Moses gave an example in this, submitting to all that Jethro commanded him, though he was only his father-in-law.[5] Have you left the age of childhood? But you have not left the class of son, nor are you released from keeping their precepts. A father commands his son not to leave the house without his permission; and the son, despising it, joins others of his own stamp and disturbs the town: this is disobedience in grave matter. A daughter hears her mother's command that she occupy herself in the work proper to her sex, that she live retired and flee the enchanting words of those who boast of being her admirers; and she gives herself up to idleness, cares only for the adornment of her body, and desires nothing but to keep company with the other sex: this is the offence of disobedience. These crimes are as frequent as they are dangerous, and their consequences are most fatal. Ah, how many men we have seen die on a scaffold! How many women, after being a shameful stumbling block to the town, have ended with a disastrous death! For all their infamy and misfortune, says St. Ephrem,[6] comes from their having been disobedient to their parents, from wanting to do their own will in everything, and from having found in their depraved will their whole ruin. Take the ray from the sun: what will it be? Shadow. Take the stream from the spring: what will it be? Sand and stones. Take an arm from the body: what will it be? Stench and rottenness. Take, then, a son and separate him from subjection and obedience to his parents, and he is at once a shadow of vices, stones of stumbling and corruption of morals. So St. Peter Chrysologus reasoned.

11. If children owe their parents obedience because of the upbringing they have received, they owe them equally respect and reverence for having received being and life from them. Among the Persians it was an inviolable custom that children never sat in the presence of their parents. The Laconians and Cretans had no other slaves for their service than their own sons and daughters; for if the father gave the son his whole being, the son is his possession. So Eve called her first son Cain, which, according to Genesis, means: I have taken possession, through God, of a man;[7] and divine and human laws doubtless looked to this when, in case of necessity, they allowed children to be sold by their parents: of the Hebrews it is recorded in chapter 21 of Exodus, and of the Romans in law 2 of the Code, *De patribus* etc.[8] Slaves? What, then, must their reverence and respect be in deeds and words, and even in their very thoughts? They are children, but they owe those who gave them being all veneration, as if they were slaves. But alas! little is seen in the world of this submission and reverence. To laugh at and mock what an aged father says, to call him an old wreck, a dotard, a fool, even in front of people, is common enough. That a daughter should despise her mother, call her doddering, ignorant, the old woman, and other nicknames, we see every day; without remembering that all the blessings the Lord pours out in his holy Scripture in favour of reverent children he turns into curses against those who despise and mock their parents. I could present countless passages of the Bible on this point. And what is most intolerable to me is that not a few, born in obscurity and poverty, if by chance or intrigue they have risen to a higher class, are ashamed to have their poor parents appear before them, and some even go so far as to deny them. What infamy! How differently Pope Boniface VIII acted! Being the son of very poor parents, his mother went to visit him when he ascended the throne of St. Peter; and seeing her adorned with finery, he said: This is not my mother; my mother was no lady, she was a very poor little woman; and he withdrew from her sight. She came back to see him in humble and poor dress, and then he recognized her, embraced her tenderly, and showed her the greatest attentions.

12. I am going on too long. Lastly, we must help our parents in their needs. If there were not countless parents in the greatest straits and distress while they have children steeped in abundance, we should not dare to say that there are countless children who shut their eyes so as not to see their parents' miseries, and their ears to the voices of God and of nature. There are children who, while spending immense sums on gambling, on excessive luxury, on worldly amusements and even on the mistresses of their criminal pleasures, do not help their poor, old and ailing father, and ignore the needs of their unhappy widowed and abandoned mother; and these unfortunates groan in a corner without finding (oh, unheard-of cruelty!) relief in the very ones to whom they gave being and life. Look, unnatural children: that man whom you abandon raised you, fed you, taught you; and perhaps the position you enjoy you owe to his watchfulness, his education and his sleepless care. And now that you do not need him, do you so easily forget when you did need him? What will the Lord say to you at the last judgment? What will you answer to the precept he laid on you in the book of Ecclesiasticus, saying: Son, support the old age of your father?[9] Look at that woman whom you refuse to help: she is the one who suffered a thousand discomforts when she carried you in her womb, pains to bring you into the world, sleepless nights while she nursed you, fears and alarms in your childhood. And now do you let her perish who fed you with the blood of her veins? These are the reflections Tobias made to his son to stir him to care for his mother: Remember, my son, he said to him, and consider how much and how dangerously she suffered for you in her womb.[10] It is indispensable, my brethren, to support needy parents; and although in temporal things they may need nothing from their children, perhaps in spiritual things they may need them, and the obligation is no less in this respect. But ah, how few look as they ought at the needs the soul of a father or mother may have, in order to give them help! Who is there who, seeing his parents at fault and breaking the holy law of the Lord, admonishes them with humility and entreaties, as the Holy Spirit commands, to leave the way of iniquity and abandon the offence that stains their grey hairs, as Jonathan did with his father Saul when he was persecuting the innocent David?[11] Very few do it; and if they admonish them, it is in a petulant and haughty tone. Who is there who, seeing his parents dangerously ill, comes to their bedside exhorting them to receive the Sacraments worthily and to dispose justly of their property? Very few;

and if they urge them to make their will, it is only with the depraved aim of enriching themselves at the expense of others concerned. Who is there who, when his parents are dead, faithfully carries out their bequests, and directs to God his vows, sacrifices and prayers to relieve them in the pains they are perhaps suffering in holy purgatory through the fault of the children themselves? Very few; and while they hurry to find out what they have inherited, they blot from their memory the very ones who enriched them. They are like the soldiers of Israel who, going out to the battlefield where in one night an Angel had taken the lives of a hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army and reduced them to dust, gladly took the rich uniforms and jewels of the dead, but shook off the ashes in which the booty was wrapped:[12] a symbol of contempt for the dead, when we embrace the goods they themselves left us, forgetting or despising help for their souls. I conclude, my brethren. You have seen the duties a son has to honour his parents, that is, to love, obey, revere and help those who gave him being. But I beg you, so as not to incur God's curses, thundered out in his divine Scriptures, not to be among the many who are irreverent to their parents. May God, the Father of all, give us his grace to praise him as his children eternally in heaven.

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[13] Matt. 9:18–26.

[14] Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16.

[15] Ecclus. 7:30 (Vulgate; Sirach 7:28).

[16] Col. 3:20.

[17] Gen. 22.

[18] Jer. 35:1–10.

[19] Acts 5:29.

[20] Jerome, Ep. 54, 3 (to Furia), in substance.

[21] Gen. 46:29 and 47:7, freely expanded.

[22] 1 Kings 2:19–20 (Vulgate 3 Kings).

[23] Ecclus. 3:8 (Vulgate). The Vulgate has *quasi dominis serviet his qui se genuerunt* ("will serve them as masters").

[24] Ambrose, *Hexaemeron* V, 16, 53.

[25] Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* V, 4, 7 (the "Roman Charity").

[1] Rom. 1:20.

[2] Plato, *Laws* XI, 930e–931a.

[3] 1 Sam. 18:1 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[4] Gen. 9:20–25.

[5] Exod. 18:13–24.

[6] Source note: "In decad. c. de virt. c. 2" (a work attributed to St. Ephrem; not identified further).

[7] Gen. 4:1.

[8] *De patribus qui filios distraxerunt.*

[9] Ecclus. 3:14 (Vulgate; Sirach 3:12).

[10] Tob. 4:4.

[11] 1 Sam. 19:4–5 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[12] 2 Kings 19:35 (Vulgate 4 Kings); Isa. 37:36.

52. Twenty-fourth and Last Sunday after Pentecost: On the Angels

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 52, pp. 162–171. Gospel: Matthew 24:15–35. Original preacher not named.

> *Mittet Angelos suos (Matt. 24:31).*
>
> *He will send his Angels.*

The Gospel of this day is from the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and it reads thus:

1. After explaining in it the dreadful signs that will precede the day of the last judgment, and after Jesus Christ has given his disciples the warnings they need so as not to be deceived by those who at that time will

preach that Antichrist is the true Messiah, which are omitted because the Gospel is long, it goes on to say: "And then the cross, which is the sign of the Son of Man, will appear in the sky; and at the sight of it all the peoples of the earth, full of terror and dread, will give themselves up to weeping and wailing; and at the same time they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty. And he will send his Angels, who will make the dreadful voice of their trumpets heard, and will gather his elect from the four quarters of the world, from one end of heaven to the other. Learn the use you must make of all these signs from a comparison taken from the fig tree: when its branches are tender and its leaves have come out, you know that summer is near. So in the same way, when you hear all these things, know that the kingdom of God is near, and as it were at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away without being fulfilled." This, in sum, is the Gospel.[1]

2. The whole of it covers the preparations for the last judgment and the terrible signs that are to precede it: a subject I have already treated elsewhere, in explaining another Gospel very like this one,[2] where I point out that on that terrible day we must all appear before the tribunal of Jesus Christ to give an account of our works and receive either the reward, if they were good, or the punishment, if they were bad. It is the holy Angels who, at the sound of their trumpet, will gather all men in the valley of Jehoshaphat, the scene of the judgment;[3] and they will separate the wicked from among the good, so that the supreme Judge, like a shepherd who separates the goats from the sheep, may put some at his right hand and others at his left.[4] Good heavens \[*¡Válgame Dios!*\]! What an august ministry this is that is entrusted to the Angels! How worthy these blessed spirits are of our homage and veneration! There is no doubt of it, for they are ministers of almighty God, destined for the eminent offices of his court. Yet we see these heavenly creatures regarded without respect, and there are even people in the world who do not know what their excellence is and the kindly offices they perform for men. Their existence is a dogma that the first article of the Creed commands us to believe in the words Creator of heaven; for among the countless treasures with which the divine Majesty adorned that court of his elect, he created the Angels for his service. I have therefore thought it fitting to speak today of these most pure creatures, to stir our hearts to venerate them. What are the Angels, and what is their ministry? I will say it in the first part. How must we venerate them? I will say it in the second.

First Part

3. The Angels are intellectual and incorporeal substances that enjoy free will, ministers of God who have obtained their immortality through the spiritual nature that the Lord's grace gave them. They are creatures of greater excellence than men; for although God formed men in his image and likeness, yet David says that he made them a little less than the Angels.[1] They are spirits, and consequently have no body. A spirit, as Jesus Christ told his disciples, has not flesh and bones.[2] And the apostle St. Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, speaking of the temptations with which the devils were persecuting them, said to them: Know, children, that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the princes and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the evil spirits that were formed in heaven.[3] It is true that they are presented to us drawn as youths full of beauty, and usually with wings; but this comes from our weakness and frailty. We, as I have said elsewhere, cannot come to the knowledge of invisible things except by means of visible and bodily things, which are within our reach. For this reason, since the Angels are invisible spirits, but creatures full of the beauty of the grace that was given them at the same time as their nature, they are painted as young men full of beauty and charm, though the comparison falls far short; and they are even painted with wings, so that we may understand that they are ready to carry out promptly the orders the Most High gives them.

4. The number of these heavenly intelligences is countless, and exceeds, in the opinion of the holy Fathers, that of all the material things we see in the world. Thousands of thousands stand in the presence of the Lord,

says Ezekiel, and ten times a hundred thousand thousands are employed in his service.[4] What a multitude! They are made up of three hierarchies, and each of these of three choirs, as appears from various places of Holy Scripture. The first is of Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; the second of Dominations, Virtues and Powers; and the third of Principalities, Archangels and Angels. They are so called according to the ministry and properties they have. How great, then, must their number be? From the last of the nine choirs alone Angels are deputed for all men; and from Adam until Antichrist, an Angel that has had the care of one man will not guard any other.

5. And why did God create the Angels? This is the same as asking what their offices and ministries are. We must distinguish them: some are directed to the homage of their Creator, and others to the benefit of creatures. All of them, though some have a certain superiority over others according to their hierarchy, are equal in fulfilling the offices entrusted to them; and above all they are occupied in contemplating the divine essence, loving it and magnifying it with their hymns and praises. These are the offices they perform towards their God. They love and contemplate him in an inexpressible way, and extol now the unity of the essence, now the trinity of the persons, now the eternal Word made flesh for the redemption of men. All this is recorded in Isaiah, chapter 6, in the Apocalypse, chapter 5, and in other places of the Old and New Testaments. The Seraphim, says Isaiah, cry to one another: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, the heavens and the earth are full of your glory.[5] And St. John says, speaking of his marvellous vision: I saw and heard the voice of many Angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders (and their number was thousands of thousands), saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and blessing.[6] And in another place he heard them say: Holy the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.[7]

6. But as regards men, how worthy of our consideration are the benefits they perform on our behalf! They pray for men and carry our supplications to the Almighty to be granted. This was signified by that mystical ladder Jacob saw, which touched heaven with one end and the earth with the other, on which the Angels went up and down:[8] they go up to bring our prayers to God, and come down with the grant of the graces given us through their intercession. So speaks the Father St. Augustine;[9] and the Church our mother, well assured of this truth, prays to the Lord in this way in the canon of the Mass: Command, Lord, that this offering be borne to the presence of your divine Majesty by the hand of your holy Angel. We see that one said to Tobias: I offered your prayer to God.[10] Let us marvel, my brethren, at the unspeakable mercy of the Lord, who, not content with offering to hear our prayers, appointed ministers of his, of the highest excellence, to present before the throne of his infinite greatness the petitions of unhappy men, and to bring from heaven to this valley of tears, full of miseries, the answer to our supplications.

7. They are also envoys of the supreme God, to communicate to us his mysteries and his dispositions. When he willed to come down into the world and clothe himself in the frailty of our clay; when he came forth alive from the tomb and it was necessary to make known to the disciples the resurrection of their divine Master; when the Apostles had to be consoled for the absence of Jesus through his glorious ascension into heaven, the Angels were ready for these embassies, so useful for men's belief.[11] They are also our protectors. God has so commanded them, as appears from Psalm 90 of David, where he says to us: He has given his Angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.[12] What observations we could make on this angelic guardianship just by reading the Father St. Bernard's exposition of these words![13] What proofs could be piled up here of the reality of this protection! What services did the archangel St. Raphael not render to the young Tobias during his journey? What help did two Angels not give to Lot, bringing him out of Sodom so that he should not be burned in the fire with which the Lord was about to punish its unnatural impurities?[14] What help to Gideon against the Midianites, to the three young men in the furnace of Babylon, to Daniel in the lions' den? What to Joseph in the flight into Egypt, to St. Agnes in the midst of her martyrdom?[15] But this would be endless. God has placed under the shelter and guardianship of the Angels all men, who through

their first father's sin find themselves surrounded by calamities, tribulations and miseries; and in every age the Angels have been their guardianship, their shelter and protection.

8. But at the same time the Lord has appointed them ministers of his vengeance and executors of his justice, to punish the sins of this world and to keep transgressors within the limits of their respective duties. The divine and ecclesiastical writings are full of punishments carried out by God on the transgressors of his law by means of the ministry of the Angels. They love us and desire to be our companions, to enjoy beatitude together with us eternally; but they love God more, and for that very reason they are zealous for his honour when men despise it. The Angels took part in the destruction of the cities of the Pentapolis, given over to the most criminal debauchery. They drowned Pharaoh and his army in the sea, because they were pursuing the people of God. They, for David's sin, killed seventy thousand Israelites by a terrible, exterminating plague.[16] And they stand ready, as soldiers of God's army, to bring down the blow of his justice on the bold who have the criminal daring to attack the rights of their Prince and Lord of lords. This, my brethren, is what the Angels are, and much more which I omit so as not to be too long. And in view of this, what must our veneration and respect be for these heavenly spirits, considering their excellence and the honourable and beneficent offices the Most High has entrusted to them? I am going to suggest it in the

Second Part

9. The Church of Jesus Christ, knowing the dignity and graces with which God has enriched his Angels, who are the favourites and grandees of his court, his friends; knowing too that sometimes, when he himself wished to speak to men and dictate his laws to them, he made use of the heavenly spirits to represent his person, as happened to Moses on Horeb and Sinai;[1] and at the same time grateful for the countless benefits the world has obtained through their mediation, has seen to it that the faithful pay them homage, honour them and thank them for their favours. Leaving aside various decrees on this that she has left us in the sacred Councils, she celebrates their feasts with hymns and processions, venerating the images that represent them, and dedicates churches in their honour. This is very just, and at the same time most useful for men, who in this way earn the continuance of their benefits. But we must not be content with the public signs of respect paid to them throughout Christendom: each one must venerate them as if they had been created for his favour alone. What a discourse the Father St. Bernard makes on this in explaining the Psalms of David! To the Angels, he says, the Christian owes reverence for their presence, devotion for their goodwill, and confidence for their guardianship.[2]

10. We owe them devotion: an affectionate devotion that makes us ready to employ ourselves in their service, considering the kindly offices they perform for our good, benefit and profit. This is what gratitude and acknowledgment require. Who does not love the one who loves him, and is not grateful to his benefactor? Only a brute or a fool. What an example of this gratitude the young Tobias gave us! As soon as he returned home from his journey and told all that the archangel St. Raphael had done for him in the person of a most handsome youth, he said to his parents: What shall we give to this man who has accompanied me all the way? It will be little to share with him half of all our goods. He has taken me and brought me back safe; he freed me from the voracity of a terrible fish; he has made me recover all that Gabelus owed us; he has obtained a holy wife for me; and to you, my father, he has given the sight you had lost. What return will be enough for so many benefits?[3] Oh, how worthy of imitation this conduct is! Christian, what have you done in homage to the Angels, especially to your Guardian Angel? He accompanies you in all your ways from your birth, and will accompany you until he presents your soul to its Creator. By his inspirations he has freed you several times from the infernal dragon that wanted to bury you in the abyss; by his prayers he has obtained for you the grace to be espoused to Christ; he has opened your eyes so that you should not fall into the precipice of sin; in short, he shows you the greatest love and goodwill. Do you repay him with your devotion and gratitude? Think about it in your heart.

11. We owe them confidence for their guardianship. Nothing stirs our hope more than the experience of favours received. How many have we experienced, though invisibly, from the guardianship of our Angels? And even if it were only to see in Scripture and history the countless fruits they have brought to men in every age, both in the old law and in that of grace, being faithful sentinels to guard them from their enemies within and without, this should be enough for us to put all our confidence in these blessed spirits; for since they love all men, and the Lord has ordered them to guard them, they will be no less beneficent to us than they have been in every age. Yes, my God: when I read that they revealed to the shepherds of Bethlehem the mystery of the birth of the Saviour of the world, and guided the kings to adore him,[4] I conceive a firm hope that they will enlighten me and, showing me the truth, will keep me from the dangers my faith may run concerning the truths God has revealed to his Church. When I read that the Angel who guarded the apostle St. Peter, seeing him in chains and already near the scaffold, unfastens his fetters and frees him from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jews,[5] how shall I not hope that the Angel God has given me will free me from the persecutions with which my enemies unjustly afflict me? When I read that the Angel who guarded Rome in the time of Pope St. Gregory, seeing the city afflicted by an extraordinary plague, sheathed the sword of divine justice, and the mortality and epidemic disappeared,[6] how shall I not hope that, through the intercession of my Guardian Angel, the Lord will suspend his rigour in the adversities that prowl about us? Yes, my brethren, the guardianship the Angels have exercised to free their clients from the troubles of the world must inspire us with a sure confidence in all adversities.

12. But above all we must have reverence for them because of their presence. The Angels are present to us, though we cannot see them as they are in themselves. Ah, my brethren, this consideration is enough for us to pay them our homage everywhere and render them our adoration. Abraham and the other ancient Patriarchs, as soon as the Angels sent to communicate the orders of the Most High appeared to them, at once prostrated themselves on the ground and adored them, recognizing the divine Majesty in these ambassadors of his.[7] But the reverence due to these heavenly creatures does not consist only in outward worship and homage. The thought of their presence must serve us for the ordering and amendment of our conduct; and it is by holiness of life that they are most venerated. I keep in mind the Angel who guards me: he watches my steps, sees my actions, penetrates my heart, and my thoughts are not hidden from him. I must, then, think, speak and act in such a way that, being acceptable to God, I do not displease my protector and guardian. Evil words, said St. Jerome, are carried off by the air; but the Angel, who is my companion, gathers them up to present them before the Lord for punishment, just as he presents the virtues for reward.

13. And if the chief dwelling of the Angels on earth is the churches, the houses of God and places of prayer, with what respect must we attend this earthly court of the supreme King, whom his heavenly courtiers are venerating? St. Paul gives us an idea of this when he commands that women should not enter the church with their heads uncovered, out of respect for the Angels who are present there.[8] Especially when we consider, during the celebration of the august sacrifice of the Mass, that the priest is surrounded by Seraphim, who with the most burning love, and with the greatest respect and veneration, adore the Only-begotten of the Father, who is really present in the sacred host,[9] this demands of us the greatest attention, respect and submission, if we do not wish to displease the holy Angels, who give us the example of their humility and watch with sorrow (if they are capable of it) our criminal irreverence.

14. Everywhere we must flee vice and practise virtue, since we have observers, as it were spies, of our actions. The Angels of peace are saddened to see that man, so favoured by his God, turns his back on him and goes over to the side of his enemy; just as, on the contrary, they have the greatest satisfaction when they see men set out on the path of virtue, along which the Guardians themselves lead them. There is great joy, says the Gospel, when a repentant sinner returns to God.[10] The tears of penitents, said the Father St. Bernard, are a delicious liquor for the Angels.

15. The reverence we owe the Angels in the world includes at the same time a certain fear of these ministers of divine vengeance. Venerating God and loving him with all our heart must be accompanied by a holy fear of his judgments, since he has power to punish our iniquities. For this same reason, if we love the Angels, if we believe in their existence, if we acknowledge their dignity, we must also fear them, since they are instruments, as I said in the first part, which divine justice uses to punish transgressors. Present at all we do, they themselves will ask for vengeance from the Lord they love so much and see offended by wretched creatures. Ah, if just for trying to rob the temple of Jerusalem the Angels came down and visibly scourged Heliodorus,[11] what can we expect who, in the church, to which holiness belongs, rob Jesus Christ of the incense, and modesty of its jewels, by stirring up impurity and seeking men's attentions? If, for having turned her face towards Sodom, out of which the Lord had brought her at the cost of wonders, Lot's wife was turned by the Angels accompanying her family into a pillar of salt,[12] what can he expect who, called by God to embrace a state of life, either abandons it or lives in it restlessly, breaking the rules laid on him? If, because King Herod persecuted the disciples of Jesus and sought to have that same Lord crucified on a tree, he is struck by an Angel as he sits on his throne making a show and display of his luxury and sovereignty, and dies eaten by worms,[13] what can he expect who, to justify his wickedness, persecutes just men with taunts, mockery and slanders, so that they may draw back from virtue, while at the same time he is crucifying the Son of God again by his sins, as St. Paul says?[14] Let us fear, then, let us fear, my brethren, spirits who, watching unceasingly over our guardianship and witnessing our actions, are angered with just cause when they see us offend our common Creator. They love their God, and are consequently zealous for his honour; and, clothed with his authority and power, they stand ready to punish our transgressions.

16. I have thought fit to speak to you of this subject today because it is a matter on which people seldom preach. Let us often consider what the Angels are, and that the Lord created these creatures not only to adore him and sing his praises, but also for our benefit and profit. They are spirits who do the will of God; but they are also, says St. Paul, ministering spirits, sent to minister for those of us who are to receive the inheritance of salvation.[15] Let us render them reverence, for they are present; let us be lovingly devoted to them for the goodwill they show us; and let us have confidence in them, responding faithfully to the guardianship with which they protect us, so that, cleansed of all sin, we may be presented by them before the divine tribunal, and afterwards to eternal glory. Amen.

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[16] Matt. 24:15–35, summarized; the verses quoted are 30–35.

[17] Luke 21:25–33.

[18] Joel 3:2, 12 (Vulgate; Joel 4:2, 12).

[19] Matt. 13:49; 25:32–33.

[20] Ps. 8:6 (Vulgate; Ps. 8:5).

[21] Luke 24:39.

[22] Eph. 6:12.

[23] Dan. 7:10.

[24] Isa. 6:3.

[25] Rev. 5:11–12.

[26] Rev. 4:8.

[27] Gen. 28:12.

[28] Source note: "Solil. c. 7" (the medieval *Soliloquia* attributed to Augustine, not his authentic *Soliloquies*).

[29] Tob. 12:12.

[30] Luke 1:26–38; Matt. 28:5–7; Acts 1:10–11.

[31] Ps. 90:11 (Vulgate; Ps. 91:11).

[32] St. Bernard, *Sermons on the Psalm "Qui habitat"*, 11–12.

[33] Tob. 5–11; Gen. 19:15–16.

[34] Judg. 6:11–24; Dan. 3:49; 6:22; Matt. 2:13; the *Acts of St. Agnes* (an angel covered her with a garment of light).

[35] Gen. 19:13; Exod. 14:19–28; 2 Sam. 24:15–16 (Vulgate 2 Kings).

[1] Acts 7:30–38, 53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2.

[2] St. Bernard, *Sermo 12 in Ps. "Qui habitat"*, 6: *reverentiam pro praesentia, devotionem pro benevolentia, fiduciam pro custodia*.

[3] Tob. 12:1–3.

[4] Luke 2:8–14. Matt. 2:2, 9. Matt. 2:12.

[5] Acts 12:6–11.

[6] *Golden Legend*.

[7] Gen. 18:2; 19:1; Josh. 5:14.

[8] 1 Cor. 11:10.

[9] Cf. St. John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood* VI, 4.

[10] Luke 15:7, 10.

[11] 2 Macc. 3:24–28.

[12] Gen. 19:26.

[13] Acts 12:21–23.

[14] Heb. 6:6.

[15] Heb. 1:14.

53. The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: On the Third Article of the Creed: Born of the Virgin Mary

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 53, pp. 172–181. Gospel: Luke 2:1–14. Original preacher not named.

> *Evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum… quia natus est vobis hodie Salvator (Luke 2:10–11).*
>
> *I bring you news of great joy, for today your Saviour is born.*

The Gospel said at the first Mass of this feast is from the second chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. "In those days an edict went out from Caesar Augustus that a census should be made of the inhabitants of the whole earth subject to the Roman empire, which was the greater part of the known world. This first universal census of the empire was made by Cyrinus, who was afterwards governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to the city his family came from. And Joseph also set out from Nazareth, a city of Galilee, to the city of David called Bethlehem, in Judea, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with his spouse Mary, who was with child. And while they were there the time came for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, who was also her only one; and wrapping him in swaddling clothes she laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn, on account of their extreme poverty and the crowd of people who had come to be enrolled. And there were in that region some shepherds keeping watch and guarding their flock by turns in the watches of the night; when behold, an Angel of the Lord appeared to them, and a heavenly light shone round them, which filled them with great terror and dread. But the Angel said to them: Do not be afraid, for I come to bring you news that will fill all the people of Israel with joy: it is that today there is born to you in the city of David the Saviour, who is the Christ whom God has promised you, and the Lord, who is to reign over you and free you from your enemies. And this will be the sign by which you will know him: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger: this child is the Son of David, and the Messiah you have long awaited. And suddenly there was with the Angel a great troop of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace to men of good will, who have an upright heart and are loved by God." This is the Gospel, in which the third article of the Creed is explained, which says: Born of the holy Virgin Mary.

2. Oh, my brethren, what a joyful day this is for all, on which the coming into the world of the Saviour who is to redeem us from the tyranny of the devil is announced to us! This is a day of the greatest delight and rejoicing for the dwellers in heaven, on earth and in the abyss. In heaven: it is so for God himself, because he has fulfilled what he promised sinful man, to send his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to accomplish

his redemption;[1] it is so for the Son himself, for he is now in the world, where the love of men brought him, saying to the heavenly Father with David: Here I am, to offer a sacrifice that will free man from his slavery, when the holocausts of the old law could not do it;[2] it is so for the Holy Spirit, who now sees born the one whose body he himself formed in the womb of a Virgin; it is so for the Angels, for they know that through that Child the seats left empty by the fallen angels are going to be filled with chosen men. On earth this day filled with joy the immaculate Virgin herself, seeing the blessed fruit of her womb, and that she had given him birth without loss of her integrity, like the rod of Jesse that flowered without cultivation;[3] the most glorious Joseph, her spouse, who sees himself made guardian of Mary, the ark of the new covenant, and keeper of Jesus, the living tabernacle of the Lord; and all men of good will, that is, of pure and upright heart, announcing all their happiness through the Lord who is born for the good of all. The abyss too was filled with joy: not for the infernal spirits and the reprobate, for whom there is no redemption, but for the Prophets, Patriarchs and just who were held there; for seeing now fulfilled their oracles and figures that foretold this day, they saw near the one who was to bring them out of darkness to see the light of his glorious eternity. Ah, Catholics! A day of such joy, how should we spend it but in holy considerations that stir up our gratitude for the priceless benefit this mystery shows us? To this the subject of my plática will be reduced. I will give an explanation of the second part of the third article of the Creed: the first part. And I will show the way in which we must celebrate this sacred mystery of the birth of the Lord: the second part.

First Part

3. Born of the holy Virgin Mary. See what we are commanded to believe in this article. After the archangel St. Gabriel announced to most holy Mary the mystery of the Incarnation of the eternal Word, a great Sacrament, as St. Paul calls it,[1] the Son of God, who was a most pure spirit only, was made man in the womb of this Virgin, in which he remained nine months, the time fixed by nature for the perfect formation of children: not because our adorable Jesus needed it, for he was already perfect man at the instant of his formation, but to follow the same course as other men, whose likeness he had taken.[2] He was, then, in the virginal cloister of Mary from the 25th of March, when he was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit, until the 25th of December, when he who came to enlighten every man came forth into the light. The Lord willed this birth to be in Bethlehem: first, because, having to be born a son of David, as the prophecies announced, he willed that the place of his birth should be the city where David was born, which was Bethlehem. Second, because, coming to destroy the pride and arrogance of the world, he willed to be born in a humble and poor town, though the Lord himself ennobled it to the utmost by choosing it as the place of his birth. Thus Bethlehem was the least among the cities of Judah, said the prophet Micah;[3] that is, if one looks at the extent of its walls, the number of its citizens and the fertility of its countryside. That is why he is born there who always chose the weak to confound the strong;[4] but by the very fact that Jesus, the leader of the house of Israel, was born in it, says St. Matthew, Bethlehem is no longer the least:[5] it has the primacy over the most opulent cities of the universe. O Bethlehem alone, sings the Church, greater than the greatest cities, to whom it was granted to give bodily birth to the heavenly Captain of salvation![6] And the Saviour willed to be born not only in a humble town, but in the humblest and poorest place the town had, which was a stable situated just outside one of its gates.

4. This stable, a lodging fitter for beasts than for the very majesty of an eternal God, according to the Father St. Jerome, who lived there for some time, drawn by his devotion, consisted of a grotto or cave hollowed out of a rock, well known to the shepherds and beggars, for it was their refuge in bad weather. There was a manger there, not of clay as some would have it, but of rough wood, which is venerated today in the church of St. Mary Major in Rome.[7] Over this stable, says the same St. Jerome, a famous church was afterwards built, the holy manger itself serving as the altar on which the same victim was offered to the eternal Father in the Eucharist that his Son offered when he deigned to be born for the salvation of men.[8] In this place, then, at a time when the whole world was at peace, because the Prince of peace was coming to visit it, in the depth of

winter and at the most unseasonable hour of twelve midnight, the divine Sun of justice was born, who by his exceeding love for us came to warm our hearts in the love of God, which idolatry, and even the abominations of his people Israel, had made so lukewarm.

5. Jesus was born without his most loving Mother feeling pains or needing any human help; for a painful childbirth did not befit her who had conceived without pleasure of the flesh, only through the overshadowing of the Most High and the Holy Spirit who had come down upon her.[9] And so some painters are to be blamed who, in depicting this mystery, paint most holy Mary lying in her bed: the Mother of purity had no need of it; but, raised up in an ecstasy or sublime contemplation, she found in her arms that Son who was the Lamb come to take away the sins of this world. At once, kneeling on the ground, she adored her God, clothed in her own blood, giving him the most heartfelt thanks, both because he came to ransom the world from the penalties due for Adam's sin, and because he had chosen this humble handmaid of his to be the Virgin of whom Isaiah announced that she would conceive and bear a son.[10] So was fulfilled, says the Church, that Mary adored the very one she had brought forth. This Lady saw that, although her childbirth had been extraordinary, miraculous and above the laws nature has laid down for childbirth, yet her divine Son had taken upon himself atonement for our offences and was beginning to experience, though voluntarily, the needs of all men. And so she wrapped him in some poor swaddling clothes or wraps that she had brought ready to protect from the cold those tender little limbs that already felt it; and holding him to her virginal breasts she fed him with milk with which heaven had filled them; and when this was done, she laid him in the manger.

6. There the immortal King of ages lay between an ass and an ox that were there, so that the prophecies might be fulfilled: that of Isaiah, who said, The ox knew his owner and the ass his master's manger;[11] and that of Habakkuk: Lord, I heard what you made me hear, and I was afraid; I considered your works, and I was amazed: in the midst of two animals he lay in the manger, and shone in heaven.[12] It is a thing worthy of wonder that Christ is almost always found in the midst. In the beginning of his eternity he was already in the midst of the two persons, the Father and the Holy Spirit. Made man, he was between the ass and the ox, which signified the Gentile people and the Hebrew, whom he came to save; between Mary and Joseph, to show that he was the author of virginity and of marriage; then in the temple between Simeon and Anna the prophetess, because he wished to be adored by both sexes; on Tabor between Elijah and Moses, the one dead and the other still alive,[13] because he was the Lord of death and of life; finally, on the tree of the cross between two thieves, because he was the judge who on the last day would be in the midst of the good and the wicked, the former on the right and the latter on the left. Would that we may be among the chosen at the right hand of the Judge who rewards, and that he may dwell in our midst for all eternity!

7. And lastly, why is it said that he was born of the holy Virgin Mary? Because this Lady was always a virgin: before childbirth, in childbirth and after childbirth.[14] Before childbirth, because the conception of the Word was not the work of any man, not even of St. Joseph her spouse, for he too kept his virginity in his espousal; and, as we have already said, the Holy Spirit did it all, as the Prophets had foretold in figures. In childbirth, because Jesus was born without breaking the virginal cloister of Mary, like the sun that passes its rays through glass without breaking it. Isaiah had said both things: Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear.[15] After childbirth, because after she gave birth to the Saviour she had no other son, nor any reason to have one; and so Ezekiel said, speaking of the virginity of Mary: This gate shall be always shut; no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God has entered by it; and it shall be shut even to this same prince.[16]

8. The Lord willed to be born of the Virgin Mary because virginal incorruption makes one like God, and it was fitting that the Mother should be as like as possible to her most holy Son; and just as the first Adam was formed from virgin earth that had not yet suffered either plough or rain, so the second Adam, the restorer of the universe, was to be born of a tender virgin, of a maiden who, as the Church sings, should unite the dignity of mother with the glory of virginity.[17] This is truly that bush that Moses saw burning without being

consumed,[18] representing most holy Mary, in whom fruitfulness burned without consuming the freshness of her integrity. But although he was born of a virgin mother, it was of a virgin espoused to Joseph. This was fitting, say the holy Fathers: both to defend the honour of the Mother of God from the insults she might suffer from those who did not know the mystery, since they would then see not an unmarried woman but a married one conceive; and for the protection of the mother, the safety and shelter of the child, and other ends of divine Providence; and finally to hide the coming of the Messiah from the devil, for he knew that he was to be born of a virgin, but without a revelation could never suppose that this virgin was Mary, since he saw her married to a man. See, briefly explained, the mystery of this day and the third article of the Creed: Born of the holy Virgin Mary.

Second Part

9. If this day is one of joy for all the Christian people, as the Angel said to the shepherds of Bethlehem, with what spirit and devotion must we venerate it? How must we give thanks for so priceless a benefit as Jesus' being born for us? I will say it briefly. Since the time of the holy Apostles the birth of the Saviour into the world has been celebrated with the greatest solemnity,[1] and the Church has continued to do so through all the succession of the ages with the most extraordinary signs of rejoicing: allowing each priest on this day to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass three times, alluding to different aspects of this august mystery, and singing the first at midnight, at the very hour when the beautiful torch of Jacob appeared on earth to dispel the darkness of sin. These ceremonies are all directed to drawing the attention of the faithful, so that, drawing near in spirit to the Lord's manger, they may profess there their respect, their homage, their devotion and their gratitude. On one occasion King Saul needed David, and Jonathan excused his absence, saying to his father: Sir, David is away on a journey; he begged me to let him go to Bethlehem, saying to me: Give me leave to go to my city, where a solemn sacrifice is being celebrated.[2] Every Christian in these days must set aside all business, all entertainment, all amusement, to go to the city of God, which is the holy church, to venerate with a spirit of thankfulness the great sacrifice celebrated in this mystical Bethlehem, where the Son of God, already made man from the virgin birth, as Tertullian said, is offering himself as victim and sacred host for the redemption of all. This is what moved St. Jerome, as I have already said, to retire to the cave of Bethlehem, since it seemed to him that the very manger where the Master of all virtues had lain was the most fitting place to offer God a contrite and humbled heart and to make virtue grow in his soul. St. Paula of Rome did the same in imitation of him, with her daughter Eustochium, founding there a monastery of virgins who with hymns of praise should thank Jesus for the priceless favour he did the world in that sacred place.[3]

10. Drawing near, then, to the sacred little stable \[*portalillo*\], what sentiments must our soul form that will be pleasing to the Lord? Two especially must be the fruits he asks of us to celebrate the feast of his birth worthily: gratitude and love. Let us say something of them very briefly. The fruit of gratitude. Why has the eternal Son of God come to Bethlehem? Ah, my brethren! Divine justice being angered against man by Adam's sin, a dividing wall cut off communication between the offended Majesty and the guilty creature.[4] Man, abandoned by God, was the slave of the devil until a perfect satisfaction should be given to the supreme Being for the offences of the world. There was no man who could do this, because all his merit could not equal the gravity of the offence. Then I will go, the second Person of the ineffable Trinity seemed to say, I will go to redeem him and bring him back to the friendship of his God. I will unite my divine nature with the human, I will be born of a woman, made man; and so on the one hand I will have, as man, a body to bear on myself the whole weight of the rigour and punishment deserved by sin, and on the other, as God, I will give my actions an infinite value capable of satisfying divine vengeance. All this is teaching drawn from St. Paul.[5] Oh, what a priceless favour! What would have become of us if this Child God, remembering his mercy of old, had not visited us from the throne of his Divinity, buying our freedom with the infinite price of his blood? Eternal damnation: there was no other recourse according to the Lord's ordinary providence. How worthy this is of our gratitude! Tobias did not know how to thank the angel Raphael, who in the form of a

handsome youth had accompanied his son on his journey and enriched his house with many benefits. Half his goods seemed to him a very small reward.[6] Then, my brethren, it is little to give God our whole heart, soul, senses and faculties, leaving no part for the world, in return for the benefit he came to do us, disguised in the garb of a sinner, breaking the chains with which the angel of the abyss held us bound.

11. The fruit of love. Love is the best reward of love. This, then, is what is clearly shown in the manger. Love alone made the eternal Word forget, so to speak, the equality he had with God the Father, and clothe himself in the form of a slave, said St. Paul.[7] Those tears he sheds, those cries, that shivering of his delicate little body under the harshness of the season: all is the effect of the love he has for man. They are the voices of our divine Jacob, disguised in the garment of the sinner Esau, asking the eternal Father for the blessing for us.[8] Love made this divine Shepherd come to seek among the rough thickets of the world the little sheep that had strayed, to bring it back to its rightful owner and rejoice at finding it.[9] Love made this perfect jeweller, who knew well the value of our soul, come down into the world and give all he had, honour, good name, rest, blood and life, to ransom it from the hands of the devil, who had usurped it.[10] What does this ask of us? I came to cast fire on the earth, he said in his Scripture, and what do I wish but that it be kindled?[11] But it does not happen so. I will go and see a marvellous sight, said Moses, I will go and see how it is that a bush surrounded by flames is not burned.[12] More marvellous will it be to see that man is not wholly kindled in the love of God, when Jesus Christ is showing him so many flames of divine love in the manger. Every Christian soul must say with the Bride of the Canticles: My beloved is all for me,[13] and so I must be all for my beloved alone. All that Jesus has he gives me; all that I have and am worth must henceforth be for Jesus alone. And if works, according to St. Gregory, are the greatest proofs of love,[14] they will prove mine: the keeping of the commandments he came to give me on earth, the imitation of the heroic virtues he shows and makes plain to me in the manger, this is what will testify to my newborn Saviour that my heart loves him, that every earthly and carnal affection will be far from me, and that I will not let him go out of my soul, as the same Bride said,[15] now that I have the happiness of possessing him, until he brings me into his eternal palace, whose gates he comes to open to me on this day.

12. This is the way we must celebrate the sacred mystery of the birth of the Child God with profit for our souls. Let it never be said of us what St. John said of the Jews: that Jesus came to his own, and his own did not receive him.[16] The Jews did not receive him; and so Mary and Joseph, because of their poverty, found no room in the inn of Bethlehem to give the world there that treasure who came to enrich them; and even on the night he was born only some shepherds venerated him, and those only because they were told by the Angels, although they knew that the time of his coming had arrived and that Bethlehem was the city from which this leader of the house of Israel was to come forth. But it is not strange. They were expecting him, without grounds, with the pomp of a majestic monarch who was to reign over them in a temporal way; and since the signs the Angels gave of him were no more than a stable, a manger, a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, they all despised him, because it seemed to them, as the heretic Marcion said in their name, that those contemptible trappings were not fitting for the Messiah they were expecting. We, then, in whom faith supplies for the defect of the senses, and who, knowing Jesus in the manger as visible in the outward form of his flesh, come to the knowledge of the invisible things that are represented to us here, as the Church sings, let us receive him into our pure heart, and sing with the Angels: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will, who, with the help of the grace this Child brings us, will certainly enter into glory. Amen.

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[17] Rom. 8:3.

[18] Ps. 39:8 (Vulgate; Ps. 40:7), as applied in Heb. 10:5–9.

[19] Isa. 11:1; cf. Num. 17:8.

[20] Eph. 5:32; 1 Tim. 3:16.

[21] Source note: St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 33, a. 1.

[22] Mic. 5:2.

[23] 1 Cor. 1:27.

[24] Matt. 2:6.

[25] Prudentius, *Cathemerinon* 12, the Epiphany hymn *O sola magnarum urbium*.

[26] *Sacra Culla*.

[27] Jerome, Ep. 108 (epitaph of Paula), 10, and Ep. 46.

[28] Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 35, a. 6.

[29] Isa. 7:14.

[30] Isa. 1:3.

[31] *in medio duorum animalium cognosceris*.

[32] 2 Kings 2:11. Deut. 34:5.

[33] Lateran Synod of 649, can. 3.

[34] Isa. 7:14.

[35] Source note: Ezek. 44:2–3.

[36] The hymn *Ave maris stella* and the Office of the Blessed Virgin: *gaudia matris habens cum virginitatis honore* (Sedulius).

[37] Exod. 3:2.

[1] The *Chronograph of 354*.

[2] 1 Sam. 20:28–29 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[3] Jerome, Ep. 108.

[4] Isa. 59:2; Eph. 2:14.

[5] Heb. 2:14–17; 10:5–10.

[6] Tob. 12:1–5.

[7] Phil. 2:6–7.

[8] Gen. 27:15–29.

[9] Luke 15:4–6.

[10] Matt. 13:45–46.

[11] Luke 12:49.

[12] Exod. 3:3.

[13] Song 2:16.

[14] St. Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Evang.* 30, 1: *probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis*.

[15] Song 3:4.

[16] John 1:11.

54. The Circumcision of the Lord: On the Mystery

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 54, pp. 182–189. Gospel: Luke 2:21. Original preacher not named.

> *Postquam consummati sunt dies octo ut circumcideretur puer, vocatum est nomen ejus Jesus (Luke 2:21).*
>
> *When the eight days were completed, the Child was circumcised, and was given the name Jesus.*

The Gospel of this day is from the second chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. “When eight days had passed since the Child’s birth, which was the time appointed for him to be circumcised, he was circumcised, and they called him Jesus, as an Angel had called him before he was conceived in his mother’s womb.” This is the Gospel.

We celebrate two feasts today at one and the same time: the Circumcision of our sacred Redeemer and the octave of his Nativity. In the early Church they were celebrated separately; but for many centuries now the two have been joined, and so the Roman Martyrologies give them. Also, some ancient Missals and classic authors who have written on the antiquities of the Church appointed two Masses for this day, one of the solemnity and the other of the most blessed Virgin Mary; and they give the reason: since our Lady had so great a part in the birth of Christ, and no commemoration of the Virgin could be made in the Office recited

that day, it was judged fitting to make it on the eighth day, when a second Mass was celebrated in her honour. But this custom has been abolished, though in the Office of the Circumcision and octave of the Nativity special mention is made of the most holy Mother of the circumcised Child. In any case this solemnity is worthy of all our respect, veneration and gratitude. First, because in it Jesus Christ appears as Redeemer and Saviour of men: for although on the day of his birth the Angels had already announced to the shepherds that the Saviour had been born for them in Bethlehem, and that they would find him laid in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes, yet on the day of his circumcision he began to show in deed the office he came to exercise in this world, shedding his most precious blood to redeem us and wash us from the stains we had contracted through Adam's fault. This feast also deserves all our attention for the precious name of Jesus, which was given on this day to the Son of God made man; for, as the apostle St. Peter says, no other name more profitable for the whole human race has been given than this, in which we have all been saved.[1] And lastly because, as a new year begins today, it is fitting that, in view of the virtues Jesus Christ shows today in the mystery of his circumcision, such as humility, obedience, conformity with the will of his eternal Father, patience in sufferings, desire for the salvation of men and countless others, we should place ourselves at the feet of this sacred and divine Child, engrave his examples on our heart, and try in the coming year to repair by a Christian life the breaches we have made in the law of the Lord in the past years of our life. This is the way to venerate the mysteries of the law of grace, and to this my plática will look today. In its first part I will show what the mystery is that the Church sets before us today, as the Gospel declares it and its interpreters explain it; and in the second, what Christian considerations we can draw from it so as to celebrate it with fruit. My reasoning will be more moral than panegyric. Give me your attention.

First Part

2. In the old law there were various sacraments, though not with the perfection of those of the law of grace; for by them men outwardly professed faith in the promised Messiah and were stirred to sorrow and to desire for their justification, which they hoped to receive through him. Nevertheless there was a great difference between them and those we now enjoy, instituted by Jesus Christ: a difference our angelic Doctor describes in these words: Some sacraments give grace, and others promise the Saviour. The Sacraments of the New Testament confer salvation; the sacraments of the Old promised the Saviour. The sacraments have been changed, and now we have others easier, more effective, more useful and fewer in number.[1] Those of the old law moved God to grant grace in view of the acts of the recipient; but those of today themselves confer it, by the power communicated to them by their author, who is Jesus Christ.[2]

3. Among those of the old law the chief was circumcision, which consisted in cutting a small piece of flesh from the one who received it, which was not done without great pain for the patient, since it was a most delicate part of the body. This sacrament was the first legal precept that almighty God imposed on the people he had chosen as his own, in preference to all the nations of the earth, to be the keeper of revealed truths. It was commanded under severe penalties to the descendants of Abraham, centuries before the law was given to Moses on Sinai, as appears from chapter 17 of Genesis.[3] It was given, first, to give them a distinguishing mark between themselves and the rest of men; and second, to mark by this ceremony the covenant between God and his people: God offering to be their God, their father and their help, and the people dedicating themselves as his by a most strict observance of his laws. So circumcision was a sacrament by which they were initiated into the service of the Lord, and an obligation to believe and act according to his revelation and his commandments. This sacrament did still more, according to St. Augustine[4] and other eminent theologians: it was the means then instituted by God to remove the stain of original sin in the male line of Abraham's descendants; for in women, and in others who were not of that Patriarch's race, it was remitted by other means, such as some outward act of faith.[5] This ceremony was performed eight days after the child's birth, since he was then thought stronger than on the day of his birth to bear so painful a wound. Circumcision required neither an appointed place nor an appointed minister: the father, the mother or any

other person could perform it, at home or wherever seemed suitable. All this is read, or can be gathered, from chapter 17 of Genesis and chapter 1 of the first book of Maccabees.[6] St. Epiphanius asserts that the Saviour was circumcised in the little stable of Bethlehem itself.[7] For this reason serious authors say that it is a popular error to paint the Lord's circumcision in the temple, performed by the priest of the law. The instrument with which circumcision was done was a sharpened stone, as appears from the books of Exodus and Job;[8] but the most common was of iron or steel.

4. Jesus Christ submitted to this painful ceremony without necessity. I say without necessity: because, on the one hand, there was no need for him to be marked as a son of the people of God who was himself God and his natural Son, anointed with the fullness of grace, and the very Messiah whom they acknowledged in that ceremony as the one sent by the Lord to give men through him the remission of their sins. And on the other hand, being holy, innocent and set apart from sinners,[9] he had no reason to receive a sacrament intended, as I have explained, for the pardon of original sin. Yet he willed to receive this badge of a sinner for many reasons, which the holy Fathers suggest. The first, to bury circumcision with honour, since it was about to be replaced by the most sweet sacrament of Baptism, which of itself, by the power that would be infused into it at its institution, would pardon not only the sin we contracted through our first father, but all those that a man might have committed personally before receiving it. The second, to prove the reality of his body and dispel beforehand the error of many who, in spite of so many proofs, would assert that his body was airy or only apparent. The third, to show that he was not only a son of man, but a son of that man to whom this ceremony had been enjoined, and of whose line it had been promised that the Messiah would be born;[10] for if he had not been circumcised, they would not have held him to be a son of Abraham, from whose branch their Saviour was to be born. The fourth, to give us an early proof of his love, beginning to shed his most precious blood for our healing as soon as he came into the world, and showing that with the same love and zeal he would pour it all out on Calvary. The fifth, to teach us to obey the laws of the Lord, since, without being bound, he submitted to a precept more painful for his body than for other children, inasmuch as he fulfilled it with full knowledge and feeling, with which the others circumcised at that tender age were not endowed. Countless other reasons could be brought forward to confirm this.

5. On the day of the circumcision, says St. Luke, the name of Jesus was given to the Saviour. The Angel who announced to most holy Mary the mystery of the incarnation of the Word had already commanded her, by God's order, to name him so.[11] The Jews used to name their sons at the time of circumcising them, but this was not a precept; for we see in many places of holy Scripture that the ancient Patriarchs used to give some of their sons their names on the day of their birth, which could not be the day of their circumcision, since the law commanded that this should be on the eighth day, so as not to endanger the life of the newborn with so bloody a ceremony. The meaning of the name Jesus was declared by the Angel himself, saying: For he will save his people from their sins.[12] An august name, which the Redeemer earned at the cost of humiliations and sufferings. He humbled himself, says St. Paul, even unto death, death on a cross; therefore God gave him a name which is above every name, for at the name of Jesus every creature in heaven, on earth and in hell bends the knee.[13] This is the mystery we venerate; let us now see how we must do it so as to draw fruit for our souls.

Second Part

6. To this the veneration of the holy mysteries must always be directed, which the Church, our true mother, who desires nothing but the spiritual good of her children, sets before us throughout the year. First, she wants us to be grateful for the countless favours she sets before us in each of the mysteries; and then she wants us to try to imitate and fulfil the mystical meaning they reveal. This, my brethren, is what we must practise today. The mystery put before our eyes today for our veneration demands all our gratitude, seeing that our adorable Saviour had scarcely limbs and blood to sacrifice for our redemption when, in the very manger where he lay,

he already offers himself as a suffering victim for the expiation of our sins, in Tertullian's phrase. This he does in the circumcision of his blessed flesh. But this signified the spiritual circumcision that all his children must practise, which St. Paul calls circumcision of the heart in the spirit.[1] St. Lawrence Justinian gives us to understand it in these words: Truly the eternal Father willed that his only-begotten Son should be circumcised in the flesh, so that you might be circumcised in the spirit.[2] Jesus had no need to receive this sign that marked him as a sinner, for he was innocent; and he was marked with the seal of circumcision only to signify the way in which we must circumcise ourselves spiritually. And what does this spiritual circumcision come to? It is accomplished, says Cardinal Hugh, when the soul circumcises or cuts away all its iniquities.[3] These can be of thought, word or deed. Our heart is surrounded by countless criminal thoughts and desires of avarice, lust, pride and revenge; in short, from the heart come all evil thoughts, thefts, adulteries and every kind of crime, says the Gospel.[4] Therefore we must take it all away from us. We must, says St. Bonaventure, circumcise ourselves of every thought and will to sin, for this is the foreskin of the heart. We must do it also, says the same Saint, with every evil word of impurity, backbiting and calumny, so that we may not be obliged to say with Moses: I am a man of uncircumcised lips.[5] We are also bound, in order to imitate the circumcision of Jesus Christ, to banish from our ears the hardness that prevents us from hearing the words of salvation spoken to us by confessors, preachers and God-fearing and sensible men, to turn us from evil and make us do good. And lastly, to banish from us all actions that contradict the laws of the Lord and of his Church. So that, says the Seraphic Doctor, the first circumcision in us is in the heart; the second in the mouth; the third in the ears; and the fourth in our works.[6]

7. Second, we must consider that if what has been explained above is fitting for us at all times in order to fulfil the mystical meaning of circumcision, it is never more so than on this day, called New Year's Day. Having consecrated it to God by the simplest and most fervent homage of praise and adoration, and having paid him the due tribute of thanksgiving for all the benefits of his plentiful redemption, and in particular for that of having still granted us time to please him, serve him and appease the just anger he has conceived for the sins we committed in the past year, we ought to spend part of this day in tears of compunction and make resolutions to make up for what was lost by the good works of the coming year.

8. The ancient pagans solemnized the first day of the year with licentious games in honour of the god Janus and the goddess Strenia; and from these criminal amusements perhaps arose among Christians the profane excesses practised in many places on this day, as in the days of Carnival, in which they turn these days into days of disorder, profanation and licence. Various councils condemn these disorders;[7] and to prevent them many churches kept this day as a fast and sang the litanies on it, as the Father St. Isidore of Seville relates.[8] The true children of the Lord must regard this day as a day of renewal of spirit, promising God to make up, by its most exact fulfilment, for the breaches his holy law has suffered through our sins. I do not say that in our country there are the enormous crimes that used to be committed among the heathen on this first day of the year; but still there is no lack of some disorders, born as a rule of want of reflection. Today men greet one another, congratulate one another on having begun a new year, and express the wish that they may be many \[*que se multipliquen*\]. If this were done with the right aim, that the future time we desire should be spent in the Lord's service, it would be praiseworthy; but ah, as a rule we take pleasure in a long life only to spend it in pastimes, in amusements, in heaping up riches on which our heart is set, or at most in earthly labours with no relation to eternity. This is an error, says St. Augustine. God created us for himself; and if we desire, either for ourselves or for our friends, to live many more years, it must be in order to respond to the ends for which the Lord created us, which is to enjoy his divine presence eternally, winning this happiness by the upright works of this life.

9. There are others who, seeing that death has not overtaken them in the past years, promise themselves today that they will enjoy the same grace in the years to come. This, my brethren, is the snare in which the enemy of our souls usually catches them, to make them fall over the precipice. Let us consider that the moments of

our life are in God's hands alone, and that, as St. Bernard says, we must consider that the Lord did not put its times and moments in our power, but in his own.[9] Three times Samson freed himself from the cords with which Delilah had bound him to hand him over to the Philistines; trusting in this, he grew careless the fourth time: then he could not get free, because the Lord had taken away his strength, and he fell into the hands of his enemies.[10] Perhaps in past years we were able to escape death with God's help; but he will withdraw it because of our sins, and then a terrible surprise will number us among the dead. This reflection we must engrave on our hearts today, and not misuse the time of life the Lord's mercy grants us. If we who live in the world, says the Father St. Gregory, knew when we were to leave it, we would devote one time to criminal pleasures and another to penance; but it is not so: he who promised us pardon through penance has not promised us tomorrow.[11] We must always consider, says St. Augustine, that the day we begin is already at the door of eternity; and so we shall always try to be like the wise virgins of the Gospel, with the lamps of virtue lit, so that when death comes and the heavenly Bridegroom calls us we may not be rejected by him, nor have the gates of his palace shut against us, but may enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb.[12]

10. See, my brethren, the considerations your spirit must form on this day. This is the holy way in which we must celebrate the mystery of the Circumcision of our adorable Saviour; and to this end the Church sets it before her children, desiring that God be honoured and magnified not only with the lips and outward acts of his worship, but by engraving on our souls the examples he displays to us in his most holy mysteries, and by our corresponding to what they signify for our good and profit. May that God who so early began to suffer in his humanity for our healing give us his help to obtain the fruits of his redemption, which are eternal glory. Amen.

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[13] Acts 4:12.

[14] St. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 73, 2: *sacramenta Novi Testamenti dant salutem, sacramenta Veteris Testamenti promiserunt Salvatorem*.

[15] VII, can. 8. St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 62, a. 6.

[16] Gen. 17:9–14.

[17] Source note: Genes. xiv, tract. 20" (unclear; probably Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* or *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* II, 11).

[18] *Summa theologiae* III, q. 70, a. 4.

[19] Gen. 17:12; 1 Macc. 1:60–61; cf. Exod. 4:25.

[20] St. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30, 29.

[21] Exod. 4:25; Josh. 5:2–3.

[22] Heb. 7:26.

[23] Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16.

[24] Luke 1:31.

[25] Matt. 1:21.

[26] Phil. 2:8–10.

[1] Rom. 2:29; Col. 2:11.

[2] Source note: "Serm. de circunc." (St. Lawrence Justinian, *Sermo in festo Circumcisionis Domini*).

[3] Source note: "Lib. ii Aleg. c. 8" (probably the pseudo-Hugonian *Allegoriae*).

[4] Matt. 15:19.

[5] Exod. 6:12, 30.

[6] St. Bonaventure, *Sermo I de Circumcisione Domini* (the fourfold circumcision).

[7] Council of Tours (567), can. 17; Council of Auxerre (c. 585), can. 1; cf. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 198.

[8] Source note: "Lib. ii offic. c. 40" (St. Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* I, 41, on the fast of 1 January).

[9] Acts 1:7.

[10] Judg. 16:6–21.

[11] St. Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Evang.* 12, 6.

[12] Matt. 25:1–13; Rev. 19:9.

55. The Epiphany of the Lord: On the Mystery

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 55, pp. 190–197. Gospel: Matthew 2:1–12. Original preacher not named.

Cum natus esset Jesus in Bethlehem Juda, ecce Magi venerunt… adorare eum (Matt. 2:1–2).

When Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judah, behold, the Magi came to adore him.

1. The Gospel of this day is from the second chapter of St. Matthew. In it is shown the most holy mystery of the Epiphany, or making known, of Christ our Redeemer. Epiphany, according to St. Augustine, is a Greek word meaning appearance or manifestation.[1] This is a principal feast, solemnized in honour of the appearance by which Jesus Christ made himself known to the Magi of the East, who, shortly after the Lord was born, came to adore him, pay him their respects and offer him their gifts, by virtue of an inspiration of the Almighty. In the Office of this day mention is made of two other manifestations of the Lord. The first, when, having deigned to let himself be baptized by St. John in the river Jordan, a voice from heaven made known the dignity of the one baptized, saying to all who were present these words: This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.[2] The second, at the wedding at Cana, to which Jesus was invited and where he turned the water into the wine they lacked: a miracle which, being the first he worked in Galilee, showed his almighty power and caused even the disciples who were not yet fully assured of his divine mission to believe in him.[3] This feast of the Epiphany, or manifestation of Christ to the Magi, is almost as old as the Church; and although at first it was celebrated together with the Nativity, we already see in the fourth century that Pope Julius I ordered in the Church of the West that they be celebrated separately. This solemnity demands all our veneration and respect, especially because Spain came to the knowledge of the true God not from the Jewish people but from heathendom; and so we must clothe ourselves in joy and gratitude on this day, on which the Lord made himself known to the Gentiles to make them his people. The call of the Magi, their readiness in following their vocation, their journey to Bethlehem, their stay in Jerusalem, their adoration of God made man, and their return to the East are related to us by St. Matthew in his Gospel. Since it is long, and since an effective lesson for us is found in each clause, I have judged it fitting (departing in part from the usual order) to explain the whole of it, making a homily of it and drawing from its words the moral lesson that seems to me fitting.

Single Section

2. Today's Gospel begins in this way: When Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judah, in the days of King Herod, behold, the Magi came from the East to Jerusalem, saying: Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to adore him. The same God who came, as was just, to receive the adoration of all men, at the same time as he invited the Jews to it in the persons of some poor shepherds by the ministry of the Angels, also called the Gentiles by means of an extraordinary star. This appeared in the East; and three magi, that is, three noble sages who had knowledge of the stars, understood that it was not one of the common stars, but that God had newly formed it to give them to understand the mystery he wished to reveal to them, accompanying this outward sign with the inward revelation they felt in their souls. In this we are shown that God is no respecter of persons, that for him there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, as Scripture says,[1] and that he called to himself equally the children of his people by means of the Angels and those who lived in the shadows of heathendom by the ministry of a star. In this way the Lord continually calls us to the knowledge of the truth and to penance for our sins: some by his inward inspirations, which are a light, a star that guides us on the way of truth; and others by means of the preachers of his Gospel, who are the Angels he has appointed in the world to make his orders known to us, and to set before us his threats as well as his promises. Would that we may respond faithfully to his divine calls and practise what he commands us through David, saying: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts![2]

3. So did the Magi of our Gospel. As soon as they saw the star that by divine inspiration called them to acknowledge and adore the newborn King of the Jews, they at once set out on the journey to do what they were ordered: *vidimus et venimus*, we have seen and have come. By this prompt obedience they gave us to understand that no one is exempt from obeying God and responding to his calls. These men, besides being sages, were kings, according to the common opinion of the doctors,[3] and were full of treasures, as their gifts showed; and yet neither their wisdom, nor their nobility, nor their wealth held them back from undertaking a long and painful road, going to a foreign land and crossing mountains in the harshest season of the year; for the voice of God, which commanded them to adore him, made them overcome all the obstacles that could hinder their submission. Ah, how many we see in the world who, because illustrious blood runs in their veins, or because they are puffed up, in St. Paul's phrase,[4] with the wind of human wisdom, or because by their interests they are among those whom the Wise Man calls men of riches,[5] refuse to humble themselves to the simplicity of the Gospel, to respect the Lord's precepts and to render him reverent adoration; on the contrary, they present themselves to us as idols to whom we must pay our homage, perhaps in preference even to the majesty of an eternal God! No, my brethren: the Lord is the God of the wise and the ignorant, of nobles and commoners, of the rich and the poor. He gave men nobility, wisdom and riches; and since all is from God, all owe God their adoration, their respect and their obedience.

4. So did the holy Kings: let us follow them on their journey. They entered the city of Jerusalem asking where the new King of the Jews was, whose birth had been revealed to them in the East. What amazement must have seized the hearts of those holy men when they saw that the people for whom the Messiah was born did not know that he was already on earth! They thought, and with reason, that all Judea would be full of joy, taken up with festivities and plunged in rejoicing, seeing fulfilled the oracles of its Prophets that announced the coming of the Leader of the house of Israel who was to break the chains of their oppression; and the people, immersed in their worldly dealings and given over to their disordered affections, did not yet know that the happy time of their redemption had come! This astonished the Magi; and this would horrify a heathen who, inspired by God to enter the bosom of our Church, came to Spain, which glories in the true worship, and saw that a great part of its inhabitants were ignorant of the mysteries of their religion, and many more despised them and trampled underfoot, by not keeping them, the commandments that religion laid on them in Baptism. Perhaps this man, seeing the indifference of Spaniards towards their religion, when he had thought that in this country it would be respected by all, would judge that what he thought God had revealed to him had been an illusion, and would give up his purpose; just as it would not have been strange if the Magi had gone back to their own land, thinking the inspiration of the star a dream, since they saw that the Jews regarded the birth of their new King as something unheard of.

5. In fact, at the question and inquiry of the Kings, Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. I do not know what this trouble was about. The Jews saw that the Messiah must of necessity have been born: the weeks of Daniel had been fulfilled, and the prophecy of Jacob, and all the others that foretold the time when the Sun of justice was to appear and the clouds were to rain down the Just One;[6] and yet they are astonished that he had already been born? We see this repeated many times. No Christian can be ignorant of the truth of the dogmas and mysteries proposed for our belief: we have more signs, and clearer ones, than those that pointed the Jews to the coming of the Redeemer; and yet there are many children of unbelief among us who either deny or doubt the objects of their faith, and even when they believe them, contradict them by their works, as the Apostle foresaw.[7] Herod, confused by the news the Magi were spreading, gathered all the chief priests and doctors of the people, and asked them where the Christ was to be born. A strange thing, that the chief head of the people did not know the foundations of his religion, when every sabbath the prophecies that marked them so clearly were read in the temple! They told him: In Bethlehem of Judah. For so it is written by the Prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the chief cities of Judah; for from you shall come forth the Leader who shall rule my people Israel.[8] There are no words expressive enough to show the feelings of that King's heart on hearing this explanation from the priests of the law: he

conceives the bitterest sorrow and brings forth the most wicked iniquity, as the Psalmist said.[9] He is in anguish, seeing or supposing that the sceptre of Judea, which he held unlawfully, would soon fall from his hand; for if the true King of the Jews had been born, his own reign must come to an end. He did not know that the kingdom of Jesus Christ was not of this world,[10] and that, as the Church sings, he who gave the heavenly kingdom did not come to take away earthly kingdoms.[11] Even so, he plots an impious means to take the life of the new King, if he had indeed been born in Judea. For this he secretly calls the Magi and inquires of them carefully at what time the star had appeared to them; and sending them to Bethlehem, he said to them: Go and search diligently for the child, and as soon as you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and adore him. Ah, perverse man! He had no intention of adoring him, but of sacrificing him to his fury as soon as he knew where he was, to make the crown sure on his head. The bloodthirsty decree he afterwards hurled against so many innocent children, so that Jesus might die among them had divine Providence not foiled his designs, is witness to this. Hypocrite! You have many imitators among Christians themselves, who under the cloak of virtue and adoration of Jesus Christ harbour a corrupt soul that crucifies him with their crimes. Many a time one goes to church with the appearance of adoring the Lord and offering him a contrite and humbled heart; but under this religious appearance is hidden the depraved intention of insulting him by immodesty, finery and irreverence, and of robbing Jesus Christ of souls redeemed by his blood.

6. Having heard King Herod, the Magi took their road; and as soon as they left Jerusalem they saw again the star that had appeared to them in the East, which went before them until it came to rest over the place where the Child was. From these words of the Gospel it may be gathered that the star was hidden from them as soon as they entered Jerusalem, and no wonder: although with a good intention, they had strayed somewhat from the divine call. They went into a city that was one of pleasures, impiety and dissoluteness; this was not a fit place to find a Child who was born to banish pleasure, establish the purest Religion and plant all the virtues. The light of heaven could not show them in Jerusalem what they were looking for. This often happens to us. Moved by a divine inspiration, we follow the paths of virtue that lead us to happiness; but, forgetful of our vocation, we thrust ourselves into the world and embrace the flattering deceits with which it charms and seduces us; and then that secret light that called us to the adoration of God and the fulfilment of our duties goes out in our soul. And although it seems that we do not forget the Lord, and we gladly hear talk of the means to find him gracious, we do not find him, because God is not in the commotion, as his Scripture says:[12] light is not in darkness, nor justice in iniquity, nor Christ where Belial is.[13] We must seek him where he is found, which is in retirement, in withdrawal from the world, in the church, in prayer and in the exercises of piety.

7. As soon as the Magi saw the star again, they were filled with joy. This is the joy a soul feels when it finds God again, whom it had previously lost through its own fault. The toil and anxiety the holy Kings showed in Jerusalem, inquiring and asking after the object of their long journey, symbolize in a way the restlessness and anguish that agitate a sinful soul which, despising the divine helps, has left the guiding star it should have followed continually. What remorse it feels! What fears! What starts of alarm! The sound of a leaf on a tree, says the Holy Spirit, frightens it,[14] and in everything it expects to find its downfall. But the sovereign Father of lights[15] enlightens it again; it follows the road of virtue it had interrupted, and at once it is filled with delight. The joy a woman receives (this is a comparison from the Gospel) when she finds a precious jewel she had lost[16] is nothing to the joy a sinner receives who, by means of the star of holy inspirations, finds the grace that justifies him and leads him to eternal life. The star that guided the Magi, coming to rest over the little stable of Bethlehem, showed them that there was the Child whom they were to adore as King of the Jews.

8. They went in, then, to the manger, and found there the Child and Mary his mother, and falling down on the ground they adored him. The faith of these wise men cannot be praised enough. They came in search of a

supreme Monarch, a King of Judea, and they see a Child: not in a majestic palace like that of Ahasuerus, not lying on a bed of ivory like Solomon's,[17] not attended by princes and grandees of his kingdom, but lying in a stone manger with no bedding but some straw, wrapped in some poor swaddling clothes, with no retinue but a tender maiden and, as is probable, a venerable old man, and two beasts, according to the tradition founded on the prophecies. And yet none of this is an obstacle to them: their faith goes beyond what appears outwardly, and their understanding of the oracles that announced the Messiah made them recognize in those signs of humiliation all the greatness of the eternal King. What an example this is, my brethren, to quicken our faith and bring our understanding into submission to it, so as to give assent to the mysteries put before us, even though they seem to us disproportionate and incomprehensible!

9. Having prostrated themselves before the Child, the Kings opened the chest of their treasures and offered him incense, gold and myrrh. This was a clear confession that they venerated Jesus Christ according to his whole character. They acknowledged him as God, and so offered him incense, a homage due to the Divinity alone; they confessed him at the same time as man, and so offered him myrrh, a symbol of mortality; and they rendered him gold as King, and as a King to whom all was owed; for he himself says: Mine is the gold, mine the silver.[18] When we, wishing to render the Lord our homage, place ourselves at his feet, we must offer him spiritually gifts like those the Magi offered him materially: prayer, which must be directed to God alone, and which incense symbolizes; that is why the Psalmist said: Let my prayer rise to you, Lord, like incense rising into your presence;[19] mortification of the flesh, figured by the myrrh; for if we have sinned, says St. Augustine, we have no gift more precious and more indispensable than penance; and detachment from everything that is of the world, rendering God the gold of our interests, not setting our heart where our treasure is, but making a lawful use of all the goods he has deigned to grant us.

10. Lastly the Gospel says that the Magi, having received a warning or heavenly command not to return to Herod, went back to their own country by another road. So the Lord foiled the wicked designs of that impious King and secured the happiness of the Saviour's many disciples. In this way they returned peacefully to the East. Burning with the love of that Messiah who had repaid their gifts with countless graces and teachings, they began to preach in their courts the birth of the Redeemer of all men, built churches to him where his name should be blessed and praised, and by heroic virtues came to the honour of being venerated by the Church under the titles of St. Melchior, St. Caspar and St. Balthasar. This happiness we shall enjoy, my brethren, if, converted to God by true penance, we leave entirely the roads of iniquity along which we had walked in the time of our sins. After our conversion we must go by different paths, leave all occasions of sin, and not thrust ourselves where our innocence is in danger. For what can we hope for if we return to the vomit of our old passions?[20] Eternal perdition. What profit would a man draw if, after washing his soul in the waters of a good confession, he plunged again into the mire of his sins? What use would it be if, after being saved from the shipwreck of the abyss on the second plank, which is penance, we were dashed to pieces in the harbour? The holy Fathers give us these figures to show us the absolute need we have to embrace a new life after our conversion if, in imitation of the holy Kings, we wish to find eternal happiness.

11. Here, then, is the Gospel of the day, full of instruction for our souls throughout. May the intercession of these Saints make us faithful imitators of their faithfulness to the divine calling, never losing sight of the inspirations, warnings and lights by which he calls us to the knowledge of the truth, so that we may attain the eternal truth. Amen.

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[21] Cf. St. Augustine, *Sermones* 199–204 (on the Epiphany).

[22] Matt. 3:17.

[23] John 2:1–11.

[1] Rom. 2:11; 10:12; Acts 10:34.

[2] Ps. 94:8 (Vulgate; Ps. 95:7–8); Heb. 3:7–8.

[3] Following Ps. 71:10 (Vulgate; Ps. 72:10) and Isa. 60:3; the Gospel calls them only "magi".

[4] 1 Cor. 8:1.

[5] Ps. 75:6 (Vulgate; Ps. 76:5), *viri divitiarum*; here ascribed to “the Wise Man”.

[6] Dan. 9:24–27; Gen. 49:10; Mal. 4:2 (Vulgate; Mal. 3:20); Isa. 45:8.

[7] Titus 1:16.

[8] Mic. 5:2, as quoted in Matt. 2:6.

[9] Ps. 7:15 (Vulgate; Ps. 7:14).

[10] John 18:36.

[11] The Epiphany hymn *Hostis Herodes impie* (Sedulius): *non eripit mortalia qui regna dat caelestia*.

[12] 1 Kings 19:11 (Vulgate 3 Kings): *non in commotione Dominus*.

[13] 2 Cor. 6:14–15.

[14] Lev. 26:36.

[15] Jas. 1:17.

[16] Luke 15:8–9 (a silver coin, the drachma, in the Gospel).

[17] Esther 1:5–7; 1 Kings 10:18 (Solomon’s ivory throne).

[18] Hag. 2:9 (Vulgate; Hag. 2:8).

[19] Ps. 140:2 (Vulgate; Ps. 141:2).

[20] Prov. 26:11; 2 Pet. 2:22.

56. The Ascension of the Lord into Heaven: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Fifth Article of the Creed: He Ascended into Heaven

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 56, pp. 198–205. Gospel: Mark 16:14–20. Original preacher not named.

> *Dominus Jesus, postquam locutus est eis, assumptus est in caelum, et sedet a dextris Dei (Mark 16:19).*
>
> *The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.*

The Gospel of this day is from the sixteenth chapter of St. Mark, and it reads thus:

1. “At that time, when the eleven disciples of the Saviour were gathered together, he appeared to them, and reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because some of them had not believed those who assured them that he had risen. And he said to them: Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. Those who believe will be known by these signs: in my name they will cast out devils; they will speak new tongues; they will take away serpents; and though they drink poisonous things, these will not harm them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and these will recover. And the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them thus, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God. The disciples went forth and, according to the command of their divine Master, preached everywhere, the Lord working with their preaching and confirming it with miracles.” This is the Gospel.

The time of Jesus Christ’s triumph has come. This most sweet Saviour, who came down from heaven to earth to accomplish our redemption, who was born in a stable, who lived thirty-three years a laborious life full of contradictions, and who finally died on a scaffold as full of pain as of shame, this same one today goes up gloriously to heaven to receive the crown so due to his victory. Who is it that ascends, says St. Paul, but he who first descended into the lower parts of the earth?[1] That is, to be the most cast down and humiliated on earth. He had been the reproach of the world and the scorn of the rabble, until he was cut off (such was the violence, says Isaiah) from the land of the living.[2] It was just that, the work of his beneficent mission finished, he should go up to heaven to be crowned with honour and glory, to confound his enemies. He humbled himself, says the Apostle, even unto death, death on a cross; therefore God exalted him and gave him a name which is above every name, before whose majesty all creatures of heaven, earth and the abyss bow down.[3] An admirable mystery, worthy of all our respect, and contained in the fifth article of the Creed!

A mystery we must contemplate in view of its wonderful circumstances, filling ourselves with joy at what is revealed to us in it. All this I intend to show you today. In my first part I will make you see the circumstances of this admirable mystery; and in the second, the effects it must produce in our souls.

First Part

2. The history of the Saviour's Ascension into heaven we must draw from the Gospel we have just read and from the Epistle of this day, which is from the first chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, written by the evangelist St. Luke. It is all full of circumstances worthy of our wonder. Let us say something of them. After our adorable Saviour rose from the dead, multiplying miracles to the confusion of his enemies, he did not go up to heaven at once, because he wished to give the world repeated testimonies of the truth of his resurrection, since this, according to St. Paul, was the foundation of our faith,[1] as we have said elsewhere. He remained forty days in the world after rising, appearing many times to his apostles and disciples, speaking of the kingdom of God:[2] that is, perfecting the work of their instruction, teaching them how to administer the Sacraments he had instituted for our sanctification, now that those of the old law were abolished, which were weak and beggarly elements[3] without the efficacy he had placed in those of the new. In that time he gave them more particularly the power to baptize, preach and absolve from sins.[4] And he made St. Peter head of his whole Church, so that as his vicar on earth he should be the universal shepherd governing all the faithful, and even the particular pastors to whose care some portion of the flock of the supreme Shepherd should be committed.[5] In short, in those forty days he taught them all they needed for the right discharge of the ministry he entrusted to them. But the time came when he was to return to the Father who had sent him; and to make his ascension more glorious and manifest, he called together all his disciples, so that as eyewitnesses they might afterwards make this most august mystery known to the nations, to confirm them in faith and in the hope of their happiness.

3. He went, then, with them to Mount Olivet, the stage he had chosen for his glorious ascension, just as on the night of the supper it had been the stage of his anguish, sweat and agony. And standing on its summit, surrounded by his children, he charged them not to leave the city of Jerusalem in those days, but to remain in it, awaiting the Holy Spirit, whom he would send them in a short time.[6] This most loving Father gave his last blessing to his dear disciples, and in their sight he was lifted up into heaven.[7] What an assemblage of astonishing marvels was shown then! Jesus Christ goes up to the empyrean by his own power and might, the only one who could do so, because he is God. For although most holy Mary went up body and soul to heaven on the day of her assumption, it was not by her own power, but by that which the Most High communicated to her for this.[8] Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God and equal to the Father in omnipotence, needed no help from another. If even while mortal he walked on the waters as he pleased,[9] and by his own power rose glorious from the tomb, with greater reason he raised himself from the earth to enter into the glory of his Father. A cloud full of splendour and beauty, which served him as a throne, was what hid him from the sight of men. The Angels and the countless multitude of Saints he had brought out of limbo, or the bosom of the Patriarchs, and whom Jesus was taking to his court as a sign of his triumph, accompanied him with songs of praise, with more cheers and acclamations than those that extolled David for defeating Goliath, the reproach of Israel.[10]

4. What marvels, how worthy of wonder! The world had never seen so strange an event: this ascension was something altogether new to it. It had seen, very near the beginning of its creation, an Enoch carried off to paradise, and an Elijah taken up in a chariot of fire to the place where God keeps him, as it were in deposit, until the end of the world.[11] But that a man should of himself be lifted up to heaven, full of majesty and sovereignty, was a thing never seen by men. What more? St. Peter, St. James and St. John had seen their divine Master transfigured on Tabor;[12] but there he only momentarily showed them the glory he enjoyed, and which by a miracle of his omnipotence he kept hidden in his humanity; but now they see Jesus full of

greatness, going up to be gloriously crowned, without his glory being able to suffer any eclipse.

5. He went up, then, to heaven, taking possession as he passed of the heavens, elements, stars and all that is visible; and all paid him respect and homage as the Lord he was of heaven, earth, sea and all they contain. And who can explain the submission, jubilation and joy of the whole heavenly court at his reception? I imagine, my brethren, that what the Psalmist sang in prophecy was fulfilled here. The Angels and blessed of the retinue accompanying Jesus Christ, on reaching the gates of heaven, shut to man since Adam's sin, would cry out with joy to the spirits guarding them: Open your gates, O princes, and lift up the portcullises of those everlasting gates, that the King of glory may enter. Who is this King of glory? they would say; and the others answered: The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle, the Lord of all hosts, he is the King of glory.[13] He who overcame the world and the devil; he who, uniting a human body to the divinity, was able to redeem the captives of hell and give his eternal Father due satisfaction for the offences with which he had been insulted: open the gates to him, that he may be crowned as an unconquered victor.

6. So it is done; and the acclaim he received, both from a Father whose obedience he had fulfilled even unto death and from the whole heavenly court, it is not easy to grasp, still less to explain. For if St. Paul says that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the knowledge of man, what God has prepared for those who fear him,[14] who can show what the Lord would have prepared to reward his Only-begotten, who had done and suffered so much for love of him?

7. Let us leave that holy city to delight in so divine a guest, and turn our eyes to the disciples left on Mount Olivet. Did they perhaps weep at Jesus' absence? Seeing themselves disciples without a master, sheep without a shepherd, sick men without a physician, dead men without life, did they give themselves up to desolation and tears? Certainly not. They were indeed astonished, not taking their eyes off the path by which the Saviour had departed, until some angels clothed in white came down and said to them these consoling words: Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up into heaven, will one day come to judge the world with the same majesty and greatness as you have seen him go up.[15] The Apostles are consoled by these words. And what affections did the mystery they had just beheld produce in their souls? Those the Church asks of us, and which I am going to explain in the

Second Part

8. The intention of our mother the Catholic Church in celebrating the mysteries of Religion and the glory of the Saints is not only to honour with outward ceremonies the greatness of God and of the blessed, but to stir us by their remembrance to form sentiments of virtue that will make us worthy to see face to face the mysteries that faith shows us here only in a dark manner.[1] And what effects must the representation of the august mystery of the Saviour's Ascension produce in us? It seems to me that, in view of the wonderful circumstances that accompanied it, as we have explained, though very briefly, we must adorn our hearts with joy and gladness. Two things must stir up this joy: first, the glory Jesus Christ receives today; and second, the benefit we have received from his ascension into heaven. Let us speak of them separately.

9. Joy at the exaltation the Saviour receives today. One must be unnatural not to take pleasure in seeing free of troubles and full of delights those who for various reasons must be objects of our love. Our adorable Jesus is the most worthy of all our affection: he is our God, our Father, our Master, our Redeemer; he who, as Isaiah said, offered himself willingly to the greatest sufferings[2] only to bring us out of the slavery in which the transgression of our first father had placed us. He became a centre of sorrows for our good: this must move us to compassion, or else we must not love the one who took upon himself all our iniquities. But today we see that a glory incomprehensible to human understanding has taken the place of the reproaches and outrages Jesus Christ received in the world. Who, then, will not be filled with the greatest delight and joy at seeing his loving Lord receive the reward of his shameful labours? The patriarch Jacob, who had wept inconsolably when he was told that a terrible wild beast had devoured his son Joseph, and was shown his

tunic dyed in blood, that same Jacob could not contain his joy when they told him that this son, the object of his tender affections, had been raised to the throne of Egypt; that he was Pharaoh's right eye, without whose authority and command nothing was done in that Prince's vast dominions.[3] Love inspired it all. The Apostles showed this well. Although they longed extraordinarily for the presence of their divine Master, and did what they could to hold him back from his passion and death, because his sufferings wounded their tender and loving hearts, yet on hearing from the mouth of the Angels, and much more by heavenly inspiration, that if Christ was going away it was to take possession of his kingdom, to receive the reward for his infinite merits, and to be crowned not as viceroy of Egypt but as King of kings and Lord of lords, St. Luke says that when the ascension was over they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.[4] For true lovers are not so much filled by their own consolations as by the honours of the beloved. So we see that the Bride of the Canticles, who had wept so much in the streets of Jerusalem seeking her beloved, who symbolized Jesus Christ, so as to see him, hear him and hold him in her arms,[5] did not hesitate to wish her spouse every good, and so said to him: Flee from me, my beloved… go up upon the mountains of spices.[6] These sentiments must inspire virtuous souls who truly love Christ to give up every comfort and earthly good, and to be filled with joy at seeing him go up upon the mountains of spices, which is the summit of his eternal glory.

10. The second motive that must stir us to joy today is our own benefit. Even looking to our true interests, we must rejoice in the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. When the Lord saw the grief the Apostles showed every time he announced his departure to the Father, he said to them to console them: It is expedient for you that I go.[7] This absence was expedient for all of us. Placed at the right hand of his Father, with the scars of the wounds he received in obeying him to ransom the world still open, he makes himself there our advocate, says St. John, to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world.[8] By his entry into glory he left open for us the gates that had been shut to us for more than four thousand years. Unhappy men, if our most loving Redeemer had not broken the bolts that barred the passage to the joy of eternal delights! However just we might have been, our lot would be no happier than that of the ancient and holy Patriarchs, who, rich in merits, could not receive the crown of justice for many centuries, until Jesus opened the gates of the kingdom of heaven. From this moment this unconquered Captain entered, accompanied by the countless just who in the bosom of Abraham had been fed only on the hope of enjoying eternal happiness. By the entry of these captives redeemed by Jesus Christ, with whom his triumph was filled with glory, he gave us to understand that the dividing wall that until then had cut off communication between the offended Majesty and the guilty creature was now broken down,[9] and that the way was now open for all the children of Adam to enjoy the goods of the heavenly Jerusalem that he had promised to those who truly love him. O happy day! O fortunate time! The ascension of Christ was the beginning of our happiness; and if he went up to heaven, it was, as he himself said through St. John, to prepare a place for us where we may reign eternally.[10]

11. But I, my brethren, would be guilty if, while inviting you to rejoice in the Lord's ascension for the advantage that comes to us from it, I did not exhort you not to stray from the road you must necessarily follow to obtain the good the Saviour procures for us today. If he merited heaven for us, he also taught us by word and deed the path that must lead us to it. By his teaching and example he is saying to us with the prophet Zechariah: This is the way, walk in it.[11] There is no other way to eternal happiness than the keeping of the Lord's commandments. Obedience to his Father's orders was what exalted Jesus, and this same obedience is the only thing that will bring us into the dwellings he has prepared for us. Let us follow the footsteps of the Saviour. On going up to heaven, he left his sacred footprints impressed on Mount Olivet, fulfilling what the same Zechariah foretold in chapter 14: On that day his feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives.[12] This miracle still lasted in the time of St. Augustine, and countless people went with reverent affection to venerate the footprints stamped on a stone.[13] And what does this mean? Ah, it seems to me that he left the traces of his feet on the earth so that, being plain to men, they might follow the footsteps of the divine Master by imitating his humility, his purity, his patience and all the virtues that were the road that

raised him to his glorious greatness, and which are those that must crown us. Let us not, then, find ourselves obliged one day to say: We have strayed from the way of truth.[14] In vain did the Lord open the gates of heaven to us if by our iniquities we stray from the one path that must guide us there. God forbid. Let us make use of these reflections to venerate this truly admirable mystery, filling our souls with joy at the exaltation of the Saviour and at how it leads to our true happiness.

12. Yes, my God and loving Father of my soul. Until now I had looked on this most holy mystery with indifference, without considering attentively that in it is revealed the triumph and glory of my Father, my Redeemer and my Spouse. Nor have I reflected that no one looks after our own interests more than a God-Man who, placed in the glory of his Father, intercedes continually for those redeemed at the cost of his blood.[15] None of this did I consider until now. But henceforth, every time this mystery is celebrated, I will rejoice in the Lord, and be filled with joy in my God and my Jesus: both for my own benefit and still more for his exaltation to glory. Amen.

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[16] Eph. 4:9–10.

[17] Isa. 53:8.

[18] Phil. 2:8–10.

[19] 1 Cor. 15:14.

[20] Acts 1:3.

[21] Gal. 4:9.

[22] Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15–16; John 20:22–23.

[23] John 21:15–17; cf. Matt. 16:18–19.

[24] Acts 1:4–5, 12.

[25] Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:9.

[26] St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 57, a. 3.

[27] Matt. 14:25.

[28] 1 Sam. 18:6–7 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[29] Gen. 5:24; Sir. 44:16; 2 Kings 2:11; Mal. 4:5.

[30] Matt. 17:1–8.

[31] Ps. 23:7–10 (Vulgate; Ps. 24:7–10).

[32] 1 Cor. 2:9; Isa. 64:4.

[33] Acts 1:10–11, paraphrased (“to judge the world”).

[1] 1 Cor. 13:12.

[2] Isa. 53:7: *oblatus est quia ipse voluit* (Vulgate).

[3] Gen. 37:31–35; 41:40–44; 45:26–28.

[4] Luke 24:52.

[5] Song 3:1–4; 5:6–8.

[6] Song 8:14.

[7] John 16:7.

[8] 1 John 2:1–2; cf. Heb. 7:25; 9:24.

[9] Eph. 2:14; cf. Plática 53, ¶10.

[10] John 14:2–3.

[11] Isa. 30:21.

[12] Zech. 14:4.

[13] *Chronicle* II, 33.

[14] Wis. 5:6.

[15] Heb. 7:25.

57. Corpus Christi: On the Institution of This Feast, and the Ways to Celebrate It

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 57, pp. 206–214. Gospel: John 6:56–59. Original preacher not named.

Caro mea vere est cibus, et sanguis meus vere est potus (John 6:56).

My flesh is true food, and my blood is truly drink.

The Gospel of this day is from the sixth chapter of St. John, and it reads thus:

1. "At that time Jesus said to the crowds of the Jews: My flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live by the Father, so he who eats me will live by me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as your fathers, who ate the manna in the desert and died: he who eats of this bread will live for ever." This is the Gospel.

2. The whole Office and Mass of this day, great in every respect, is ordered to showing us the institution of the august and venerable sacrament of the Eucharist, worthy of all our respect, homage, gratitude and devotion. In it is presented to us the Son of God himself, made man for love of us, who even after his wonderful ascension into heaven willed to remain with us until the consummation of the ages, to feed our souls with his most precious flesh and blood.[1] The apostle St. Paul shows us in the Epistle of this day the manner of the institution of this Sacrament. It took place on the night of the paschal supper. Seeing that he must go to the Father, and yet his love not allowing him to be absent from men, in whom he had his delight,[2] he joined his wisdom to his power and instituted a Sacrament in which, remaining in the world, though invisibly, he would let us enjoy his divine presence. For this he took bread and a cup into his hands; he blessed, consecrated and distributed them to his disciples, saying: Take and eat, all of you, for this is my body; take and drink, all of you, for this is my blood. As often as you do this, do it in memory of me.[3] By these last words, according to the mind of the Fathers, he ordained the Apostles priests, giving them power to ordain others, so that the priesthood, and consequently the power to make this wonderful Sacrament in the name of Jesus Christ, should be perpetual.[4] This institution, my brethren, is what we venerate today with so much pomp, majesty and rejoicing, and indeed through the whole octave by the Church's ordering. But ah, with what spirit must we consider today the greatness of this feast, and respond with fruit in our souls to the holy ends our mother the Church had in view when she commands us to celebrate it! I will show it to you briefly, so that you may not profane with worldly rejoicing what must be so holily venerated. In the first part I will show the institution of this feast of Corpus; and in the second the way in which it must be celebrated.

First Part

3. Although our most lovable Saviour, from the moment he consecrated the world by his merciful coming, gave it clear signs of the deep affection he bore his friends, as St. John said, at the end of his life he gave the greatest proofs of his love.[1] On the very night when the wicked Judas had agreed with the Pharisees to sell his divine Master; at the very time when the Jews were seeking the most shameful devices to destroy Jesus and sacrifice him to their fury and their butchery: then it was that he gave them the proof of the greatest love, instituting a Sacrament that was the most precious gift, because in it he gave us himself. On Holy Thursday, the day of its institution, the Church makes only a slight remembrance of it, being occupied the whole triduum of Holy Week in recalling the death of her Spouse and venerating such sacred mysteries with mournful ceremonies. Therefore, although the venerable mystery of the Eucharist is adored every day of the year, especially in the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, it was fitting that on a particular day the institution of this venerable Sacrament should be celebrated with pomp, majesty and rejoicing, to show Jesus Christ our gratitude for the unspeakable benefit he did us in instituting it.

4. Yet many centuries passed without this being done, bearing out the prophecy that said: Truly God is a hidden God.[2] No doubt the Lord wished to quicken the longing of his devout ones and in some way make them merit by their desires the happiness of seeing this solemnity instituted in the Church. In every age there was no lack of just souls who, extraordinarily zealous for the honour of their immaculate Spouse and most loving towards the august mystery of the altar, longed for all the faithful to venerate with special signs of joy and gratitude the institution of the Sacrament of Sacraments, as some Fathers call the Eucharist; but they saw their desires frustrated, and it seemed that Jesus Christ did not hear when his brides called him. But the fullness of time came when the true Joseph willed to make himself known to his brothers,[3] and by means of some revelations he moved the Prelates of the Church to the longed-for institution. As a rule God uses weak instruments to achieve great undertakings, and sometimes withholds from the knowledge and notice of the wise what he reveals to little ones, as the Gospel says.[4] So it happened in the matter we are speaking of. It was the thirteenth century of the Christian era, and there lived in Germany a virgin as adorned with virtues as she was loving towards Christ in the Sacrament, named Juliana of Mont-Cornillon. Raised up in continual ecstasies, she was shown wonderful mysteries; and once there appeared to her a moon full of splendour and beauty, but a small part of its round body was missing. She told this vision to her confessor, a learned and virtuous man, who consulted the most excellent theologians about it; none could guess its meaning. The continual entreaties of Blessed Juliana and her fervent prayers to God to reveal the riddle to her moved the Father of mercies to declare to her that the moon that had appeared to her was the Catholic Church, lit by the splendour of the feasts she celebrated, but not yet with the fullness of her light, because one was missing, that of the most holy body of the Son of God in the Sacrament. This holy virgin was filled with joy; but she was not one of those chattering souls who readily make known the favours they receive from heaven. Struck by the words St. Raphael said to Tobias, It is good to hide and keep close the sacrament, or secret, of the king, for twenty years she did not dare to reveal this vision. But seeing that the same Archangel added, It is honourable to reveal the works of God,[5] she opened herself to her confessor; and here you see the first impulse towards the institution of this feast.

5. It would take too long to relate the whole series of events from that point until the Church instituted it, still less the opposition by which the devil tried to prevent a feast from which so much honour would come to our adorable Saviour and such great advantages to the faithful. Suffice it to say that it was first celebrated in the diocese of Liège by decree of one of its councils, a thing that Pope Urban IV extolled from the pulpit of its cathedral when he was still only a cardinal and apostolic legate. This Prelate rose to the see of St. Peter; and both from what he had learned of the revelation to Blessed Juliana, who was by then dead, and from the repeated entreaties of the diocese of Liège, and from his own deep devotion to the venerable Sacrament of the altar, he resolved to institute this solemnity to be celebrated throughout the Christian world. He was moved to this also by various miraculous events that took place in Christendom at that time. The first at Daroca in Aragon in the year 1239, where a corporal was found in a wonderful way, on which six particles or hosts soaked in blood were imprinted, as they are venerated today, the Lord multiplying his wonders for those who adore them in a spirit of devotion. The second at Bolsena in Italy, where, because of the doubt of a priest who after consecrating wavered over the real presence of Jesus Christ in the host, a copious fountain of blood burst from it, which bathed the corporals, the altar cloths, the altar and even the floor in the presence of the bystanders: a miracle that moved Pope Urban himself, accompanied by many cardinals, to translate those sacred relics to the city of Orvieto. The third, what happened at that time in Paris, where a child full of beauty appeared in a consecrated host: a miracle that brought countless people to the church to see that wonder, and was the reason why all extolled the faith of the king St. Louis, who would not go to see it, saying: Let him who does not believe that Jesus Christ is in the host go and see it; I have no need to do so, for I believe it more than if I saw it with my own eyes. All this, and much more the divine inspiration, was what moved Pope Urban IV to issue a bull in the year 1263, in which, gathering up all that can be said about the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist, he commands that in all the churches of Christendom the feast of the institution

of this mystery be celebrated on the Thursday immediately after the octave of the Holy Spirit, with devotion, joy and signs of gratitude for so singular a benefit, granting many indulgences to those who devoutly attend the divine offices on that day and through its octave.[6]

6. It seems that this event was already foretold in Psalm 117 of David, where he says: Appoint a solemn day with thick boughs, even to the horn of the altar:[7] words that Albert the Great, St. John Chrysostom and other doctors explain in this way: Institute a feast day on which people and clergy gather, and the churches are adorned with boughs, flowers and hangings (all of which is meant by the word "thick boughs", *condensis*), so that your devotion may reach not only to the Sacrament of the altar but to its horn, that is, to knowing its full force and efficacy. *Constituite diem solemnem in condensis, usque ad cornu altaris*. The reason the Pontiff had for appointing the Thursday after the octave of Pentecost was, as he himself says, that it was on a Thursday that Christ instituted this Sacrament; and because on that day the Church is occupied in reconciling penitents, consecrating the holy oils, performing the washing of the feet and contemplating the passion and death of the Lord, it was fitting to appoint another Thursday for a special remembrance of the eternal memorial, which is the sacrament of the Eucharist. Therefore, after celebrating the Resurrection of the Lord, his Ascension into heaven and the Coming of the Holy Spirit, the first Thursday was dedicated to it. I have wished to show you very simply the institution of this feast and the circumstances that led to it, because as a rule it is not known, even by those who are moved by a spirit of devotion. Let us now see how we must celebrate it.

Second Part

7. I would not wish what the prophet Jeremiah laments in his Lamentations to be true of the Christian people: The ways of Sion mourn, because there is none who comes to the solemnity.[1] It seems that in Spain especially there is no room for this complaint. On this day a great crowd gathers in the church; it is adorned with all the elegance possible in each town; the prescribed procession is made with pomp and majesty; the streets are decked with boughs; illuminations are lit; carpets and tapestries are spread; the fronts of the houses are beautified; and every one of the townsfolk dresses in his best. That is to say, the ways of Sion have no reason to mourn, for many come to celebrate the feast of Corpus and carry out all that the Church has ordered for the greater worship of the most holy Sacrament. But ah, my brethren! Perhaps the Church, which is the true Sion, will have reason to weep, because all that we seem to do on this day in honour of the Lord is mere outward show that does not move heart and spirit, nor do we do it for the high ends and moral reasons she had in instituting this feast. And what are these? I will tell you some, so that you may conform yourselves to her intentions, and this feast may be useful to your souls and an act of homage to our divine Saviour.

8. First, the Church celebrates this feast with outward pomp that shows joy, with processions, candles, altars, banners and incense, so that by this outward display and worship, which shows our inward worship, we may adore Christ as our Lord, as King, as our Emmanuel, which means Lord who is with us; for he is so in that tabernacle really and truly, and will be so according to his infallible promise until the consummation of the ages. What submission and surrender we must, then, show him as the supreme King of glory, before whose presence the loftiest Seraphim bow down! With what joy must we cry out at the sight of our God's presence: There is no nation so great that has its gods so near to it as our God is with us![2] And just as on Palm Sunday the children of the Hebrews, seeing the Messiah present, cried out, Glory to the Lord in the highest; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,[3] so we, seeing him on the litter in our processions, must carry in our hands not only branches like the people of Jerusalem but lighted torches, proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the brightness of eternal light,[4] the God who, made man, came to redeem us from the devil, and dwells in the Sacrament to feed us with his flesh. This must move us to cry out: Behold, the bread of Angels has become the food of men:[5] let us bow down and venerate so great a Sacrament.

9. The Church also wishes, by the solemn ceremonies of this day, to show the triumph the Saviour won by his passion and painful death over the treacherous Jews who caused it, conquering the world and hell on the tree of the cross. That is why we carry the monstrance in procession, which is the throne on which the Son of God is placed, proclaiming him victorious over all his enemies. With what joy must we today make up for the outrages done to our Redeemer in Jerusalem, making certain stations with the most holy Sacrament in memory of those cruel ones he suffered when they led him from the garden to the tribunals, and that procession, as impious as it was sorrowful, from Pilate's house to Calvary, to sacrifice him on a shameful gibbet! Let us clothe ourselves today, my brethren, in holy zeal to make amends to Jesus Christ for the insults he suffered, and with all the feeling of our hearts let us say to him those words of the Apocalypse: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.[6]

10. The Church likewise intends to confound the pride of the heretics, who in every age, and even in these last times, have vomited from their infernal mouths so many blasphemies against this venerable and august Sacrament, denying the real presence in it of the Only-begotten of the Father, outraging the sacred consecrated hosts, and even raising the standard of rebellion and impiety in the very church where Christ dwells in the Sacrament, who is the banner of peace, religion and loyalty. Our submission in the presence of these altars, our humility before the Almighty, our songs of praise, our devotion and composure will be able to confound the most impious enemy of this most holy mystery. It was enough to carry the ark of the Old Testament in procession round Jericho for its walls to be thrown down and the city delivered up, unable to resist the sound of the trumpets or horns of the priests who carried it.[7] And our voices of *Tantum ergo*, *Sacris solemniis*, *O salutaris hostia* and others that are sung as that ark of the new covenant is carried through the streets and squares will beat down the fury of the heretics who attack the truth of this Sacrament. And if your spiritual signs of joy do not convince them, and they mock them and revile you as weak fools, God will stand up for his honour and your cause. King David went leaping amid music in the procession that brought the ancient ark to the city of the king; his wife Michal, a symbol of heresy, mocked the King's simplicity and took him for a madman, seeing him dance among his people; but the Lord punished Michal with perpetual barrenness and upheld the reputation of that religious Prince.[8] So, my brethren, nothing must hinder our joy, our rejoicing and our signs of delight today, in spite of the gibes of the enemies of true worship. You are my God, we must say to him, and I will confess you as such in the presence of your enemies; you are my God, and I will exalt you with these signs.[9]

11. Lastly, the Church, foreseeing that there are countless Christians who insult this divine Sacrament by unworthy communions, intends today that her true children should make amends to their God for these outrages, which we may call domestic. Indeed, there are many who boast of being within the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem and, as children of this holy house, come to share in the goods of the sanctuary by partaking of the body of Jesus Christ. Their faith tells them that whoever eats the flesh of the Lord and drinks his blood unworthily becomes guilty of the body of the Saviour;[10] they know that by communicating in mortal sin they eat their own judgment and condemnation; they know full well that it is not material bread they eat, but the very Son of God made man, who is to judge them on the last day. Yet they come to the communion rail with a conscience stained with sin, and in cold blood renew the sacrilege of Judas, selling their divine Master and handing him over to the devils who possess their hearts. This, which is not hidden from the Church, this mother and spouse of the sovereign Spirit wishes the true children of Jesus to make amends for today, praising him in the offices and processions and resolving in their souls on the most worthy reception of the Eucharist. Yes, my God, we must exclaim at the sight of that monstrance, I will try to make up for this injury from the profaners of your mystery, proving my soul as your Apostle commands, and seeing whether it is like a pure vessel, without the dross of sin, so that it may be a worthy throne for your majesty and greatness. I will not come to eat of this sacred bread or drink of this august cup until I am quite sure of the purity of my soul. I know that this most sweet Sacrament, as it is life for the good, is death for the

wicked. I want it to be life for me; and so, far from communicating unworthily, I will try henceforth to approach the throne of God without any stain. With these sentiments, put into practice, we take just vengeance on those who partake of this Sacrament unworthily. Let us not abuse your patience further.

12. Let us conclude. From all that has been said you will already have been able to see that this feast is not instituted for outward acts of virtue alone. To be content only with adorning the church, with illuminations, with boughs, with processions, with tapestries, without all this being directed by the interior, which must be the soul of these outward things, would be a feast of pagans. If we celebrate this one because the Church commands it, let us respond to the high ends she set herself in instituting it. Let us adore in spirit the Lord, who is Christ the King, who to those who eat him gives the fatness of the soul, as the Office of this day sings.[11] With our devout processions let us make amends to Jesus for the outrages he received from the Jews, the blasphemies of the heretics and the insults of bad Christians. A procession in honour of the Sacrament held in the city of Augsburg in the time of Charles V, in which this pious Emperor and the grandees of his court carried the canopy and lighted torches, was enough for the conversion of countless unbelievers and the repentance of the profaners of this mystery. Would that we may draw the same fruit from these festive signs we make to the supreme King of glory! Amen.

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[12] Matt. 28:20.

[13] Prov. 8:31.

[14] 1 Cor. 11:23–25; Matt. 26:26–28; Luke 22:19–20.

[15] XXII, can. 2.

[16] John 13:1.

[17] Isa. 45:15.

[18] Gen. 45:1–4.

[19] Matt. 11:25.

[20] Tob. 12:7.

[21] The bull *Transiturus de hoc mundo*, 11 August 1264 (the source says 1263).

[22] Ps. 117:27 (Vulgate; Ps. 118:27).

[1] Lam. 1:4.

[2] Deut. 4:7, the Magnificat antiphon of First Vespers of Corpus Christi (*O quam suavis*).

[3] Matt. 21:9.

[4] Wis. 7:26.

[5] Ps. 77:25 (Vulgate; Ps. 78:25); the hymn *Sacris solemniis*: *panis angelicus fit panis hominum*.

[6] Rev. 5:12.

[7] Josh. 6:1–20.

[8] 2 Sam. 6:12–23 (Vulgate 2 Kings).

[9] Ps. 117:28 (Vulgate; Ps. 118:28).

[10] 1 Cor. 11:27–29.

[11] The Introit of Corpus Christi, *Cibavit eos ex adipe frumenti* (Ps. 80:17).

58. The Most Pure Conception of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Dogma of Original Sin

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 58, pp. 215–223. Gospel: Luke 11:27–28. Original preacher not named.

> *Non pro te, sed pro omnibus haec lex constituta est (Esther 15:13).*
>
> *Not for you, but for all others has this law been made.*

The Gospel of this day is from the eleventh chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. “At that time, as Jesus was speaking to the crowds, a certain woman raised her voice and said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts you sucked. But he said to her: Far more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” This is the Gospel.

2. A woman filled with the spirit of God, in some words she said in praise of Jesus, reveals to us the mystery of the most pure Conception of Mary; and the answer the Saviour gave her is the most effective teaching for our conduct if we wish to be eternally happy. While the divine Master was teaching the people, confirming his teaching with the most beneficent miracles, the Pharisees insult him, mock him and rebuke him, attributing to the spirit of Beelzebub the wonder he had just worked in casting Satan out of the body of a possessed man. On this occasion a woman, who according to some authors was called Marcella, a servant of Martha and Mary, cried out in the presence of the slanderers: Happy and blessed is the womb that carried you within it, and the breasts that fed you. These words, which honoured Jesus Christ, since she called his mother happy for having given him birth, expressed the highest praise of most holy Mary, according to the interpretation of some Fathers; for they proclaimed the singular privilege of this Lady in being exempt from the contagion of original sin, which, according to the faith, we have all contracted. She tells the Saviour that Mary is happy, fortunate and blessed for having been his mother; and therefore happy and blessed because she was never unhappy, nor fell by sin into the Lord’s disfavour. So the Church seems to understand these words, applying them in the Gospel of this feast to extol the spotless conception of this sovereign Queen. But Jesus Christ answers this praise by saying: Still more happy are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice. As if he said, St. Augustine explains: You call my mother happy; she is so indeed, but not for having begotten me bodily, but because she always kept the word of God.[1] There is no happiness, my brethren, nor blessedness, except for those who, in imitation of most holy Mary, put into practice all that faith and the word of God announce to us. Nor would Mary have been blessed otherwise, however much she conceived, gave birth to the Son of God and fed him at her breast. See all that I intend to persuade you of today. Most holy Mary was happy in being free from the stain of original sin that we all contract, because she was to be the mother of God: the first part. We shall be happy, though not exempt from original sin, if we imitate most holy Mary in virtue: the second part.

First Part

3. Adam was created with the greatest grace and beauty; it could not be otherwise, for he was an image of God himself. This being so, God placed him over all the works of his hands and made him a little less than the Angels, says David.[1] He adorned him with original justice, which consisted in a certain subordination of the lower parts to the higher, of these to reason, and of reason to God. What a happy state! In it man would not have offended the Lord, nor would he have experienced sufferings, nor even death; for when it pleased God, he would have transferred him from this temporal life to the eternal. These goods the Lord entailed on the first father, so that all his descendants might enjoy them, on condition that he should not eat of a certain tree that was in paradise, so as to test his obedience in this way; but threatening him that if he broke this precept, neither he nor his successors would enjoy the happiness he had promised them. Adam sinned, then, by breaking that law on whose keeping God had secured to him the possession of so many goods; and, unfaithful to his Creator, he became guilty of high treason against the divine majesty, was cast out of paradise, his inner self was thrown into disorder, the passions lost their bridle, and he was condemned to be the unhappy captive of the devil. We all sinned in him; our wills were in Adam as in the head of his race; and at the moment he became a criminal, we ceased to be innocent.[2] Heirs of his guilt, we are heirs also of his punishment; we are all born, then, with this shameful blemish. At the instant our soul, created with all the prerogatives befitting an image of the Divinity, enters the leper’s house, that is, as soon as our soul is united to the body, this mass contaminated by the first sin, we contract original sin and are children of curse and death; disinherited from heaven, we deserve only hell.

4. But the Father of mercies, just as he pardoned Adam his sin as a personal one, because of his sorrow and repentance, willed to give his descendants a remedy by which this sin might be washed away from us. He sent redemption to his people, causing his only-begotten Son to become man and institute a Sacrament, that of Baptism, enriched with the price of his blood, so that through it the sin committed in Adam might be forgiven, although certain painful remnants should remain as a punishment, such as the rebellion of the passions and so many bodily and spiritual sufferings as we experience.[3] This God-Man, the restorer of our loss, was to be conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary; and this happy woman was to give him birth under the law, because such was his will, to redeem us who were fighting under the law and banner of the devil, says St. Paul. And did this woman, who was to be the mother of her God, also contract this stain of original sin? No, my brethren. She was the sacred and peerless Esther, raised above the peoples, whom the sword of the common destruction did not reach. It is a truth of faith that all the children of Adam have contracted his sin; St. Paul says so expressly;[4] but Mary is the exception to this general rule. To this Lady we can say what King Ahasuerus said to the heroine of Susa: This law has not been made for you, but for all: you must not include yourself among the generality of all other men.[5] It seems to me that most holy Mary could say those words of David: All sinners will fall, at the moment of their conception, into the net the devil has prepared for them; but I alone will pass through it without stumbling into its snares: *cadent in retiaculo ejus peccatores, singulariter sum ego donec transeam.*[6] I am singular in everything, and the dignity of mother of the Most High, which I come to exercise in the world, is enough for me not to be contaminated with the common curse.

5. Indeed, most holy Mary is happy and blessed at the instant of her being, because she was to carry her Creator in her womb and feed him with her milk. Mother of Jesus Christ! How could she have been for a single moment in his disfavour? She was the house that divine wisdom built for itself;[7] but a house, says David, whose foundations the Most High laid. Her foundations were, says the same David in prophecy, upon the holy mountains of grace.[8] She is the altar on which the Only-begotten of God was to offer the sacrifice and victim in which the Father is well pleased; and was she to have been impure for a single instant? Certainly not. Most holy Mary was the loom on which was woven the cloth that was to cover the shameful nakedness the first sin brought on us; necessarily she had to be free from its filth. Most holy Mary was the merchant's ship that brought us from heaven the sacred bread of life;[9] but a ship that, like Noah's, was not to suffer the universal shipwreck of sin. Most holy Mary was the cloud that was to rain down the Just One;[10] but a cloud that, like the one Elijah saw from Carmel,[11] would come up out of the bitter sea of iniquity without any taste of its salt waters. In short, the Mother of Jesus Christ had, for that very reason, to be conceived without stain. God gave us to understand it quite clearly at the beginning of the world. At the same time as he announced to Adam the punishment for his sin, he promised him a Redeemer, through whom it would be forgiven him and all men. For, turning to the infernal serpent that had led our first parents into sin so as to ruin us all, he said to it: I will put enmity between you and the woman, between her seed and yours; she shall crush your head.[12] As if to say: You have made the woman fall, making her eat the apple by deceit and commit a sin that would bring death to all her race; but in the very thing in which you have sinned you will be punished. A woman will come who will crush your head, for she will not be infected with original sin; and her offspring, who will be the Son of God, will blot out your crime with his blood.

6. What more? As Mother of God, most holy Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. And would this sovereign Spirit have given her his hand as spouse if for the least moment she had given hers to the devil? What fellowship can there be between light and darkness, what partnership between justice and iniquity, what accord between Belial and Jesus Christ?[13] What man adorned with the highest nobility would accept in marriage a woman who came from the most infamous family? Then with how much more reason would the Spirit of the Lord have refused to admit Mary to his spiritual bridal chamber if she had been, even for a single moment, debased by a sin that degraded the whole human race? It is not credible.

7. As Mother of God, our Lady was to be the temple of the most holy Trinity: the Father was to rest in her as in his firstborn daughter before every pure creature; the Son as in a mother, the object of all his delights; and the Holy Spirit as in a spouse whom he overshadowed so that she might conceive the Messiah. And was it right that the temple of the Divinity should have been profaned at the very instant of its being? With what fine workmanship and precious materials Solomon took care to build the temple of Jerusalem! He wished even its foundations to be of clean stones and exquisite jasper. And who was to be placed in that sanctuary, which became one of the wonders of the world for its greatness, beauty and wealth? Ah, it was to serve as a throne for the ark of the covenant, which held the tables of the law, the rod of Aaron and a little manna, all memorials of ancient wonders.[14] Most holy Mary was the temple where the ark of the new covenant was to be laid up, in which was the lawgiver Jesus Christ, the omnipotence of God that the rod symbolized, and the sacred manna of the unction and sweetness of the Holy Spirit. How full of precious virtues must its structure have shone! How holy and most pure must its foundation have been, which was the Conception of this maiden! And if the Saviour punished so severely the profaners of the old temple,[15] which was only a figure of our Queen, how would he have allowed the reality, his most holy Mother, ever to have been profaned by slavery to the devil?

8. Lastly, our Lady, as mother of the Redeemer, was to be mediatrix between God and sinners. Already in the temple she presented her Only-begotten, offering him as a victim for the salvation of men; and on Calvary, as a spiritual priestess, she cooperated in the sacrifice of Jesus to cleanse the world from the stain of original sin. How, then, could she intercede for the pardon of this sin if she too had committed it? He is no good mediator between a judge and a criminal who is implicated in the very crime whose pardon he seeks. The prudent Abigail became a worthy intercessor for her husband Nabal, that David might pardon his offence, because she had had no part in offending the King.[16] Mary in no way offended the Lord in the sin of the first father; and so it was necessary for her to be co-redemptress of the human race. In a word, it was fitting that most holy Mary, who was to be Mother of God, should be exempt from the original sin that contaminated us all; and so we can say to the Lord, like the woman of our Gospel: Blessed is the womb that bore you. This was my first part.

Second Part

9. I do not wish, my brethren, that a feast that the Church celebrates today with such joy, especially in our Spain, where most holy Mary is venerated as principal patroness in the mystery of her most pure Conception, should be barren in your souls. I promised for my second part to treat of the answer the Saviour gave to that holy woman who extolled his Mother, saying, Blessed is the womb that bore you; it was to tell her: More blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Explaining these words, the Venerable Bede says: Mary was blessed and happy for having begotten the incarnate Word bodily; but much more because she remained for ever loving and keeping the same Word. And not only she received this happiness, the same author continues, but all those will be blessed who, conceiving the same Word, or word of God, spiritually through the hearing of faith, strive to keep it.[1] Here is a lesson for our conduct. Holy Scripture, the catechism and sermons: this is the word, or Word, of God, written or spoken. We are blessed or happy if we conceive this Word by hearing or reading what faith teaches us as the word of God; but this is little: we must retain this word, preserve it, keep it and fulfil it. This is what makes us happiest, and this is the greatest happiness of most holy Mary, according to the expression of the Gospel.

10. All the Saints who extol our Lady's privilege of having been most pure in her Conception attest that grace was infused into her in it, with all the virtues; but she made herself worthy of God's acceptance by developing in the course of her life those same virtues that were communicated to her at her first instant, rising from then on from virtue to virtue until she reached a degree of perfection that no one under heaven equals, as the Church sings, following the common judgment of the Fathers. We have not the happiness of

having been conceived in grace; that is true. Yet in the sacrament of Baptism the first sin, contracted through Adam, was forgiven us; but there still remain, as I have said, certain remnants in our soul that can make us personally guilty if we do not strive by means of virtue to subject our passions to reason, and reason to God. The word of God that we conceive by faith gives us rules for this; but we must put them into practice, as our Lady did, whose imitation will make us happy and blessed.

11. Let us set before us some of the virtues of our Lady that made her happier than her divine motherhood, so that by imitating them we may be eternally happy. What obedience to all that God commanded her! At three years old she yields to the will of the Lord, who through her holy parents shut her up in the temple, separating her from her parents' affection. At fifteen she accepts an espousal that was contrary to her purpose of virginity, only because she knew by revelation that God so ordered it. Forty days after giving birth she presents herself for the purification the law prescribed, although by its very terms she seems to have been exempt from it.[2] She flees into Egypt… But Mary was, like her most holy Son, obedient even unto death. What an example for us! We have precepts God laid on us in the Decalogue; others imposed on us by the Church, our true mother and lawgiver; others prescribed by our state of life. There is no help for it, my brethren: we have no other road to blessedness, as Jesus Christ said, than obedience to these commands and their fulfilment. If you would enter into life, keep the commandments.[3] Some perhaps will be distasteful to us; but the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and only those who do violence to themselves bear it away.[4] What humility was that of most holy Mary! Among countless other acts of this virtue, the one she performed at the annunciation of the Word is very remarkable. At the very moment when they were raising her to the most sublime dignity, lifting her above all women to the dignity of mother of her own Creator, that is to say, to be august Empress of heaven and earth, far from being filled with vanity and pride, she bows down, humbles herself, and acknowledges herself a poor little handmaid of the Lord.[5] This invites us most effectively to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God,[6] and, however adorned we see ourselves with nobility, riches, honours and distinction, to regard ourselves as a little dust and ashes,[7] and not to glory in whatever good is found in us; for we have nothing that we have not received from the Lord, and nothing is our own, as St. Paul said.[8] What purity was that of this most holy Queen! An Angel announced to her that she would conceive and give birth to the Son of God; but Mary is troubled, she trembles, and with the firm resolve to remain a virgin she exclaims: How shall this be?[9] So that, says the Father St. Gregory, on hearing of conception and childbirth she arms herself with her virginity, and would gladly give up the dignity promised her rather than cease to be a virgin; only when she knew that this conception would not be by the agency of man but by the power of the Most High did she yield and give her consent. A confusion for many women of our time, who with the greatest ease yield their bodies to carnal filth, not to obtain the crown of a kingdom by their wantonness, but for a momentary pleasure or a contemptible gift. This is not the way to enter that heavenly Jerusalem that has nothing defiled.[10] What patience was Mary's! Her heart was tossed by the bitterest waves of tribulation and anguish, but she always remained calm and serene. Look at the course of the life, passion and death of her most loving Son, and you will see our Lady always resigned to the divine will, bearing with unalterable patience the sorrows and anguish with which the sword pierced her that the holy old man Simeon had foretold to her.[11] We have no lack of troubles: poverty, opposition, enemies, the deaths of those dear to us, illnesses, and who knows how many more? All are fruits of sin, remnants (as I have said) left to us from the first transgression. Self-love resists them, no doubt; but we hear the word of God, which tells us that no one can be predestined or happy who does not become conformed in suffering and patience to the image of Jesus Christ.[12] He has left us no other path to blessedness than the cross. This most holy Mary followed, and this we must follow in imitation of her. What prayer!… But it would be endless if I were to list them all. These were what made Mary our Lady happy, more than her having been Mother of her God; and these are what, as the Saviour said, must give us eternal happiness. This was my subject. This is the great mystery we celebrate today, worthy of our veneration because it is glorious for most holy Mary and useful for our souls. I have shown you, in the words of the woman of our Gospel, that it was

fitting for our Lady to be immaculate in her conception so as to be the worthy Mother of God; and in the answer the divine Master gave her, that to be blessed it is indispensable that, like our Lady, we should not be content to conceive the divine word by faith, but should put it into practice by the perfect observance of his laws. We have sinned much, and the multitude of our sins will have barred our entrance into our eternal happiness; but to make amends to God, justly angered by our sins, I judge the pious and reverent veneration of this mystery a fitting means. The way the woman of today's Gospel devised to disarm the Saviour of the anger he had conceived at the blasphemies of the Pharisees was to praise and extol the most pure Conception of his Mother. How sweet to the ears of the just Judge is the praise and veneration of her who bore him in her womb! To make amends to him, then, for our offences, let us praise today the condescension he showed in making most holy Mary holy and immaculate; but let us try to imitate the virtues of this Lady, which is the means set before us in the Gospel to obtain blessedness. Amen.

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[13] Source note: "Tract. x in Joan." The sense is found in St. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate* 3, and *Tract. in Ioannem* 10, 3.

[14] Ps. 8:6 (Vulgate; Ps. 8:5).

[15] Rom. 5:12.

[16] V, can. 5 (concupiscence remains).

[17] Rom. 5:12, 19.

[18] Esther 15:13 (Vulgate; Greek Esther D 13–14).

[19] Ps. 140:10 (Vulgate; Ps. 141:10), applied by accommodation.

[20] Prov. 9:1.

[21] Ps. 86:1, 5 (Vulgate; Ps. 87:1, 5).

[22] Prov. 31:14.

[23] Isa. 45:8.

[24] 1 Kings 18:44 (Vulgate 3 Kings), a figure dear to the Carmelite tradition.

[25] Gen. 3:15.

[26] 2 Cor. 6:14–15.

[27] 1 Kings 5–8; Heb. 9:4.

[28] John 2:14–17.

[29] 1 Sam. 25:18–35 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[1] Source note: "Lib. iv, cap. iv in Luc." (Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium expositio* IV, on Luke 11:27–28).

[2] Luke 2:22; Lev. 12:2–8.

[3] Matt. 19:17.

[4] Matt. 11:12.

[5] Luke 1:38.

[6] 1 Pet. 5:6.

[7] Gen. 18:27.

[8] 1 Cor. 4:7.

[9] Luke 1:29, 34.

[10] Rev. 21:27.

[11] Luke 2:35.

[12] Rom. 8:29.

59. The Nativity of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and the Blessings That Came into the World with Our Lady's Birth

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 59, pp. 224–233. Gospel: Matthew 1:1–16. Original preacher not named.

Nativitas tua, Dei Genitrix Virgo, gaudium annuntiavit universo mundo.

Your birth, Virgin Mother of God, has announced joy to the whole world.

(The Church in her Office.)

1. The Gospel of this day is from the first chapter of St. Matthew. In it the sacred Evangelist relates the temporal genealogy of the Son of God, beginning with Abraham and ending with Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. And to trace the origin of Jesus, does he give the forebears of Joseph, who had no part in his generation, and not those of Mary, who alone gave her blood to form his body? The Father St. John Damascene resolves this difficulty in a treatise he wrote on the subject,[1] whose teaching I have thought fit to explain, though not in all his words. St. Matthew, he says, gives the temporal genealogy of Jesus through St. Joseph and not through Mary, because among the Hebrews, whose practice Scripture follows, it was not customary to set down in writing the descent of women, but only that of men. But since most holy Mary was the wife of St. Joseph, Mary's genealogy is included in his; for the law provided that no man of one tribe should take as wife a woman of another tribe.[2] This being so, these two most holy spouses were of one tribe, one origin and one family, that of David; and consequently both were descended from the most illustrious family of Israel, the most pleasing to God for its holiness and heroism, since from it the Redeemer of the world was to be born. The Gospel says nothing of the birth of Mary, the mother of Jesus; but tradition teaches that Joachim, a most holy man of the line just mentioned, married the virtuous Anne. And just as the Anna of old, the mother of Samuel, being barren, obtained by her virtue and prayers to give birth to that great Prophet,[3] so this Anne, aged and barren, by her holiness and entreaties obtained the daughter most precious in God's eyes, Mary, the Lady of the whole universe. So far the Damascene; and with this the difficulty we raised is resolved. Is the birth of Mary, then, a point of faith? It is not of faith if we require the Gospel to say it in express words; but it is so by legitimate consequence. It is an object of our belief that Mary existed, that she was the wife of Joseph, and that Jesus Christ was born of her; and since no one after Adam has existed without being born, it is therefore one of the articles of our faith that most holy Mary was born. This, then, is the sacred mystery we celebrate today, worthy to be venerated with the greatest rejoicing and joy: both for the gifts and privileges with which this most singular creature came into the world adorned, which I will show in my first part; and for the countless blessings that came to men from her birth, which I will speak of in the second.

First Part

2. We may call the day of our birth into the world unhappy, for at that moment we open our eyes to calamity, toil, sin and hell. The consideration of this made holy Job exclaim: Perish the day on which I was born, and the night in which it was said, A man is born into the world; let that night be solitary, and in no way worthy of praise.[1] That is why the Church does not as a rule celebrate the day of men's birth, however just they may have been in their lives, but rather that of their precious deaths, which she calls their birthday, *natalis*: because the beginning of life is the beginning of tribulation, and above all because we are born in sin, children of curse and death; while death, for the just, is the beginning of an immortal life of joy and of the crown. But the same Church makes some exception to this general rule, because there is an exception also in the manner of being born. She celebrates the temporal birth of Jesus Christ, because he was born holy and innocent, being holiness and innocence itself: so his birth was holy, and the Angels, the shepherds and the kings of the East celebrated it; they foresaw in it the good of the whole human race. She celebrates also that of his precursor St. John the Baptist, because, although he was conceived in sin, he was born without it: God sanctified him in his mother's womb, where he already gave signs of being a prophet and more than a prophet, for he made the woman who carried him in her womb prophesy;[2] and so all the hill people of Judea celebrated his birth with rejoicing and acclamations. And lastly she celebrates with the greatest pomp and solemnity the nativity of most holy Mary.

3. What, then, was special about this birth that can give rise to our joy? Ah, the world has many reasons to rejoice at this feast. The first, which makes up the first part of this plática, is to see how most holy Mary was born, adorned with the most excellent gifts of heaven. Nature and grace united their finest gifts to enrich this

child when she came into the light. She was born with brilliant natural endowments, with unspeakable gifts of grace, and destined for the most eminent offices. Let us speak of them separately.

4. Natural endowments. As was said at the beginning, there ran in her veins blood passed down through the greatest men the world had known. Read the genealogy of this Lady written by St. Matthew, and you will see that her forebears were the Patriarchs of the old law, who by their figures represented the high mysteries our Religion venerates; the holy Prophets, who, inspired by the Lord, announced his promises and his punishments; the most illustrious kings and captains, who raised the banners of the true God on the ruins of his enemies. In short, an Abraham, who by his faith and obedience merited that in him all generations should be blessed; a David, a man after God's own heart;[3] a Solomon, who built for the God of his fathers the most sumptuous temple, which amazed the whole world: see here the ancestors of the newborn child. What nobility! When it goes together with virtue, nobility is a precious gift of the Lord; and he who willed to be born poor and full of hardships did not wish to lack the prerogative of nobility, and so was born of a mother full of gentility and noble blood. Bodily beauty also shone in our Lady's precious body. How precious this gift is when outward beauty is a shell holding a virtuous soul! Oh, how beautiful you are, my beloved, the Lord said to Mary in the person of the Bride of the Canticles, how wholly beautiful you are; there is no ugliness or any stain in you… Arise, my friend, my dove, my beautiful one, and come with me. Your eyes…[4] There is no charm or beauty that the book of the Canticles does not attribute to Mary in prophecy. The historians never tire of extolling the natural graces of our Queen; and St. Dionysius the Areopagite, who travelled countless leagues to see her, confesses that on beholding her beauty, had he not known that she was a human creature, he would have adored her as God. Wisdom: to the extraordinary talent nature gave her, together with supernatural lights and the loftiest knowledge, we owe having had a doctor and teacher of the nations. Her lovableness… Let us not weary ourselves: this child was born clothed in the most brilliant gifts of nature, God lavishing on her who was to be the Mother of God the graces he denied to others.

5. But all this was nothing without the treasure of the virtues. Natural endowments, when Religion does not adorn them, are a torch that gives off shadows instead of clear light; so said Valerius Maximus. Mary was born with her heart the throne of holiness. From the moment she had being, neither original nor personal sin had entry into her soul. I have already said, in explaining the mystery of her most pure and immaculate Conception, that Mary was the sacred Esther whom the curse and sentence of death pronounced against the whole human race did not reach. Most holy Mary, on presenting herself to the world, could say like the holy Bride: I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem.[5] That is: I am black because I come of the human race, blackened by the sin of the first father; but I am beautiful because I have not received its blackness: I was preserved from the black stain of my fellows at the instant of my conception. And Mary was pure and holy not only then; she kept all her life the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the virtues infused into her, rising all her life from virtue to virtue until she came to see the God of gods in the heavenly Sion.[6] This pure creature came into the world full of holiness, since she was to give men the Holy of holies, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

6. Decorated with so many gifts and endowed with such singular privileges, the most sacred Virgin was being prepared by the Lord for the high destinies for which he had predestined her, the most sublime that the human understanding can conceive. Was our Lady perhaps born to rule over a hundred and twenty provinces like Esther?[7] Was she born to command an army of the children of God like Deborah? Was she born only for the undertakings the Most High entrusted to other heroines of antiquity? That was little. She was born to conceive and bring forth the Messiah promised by the law; to be Mother of her own God. Of God; yes, my brethren: Mary was mother of a man who was at the same time God. And just as we can say without contradicting the faith that God became incarnate, suffered and died, because although he was impassible and unchangeable as to the divinity, he was not so as to the humanity, which by the hypostatic union he united to the divinity, becoming God and man in one and the same divine Person; so, although Jesus Christ as God could not have a mother, he could as man subsisting in the divine Person; and so Mary is called, and was,

Mother of God. Far from us be the error of Nestorius, who said that the God of the Christians must not have a mother as the gods of the heathen had. The Church condemned this error at the council of Ephesus; and the very Fathers who attended it, to vindicate the honour of this Lady, whose motherhood that heresiarch had sullied, then composed and sang through the streets the prayer Holy Mary, Mother of God, etc. Mother of God? This dignity raises most holy Mary above all men. I have said too little: above the heavenly spirits. To which of the Angels, I will say with St. Paul, did God say, You are my father, as he said to most holy Mary, You are my mother? A sovereign dignity: Mary comes into the world today to enjoy it. She is born also to be august Empress of heaven and earth; and if, when God brought his Son into the world, he said, according to the Apostle, Let the Angels of heaven adore him,[8] it seems to me that when Mary was born the Lord would command the blessed spirits to pay her homage[9] as their sovereign Queen. She was born to crush the head of the devil, the infernal serpent, and, through the generation of her divine Son, to undo his works and cast out of the world this prince of darkness, who held it under his tyranny. She was born to be proclaimed blessed by all generations;[10] that kings and emperors might lay their sceptres and crowns at the feet of her images; that the whole Christian people might extol her and cry out continually, as the priests of Bethulia did to the great Judith: You are the glory of our militant Jerusalem, you the joy of your people, you the honour of the whole human race.[11] She is born to be co-redemptress of the world. A generous daughter of Abraham, she offered for us in the temple and on Calvary that holy and peaceable victim in which the eternal Father is well pleased… But this belongs now to my second reflection.

Second Part

7. If the feast of the Nativity of most holy Mary is worthy to be celebrated with the greatest veneration and rejoicing for the outstanding endowments with which this Lady, who must be the object of our love, came into the world, it is no less so for the priceless blessings that came to all men from her birth. To know these, it is enough to say with the Gospel that of her was born Jesus, who is called Christ. On the day of the Saviour's birth the Angels appeared to the shepherds of Bethlehem and said to them: I bring you news of great joy, which will be for all the people: there is born to you the Saviour of the world.[1] In like proportion I can say to you, to invite you to joy and gladness: There is born to you the Mother of the Saviour. What great cause for the rejoicing of all mortals! When I see the festive acclamations and congratulations the peoples of antiquity paid to Sarah, wife of Abraham, to Anna, wife of Elkanah, and to Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah, at the births of their respective sons, because those children, born miraculously of aged and barren mothers, foretold some good for their nation,[2] it seems to me that with far greater reason we must offer Joachim and Anne the most joyful congratulations at the birth of their daughter, brought forth from barrenness, for the countless blessings with which her coming into the world enriched us. For who were the sons of those three venerable matrons? What benefits did the world receive from them? Great ones, no doubt. Sarah gave us Isaac, who, carrying the wood on his shoulder to the place of sacrifice, represented that of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; Anna gave us Samuel, a great prophet, who was to rule the Lord's people and take care of his sanctuary; Elizabeth gave us John, the voice that called to penance in the desert and prepared the ways for the Messiah by his preaching and example. But this is nothing in comparison with the good that the birth of Mary bestowed on the earth, the mother of him who was the reality of all those had foretold.

8. The Angels themselves joyfully solemnize this day, saying: Who is she that comes forth like the dawn as it rises?[3] They call Mary the dawn on the day of her birth. How fitting! You will have noticed that when the dawn breaks, everything is happily transformed: the fields shine with a singular enamel; the flowers receive new beauty and loveliness; the birds fill the air with harmonious songs; the sick feel a notable relief in their ailments; everything is glad and rejoices. And this, says the abbot Rupert, is because the dawn banishes the dark shadows of the night and begins the clear splendours of the day. This happened at our Lady's birth. How was the world before she was born? It was all a dark chaos full of darkness that could be felt: superstition and idolatry sat on the throne of empire; virtue was dethroned, justice persecuted, impurity crowned; and if there

was any nation that worshipped the true God, which was Judea, it belied its belief by the laxity of its morals. But Mary is born, and at once the whole world is seen renewed. Virtue begins to reign and vice to be dethroned; the devils, nocturnal birds as Scripture calls them,[4] flee headlong to the abyss, unable to bear such splendour; God begins to recover his rights; and men seem to feel the chains of slavery with which Satan held them prisoner falling from their hands. For although all these blessings were to be experienced through the birth, life, passion and death of the Saviour, yet the birth of Mary already announced this happiness to mortals, because the sun that was to dispel the darkness of sin was now near, since the dawn had already risen.

9. Oh, my brethren, what joy must fill our hearts in celebrating this mystery! The northern peoples, by their situation, enjoy six continuous months of the sun's presence, without its ever setting; but then they pay for it with another six months of night, seeing no light, but only darkness and gloom. But when the end of their black shadows draws near, what do they do? They go up the mountains with tambourines and musical instruments; and as soon as the dawn begins to break that will end their darkness, they sing, dance and utter expressions of delight, their breasts unable to contain their joy. Then if these peoples make such signs of joy at the end of a single night of six months, what must ours be at the birth of our happy dawn, which put an end to the dreadful shadows in which we had been wrapped for so many centuries? The Church our mother, inspired by her Spouse and well aware of our true interests, sings with joy in the Office of this day these words, addressed to our Lady: Your nativity, Virgin and Mother of God, announced joy to the whole world; for from you arose the sun of justice, Christ our Lord, who, taking away the curse, gave us the blessing, and, confounding death, gave us everlasting life.

10. What a consolation, my brethren, to see already in the world the restorer of our ruin, through the blessed fruit that is to come forth from her most pure womb! To see already built the chariot that is to bring from heaven to earth the Prince of the eternities, who is to save all nations! To see already the cloud the Patriarchs and Prophets longed for so much, because it was to rain down the Just One and sweetly flood all with the torrent of his mercies! To see already made the loom on which is to be woven the cloth that will cover the shameful nakedness of all good in which the sin of the first man left us! In short, what joy to see already in the world the Mother of uncreated Wisdom, with whom all good things came into the universe, as Solomon said![5] Yes, my brethren: when Mary is found, all good is found, said a Father of the Church. She is our mother, our advocate, our intercessor, our refuge and our happiness. There, then, is your mother, who will adopt you as her special children on Calvary when, wrapped in sorrow and sadness, she hears from the mouth of her dying Son: Woman, behold your son;[6] giving her the consolation of naming substitutes for him who was going into the hands of his eternal Father. There is your mother: no sooner will you have called on her name, says the Father St. Bernard, than you will find her favourable in all your troubles.[7]

11. Poor sinners, who, weighed down by your iniquities, almost come to despair of your remedy: there she is, your mother is already born, and a loving mother, who will present to you in her arms the lamb who takes away the sins of the world; and who, like another prudent Abigail, will hold back the rigorous justice of the true David, justly angered, giving you help towards repentance, and with it the pardon of your sins.[8] Men pursued by the devil with his alluring persuasions: there she is, already born, the woman St. John saw in the Apocalypse, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and crowned with stars,[9] destined to subdue the infernal dragon so that he may not devour her children through the snares he lays for them. Poor sick people weeping on the rack of pain, oppressed by various bodily ailments: she is already born who is the pool of healing, more abundant and effective than that of Jerusalem;[10] for that one healed only one sufferer each year, and this one all who take refuge under her protection; and she is mother of him in whose hands are the sickness and health, the life and death of men. Unhappy farmers who fear your poverty and misery because drought, storms, insects, floods of torrents and other plagues are going to destroy your fields and rob you of the fruit of your labours: there she is, already born, the merchant's ship that brought from heaven the bread of

life, in whose hands the Lord has placed all the riches of his glory. She is Mother of him who commands the sea and the wind to be calm, who opens the floodgates of heaven to give the rains in due season.

12. In short, many are the evils that surround us, many the enemies that attack our body, and still more our soul, many the risks and dangers in which we find ourselves; that is why holy Job compares the life of man to a continual warfare on earth.[11] But there she is, already born, she who through her most holy Son is the impregnable shield to repel all the darts of our adversaries. The Angels, who, as I have said, proclaimed Mary's birth as that of a dawn coming to dispel our evils, say that she is more terrible than an army well drawn up.[12] The favour the children of God's people experienced against their enemies through those heroines whom they called mothers of Israel is nothing beside what the Christian people receives from the Mother of men, Mary our Lady. Jael may nail the brow of Sisera, the enemy of her people;[13] Deborah may take command of God's army when the bravest generals had lost heart;[14] Judith may enter the camp of the Assyrians and return with the head of the general Holofernes, announcing the victory of which the whole people of Bethulia had despaired:[15] all this was worthy of acclamation and joy, all a great favour from those brave women who loved their children. But it is a very inadequate comparison for the blessings the world receives from most holy Mary, its defender; for as our Lady surpasses all the ancient matrons in love for her children, so she surpasses them in power, since she is Mother of Jesus and Christ, which is all that can be said. The day, then, on which this privileged woman comes into the world is a day of delight, not only because she is born so adorned with endowments and gifts, but because through her birth priceless blessings came to the whole universe.

13. But what must our joy be in celebrating this mystery? Such as befits the holiness and virtue of our Lady, whose birth we celebrate. The birthdays of princes are usually celebrated, but sometimes with rejoicings that are criminal and unbecoming to the very ones we wish to honour. Already in the time of Joseph of old, Pharaoh's birthday was celebrated in Egypt, but with pagan displays.[16] That of Antiochus was celebrated with rejoicings produced by irreligion.[17] And Herod's was celebrated with a banquet as splendid as it was impure, which ended in the beheading of the greatest and most virtuous man the ages had known, John the Baptist.[18] Not so, my brethren, must we celebrate the birth of the august Empress of heaven. A holy and spiritual joy; a modest gladness produced by virtue; an affectionate and devout veneration for our Lady, who is born today to promote our true happiness: let all this be our occupation on so festive a day, which was the beginning of our happiness.

14. I conclude with the words with which St. John Damascene congratulated Mary's parents on the birth of their precious daughter: O blessed union of Joachim and Anne! Every creature must bow at your feet. Through you it has received the most excellent gift of all gifts, the virginal Mother, who alone was worthy to be the mother of her Creator… Of your daughter a son was born to us whose name is the Angel of great counsel, that is, the Angel of the salvation of the whole world.[19] You are worthy of our respect. May God give us his help, so that the example of virtue given us by the daughter of Joachim and Anne may make us be born again at our death to eternal life. Amen.

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[20] Source note: "Tract. iv de fide, c. 5" (St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* IV, 14).

[21] Num. 36:6–9, which concerned heiresses only.

[22] 1 Sam. 1 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[23] Job 3:3, 7.

[24] Luke 1:15, 41–45, 65; Matt. 11:9.

[25] Gen. 22:18; 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22.

[26] Song 4:1, 7; 2:10, 13.

[27] Song 1:4 (Vulgate; Song 1:5).

[28] Ps. 83:8 (Vulgate; Ps. 84:8).

[29] Esther 1:1 (127 provinces in the Vulgate).

[30] Heb. 1:6.

[31] *hyperdulia*.

[32] Luke 1:48.

[33] Jdt. 15:10 (Vulgate; 15:9).

[1] Luke 2:10–11.

[2] Gen. 21:6–8; 1 Sam. 1–2; Luke 1:57–58.

[3] Song 6:9 (Vulgate; Song 6:10).

[4] Cf. Isa. 34:11–14; Bar. 6:21.

[5] Wis. 7:11.

[6] John 19:26.

[7] Cf. St. Bernard, *Hom. super "Missus est"* 2, 17 (*Respice stellam, voca Mariam*).

[8] 1 Sam. 25; John 1:29.

[9] Rev. 12:1.

[10] John 5:2–4.

[11] Job 7:1.

[12] Song 6:3, 9 (Vulgate; Song 6:4, 10).

[13] Judg. 4:21.

[14] Judg. 4–5.

[15] Jdt. 13.

[16] Gen. 40:20.

[17] 2 Macc. 6:7.

[18] Mark 6:21–28.

[19] St. John Damascene, *Homily I on the Nativity of Mary*; Isa. 9:6 (Septuagint: "Angel of great counsel").

60. The Annunciation: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Hail Mary

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 60, pp. 234–243. Gospel: Luke 1:26–38. Original preacher not named.

> *Ave gratia plena… (Luke 1:28).*
>
> *Hail, full of grace.*

The Gospel of this day is from the first chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. "God sent the Angel St. Gabriel to a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man called Joseph, of the family of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the Angel came in to visit her and said to her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you: blessed are you among women. When the Virgin heard this, she was troubled at the saying, and wondered what kind of greeting this was. And the Angel said to her: Do not fear, Mary: you have found grace with God; behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. But Mary said to the Angel: How shall this be, since I know no man? And the Angel answered and said to her: The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High alone will overshadow you; and therefore the Holy One who will be born of you will be called Son of God. And so that you may believe this, behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth has conceived a son in her old age, and she who is called barren is now in her sixth month; for nothing is impossible with God. Then Mary said: Here is the handmaid of the Lord; be it done according to your word." This is the Gospel.

2. In it is declared to us the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. It is a mystery that the Prophets had announced from the beginning of the world, that the Patriarchs longed for and all nations desired. It is a mystery in which God could not humble himself more, nor man rise higher; for in it God humbled himself to become man, and man rose to share in the divinity. It is a mystery that amazed the Angels and cast into the

abyss Lucifer and his followers, who refused to acknowledge it, proud at the beginning of their creation, according to some holy Fathers. Many heretics and philosophers have not believed this mystery, unable to understand how the two natures, divine and human, could be united in one and the same person, because they were guided only by the scanty and corrupt lights of reason. With it they cannot even comprehend the natural union of a spiritual soul with a body of flesh, as it takes place in man. But faith teaches it, and to faith we must submit our understanding, venerating this mystery of the Incarnation as an object of our belief. But what draws my attention today is the Angel's embassy announcing to most holy Mary the incarnation of her Son; and in it I note two things. First, the most honourable manner in which the heavenly spirit informed our Lady of the commission entrusted to her. Second, the instruction it gives us for praising Mary, which is the very greeting with which he honoured her who was to be Mother of God. I am going to explain it all briefly. The honour most holy Mary received in the annunciation the Angel made to her: the first part. Explanation of the Angelic Salutation with which we must praise our Lady: the second part.

First Part

3. The fullness of time had come,[1] when the tears of the ancient Fathers softened the heavens, which had shown themselves unbending regarding the coming of the Messiah. The time had come when (the weeks of Daniel being ended, and the sceptre having departed from the house of Judah, which were the chief signs for the coming of the one who was to be sent)[2] the clouds should rain down the Just One and the earth open to bring forth the Saviour.[3] The Lord now willed to carry out the decree of mercy he had given before the foundation of the ages for the ransom of the world, causing his Son to become incarnate in the womb of a virgin, so that by his humanity he might be capable of the sufferings and pains the sinner deserved for his crime, and by his divinity give infinite value to his actions, as was necessary to make complete satisfaction for the offence done to the divine Majesty. But that God who does all things with wisdom and prudence would not work so extraordinary a mystery in Mary without first informing her of what was to be done, by means of an embassy. Otherwise, on finding herself with signs of conception without having given cause for it, our Lady would have been startled and even filled with confusion, fearing to incur the penalty of the law and the indignation of her innocent spouse. And on the other hand, since the Lord did not wish this mystery to be made public at that time, it was fitting that it should be revealed to Mary, who with this news from heaven would know how to hide the sacrament of the King,[4] as she did, exposing herself to her spouse's suspicion.

4. Gabriel was the ambassador appointed for this business. Gabriel, though usually called an archangel, is one of the chief princes of the heavenly court, and one of the first of the Seraphim, according to the Master of the Sentences.[5] It was fitting, says the Father St. Gregory, that to announce the supreme Good only a supreme Angel should be worthy.[6] An Angel of the highest hierarchy visited Eve to bring her low and ruin the whole universe; it was right that another Angel of the most supreme excellence should visit Mary to raise her up and through her redeem the whole human race: so St. Basil reasoned. Most holy Mary, who had a short time before been betrothed to the craftsman Joseph, was in her chamber contemplating the mercies of the Most High and reading the prophecies that spoke of the Messiah and of the virgin who was to have the happiness of conceiving him and giving him birth, when on a Friday, the 25th of March, the Angel comes to her. It was just that on the same day on which man fell from the grace of his God he should recover it through the mediation of a maiden. Gabriel appears in human form to our Queen and, paying her the homage due to her as such, greets her with the most flattering but true praises: Hail, full of grace, he says to her. *Ave*: this word expresses an eloquent greeting, as if he said: Rejoice, be filled with gladness, God save you, God fill you with blessings. *Ave* reversed spells *Eva*, for it announced to Mary the restoration of what Eve had lost, says Chrysostom.[7] He does not call her by her own name, but full of grace; and there was no need to: to Mary alone, and to no other pure creature, was this privilege granted of being full of grace; and so by calling her full of grace he already expressed who she was. As a rule great personages are not called by their own

names: the Supreme Pontiff is called Most Holy Father, the King Sire, the Archbishop Most Illustrious Lord, and so on. So the Angel calls most holy Mary by her proper and exclusive title. The Angel continues: The Lord is with you. The Lord was in Mary not only as he is in all things, by essence, presence and power, nor yet as he is in the souls of all the just; the Angel meant that he was in Mary in a most special way, which some doctors call a way of identity, God and Mary being made, as it were, one thing. The Angel continues: Blessed are you among women. Clearly so; for which of women ever merited so singular a blessing as this Virgin?

5. Mary heard Gabriel and was troubled. And why? Ah, she was accustomed to converse with angels; but she was disturbed not so much because her virginal eyes shrank at seeing beside her the fair form of the male sex in which the heavenly envoy \[*paraninfo*\] appeared to her, as at hearing the magnificent praises he paid her. She was troubled at the words, says the Evangelist. Nothing distresses a humble soul so much as to hear praises that seem to her beyond her merit. Holy Archangel, do not keep our Lady in suspense: reveal to her at once the commission the Most High has entrusted to you; make known to her the secret kept in eternal silence for so many centuries,[8] and reveal to this humble handmaid of the Lord the mystery of the Incarnation, which the wisdom of the elders could not comprehend when they were shown the book of the seven seals.[9] He does so at once: Do not fear, Mary, he says to her, you have found grace in the Lord's presence: you will conceive a son whom you shall call Jesus… he will be son of the Most High, he will sit on the throne of David his father, and his reign will have no end. Mary is not set at rest by these words. The words conception and childbirth make a virgin tremble who had resolved to be one with more perfection than Jeremiah, Elijah, Elisha, Joshua and Melchizedek, according to the Father St. Antoninus;[10] and with trembling and confused voice she says to the Angel: How shall this be, since I know not man? As if she said, St. Gregory of Nyssa explains: Must I abandon, to obtain what you offer me, a virtue that makes men heavenly, like the spirits and imitators of an infinitely pure God? How is this to come about? I will gladly give up all the dignity and greatness you announce to me if for it I must sully the most beautiful flower of my purity.[11] So that when the Angel announced to her that she was to give birth, says St. Gregory, she took up the shield of virginity, and judged that she must put the integrity of her body before such magnificent promises.

6. But do not fear, Mary, the Angel says to her: your conception and childbirth will all be miraculous; you will have the dignity of mother with the privilege of a virgin. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and the holy one to be born of you will be called son of God. You will give birth and remain a virgin. So it was fitting: the Word, who was born from eternity without corruption of his father, was to be born in the world of a holy and incorrupt mother; and as the first Adam was formed from pure and untilled earth, so the second Adam was to be conceived of most pure and virginal flesh. Isaiah had already prophesied it: A virgin, he says, shall conceive and bear a son.[12] It was fulfilled in Mary; and in this Lady there was brought about, says the martyr St. Ignatius, a heavenly prodigy, a most sacred marvel \[*monstruo*\], for motherhood and virginity were united, two extremes that are incompatible in nature. What is done now, according to St. Bernard, had never been done until then, nor will ever be done again.

7. And what do you say to this, most holy Virgin? The Angel awaits your assent; he asks your consent to bring about the happiness and felicity of the human race and your own greatest honour. What do you say? What was this obedient daughter of Abraham to say? Behold, Lord, your handmaid here: be it done to me according to your divine word. *Fiat*. Oh *fiat*, oh happy yes, which put an end to eternal death and began the life of all men! The Incarnation of the Word has now been accomplished. Mary has now become the compendium of all the wonders of God. Now all the prophecies that announced this mystery and the glories of this privileged woman have been fulfilled. Now Mary is the eastern gate Ezekiel saw shut even to the prince who entered by it;[13] the pleasant garden of delights that brought forth the lovely lily of the valleys

without human cultivation;[14] the mysterious bush of Horeb, in which fruitfulness burned without consuming the freshness of her purity; the dawn that gave forth the Sun of justice; the rod of Jesse…[15] Who knows how many prophecies are fulfilled in Mary on this day, all honourable to this extraordinary woman! Can there be greater exaltation? Well, all that we have explained is contained in the words with which the archangel St. Gabriel honoured most holy Mary when he announced to her the mystery of the incarnation of the eternal Word in her womb. Then are these words of the Angel the model we must follow to extol Mary? Yes, my brethren; and so that you may do it perfectly, I am going to give you a full explanation of the Hail Mary, or Angelic Salutation.

Second Part

8. Our great God, who always provides us with the most fitting means to serve and please him, and to obtain from his mercy help in our distress, just as by the mouth of his most holy Son he taught us the prayer of the Our Father, in which he is honoured and we set out our needs, so also by means of an Angel he taught us the praises we should pay his most holy Mother so as to win her goodwill, that she may intercede for us. The archangel St. Gabriel was the chief teacher who on the day of the Annunciation taught us the words with which our Lady was to be honoured.

9. The Angelic Salutation, commonly called the Hail Mary, is a greeting of honour in which, in imitation of the archangel St. Gabriel, we gather the greatest praises of this Lady, so that she may help us to obtain the fruit of our petitions. This prayer is made up of three parts. The first, of the very words the Angel said to Mary when he announced to her the incarnation of the Word in her most holy womb, which are these: Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. The second, those her cousin St. Elizabeth said to our Lady when she went to visit her from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea, having learned from the Angel that she had conceived St. John; and they are these: Blessed are you among all women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.[1] And the third, a prayer that the Church composed for all the faithful at the council of Ephesus to confound the heresiarch Nestorius, which goes: Holy Mary, Mother of God, etc. Although there seem to be three authors of this prayer, there is only one, the Holy Spirit, who used three channels for our instruction in it. I will speak in explanation of the first two parts, because the third will be touched on another occasion. I will say, then, a little about the meaning of each word of this Angelic Salutation, so called because it was the Angel who began to form it.

10. *Ave*: this is the first word the heavenly spirit said, and we say it thus: God save you. What we say in this way is equivalent to the *Ave* St. Gabriel said. All of it, as I have said, means: Rejoice, holy Virgin, be glad, be happy for the high destinies to which you have been raised. But it seems to me that this word *Ave* is more a congratulation than a simple greeting: it is like congratulating our Lady and wishing her joy because, made Mother of God, she came to give us with her precious Son what Eve had taken from us. What glory for Mary that, when one woman, yielding to the poisonous hissing of the infernal serpent, ate of the fruit forbidden by the law, making all her descendants captives of the devil and shutting the gates of heaven for which God had created man, another of her sex, our Lady, should give a fruit by which the chains of our slavery were broken and the gates of the empyrean, from which we had been banished through the first woman, were opened to us! Through you, most holy Virgin, the Church sings, the gates of paradise were opened to us.

11. *Maria*: this is the proper name of the daughter of Joachim and Anne, the spouse of chaste Joseph, appointed to be Mother of God while remaining ever an immaculate virgin. This name Mary, in its proper meaning, already declares the dignity of this maiden, for it means Mistress, or Lady of the sea. So the sister of Moses was called Miriam after the crossing of the Red Sea, when Pharaoh and his followers were drowned in its waters.[2] She was a figure of the Virgin, says St. Ambrose,[3] who is called Mary, or Lady of the sea of this world, so that as we cross it she may bring us into the promised land, which is heaven. The name Mary is also interpreted “sea”, and it befits her who was an immense sea of graces and privileges; and it even

means “bitter sea”: and this too our most loving Queen was, for on Calvary she was seen drowned in the waters of tribulation. That is why Jeremiah lamented in this Lady’s name, saying: Great as the sea is my sorrow.[4]

12. Full of grace: we mean that Mary was free from all sin, for she neither contracted original sin, as I explained on the day of the Conception, nor committed personal sin, either mortal or venial: so says the council of Trent.[5] Besides this, Mary had all the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit in the most excellent degree, and acted on them so unceasingly that, both in soul and in body, she was worthy to rise above all the choirs of the Angels. Full of grace, says St. Jerome, because to the other just grace was given in part, but into Mary was poured the whole fullness of grace.[6] This is not to say that in this she equalled Jesus Christ, of whom St. John says that he was full of grace and truth;[7] certainly not: there is a great difference between the creature and the Creator. Jesus Christ was God and the author of grace; the fullness of it the Saviour had was like a superabundant fountain from which all, and even his own Mother, have drawn. To Mary was granted the grace necessary and proportioned to the dignity she was to exercise as Mother of the Author of grace; and to no creature was grace given in such fullness as to Mary, since none was raised to the office to which she was exalted.

13. The Lord is with you: this is the second praise we give our Lady in the Angel’s words. And when we say the Lord is with you, what Lord do we understand to be with Mary? From the moment of her creation the whole most blessed Trinity is with her: the Lord Father, the Lord Son and the Lord Holy Spirit; and all three persons were with her in a most special way from the Angel’s annunciation. The most holy Trinity was always in Mary; but immediately after the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished, the Father was there, that is, the power of the Most High overshadowing her; the Holy Spirit was there, who took her blood to form the body of the Messiah; but most especially the Son was there, taking flesh in her womb and being born of her to be her son as man, as he was the Father’s son as God. So the Father St. Bernard explains it: Not only is the Lord Son with you, Lady, who clothed himself in your flesh, but the Lord Father, who eternally begot your Son, and the Lord Holy Spirit, of whom you conceived. The Lord is with you.[8]

14. Blessed are you among all women. Many daughters of God, says the book of Proverbs, speaking in prophecy to most holy Mary, many daughters have gathered riches of gifts, blessings and privileges, but you surpass them all, you exceed them all.[9] Mary exceeds all women, and therefore the blessing that fell on Mary is more abundant than that which all the others received: Blessed among all women. The blessing of other women is to be made fruitful so as to bear their children; but it carries with it the curse of conceiving and bearing them with carnal pleasure, with loss of their virginity, with pains and alarms. But Mary conceived without the agency of man, remained a virgin, and gave birth to her Only-begotten with delight and gladness. Other women were cursed in Eve; but our Lady received no hurt from that sin; on the contrary, in the generation of this daughter of Abraham all generations were blessed. Let us hear the Father St. Augustine on this: Blessed are you among women, who gave life to men and women. The mother of the human race brought punishment into this world; the Mother of our Lord brought forth life for the world. Eve was the author of sin, Mary the author of merit. Eve by killing harmed us; Mary by giving life has profited us. The one wounded, the other healed. The disobedience of the one was exchanged for the obedience of the other, and the faith of Mary made up for the unbelief of Eve.[10] More cannot be said.

15. Blessed is the fruit of your womb. From so blessed a tree no fruit could come but one full of blessings. It is true that it was Mary’s fruit that blessed his most holy Mother. Not because you are blessed, my Lady, says St. Bernard, is the fruit of your womb blessed; but because he went before you with the blessings of sweetness; therefore you are blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, of whose fullness all peoples, and you yourself, received the blessing, though you in a more singular and different way.[11] Jesus is the fruit of Mary, who, according to St. Paul, is blessed above all creation;[12] Jesus, whom the Jews called blessed at the sight of his wonders and virtues; Jesus, by whose blessing the sick were healed; Jesus, whom on Palm

Sunday they received in Jerusalem with the most festive acclamations, saying: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, glory in the highest.[13] This is the fruit of Mary, the fruit of life, the blessed fruit that came from heaven and that Mary, the sacred tree of paradise, brought forth as man, a universal medicine against the ancient fruit that made us all accursed.

16. This in summary is what the Angelic Salutation, or prayer of the Hail Mary, means. No excellence of the Queen of the Angels can be imagined that is not gathered up in the words the Angel said to her to extol her above every pure creature on the day he announced to her that God himself wished to become incarnate in her womb. Therefore there is no more excellent greeting and no more sublime prayer than this, after the Our Father, which the Only-begotten of the Father spoke with his own lips and taught to the Apostles, commending it to his whole Church. For this Angelic Salutation was inspired by the Holy Spirit (who teaches us to pray, and prays for us with unutterable groanings, as his Scripture says),[14] and he willed it to be spoken by the mouths of his most intimate servants. Oh, how precious it will be to the eternal Father to hear from the lips of his children this greeting to Mary, his firstborn daughter, rejoicing that they recall to this Lady the inexpressible privileges with which he deigned to distinguish her! What a pleasing homage to this same Lady and our mother, to renew to her the greeting the Angel gave her on the day of her elevation to that august dignity, to which no other creature, not even the loftiest Seraphim, was worthy to rise! History relates that St. Gertrude, being ill on one occasion and seeing that because of her illness she could not recite the canonical Hours or read anything to stir her devotion, contented herself with saying often: *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum*. The Mother of mercy appeared to her clothed in a mantle embroidered with golden letters, on which were written the words that devout daughter of hers had spoken, showing her how pleasing that Salutation had been, expressing as it did her faith, her hope and her love for her sacred person.[15] Let us, then, my brethren, often say this Angelic Salutation with a spirit of devotion, especially on this day on which it was first spoken through the ministry of an Angel; and rest assured that, winning our Lady's goodwill with it, she will hear your prayers and supplications when you go on to say to her: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

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[16] Gal. 4:4.

[17] Dan. 9:24–27; Gen. 49:10.

[18] Isa. 45:8.

[19] Tob. 12:7; cf. Matt. 1:18–20.

[20] Source note: "4, dist. 1" (unclear; perhaps Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II, d. 9–10, on the orders of angels).

[21] Source note: "Hom. iii in Evang." (St. Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Evang.* 34, 8).

[22] *mutans Evae nomen*.

[23] Rom. 16:25.

[24] Rev. 5:1–5.

[25] St. Antoninus of Florence, *Summa theologica* IV, tit. 15.

[26] Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio in diem natalem Christi*.

[27] Isa. 7:14.

[28] Ezek. 44:1–2.

[29] Song 2:1; 4:12.

[30] Exod. 3:2; Mal. 4:2; Isa. 11:1.

[1] Luke 1:42.

[2] Exod. 15:20.

[3] Source note: "Hom. ad Virg." (St. Ambrose, *De institutione virginis* 5, 33).

[4] Lam. 2:13.

[5] VI, can. 23 (Mary's freedom from all venial sin by special privilege).

[6] Pseudo-Jerome (Paschasius Radbertus), Ep. 9, *Cogitis me*, read in the old Office of the Assumption.

[7] John 1:14.

[8] St. Bernard, *Hom. super "Missus est"* 3, 4. Source note: "Serm. iii sup.

[9] Prov. 31:29.

[10] Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermo* 18 *de Sanctis*. The Eve–Mary parallel goes back to St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* III, 22, 4.

[11] St. Bernard, *Hom. super "Missus est"* 3, 5.

[12] Rom. 9:5.

[13] Matt. 21:9.

[14] Rom. 8:26.

[15] From the revelations of St. Gertrude the Great (*Legatus divinae pietatis* IV).

61. The Purification of Our Lady: On the Mystery, and the Virtues Most Holy Mary Practised in It for Our Imitation

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 61, pp. 244–253. Gospel: Luke 2:22–32. Original preacher not named.

Postquam impleti sunt dies purgationis Mariae (Luke 2:22).

After the days of Mary's purification were fulfilled.

The Gospel of this day is from the second chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. "After the days of Mary's purification were fulfilled according to the law of Moses, they took Jesus to Jerusalem to offer him to the Lord, as was written in the law of the Lord, which said: Every male that opens the womb shall be holy before the Lord; and at the same time they took him to offer the sacrifice spoken of in the law of the Lord, which was two turtledoves or two young pigeons. And there was in Jerusalem a man named Simeon, and this man was just and God-fearing, awaiting the consolation of Israel through the coming of the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit was with him. And he had received a revelation from the same Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Christ of the Lord. And when his parents brought Jesus into the temple to do for him what the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and blessed God, and said: Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace, according to the word you gave me, for my eyes have now seen that salvation which you had prepared by the prophecies before the face of all peoples, the light for the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel." This is the Gospel.

2. See here fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi, which said: Behold, I send you my Angel (who was the Baptist), who will prepare my way before me; and then the Lord whom you seek will come to his temple, and the Angel of the Covenant whom you desire.[1] All this was fulfilled today, when Mary our Lady went to Jerusalem to be purified after childbirth and present to the Lord the fruit of her womb, the Saviour of the world. It is a feast that, as you see, the Church celebrates with the greatest display and pomp and with devout signs of joy. And justly so: this is the first day on which our adorable Jesus presented himself in public to men. He had already shown himself to a few faithful, but they had seen him only humbled in a manger, lying on straw and surrounded by dumb beasts. Now they see him carried in the magnificent litter of the arms of a virgin mother, a carriage more precious than the one Solomon built for the daughters of Jerusalem.[2] It is true that in the temple the shepherds did not adore him, nor did the Kings of the East pay him homage; but the prophets Simeon and Anna recognized him as the Messiah. What a delight it would be to see that mysterious scene of our Lady's purification, the Queen of the virtues giving the world an example of the most heroic ones on that occasion! I am going to show it. I will tell simply how this mystery took place, as the Gospel relates it: the first part. I will set out the virtues most holy Mary practised in it for our imitation: the second part.

First Part

3. In Leviticus the Lord laid down various laws that women were to fulfil after giving birth.[1] To suggest to them, and to all of us, that through Adam's crime man is conceived and born in sin, a child of wrath and

death, deserving of God's indignation, he ordered first that after childbirth the woman should remain for a certain time in a state the law itself called unclean. This was a space of forty days if the child was a boy, and eighty if a girl. During all this time she could not appear in public or touch anything consecrated to God. When these days were past, the mother took the fruit of her womb to the doors of the temple, with a yearling lamb for the holocaust (a sacrifice in which the victim was burned), and this was done in profession or acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God, absolute master of all creation, and in thanksgiving for the mother's health. She also brought a young pigeon or turtledove as an offering for sin. When these oblations had been sacrificed by the priest, the woman was purified and restored to the enjoyment of her former rights, of which legal uncleanness had deprived her. If poverty made it impossible for her to offer a lamb, this lack was made up by offering two turtledoves or pigeons, one for the holocaust and the other for the sin-offering. Besides these laws there was another, which ordered that the firstborn son should be presented and offered to the Lord, as a sign, some authors say, of gratitude and acknowledgement for God's having taken the life, through the ministry of an Angel, of all the firstborn of the Egyptians, their adversaries;[2] though after the child had been offered, the law permitted it to be redeemed for a certain sum of money, which was five shekels, a Hebrew coin,[3] with other sacrifices offered as well.

4. The mother of him who had come not to abolish the law but to fulfil it[4] fulfilled with the greatest exactness all that the Lord had ordained through Moses for this case. She remained withdrawn from dealings with people and from contact with holy things for the forty days ordered by the law, which ran from the 25th of December, when she gave birth to Jesus Christ, the splendour of eternal light, until the 2nd of February, when she went to the temple to be purified. She went in company with her husband, and brought for the holocaust and sacrifices two young pigeons or turtledoves, like a poor and wretched woman, though she was the Lady of the nations; for the treasures the Magi had left her at their adoration of the Saviour she had distributed to the poor, according to the teaching of some pious doctors. She arrives, then, at the temple; and there was fulfilled what the prophet Haggai had foretold,[5] that its glory then would be greater than that of the temple built by Solomon. Happy temple! Privileged temple! The desired of the nations, prefigured by the Patriarchs and announced by the Prophets, is about to enter by your gates. Open your gates, that the King of glory may come in.[6] He does not come in a magnificent carriage drawn by lions or elephants, such as the ancient emperors commonly used to enter and take possession of conquered cities; no, but he comes in another greater, more majestic and more acceptable in the Lord's eyes: the arms of his most loving Mother, a living carriage enamelled with the gold of her love and adorned with the purest virtues.

5. On that day the holy Simeon was in the temple, a venerable priest of the law, full of holiness and favoured by heaven with holy revelations. So great was his longing to see on earth the Messiah who was to destroy sin and hell, freeing the world from the slavery of the devil, that the Lord had consoled him by promising that he would not see death until he had seen his Redeemer with his own eyes. He saw him, then, at the door of the temple, and took into his arms from the Virgin's arms that treasure in which his heart was laid up, knowing by light from heaven that this was the captain of the house of Israel, who came to be crowned with the humiliation of his adversaries. God help me! Every time I consider this tender scene, tears want to bear witness to my inward joy. When the holy Simeon found himself with the child God in his arms, what would the feelings of that great soul be? What tenderness, what loving devotion! Carrying the longed-for Jesus in his trembling arms, he would mingle his tears with the most heartfelt words of gratitude and love. Now, Lord, he would say, there is nothing left for me to see or desire: I will die content, for I have obtained what I longed for. How many prophets and kings desired to see what I not only see but touch with my hands, and could not obtain it![7] Seeing him only in prophecy filled Abraham with joy;[8] what effects must his real sight and true presence not work in my soul? I can have no more complete satisfaction: my eyes see the salvation of Israel, the light that is to reveal to the Gentiles the knowledge of the truth; I see, in short, fulfilled all the promises that announced to my people Israel all its glory. So Mary together with Joseph, Simeon, and Anna the prophetess, a devout widow who likewise proclaimed the happiness the world experienced that day,[9]

formed the most sacred procession to the tabernacle to perform the ceremonies of the law.

6. And see here, brethren, the origin of the procession we have just made with lighted candles, representing the one formed in the temple of Jerusalem by such sublime persons. You will have noticed that before the procession the candles to be used in it were filled with blessings, God being asked in the various prayers said to deign to consecrate to his service these tapers or candles with which we wish to honour him. Then the procession is made: a procession, says the Father St. Bernard,[10] that was made first by the Virgin, St. Joseph, and Saints Anna and Simeon, so that thereafter it might be celebrated everywhere and by all nations, with the rejoicing of the whole earth in honour of this mystery. We go in it singing and walking at the same time, according to the same Saint, to show that we must not stand still when it is a matter of going to seek God and offer him our homage, but go with giant strides, as those who go to visit him who fills us with his mercies. We carry lighted candles to show that our soul burns with the fire of love at the sight of its Redeemer, and at the same time to honour him who is the light of the world, a light that, as Simeon said, enlightened even the Gentiles. Would that we might perform this sacred ceremony with true fervour and spirit, and likewise imitate the virtues most holy Mary practised at the celebration of this mystery! This is what I am going to set out in my second part.

Second Part

7. Most holy Mary is the exemplar and model of all the virtues. She was the mother of divine wisdom; and since wisdom, according to the Wise Man, does not make its dwelling in a malicious soul or in a body subject to sin,[1] it would not have become incarnate except in the womb of a woman adorned with holiness. This Lady performed no action that was not heroic and worthy of imitation, so far as our human frailty and misery allow. In the august ceremony of her purification and the presentation of her blessed Son in the temple, many virtues shone out in this immaculate Virgin; but three especially claim my attention today, able to put to shame many Christians who live forgetful of them. Obedience, humility and resignation to the divine will: these are the virtues Mary displayed in the ceremony of this day, stirring us to imitate this model. Let us speak of each separately.

8. Obedience. Mary fulfilled most exactly everything God ordained in the law of Moses. For the forty days the law laid down she abstained from entering the temple, from touching any holy thing, and from dealings with her neighbours. And was Mary subject to this law? Here she showed the refinement of her submission to the orders of her God. The law itself, in the terms in which it was framed, seemed to exempt our Queen. Every woman, it said, who has conceived in the human way shall be, etc. The Lord almost in express words excepted the Virgin from this ceremony, for he gave to understand that some woman would come to conceive in a supernatural and divine way. This was Mary, and there was no other. This Lady had conceived not in the ordinary way of other women, but by the work of the Holy Spirit alone, without any intervention of man. Yet for all that she obeys the law and bears the humiliations it brought with it. In this she imitated her most loving Son, who, being above the law, subjected himself to the law; and, having had no part in original sin, but rather having come into the world to destroy it, submitted to the law of circumcision, a sacrament intended especially to remove that stain. So did our obedient Lady with the law of purification. Who imitates her in such submissive obedience to the Lord’s commands? Very few. As a rule men look for excuses and pretexts to free themselves from the laws of God and of his Church. The precept of keeping holy the feast days, for example: on the slightest ground of necessity they already consider themselves dispensed from fulfilling it. Mass is not heard, servile work is done, and there is no other cause for neglecting this commandment than to say: I am unwell; I am poor and cannot get by or keep my family if I leave off the work of my hands on feast days. If the need is real, there is no doubt that a man is free from fulfilling the outward actions the Church prescribes for keeping the feasts holy. But how often is there no other cause than laziness, amusement, avarice or other sins? I say the same of fasting and the other precepts of the Church;

and, for all I know, even the divine ones are left unfulfilled on frivolous pretexts, to shake off the yoke of the law, to which we are most strictly bound.

9. The second virtue seen today in most holy Mary is humility. To fulfil the law of purification her honour had to suffer greatly. The law was given for women who had conceived by a man; that is, to see a woman in the temple with her child in her arms performing the legal ceremonies was to show her to the people as a woman whose flower of virginity had already withered, and who had consequently given herself, though blamelessly, to the sensual pleasures of the flesh. And Mary, who had conceived and given birth to her Son solely by the power of the Most High and the cooperation of the most pure Spirit of God; Mary, all holy, pure and immaculate, as the Bridegroom of the Canticles calls her;[2] Mary who, as I said on the day of her Annunciation, would have given up being Mother of God if for it she had had to lose her virginal purity: does she go to the temple and mingle with the other women as if she were one of them, giving to understand that she held that fruit of her womb as the fruit of a carnal concupiscence she had never known? Who, seeing her purified, would judge that she was the virgin Isaiah announced, who was to conceive and bear? How were they to think she was the mother of God himself, who had deigned to take flesh in her womb without loss of her integrity, giving her fruit as the cloud gives the dew, the rod the flower and the dawn the light, remaining in all her integrity and beauty? None of this matters to our Queen's humility: to obey God she yields her honour, hides her dignity, conceals her privileges, and the mother of innocence appears to the world as a guilty woman. She was not subject to the law; but not to observe it, if she was not to scandalize the people, she would have had to reveal the mystery of the Incarnation, which was not to be disclosed at that time; and she preferred to humble herself like other women of the flesh rather than make known the secret of her King. So as not to make it known to her husband, she exposed herself to suspicions of adultery, had God not revealed to Joseph, through the ministry of an Angel, what was being wrought in his wife.[3] Great glory would have come to Mary had the whole people known that she was the carriage bringing into the world the Prince of the eternities; but her humility puts itself before all the greatness of the earth.

10. What an example! But how little imitated! Illustrious blood, a handful of money, a high post turn the heads of men who seem sensible; they make them present themselves as idols whom all must adore, and sacrifice the most sacred laws to their caprice and pride, so as not to seem equal to other men in their veneration and respect. Be confounded, you who rule, at seeing today the Queen of heaven, into whose hands God put all the treasures of heaven and earth, exalted above all the Angels by an office they did not merit, prostrate at the foot of the tabernacle fulfilling a law that did not bind her, presenting herself as a sinful woman, making only the offering of the needy, two turtledoves, so as to be taken for a poor and wretched woman.

11. Resignation to the divine will: this is the third virtue Mary practises today in the temple. She presents to the Lord there him who was greater than Solomon and his temple.[4] Let us leave aside now the humility of the Saviour in offering himself to the Father without being obliged to, for the king's son, says St. Hilary, to whom the inheritance of the crown belongs, is exempt from servitude. Much more, Christ the Redeemer of the world could not be subject to a law by which he himself was to be redeemed. Let us speak only of Mary's resignation. The ceremonies of the law being done, the holy Simeon turned to most holy Mary and, after congratulating her a thousand times on her dignity as mother of the Messiah, announced to her by the Lord's inspiration that that child was to be the target of the bitterest persecutions, and that Mary's soul would be pierced with the sword of sorrow.[5] It was a prophecy that, according to the holy Fathers, summed up all those that announced the humiliations and sufferings of this Lady's Son, which were bound to strike the heart of a most loving mother, one who was not ignorant of the cause of her Son's sufferings. Yet Mary resigns herself and, as a spiritual priestess, offers her beloved Son as a victim for the redemption of men, for she saw that this was the will of his Father. History tells that the cruel king Astyages had the dearest son of one of his subjects killed and, inviting the father to dine, set his roasted body before him. What do you think of this

dish? the King said to him; and the subject answered: Sire, what I see is painful, but whatever my King does pleases me.[6] This same thing, though from a higher and virtuous motive, most holy Mary seems to have said silently on the occasion we describe. It grieves me, and greatly, to see that my Son is to be most cruelly sacrificed; but the supreme King commands it, and that is enough for me to offer him gladly to the torments. There he is, Lord, there he is at your disposal: the Joseph who is to be sold by his brothers, the ark taken by the Philistines, Job covered with sores, the Isaac who carries the wood on which he is to be crucified, the bronze serpent…[7] In short, there is my Son; and if it is your pleasure, let all the bloody prophecies that the oracles pronounced about the Son of Man be fulfilled in him. I submit to everything; and although I am to be terribly martyred by compassion if all these prophecies are fulfilled, I do not give up the undertaking, I do not withdraw the victim: I offer him to you now for then, solely to yield to your divine good pleasure.

12. What resignation, what conformity, what patience! Tell me, my Christian: if you lose your temporal interests; if your father, your son, your friend, your relative dies; if you find yourself persecuted by the very ones you have helped; if you find yourself laid low in bed by the blow of an illness: tell me, can all these sorrows be compared with those Simeon announced today to most holy Mary? Is there not a very great difference between the persons who suffer and the trials they endure, that is, between the most tender and loving mother and ourselves, between the trials to which she submits and ours? Without doubt. Yet many times we resist the will of God in our tribulations and call cruel him who is goodness itself, and whose wisdom draws from the very trials he sends us instruments of our happiness.

13. I am concluding, my brethren; but I cannot help explaining to you, in the light of this mystery, the meaning of the ceremony that all Christian women commonly perform after childbirth in imitation of our Lady.[8] In the old law God declared unclean some actions that, although innocent, had some relation, however remote, to sin. Such was childbirth; and for this uncleanness the Lord ordered the purification we have explained. It would be superstitious for women now to want to fulfil the ceremonies the law prescribed, for it is already abrogated; and consequently women are not bound by legal uncleanness or to have recourse to Jewish purifications. The Christian Church has no such intention, but acts from a motive common to the whole human race: that of fulfilling the duty of giving thanks to God for benefits received. That is why Pope Innocent III speaks in this way: If a woman after giving birth wishes to enter the church at once, she will commit no sin in doing so; and if, moved by reverence, they wish to abstain from it for some time, we judge that their devotion should not be reproved either. In some dioceses the time is fixed at a certain number of days; but usually it is left to the women themselves to go out of the house when they feel ready to do so. The first visit to the church is generally made to give thanks to the author of all good things for the gift of fruitfulness and the recovery of health after the dangers of childbirth; also to offer to the Lord the fruit of their womb and to receive the blessings of the Church, all directed to the good of the mother and her child. Enough.

14. Let us strive, my brethren, to celebrate this mystery not only with joy of soul but with special devotion, striving to copy in our hearts the virtues most holy Mary practised in the ceremonies of her purification, especially obedience, humility and resignation, so that in this way, through her intercession, we may be presented in the temple of glory. Amen.

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[9] Mal. 3:1.

[10] Song 3:9–10.

[11] Lev. 12. The source's figures (40 days for a boy, 80 for a girl) are the totals of Lev. 12:2–5.

[12] Exod. 13:2, 12–15.

[13] Num. 18:16.

[14] Matt. 5:17.

[15] Source note: "Cap. ii, 8" (Hag. 2:8 Vulgate; 2:9).

[16] Ps. 23:7 (Vulgate; Ps. 24:7).

[17] Matt. 13:17; 1 John 1:1.

[18] John 8:56.

[19] Luke 2:36–38.

[20] Source note: “Serm. de Purif. p. 989” (St. Bernard, *In Purificatione B. Mariae, Sermo* 2).

[1] Wis. 1:4.

[2] Song 4:7.

[3] Matt. 1:19–20.

[4] Matt. 12:42.

[5] Luke 2:34–35.

[6] Herodotus I, 119.

[7] Gen. 37:28; 1 Sam. 4:11; Job 2:7; Gen. 22:6; Num. 21:9; John 3:14.

[8] *Benedictio mulieris post partum.*

62. The Assumption of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and on the Reward of Humility and the Punishment of Pride

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 62, pp. 254–262. Gospel: Luke 10:38–42. Original preacher not named.

Assumpta est Maria in caelum.

Mary has been taken up into heaven.

(The Church in the Office of this day.)

The Gospel of this day is from the tenth chapter of St. Luke, and it reads thus:

1. “Jesus entered a certain village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his words. But Martha was busy preparing for her guest; and she came up and said: Lord, do you not care? My sister leaves me alone to serve you; tell her to help me. And the Lord answered and said to her: Martha, Martha, many things occupy you, when only one is necessary: Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her.” This is the Gospel.

2. All of it is an instruction for us. The heavenly Physician, who, as St. Gregory says, came to give us a medicine for each of our spiritual ailments,[1] left us humility, says the Catechism, to curb pride. Pride is a disordered appetite for our own excellence, by which a man takes the very goods, spiritual and bodily, with which the Most High enriched him as grounds for puffing himself up. It makes him think himself superior to other men, and even to God himself, whose rights he thinks he is free to violate. Humility, on the contrary, is a virtue by which a man, knowing his misery, abases and humbles himself under the mighty hand of his God, respects his laws submissively, and considers himself inferior in merit to other men; and whatever good is found in him he attributes entirely to the gracious mercy of the Lord. Jesus Christ shows the necessity of this virtue when he says: Unless you become like little children by humility, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.[2] Its reward matches the punishment of pride, for God, who resists the proud, fills the humble with graces.[3] We see this proposition verified in countless examples that sacred and even profane history sets before us. I wish to make it plain only in the model shown to us today. Most holy Mary… Ah, I find myself already brought into the mystery that is to be the guiding star of my discourse. Most holy Mary humbled herself; but how? Neither the nobility of her blood, distilled into her veins through the most illustrious heroes of antiquity; nor the extraordinary gifts with which nature and grace adorned her, exhausting all their refinements; nor even the dignity of mother of her God to which the Most High raised her: nothing was enough to make her break the precept of humility, by which she triumphed over the pride her merit might have stirred in her. But the Lord rewards her; and on this day, which was that of her passing, he repays her humility with a precious death, an anticipated resurrection and a triumphant assumption into heaven. To Mary on this day was given the better part of reward, as the Saviour said of the Magdalene (and the Church applies it to our Lady), because in life she chose the better part of humility: *Maria optimam partem elegit*.[4]

But, my brethren, we who not only lack the graces and privileges of most holy Mary but are clothed with so many reasons to humble ourselves, and yet do not keep the precept of humility nor set it against pride to triumph over it: what reward can we expect? Abasement, confusion and punishment; there is nothing else for the proud, says the Gospel: *Qui se humiliat exaltabitur, et qui se exaltat humiliabitur*.[5] See my subject: in most holy Mary we shall see humility exalted, the first part; in ourselves we shall see pride humbled, the second part.

First Part

3. Mary our Lady, this wondrous Esther whom the sword of the common destruction of original sin did not reach,[1] seemingly should not have been the prey of death, which sin alone brought into this world, as St. Paul said.[2] But the imitation of her most holy Son, who, being holiness itself by essence, humbled himself to death to give us life: this obliged the Mother of Jesus to accept this law, from which she was exempt by a singular privilege of the Lord.[3] But ah, a death full of delights, for it was brought about only by an act of divine love, in the opinion of the Fathers of the Church, was the reward with which she was repaid for humbling herself to the decree given against all sinners. Those pains, convulsions, anguish and agonies that make even the memory of death bitter fled from the bed of innocence, and in their place came the consolation of seeing the whole Apostolic college beside her, the joy of hearing the heavenly music, and the gladness of seeing that her heart was soon going where her treasure was.[4] Death came, then, disguised in the garb of pleasure, and took possession of the Lord's holy inheritance. But where, O death, is your victory?[5] Do not rejoice, proud and sad power, the Mother of the Almighty says to you in the words of a Prophet: Do not rejoice because you saw me one of your victims; I shall rise, though I sit in darkness.[6]

4. And indeed: Mary dies; her soul flies to glory like a white dove called by her beloved in the Canticles.[7] And does her body stay in the tomb? What is this? Is the mother of the better Jonah to remain shut up in the whale?[8] Is this holy ark, built better than the ancient one of incorruptible material, to decay, eaten by worms?[9] No, my brethren: the very thought of it is horrifying, said St. Augustine.[10] The heavenly spirits ask Jesus to raise to his side the ark of his sanctification; heaven judges its accidental glory incomplete, for part of the flesh of the God-Man is missing from it, since it did not yet have that of his mother. The soul of this Lady longs to be joined again to a body that was the faithful helper of her virtue and had not been a body of sin. What more? I imagine the very dead flesh of our Lady, taking the words Martha said to her divine Master in the Gospel of this day, saying to him silently: Lord, my soul, this sister of mine who was bound to me by the ties of pure love, has left me alone; tell her to help me out of this mournful occupation in which I find myself, so that together we may enjoy your company: *Soror mea reliquit me solam… dic ergo illi ut me adiuvet*.

5. God hears these cries; and to reward the humility with which most holy Mary had ordered the Apostles to give burial to her body (the grave being the house prepared for all the living),[11] he decrees the prompt resurrection of his Mother. The soul of the Virgin descends, then, accompanied, revered and applauded by the heavenly intelligences. It goes to the tomb and found her body, not ugly, blackened and eaten by dogs like that of Jezebel, because she was vain, haughty and proud,[12] but full of grace, beauty and loveliness, the fruits of humility, says St. Bernard. It enters it, communicates to it the four endowments of a glorified body,[13] and it begins to shine like the sun in the kingdom of its Father.[14]

6. Now that beautiful light of the world is drawn out from under the bushel, so that, set on the lampstand, it may shine in the house of the Lord.[15] Risen, Mary is no longer of this world; the earth no longer has the right to possess her; and she who in her humility put herself beneath all men, says St. Gregory, should by right rise above all the Angels.

7. Most holy Mary goes up body and soul into heaven. Let us say something of the triumph of her humility. The divine Solomon comes down from his throne to receive the better Bathsheba, his mother.[16] The greeting

alone that he would give her was her greatest reward. I think he would say to her in the words of the Canticles: Arise, my dove, my beautiful one, my mother, and come.[17] Many are the carats of your humility. You humbled yourself when, at the announcement of the dignity of Mother of your God, you confessed that you were his handmaid;[18] you humbled yourself when you were not ashamed to lay in the place of beasts him whom you knew to be the supreme King of glory and your Son; you humbled yourself when you obeyed submissively the decree of my exile to Egypt, knowing that I could destroy Herod my enemy; you humbled yourself in not daring to ask me openly for a single favour, although you knew that the Father had put all things into my hands;[19] you humbled yourself, in short, by always fleeing the crowds that acclaimed me. You wanted no occasions of vanity; you were present only at my trials and humiliations, glorying in being the mother of a man executed as a seditious agitator: great humility! But I have refined every means there could be of rewarding you. Arise and come, that the morning stars may adore you,[20] that the sun and the moon may admire your beauty; the Almighty himself already longs for your loveliness.[21]

8. Mary, then, goes up to heaven: not by her own power, which is not possible to a pure creature, nor in the arms of the Angels (if she is usually painted so, it is only to show the retinue that accompanied her), but leaning on her beloved Son;[22] and she goes up from the desert like a column of smoke, scattering delights.[23] All the elements greet her in her passage, and her whom they saw humbled on earth they venerate as Mother of him who formed them all by his word alone. The stars, which took part in her humiliations by veiling themselves in mourning with their eclipse on Calvary, acknowledge her as star of the sea, mother of the divine Sun of justice and a moon full in her days. She arrives amid acclamations in the empyrean, and at the voice of Jesus Christ those everlasting gates are opened,[24] that the Queen of glory may enter who had been Queen of all the virtues. The heavenly court is filled with delighted surprise at the sight of such majesty, and the more so when they see the Queen's throne placed at the right hand of the supreme Monarch,[25] and the whole most blessed Trinity crown this poor little handmaid as Empress of heaven and earth. Mary now crowned, come, I will say with the Church, come, let us adore Mary, or rather let us adore in her the Lord who so exalted her.[26] *Venite adoremus*, angelic spirits, come: this Lady was troubled when she saw one of you beside her, recognizing in him, says Chrysostom, a superior nature; adore her now as your Sovereign. Patriarchs and Prophets, come: this Lady thought herself unworthy to be the virgin your oracles announced; adore her now as the holy mountain from which was cut the cornerstone that served you as foundation.[27] Sacred virgins, come: Mary had the humility to present herself in the temple with the fruit of her womb in her arms, being purified like other women of the flesh; adore her now as your Queen, who was the pleasant garden of delights that brought forth the lily of the valleys without human cultivation.[28] Blessed… but this would be endless. All of us must adore our Queen and bless the Lord, who so rewarded this humble Mother of his; and we see clearly that he who humbles himself will be exalted, which was my first part.

Second Part

9. But he who exalts himself will be humbled. We usually deprive ourselves of the reward God has prepared for the humble, which most holy Mary enjoyed, and even draw down on ourselves the scourges of divine indignation, because, lacking the privileges and graces with which our Lady was enriched, we use the very reasons we have for humiliation to fill ourselves with pride and vanity. Let us consider, my brethren, that there is nothing in us that can stir up our haughtiness. What is man? A compound of body and rational soul; there is nothing more in us. Let us examine these two parts, and in them we shall find much ground for humbling ourselves. The body: to form it, none of those rich materials that draw the attention of mortals were used. When the most holy Trinity said, Let us make man,[1] it did not use gold, silver and the most precious stones to make the body; it did not take any portion of the heavens or the stars. No: earth; less still, the mud of the earth.[2] From that it formed the bones, the nerves, the arteries, the veins, the blood, the flesh, the skin; and the result was the most perfect body of man. From dust, from mud? Then what reason has dust and ashes to be proud?[3]

10. The soul: this indeed God created full of perfections. He made it in his own image and likeness, a little less than the Angels,[4] and set it over all the works of his hands. But ah, this noble and beautiful creature is defiled as soon as it enters the leper's house; that is, our beautiful soul, at the moment it is united to the body at our formation, contracts original sin. Since Adam sinned it comes into the world with a shameful blemish, which declares us sinners, children of wrath and curse, enemies of God and slaves of the devil. It is true that this sin is forgiven us by Baptism; but many remnants still remain, and above all the inclination and tinder of sin \[*fomes*\].[5] If so, I will say with the Psalmist: How long, and for what reason, shall sinners boast?[6]

11. Man, this compound of soul and body, can no doubt be endowed with those graces and privileges that mortals consider happy: he may be noble, handsome, rich, learned and raised to an honourable post. But where does man get this from? Every perfect gift, says St. James, comes down from the Father of lights,[7] who distributes them among those he pleases. So then, you have nothing, says the Apostle, that you have not received; and if you received it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?[8] And even if it were all your own, what is all of it to found pride on its possession? No one could be more puffed up by this than Solomon, the most majestic monarch of Israel: Jebusites, Amorites and other princes became his tributaries; his wisdom exceeded that of all the people of the East; in his house silver came to be despised for the great amount of gold the nations paid him each year.[9] In short Solomon, who, as he himself confesses, denied his heart nothing it had desired, was so far from glorying in this that he confesses and says: All, all is vanity, all only a cause of affliction to our spirit.[10]

12. What is certain is that the most precious thing we can enjoy in this world is life. But the life of man is a continual warfare on earth, says Job:[11] it is full of trials, exposed to illnesses, accompanied by vexations. Man, said Aristotle, is the most perfect creature on earth; but in this very thing his misfortune lies, for with the make-up of so delicate a constitution he is more apt to receive pain. In short, what is man? Cry out, God said to Isaiah. Cry out? And what shall I say? Say: All flesh is grass, and all its glory like the flower of the field, which withers and decays under the burning rays of the sun.[12]

13. In view of this, does it not seem to you that, even setting aside the Lord's command to humble ourselves and the rewards promised us for doing so, the mere consideration of what we are is enough to abase us? Yet the contrary happens. Nobility makes us vain: the blood that runs hot in the veins of many with the ardour of their gentility often raises many vapours that cloud their heads, and they present themselves to us as men of a different nature so as to win the breeze of popular favour. Riches fill with pride; and although the Lord grants them so that their owners may exercise certain virtues the poor cannot practise, they make them despise even the God who gave them, using them as means to satisfy their criminal passions. I became rich, said Hosea, and I became an idolater.[13] Bodily beauty, a gift heaven gives a creature so that it may place a pure soul in a beautiful shell, is often a cause of haughtiness in some women, who imagine themselves goddesses worthy of worldly incense. Honourable posts, perhaps obtained by intrigue and on the ruins of a rival, set a proud man above the cedars of Lebanon,[14] and there is no homage he does not think is due to him. (Wisdom.)[15]

14. But you yourselves are witnesses that of the very things that should incline us to humility, considering that all we have is as it were begged, we make a ladder (though without foundation, since it is built on dust) to climb to the throne of pride. But you yourselves will also have observed the fulfilment of the punishment with which God threatens the proud, which is humiliation and abasement. Let us leave aside now the eternal punishment deserved by one who admits a capital vice into his soul. How many punishments have we not seen carried out even in this world on the haughty and vain, in the very thing in which they sinned, which is what God does, as Scripture says?[16]

15. How many who were puffed up with the lustre of their blood, which spurred them to commit some crime, experienced like Nebuchadnezzar their infamy and disgrace?[17] How many Jezebels, proud of their beauty, have we seen presented to us with a horrible face after the blow of an illness, fulfilling in part what Jeremiah says,[18] that having lost wisdom and virtue through their beauty, their face was blackened above the coals?

How many Hamans, whose arrogance made them use their office to crush some poor wretch, found themselves on a gallows?[19] How many rich men who, driven by their abundance (perhaps gained by injustice), wanted their whims to prevail over the opinion of sensible men, came like the Great Captain to beg for alms?[20] There is no help for it, my brethren: God, who commands humility in order to reward it with exaltation, punishes, humbles and confounds anyone who despises this virtue and uses what should humble him to make himself vain. *Qui se humiliat exaltabitur, et qui se exaltat humiliabitur*.

16. Most pure Virgin, we have in you a good example of the exaltation God offers to the humble. You fulfilled in a most singular way the precept by which this virtue is laid upon us. The outstanding gifts with which grace enriched you were no spur to pride in you: you set against it the greatest humility, which is humility practised in high station, as St. Bernard said.[21] But God, as David foretold, raised you from the mire of self-knowledge to set you above all the princes of his kingdom.[22] And I, my mother, what can I expect, when, a wretch full of miseries and sins, I have tried to raise myself above my fellows with the greatest haughtiness and pride? What must I expect? Humiliation and abasement. You said it in the canticle of the Magnificat: God looked on the humility of his handmaid; even when the Almighty did such great things in me, and therefore he rewarded me by making all generations call me blessed. He showed the might of his arm and cast the proud from his heart; he put down the mighty from their throne and exalted the humble; the poor and needy he filled with good things, and the proud rich he sent away empty of them.[23] In this canticle, Lady, you have summed up my sermon. Give me your intercession to imitate you, humbling myself with the Lord's grace, so as to be exalted with you in glory. Amen.

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[24] Cf. St. Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Evang.* 32.

[25] Matt. 18:3.

[26] Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.

[27] Luke 10:42.

[28] Luke 14:11; 18:14.

[29] Esther 15:13 (Vulgate).

[30] Rom. 5:12.

[31] *Munificentissimus Deus*.

[32] Matt. 6:21.

[33] 1 Cor. 15:55.

[34] Source note: "Mich. vii, 8" (Mic. 7:8).

[35] Song 2:10, 14.

[36] Jonah 2; Matt. 12:40.

[37] Ps. 131:8 (Vulgate; Ps. 132:8); Exod. 25:10.

[38] Pseudo-Augustine, *De Assumptione B. Mariae Virginis* (probably 12th century).

[39] Job 30:23.

[40] 2 Kgs. 9:30–37 (Vulgate 4 Kings).

[41] Impassibility, clarity, agility and subtlety (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42–44).

[42] Matt. 13:43.

[43] Matt. 5:15.

[44] 1 Kgs. 2:19 (Vulgate 3 Kings).

[45] Song 2:10.

[46] Luke 1:38.

[47] John 3:35. At Cana Mary did ask, though indirectly: John 2:3.

[48] Job 38:7.

[49] Ps. 44:12 (Vulgate; Ps. 45:11).

[50] Song 8:5.

[51] Song 3:6.

[52] Ps. 23:7–9 (Vulgate; Ps. 24:7–9).

[53] Ps. 44:10 (Vulgate; Ps. 45:9).

[54] *latria*.

[55] Dan. 2:34, 45.

[56] Song 2:1; 4:12.

[1] Gen. 1:26.

[2] Gen. 2:7.

[3] Gen. 18:27; Sir. 10:9.

[4] Ps. 8:6 (Vulgate; Ps. 8:5).

[5] V, can. 5 (on concupiscence).

[6] Source note: “Psalm. xciii” (Ps. 93:3 Vulgate; Ps. 94:3).

[7] Jas. 1:17.

[8] 1 Cor. 4:7.

[9] 1 Kgs. 9:20–21; 4:30; 10:21, 27.

[10] Eccles. 2:10–11; 1:14.

[11] Job 7:1.

[12] Isa. 40:6–7.

[13] Source note: “Cap. xii” (Hos. 12:8; cf. 13:6).

[14] Ps. 36:35 (Vulgate; Ps. 37:35).

[15] Cf. Wis. 5:8.

[16] Wis. 11:17 (Vulgate; 11:16).

[17] Dan. 4:27–30.

[18] Source note: “Thren. iv, 8” (Lam. 4:7–8, on the Nazirites, whose faces were “blacker than coal”).

[19] Esther 7:10.

[20] *Date obolum Belisario*.

[21] St. Bernard, *Hom. super “Missus est”* 4, 9: *magna virtus humilitas in honore*.

[22] Ps. 112:7–8 (Vulgate; Ps. 113:7–8).

[23] Luke 1:48–53.

63. For a Parish Priest’s First Appearance before His Parishioners in His Church

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 63, pp. 263–273. Gospel: John 10:14 (theme only). Original preacher not named.

Ego sum Pastor bonus, et cognosco oves meas, et cognoscunt me meae (John 10:14).

I am the good Shepherd: I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.

1. I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and they know me. These, my brethren, are the words our adorable Saviour repeats to us in various places, especially in the tenth chapter of St. John.[1] They are brief but full of meaning: they show the obligations of a parish priest towards his parishioners, and at the same time they reveal the obligations of the parishioners towards their parish priests. Jesus Christ is the good shepherd by essence, to whom the Father entrusted the direction and government of a Church that he was to make his own at the inestimable price of his blood. He founded it, enriched it with his gifts, instituted most sweet Sacraments for it, and gave it all the resources needed for its preservation, growth and defence. But the Saviour could not govern it visibly for long: a painful passion and death were to take him from our sight and set him at the right hand of his Father. But so that at his death his sheep might not be left exposed to straying, he left in the world those who would take the government of his own flock in his name. As universal shepherd of the whole flock he left St. Peter, and in him all his lawful successors the Roman Pontiffs; for the particular dioceses, the Apostles and all the lord Bishops; and for each particular church, the parish priests

appointed to them. These are subject to the lord Bishops, and all to the Supreme Pontiff, vicar of Jesus Christ, who holds in the Church the primacy of honour and jurisdiction.[2] He is like the chief herdsman of the whole flock \[*mayoral de cabaña*\], to whom must look as their superior not only all the faithful, who are like the sheep of the Lord's flock, but the parish priests and Bishops themselves, who are the lower shepherds to whose charge part of the Saviour's flock is committed. By the providence of this Lord I have been named parish priest, or curate, of this parish, judging myself the least of all who have gone before me in this office until now. In view of my insufficiency, lack of talent and of virtue, I fear, and not without reason, that I shall destroy what others will have built. Nevertheless, I can do all things in him who strengthens me, I will say with St. Paul; not I, but the grace of God with me.[3] I promise in the presence of the Lord to do what I can for the right discharge of my ministry. For this I will keep before me the words of my text: I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep. That is, as a good shepherd I will regard my parishioners as so many objects deserving all my attention and care. Would that, through your docility, love and submission, I might say with Jesus Christ that my sheep know me! And see here what I am going to set before you for the first time. In what does the knowledge a parish priest must have of his parishioners consist? The first part. In what does it consist, or how must the parishioners know their parish priest? The second part.

First Part

2. The Saviour himself speaks of those who have the care of souls under the figure of shepherds of sheep; and so he said to St. Peter and to all who follow him in this ministry: Feed my sheep.[1] What, then, are the chief obligations of a shepherd? They are to live always in their company, to watch over them day and night, and to procure them their necessary food. This a shepherd owes his sheep; this is to know them as he should. And see here the three special obligations of a parish priest, who is the shepherd of his parish. They make me shudder every time I contemplate them, for the account I must give God of the right administration of my office: residence in my parish; zeal and vigilance for the good of your souls; and giving you the necessary pasture. Let us speak of them separately, though briefly.

3. Residence. The shepherd lives always in the company of his sheep and never abandons them. The most delightful palaces, the most beautiful gardens and the most agreeable society: all, all he puts after rough mountains, wild forests and the most overgrown valleys, for the sole delight he finds in living beside his flock. Were it not so, he could not know his sheep well, look into their needs or attend to their relief. See here the first obligation of a parish priest, which is to reside continually in his parish. It is an obligation the sacred Canons enjoin severely, and especially the council of Trent;[2] an obligation that, according to weighty authors, is not only of ecclesiastical law but also of divine and natural law. And indeed, either the parish priest is not to be a shepherd, or he must reside materially within his parish, to know and deal with the sheep the divine Shepherd has put in his care. For how will he see them if he is absent from them? How will he know them if he does not see them? How will he love them if he does not know them? And how will he console and help them in their tribulations if he does not love them? In the same way the sheep, the parishioners, must live with their parish priest in order to know him, and must know him in order to love him; and with this mutual love the people and their curate form a holy city, a chosen flock, in which the eternal Shepherd of our souls takes pleasure.[3] This obligation to reside in my parish will be the object of my first care; and only necessity will ever take me away from you, and that with the proper permissions to relieve me of my duty in this respect, and putting in my place a satisfactory person capable of carrying out my ministry.

4. To watch over the flock entrusted. See the second obligation of a parish priest. What does a shepherd who cares for the good of his sheep do? Day and night he watches over them: by day so that they may feed on wholesome pasture; by night so that they may sleep, while he usually stays out in the open, in the cold, the rain, the sun and the night dew, to look after and defend them. If he hears the wolf, what movements are not

seen in that man, showing his love for his flock? He shouts, throws stones, wakes the dogs, calls others to help him drive off the enemy. If some quarrel arises among his sheep, he runs at once to quiet them; and when a threat is not enough, he strikes them with his crook, but with what care and compassion! If one goes astray, he looks for it to bring it back to the fold; if it falls sick, he applies the remedies nature and experience suggest to him; and if it dies, his affection sometimes makes him shed tears. From this simple explanation of a shepherd's material care and zeal, which you yourselves will have experienced, you will know how much a parish priest must watch in the care of his parish; and I will strive to carry this out, with the grace of my God and your prayers to help me.

5. If the infernal wolf, if the evil spirit, if irreligion, if scandal should seek to take possession of your souls, I will run at once to the remedy. And if I saw my labours, my exhortations, my charitable admonitions and my threats bear no fruit, I will look for other shepherds to help me, I will inform my prelate, I will make use of the civil authority, which according to St. Paul bears, and not without cause, the sword of God for the punishment of the wicked.[4] If in your houses or families there should be discord, or lack of unity and peace, a thing so contrary to the spirit of Christianity and even to your own tranquillity and quiet, I will try to bring you to peace by the means prudence suggests to me, so that each house, each family, may be like a spiritual Jerusalem, which means vision of peace. If one of you falls sick, like St. Paul I will take your sickness into my own spirit,[5] filled with sadness at the sight of your suffering, and I will give you what consolation I can, assisting you spiritually with the helps the Church has provided for this situation: the administration of Penance, and feeding you with the living bread that came down from heaven, which may give you strength like Elijah to walk without stumbling to Horeb, the mountain of God,[6] which is glory. And if he dies, for there is no man who lives and shall not see death,[7] I will bury his body, I will pray to the Lord for his soul, and I will present to Jesus Christ the fleece of that sheep he had put in my care, assuring him that it died in my presence and that I left out no means that could lead to its salvation. In this way I will fulfil the indispensable obligation of watching with zeal over the good of my parish.

6. To feed the sheep. This is the third obligation that falls on a good shepherd. He must procure the food of his flock with the greatest earnestness, letting no day or night pass without seeking the most abundant pastures for them to eat and the most wholesome waters for them to drink. Whoever did not do so could not be called a shepherd to whom the sheep belong as his own, but only a hireling, who cares only for his own comfort and ease.[8] This too is the obligation of a parish priest. The preaching of the divine word, attendance in the confessional and instruction in the catechism are the spiritual pasture a curate owes his parishioners; and all this, together with private admonitions when necessary, is able to feed souls, so that all may form a perfectly Christian people.

7. Preaching has always been held so indispensable to our ministry that it made St. Jerome say that without it all the other virtues, however brilliant they seem, are barren.[9] That is why the sacred council of Trent strictly commands us parish priests to preach to the people on every Sunday and principal feast of the Church.[10] Whoever does not do so, besides falling into disobedience, might fear the divine indignation, as St. Paul feared it when he said: Woe to me if I do not preach! I should be unfaithful to my ministry and disobey the orders of God, who has sent me only to preach; and when I do it, it can be no cause of praise to me, for I only fulfil a strict obligation.[11] If he who does not feed, according to the holy Fathers, kills, I should be a murderer if I failed to feed my faithful with the pasture of the divine word. So do not be surprised that I fulfil my duty in this respect, preaching often to teach you the way of truth, so that your souls may live in the grace of the Lord. Do not expect me to give you discourses full of human rhetoric: what I preach will be with the greatest simplicity, for your better understanding. The confessional will be my constant dwelling, ready to give the robe of a child of God to all the prodigals of the divine mercies who have strayed from the law and sinned against their heavenly Father.[12] Would that I might often see the Sacraments received, which will be for me the clearest proof that my children, my parishioners, wish to set their conduct in order and wash their souls

when through human frailty sins have stained them! Instruction in the catechism of Christian doctrine is the most necessary, because children, once imbued with the rudiments of the faith, keep them in mind and preserve them all their lives. A new jar or vessel usually keeps the smell of the first liquor put into it.[13] In this, my brethren, I will spare no labour or fatigue; I will not allow in my parish the renewal of the complaint Jeremiah once made, that the little ones asked for the bread of true doctrine and there was no one to break it to them.[14] But the fathers of families must help me in carrying out this ministry, sending their children and servants to learn the doctrine from their parish priest; and from now on I say to you with Jesus Christ: Let the children come to me to hear my instructions, for such as these God has prepared the kingdom of heaven.[15] In private consultations, when some poor soul finds himself oppressed by doubts of conscience, he will find me ready to dispel them and give him the consolation needed for his peace. And since the shepherd must also attend to the bodily sustenance of the unfortunate, I will try, as far as my means reach, to help the truly needy. Would that my income could relieve every misery! I keep well in mind what St. Paul said of himself, that we parish priests should desire no more than the necessary food and clothing.[16] All the rest belongs to the poor, and they shall share in it. This, briefly explained, is the obligation of a curate; this is for the shepherd to know his sheep. Let us now see how the sheep must know their shepherd.

Second Part

8. Not once but repeatedly Jesus Christ says in his Gospel the words on which I have founded the teaching of this my first plática: I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and they also know me. The divine Saviour wished to set before us not only the character of a shepherd of souls, a bishop or a curate, but also the obligation of the faithful, symbolized by the sheep, towards their parish priest or spiritual shepherd. I have already suggested in what the shepherd's knowledge of the sheep consists, that is, the curate's knowledge of his parishioners. We shall now see the obligations you have contracted towards your parish priest or shepherd. For this we have only to look at what sheep do with those who govern them. They know their shepherd without confusing him with others; they hear and understand his voice; and they follow him with meekness, docility, submission and love. From the moment their natural instinct notices the care the shepherd uses for their good, they place themselves under the shelter of his protection, defence and safety. They never suppose that the one who rules them will lead them to the precipice, still less expose them to the fury of their enemies. So they live in peace and rest in their shepherd's vigilance. In this consists the knowledge sheep have of their shepherd; and in this is summed up the knowledge parishioners must have of their parish priest: to recognize his authority, to obey him with submission, and to deal with him openly and with love. Let us reflect a little on this.

9. To recognize the authority of a parish priest. You must not consider him, my brethren, as a private person, as Peter, John or James, but as a minister of Jesus Christ, of the number of those whom he sent to various parts for the government of souls, saying to them: Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.[1] In these words the Church in her Councils and all the holy Fathers have found the true origin of the dignity of a curate of souls, which acknowledges no other author than Jesus Christ himself. He ordained the Apostles and gave them his power to rule his Church and to ordain others who, with his authority and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, would direct the Saviour's flock in the part that falls to them. You must, then, regard and recognize him as a successor in the priesthood of Christ, to whom at his ordination was communicated power over the real and mystical body of the same Jesus. That is, he was given in the first place the power to consecrate his most holy body, a power not granted to the kings of the earth nor even to the loftiest heavenly spirits. What dignity! That at the voice of a man the Son of God should, as it were, become incarnate again in his hands, and that earthly matter such as bread and wine should be changed into the body and blood of the Saviour! That God should obey, so to speak, the words of a man, and the Sun of justice come down to earth in obedience to the priest, better than the great luminary did

at the voice of Joshua![2] This is the dignity of your parish priest, though unworthy to enjoy it. More still: he has also received power over the mystical body of Jesus Christ, which is this part of the Church entrusted to him, with authority to forgive your sins in the name of the same Lord. What power! Who can forgive sins but God alone? says the Gospel.[3] It is true: God alone forgives them; but he wills that only those be forgiven whom his minister the priest forgives. Those whose sins you forgive, said Jesus Christ, are forgiven them; and those whose sins you do not forgive remain unforgiven.[4] That is to say, my brethren, that although it is God who gives grace and the remission of sins, since he has appointed sacramental confession as the one means for it, he seems to wait for the priest's words to forgive the sinner. I have more still as parish priest. In the collation of this curacy I have been given faculty for the administration of the Sacraments, which is not granted to other priests without a particular commission, and that only as delegates, not with ordinary jurisdiction, which the Pontiff enjoys in the whole Church, the bishop in his diocese and the curate in his parish. So I am the one appointed as proper pastor to hear confessions, preach, baptize, marry, administer Viaticum and Extreme Unction, and govern the people in everything spiritual.[5] In this respect you must know your parish priest: the titles that adorn him and the powers granted him demand all your respect; my person does not deserve it, and you must look not at it but at my ministry.

10. To obey him with submission. I have no authority to command you except in what belongs to Religion and the spiritual good of your souls. My government is purely religious. With my commands, as God said to his Prophet, I must root out vices, plant virtues, build up holiness and tear down the building of abomination.[6] This I must do by means of my sermons, of instruction in the confessional, of my decisions in the consultations brought to me, and of private admonitions. In vain, then, would my authority to do this be if there were no obligation in you to obey me. If the sheep do not heed the voice of their shepherd, all is lost: once they stray, they would all fall over the precipice. Obey your superiors:[7] this is a common saying that Scripture repeats to us many times. My conduct may not be the most fitting for your imitation, though I will try to order it rightly; but you must not hear my commands as coming from me, but as words of God, who uses this lowly instrument to instruct and teach you. He who hears you, said the Saviour, hears me, and he who despises you despises me.[8] The sins that stain a man in no way harm his dignity. That is from God, and it is God who is obeyed in the commands of superiors. When a parish priest is bad, his parishioner must not take what is bad in him, but must take the doctrine and the commands he lays on him. This is what Jesus Christ said to the Jews, who apparently wished to excuse themselves from obedience to the superiors who governed them because of the depravity of their conduct. Look, he said: the scribes and Pharisees, that is, the doctors and ministers of the law, sit on the chair of Moses; do all they command you, but do not imitate their works.[9] We see, my brethren, some Fathers of the Church say, that mines of gold, silver and precious stones usually lie in the most arid and rugged ground; yet we go there, take out the treasures they hold, and throw away the briars, rocks and thistles that hid them. So, when a parish priest is stained with sins, why should we not take the gold of his doctrine and pay no attention to the faults that surround him? Only when the parish priest or another superior evidently commanded you something contrary to the religion of Jesus Christ should you not obey him, but say with the Apostles: We must obey God rather than men.[10]

11. To deal with him with love and openness. This is one of the most necessary conditions for the unity, peace and spiritual progress of a parish. I do not speak here of that human, civil and social dealing rightly established among people, which contributes so much to keeping harmony and good order among them. I do not speak of this now, but of that spiritual and inward dealing the sheep should have with their shepherd, and the faithful with their curate. The qualities with which a parish priest is adorned, and which the Councils attribute to him, all require the faithful to deal with him in matters of conscience so as to set their consciences at rest. He is a teacher; and all, as disciples, must seek on his lips good counsel, sound doctrine, light in their doubts and truth for right action. The lips of the priest, God said by Malachi, keep knowledge, and the understanding of the law shall be sought from his mouth.[11] Most of the errors and disorders seen in towns arise because people do not open their souls to their parish priest, who should be their teacher; they consult

only men who are ignorant, lax or corrupt; and he who touches pitch, says the Holy Spirit, will be defiled by it.[12] What will a man in doubt about one of the articles of our belief gain if he asks the opinion of an impious and irreligious man? To err as his teacher errs. I say the same in any other moral matter if he consults one who is immoral and lax.

12. The parish priest is also a physician appointed to heal the spiritual ailments of the people entrusted to him. Now, with what openness does the sick man deal with the one he thinks can cure his ailments? He seeks him out, tells him in the greatest detail the symptoms of his illness, shows him the sores that torment him; in short he hides nothing from him and reveals everything; and if he did not, not only would he not recover from the illness that afflicts him, but he would put his life in danger of death. This would happen to a man suffering from a spiritual ailment, or troubled by doubt in his actions, if he does not seek out his parish priest, the physician of his soul, and show him, whether in the confessional or in private consultations, all that passes within him, so that he may give him the proper medicine for his complete cure. But little of this is seen; and in view of the laxity found in many towns we might ask with Jeremiah: Is there no balm in Gilead, or is there no physician there?[13] Is there not in each place a parish priest, a priest, a spiritual physician? Then why are the diseases of souls not cured? Why are families so corrupt? It comes either from not dealing openly and sincerely with the parish priest, or from avoiding him if it is suspected that he will not settle doubts as one would like. This often ruins the virtue of a parish. Lastly, he should be regarded as a father, and a father who desires nothing more than the consolation of the children he has begotten in Jesus Christ.[14] God help me! What mutual love is seen between submissive children and an affectionate father! With what tenderness they love one another and share their concerns! So great is the love you have for me, said St. Paul to the Galatians, that if it were possible you would have plucked out your eyes and put them in my hands.[15] So those first faithful repaid the love the Apostle had shown them, watching, labouring and suffering hardships for the children God had given him and whom he had made Christians by his preaching and doctrine. I have neither the spirit of St. Paul nor can I labour as he did, with such knowledge and virtue, in your spiritual regeneration; yet I have contracted with you an obligation that orders me to regard you as children whom I must care for with the greatest diligence and affection, protect in their needs and console in their afflictions. But while I do all this in fulfilment of my duties, you must not be unnatural children. You must look on your parish priest as a true father, deal with him with the greatest confidence and tenderness in all your troubles, consult him in your doubts and set your needs before him; but this with trust, with openness. For what father will refuse the just requests of his children, if it is in his power to meet them? If he asks for bread, Jesus Christ says through St. Luke, will he give him a stone; if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?[16] That is, if a parishioner asks his curate for good advice, will he send him away ill served? If he asks for help in his misery, will he shut the door in his face? God forbid that the new parish priest heaven has sent you should do such a thing. I, with heaven's help, will strive to carry out my ministry as shepherd by knowing my sheep; and for this I will always be in their sight, I will watch with zeal over their good, and I will give them the spiritual pasture that belongs to me as such. And I hope with good reason that my sheep, my parishioners, will know me as the angel God has appointed to guide them to eternal life;[17] and so they will hear my words and obey my commands, all directed to the good of their souls, and will come to me as to a teacher, physician and father to set out their needs so that I may relieve them. This is what I set out to prove.

13. My God, may a ray of light come down, sent by the sovereign Spirit, to enlighten my understanding and inflame my will, so that I may fruitfully carry out the ministry entrusted to me, far beyond my strength. From today I present to you these children, who, being yours, you have put in my care. Fill them with your blessings, so that, practising virtue, they may attain the end for which they were created, which is blessedness. Amen.

[18] John 21:15–17 is "Feed my sheep", cited in ¶2.

[19] 1870, *Pastor aeternus*.

[20] Phil. 4:13; 1 Cor. 15:10.

[21] John 21:17.

[22] VI, *De ref.* c. 1–2; Sess. XXIII, *De ref.* c. 1.

[23] 1 Pet. 2:25.

[24] Rom. 13:4.

[25] 2 Cor. 11:29.

[26] John 6:51; 1 Kgs. 19:8.

[27] Ps. 88:49 (Vulgate; Ps. 89:48).

[28] John 10:12–13.

[29] Source note: "Epist. ad Ocean." (St. Jerome, Ep. 69 *ad Oceanum*, 8, on the bishop's duty to teach).

[30] V, *De ref.* c. 2; Sess. XXIV, *De ref.* c. 4.

[31] 1 Cor. 9:16, paraphrased.

[32] Luke 15:22.

[33] Horace, *Epistles* I, 2, 69–70.

[34] Lam. 4:4.

[35] Mark 10:14; Matt. 19:14.

[36] 1 Tim. 6:8.

[1] Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19–20.

[2] Josh. 10:12–14.

[3] Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21.

[4] John 20:23.

[5] XXIV, *De ref. matr.* c. 1.

[6] Jer. 1:10.

[7] Heb. 13:17.

[8] Luke 10:16.

[9] Matt. 23:2–3.

[10] Acts 5:29.

[11] Mal. 2:7.

[12] Sir. 13:1.

[13] Jer. 8:22.

[14] 1 Cor. 4:15.

[15] Gal. 4:15.

[16] Luke 11:11.

[17] Mal. 2:7; Rev. 2:1 (the "angel" of a church).

64. For a Parish Priest's Farewell When He Is Transferred to Another Parish, or Leaves His Own for Another Reason

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 64, pp. 274–279. Gospel: Acts 20:22 (theme only). Original preacher not named.

Ego vado (Acts 20:22).

I am going.

1. After the apostle St. Paul had governed the church of Ephesus for three years,[1] he found he must part from those children he held in his heart, because the Holy Spirit urged him inwardly to go to the city of Jerusalem to carry out there the high purposes for which the Lord had marked him out. This parting was painful to him: he was leaving a people and a province where he had scattered the seed of the Gospel, gathering most abundant fruits from his ministry and winning the love and esteem of those people. To show them, then, his

sorrow, his gratitude, and the desire that filled his heart that they should persevere in the Religion and virtue they had acquired, he summoned the chief leaders of that church to a town near Ephesus. There he addressed them in a tender and loving speech to take his leave of them, reminding them of all he had preached to them and giving them certain instructions to guard themselves henceforth against error and falling away. I, my brethren, am in a very similar situation. Divine Providence obliges me to leave you in body, though my heart will always be in your midst. No doubt you deserve another parish priest more learned and more zealous than the one who has governed this parish for so many years. Would that you may obtain one as you desire! And I will pray to the Lord unceasingly to give you such a one, who may rebuild what I perhaps have torn down. My departure is not caused by any displeasure I have with you; on the contrary, you have given me nothing but reasons for gratitude and loving appreciation. God disposes it, and we must submit to his inscrutable judgments. I am going, I will say like the Apostle to the Ephesians; but I wish to take leave of you by speaking to you for the last time in this place. And what shall I say? Ah, I have taken as my model today the apostle St. Paul in his farewell to Ephesus, and I will do no more than relate the words with which he made it, applying them, though I cannot do it so perfectly, to the farewell I mean to make to this my church. This will be my subject.

Single Section

2. The Apostle, finding himself obliged to leave Ephesus, since he meant to be in Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost,[1] went to the port of Miletus to take ship and carry out the orders of heaven. He did not take leave of the Ephesians in their own city, perhaps so as not to stir up their grief and tears; from Miletus he sent to call the most respected persons of that holy church, and when they were before him, he gave them a long address, whose words I will give in substance. He reduced his whole farewell especially to three things, which I will try to apply as far as I can to mine.

First.

3. Surrounded by those children he had just begotten in Jesus Christ, St. Paul said to them first: My brethren, you know very well how I have behaved towards you from the first day I entered Asia. I have tried to give you an example of virtue, serving God with humility, and also weeping for my sins, resisting the temptations that came upon me through the plots of my enemies. You know too that I have left out no means that could help to announce to you all the precepts and counsels of the Lord, exhorting you to keep the faith and to do penance for your sins. I say this because I am leaving you, and you will see my face no more.[2] See here the first thing he said to them at his leave-taking, which did not fail to wring the hearts of such beloved children.

4. I have not laboured in this parish with the wisdom and spirit of the Apostle in Ephesus, nor do I deserve the grief and sorrow the Ephesians showed at the departure of their shepherd. But as far as my uselessness and lack of virtue allowed, I can tell you that from the day I set foot in this church I have not wilfully left out anything belonging to my ministry. I have tried to instruct the young in the doctrine of the catechism, knowing that all men are vain in whom there is not the knowledge of God,[3] which is Christian doctrine, as the Wise Man says. I have gladly received in the confessional all the Naamans, leprous with sin, who wished to wash in the Jordan of penance and be cleansed of their iniquities.[4] I have attended the poor sick, reconciling them with God and administering to them the Sacraments needed to go holy and pure to the heavenly Jerusalem, which admits no stain.[5] And I have answered as well as I could the doubts that had arisen in your consciences, when you asked advice of the one who by office was the angel God sent you to guide you to heaven.[6] Above all, I have preached the divine word, showing you your obligations, the reward you could hope for from fulfilling them and the punishment you must fear from transgressing them. Someone may have resented my reproofs; but I assure you before God that my intention has never been to wound anyone, but to fulfil my obligation. The Lord commanded in the old law that if two men went out to cut wood and the iron of one man’s axe flew off the handle and struck the other, it should be found out whether the

striker was an enemy of the injured man, in which case he was held guilty of the mishap; but if he was a friend, the accident should be taken as chance and not imputed to him as a crime.[7] Preaching is like going to cut wood in a forest, some holy Fathers say. Often someone comes away wounded from sermons, especially those who, according to Scripture, want to be told only words that please their senses.[8] But if by chance this has happened in my exhortations, you cannot be unaware of the affection I have had for all of you; and so I have been to blame for no resentment that may have arisen from them, for I was appointed by God to root out vices,[9] even though this was painful to those who were at ease in the midst of their iniquities. Let us go on.

Second.

5. The second thing St. Paul said on taking leave of the Ephesians was this: I fear, my children, that after my departure ravening wolves will come who will not spare the flock of Jesus Christ: men who will speak perversely; and from among yourselves partisans of error will arise, trying to lead others astray and make themselves leaders of impiety. Therefore be always on the alert, keeping always in mind what I have announced to you, exhorting each of you, even with tears in my eyes, to keep the faith and good morals.[10]

6. Would, my brethren, that the same may not happen among you! We are in an age in which virtue, and even faith, are regarded with great indifference. The enemies of Religion do not sleep: they are always scheming to undermine its foundations, so that the building Jesus Christ raised at the cost of his most precious blood may fall. For this they spread irreligious ideas; they publish doctrines that St. Paul calls strange,[11] because they are not those our divine Master taught us. They attack the Church, her mysteries, her Sacraments and her ministers; and they do not hesitate to call works of piety and spiritual ceremonies childish superstitions, with the aim of destroying all outward worship with which we venerate our great God. And this is done not only by those who are openly children of unbelief. Among ourselves, among those who by Baptism are enrolled under the Saviour's banners, who call him their Master and pretend to follow his doctrine, there are men who by their actions, words and writings contradict the very doctrine and maxims they have professed and which our fathers taught us. Therefore, my brethren, I strongly charge you to watch over your souls. Arm yourselves with the catechism, and believe nothing that contradicts what you see engraved in it. Recall from time to time what I have tried to engrave on your hearts. The parish priest who succeeds me will teach you the same as I have preached to you, for we are both ministers of the same Lord and both profess the same law; and he as well as I desire nothing more than the salvation of your souls, whereas the partisans of error seek only to hurl them into the abyss. Follow always the voices of your shepherds. As sent by the eternal Shepherd, who gave them his authority over this small portion of his flock, they will regard you as their sheep, for whose loss they must give account at his divine tribunal; and so they will never tell you anything but what leads to your eternal salvation. Do not listen to anyone who is not your shepherd if he goes against what your own has taught you. Some wolves in sheep's clothing will come to you,[12] that is, men who under pretext of religion and virtue will try to seduce you away from true doctrine. But look, I say again, to the catechism: let it be the shield that turns back their poisoned darts; and do nothing, however much they persuade you otherwise, but what it commands you and what your parish priests have taught you.

Third.

7. Lastly, the Apostle took his leave saying: Now, my children, I cannot repay you otherwise for the kindnesses you have shown me, and the docility with which you submitted to the faith of my Lord Jesus Christ through my preaching and teaching, than by commending you to God, who alone can build up and give holiness to all, so that they may obtain that heavenly inheritance he has prepared for his elect. And having said this, he knelt down and prayed to the Lord with his disciples. There was great weeping from all, who embraced St. Paul and showed their sorrow at his departure, especially remembering what he had told them, that they would see his face no more; and they did not leave him until he had embarked on the ship that was to part them.[13] So the Apostle ended his farewell to a church that had been the object of his love and labours.

8. Ah, my brethren! Every time I consider the affection you have shown me during my spiritual government of this holy parish, your eagerness to hear the divine word, though announced by the least of its ministers, and how much many of you have helped me in the needs that befell me in this time, my heart, full of gratitude, finds no other way to repay your affection than to pray continually to God for the spiritual and even temporal happiness of your town. Perhaps I have offended you at some time, either by my words or by my actions; but I sincerely hope for your indulgence. Do not blame my will, which has never been to harm you. From now on I will not cease to beg the sovereign Father of lights[14] to fill you with his gifts and to help abundantly with his graces even those who may have offended me in any way, whom I forgive with all my heart; and I offer myself as their friend and protector as far as my strength reaches. So I promise, and God is my witness of the desire I have to fulfil it. Now, then, I will say with St. Paul, I commend you to God.

9. Yes, my God: into your hands I put this parish, which in your name and by your authority I have governed for some years, and which at the prompting of obedience I find myself obliged to leave. It is yours, Lord; yours are its children. Give them another shepherd who will govern them with more care and solicitude. But above all, govern it yourself from heaven. He who plants is nothing, I will say with St. Paul, and he who waters is nothing, unless you give the increase.[15] That is, however much care a parish priest takes to plant the virtues and water souls with the waters of true doctrine, he will do nothing without your powerful influence, for you are the author of grace and the King and Lord of all the virtues. May I, my God, say at my departure what my most lovable Redeemer said to the eternal Father when he was about to ascend to his glory: Not one of all those you put in my charge has perished. Let none of this parish perish, Lord; rather, I beg you, fill them all with blessings. Bless their fields, so that, bearing the necessary food, the spiritual life may not fail for lack of what the body needs. Bless the animals that serve them, either for their labour or for their sustenance. Bless their houses, so that the spirit of Satan may flee from them and peace may reign, that most precious gift which was the blessing you left us as our patrimony when you went up to the right hand of your Father;[16] that holy peace which the world cannot give, which alone can sanctify all, for it springs from divine grace. Bless their bodies, so that, free from illnesses, they may give themselves to the tasks that belong to them. For a poor man who must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow,[17] how can he feed his little children and all his family if he finds himself laid low in bed and unable to work? Above all, bless their souls: what will it profit a man to have all the world if his soul suffers loss?[18] Give all the helps they need to turn away from sin, courage to resist the temptations with which the devil tries to pervert them; and if perhaps they have already fallen into sin, inspire their conversion, give them true penance, so that they may be restored to your divine grace. In short, bless them with all the blessings from on high. And I, my brethren, as the last of my blessings, give you the blessing of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; may it come down upon you and remain with you for all eternity. Amen.

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[19] Acts 20:31.

[1] Acts 20:16–17.

[2] Acts 20:18–21, 25, paraphrased.

[3] Wis. 13:1.

[4] 2 Kgs. 5:10–14 (Vulgate 4 Kings).

[5] Rev. 21:27.

[6] Mal. 2:7.

[7] Deut. 19:4–6.

[8] 2 Tim. 4:3.

[9] Jer. 1:10.

[10] Acts 20:29–31.

[11] Heb. 13:9.

[12] Matt. 7:15.

[13] Acts 20:32, 36–38.

[14] Jas. 1:17.
[15] 1 Cor. 3:7.
[16] John 14:27.
[17] Gen. 3:19.
[18] Matt. 16:26.

65. For the Day of the Publication of the Bull of the Holy Crusade

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 65, pp. 280–293. Gospel: Luke 16:6 (theme only). Original preacher not named.

Accipe cautionem tuam (Luke 16:6).

Take your bond.

1. Take this note, or receipt \[*vale ó carta de pago*\]. See here, my brethren, the wise and prudent way in which, according to the parable Jesus Christ puts before us in the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, a steward won the esteem of his master.[1] To win his favour he called the other servants or lesser tenants. Seeing that they could not pay their master all they owed him, he called them all one by one and asked them how much their debt was. Seeing that they did not have the full sums needed to settle it, he took from them what they could give him, and then gave them a receipt, or discharge, for all the rest. So they were square with their lord, and he made friends for the future of all whom he had helped in this way. This is a likeness, though with some difference, of what happens today at the publication of the Bull of the Holy Crusade. We are like tenants of the vineyard the sovereign Householder planted.[2] He requires of us the fruit of penance, of the virtues and of the fulfilment of our obligations, and of the precepts he laid on us, both by himself and through his Church. This mother, full of compassion, sees that our weakness and frailty sometimes prevent us from paying God all we owe him. As faithful steward of the price of the blood of Jesus Christ and dispenser of his goods, she presents us today with a Bull that the Sovereign Pontiff grants us every year at the request of our Catholic Monarch. It contains countless graces, indults and privileges: some to expiate our sins by means of indulgences, some to relieve our bodies of various austerities our law ordains, and some for other holy ends that free us from certain burdens which without this Bull might perhaps be unbearable to us. There you have, the Supreme Pontiff seems to say to us in the name of the Church he governs as supreme shepherd and vicar of Jesus Christ, there you have this Bull, this bond, this note, this receipt. With a modest sum given by way of alms, which must be spent on the holy ends for which it is appointed, you may use graces that would otherwise be hard for you to enjoy, and give the Lord satisfaction for a great part of what you owe him. And what does this Bull amount to? I will show you in this plática. In it I will do no more than explain with the greatest simplicity and clarity what the Bull of the Holy Crusade is, whose publication we carry out today. I judge this plain and simple explanation necessary to avoid many errors.

Single Section

2. What is the Bull of the Holy Crusade? It is a pontifical diploma containing many very useful privileges, indults and graces, granted to the Catholic King of Spain to help him in the war against the infidels. The name Bull comes from a certain round medallion the citizens of Rome wore to show their nobility, which for that reason they called *bulla*; and since all pontifical diplomas or briefs carry their leaden seal, they came to be called Bulls. The one we are speaking of is called the Bull of the Crusade because it is granted after the manner of the graces and indulgences that the supreme pontiff Urban II granted to the soldiers then fighting against the Turks for the recovery of the Holy Land, who were called crusaders because they wore a red cross on their breasts. It is called a pontifical diploma because only the Pope can grant this Bull, and the lord Commissary of the Crusade can explain and interpret it with authority the Pope himself grants him. This Bull is granted to the Catholic King and to all who live in the dominions of his kingdom, and it is a privilege

enjoyed only by Spaniards. It is to help our Monarch spiritually in the war against the infidels. For although at present there seems to be no open fighting against them, the King must still maintain the garrisons in Africa to hold back the Mohammedans, at the cost of great expense and other outlays of this kind. This Bull contains countless graces and privileges for those who contribute the fixed alms for the ends stated, just as they were granted of old to the crusading soldiers and to all who, unable to take up arms, contributed from their means to the happy outcome of the Christian expedition.

3. The indults and privileges of this Bull last from the day of its publication until the publication of the following year. So whoever took the Bull before its publication does not enjoy its graces, nor can whoever takes it afterwards enjoy them once the next publication has passed. This Bull is not revoked, nor do its graces lose their force, by the publication of the jubilee of the holy year; nor are other graces granted by the Church revoked by it, but those who have it may enjoy them. Various conditions are required to enjoy the indults of this Bull. 1. That the one who takes it be baptized: whoever is not of the Church cannot enjoy her goods. 2. That he be not a heretic or schismatic; these are unworthy to share in these privileges. 3. That he receive the Bull, either himself or through another person. Actual receipt is necessary; the intention or mind to take it is not enough. 4. That he give, himself or through another, the alms fixed in the kingdom or province where he takes it, and this from his own goods; for it does not profit the thief if he gives the alms from goods he has stolen. But it is enough to take it on credit with the intention of paying in due time, as commonly happens in many towns. The Bull taken in Aragon, for example, is no good for Catalonia, nor that of Navarre in Castile: each must take it in the province where he lives. But if, having taken it lawfully, he happens to go to another kingdom, he may enjoy all its privileges, provided he has lived for some time in the dominions of the King of Spain; though he should not eat milk foods in Lent, nor meat on the advice of both physicians, to avoid scandal. 5. That his name be written in it, and that he keep it with some care. 6. That he be not excommunicated. These are the chief conditions to be observed for the enjoyment of the Bull. But since its privileges are many and of different kinds, the special ones must be set out in detail to avoid confusion. The Bull of the Crusade, like the fountain of paradise,[1] divides into four abundant rivers of benefits, which are so many bulls. The first takes the name common to all and is called the Bull of the Crusade; the second is called that of the Dead; the third that of Milk Foods \[*Lacticinios*\]; and the fourth that of Composition. The said Bull includes all four, though they are set out in separate summaries. Let us speak of each in particular.

The General Bull.

4. There is only one Bull of the Crusade, as I have said, and in it are included all the graces and privileges that, for the reasons suggested, the Sovereign Pontiff grants to the subjects of the King of Spain. Nevertheless, the lord Commissary General has seen fit to draw up various summaries of it, and they must be taken, giving the alms fixed for each, in order to enjoy the graces they contain. The first, then, is the one commonly taken by all, and it includes the following graces. In the first place the Church grants various indulgences, both plenary and partial. An indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven as to their guilt, granted from the merits contained in the treasury of the Church by one who has lawful authority to do so. It must be understood that our adorable Saviour, his most lovable Mother and the other Saints gathered merits that in many cases were not needed to satisfy for their own sins: either because they had none, like Christ and Mary, or because, if they had some, not all their holy works were needed for their expiation. If my sins were put on one side of a balance, said Job, and my sufferings on the other, these would certainly outweigh those.[2] This store of superabundant merits, all of which receive their value from Jesus Christ, though they are past, remains in the divine acceptance and clemency; and this is what we call the treasury of the Church. And since the Church holds the keys of heaven by divine dispensation, it is she who at her discretion dispenses these merits for the remission of the temporal punishments we owed for our sins. The Supreme Pontiff is the one who by divine right can grant these

remissions or indulgences in the whole Church, of which he is universal head; and the lord Bishops in their own dioceses, by ordinary right and by concession of the Pope. These indulgences are either plenary or partial. The plenary is the remission of all the punishment due, and the partial of so many days; but all depends on the divine will, which gives to each as it pleases according to its good pleasure.

5. The Bull of the Crusade, then, dispenses various indulgences. It grants two plenary ones to those who receive it, which must be applied by the confessor: one during life and the other at the point of death. That is, one within the year for which the Bull serves, while the person is in health; and the other at the point of death, when it must be applied on the condition "if this is the point of death". Whoever takes two bulls or summaries receives this grace doubled; but not if he takes more, for the concession is only for two. It also grants various partial ones: some for those who fast on a day when they are not obliged to, and some for visiting the five altars, praying to God for victory against the infidels, the peace of the Church and the rooting out of heresies. There are others for other reasons, which can be seen in the summary. To gain these indulgences, besides the conditions I have stated for obtaining the graces of this Bull, it is required that whoever is to gain them be in the grace of God, at least when he performs the last act appointed for gaining them. I have said that indulgences do not forgive the guilt, which can be pardoned only by sacramental confession, received either actually or in desire. And since the temporal punishment cannot be remitted without the guilt that deserved eternal punishment having first been remitted, the state of grace is therefore necessary to enjoy the indulgences granted. But, my brethren, I should be a criminal if I did not tell you this: although indulgences forgive us the temporal punishments deserved by our sins even after they have been forgiven in confession, it is not the Church's intention to release the Christian from the indispensable obligation of doing penance for his sins. These, and the remnants or stains they left in our souls, must be purged either in this world by penance or in the next by the fire of purgatory. Nor is it to be believed that God wishes merits gained by the most terrible sufferings of Christ and his Saints to serve to encourage the idleness and negligence of sinners. Yet, when we do what we can on our part to satisfy God for the much we owe him, indulgences help us to complete satisfaction; and even the penitential works laid down as conditions for gaining them are part of penance and satisfaction for sins.

6. This same Bull also grants other graces, worthy of our gratitude to a beneficent mother who does not keep hidden the treasure the Saviour entrusted to her. It grants that whoever takes this apostolic diploma may choose a confessor from among those approved by the Ordinary, to absolve him from reserved sins.[3] The distinction is this: if they are reserved to the Pontiff, once in life (or in the year of the Bull) and once at the point of death, this grace being doubled if he takes two summaries; and if they are reserved to the lord Bishops, as often as the case arises in the course of that year. What a singular grace this is! Without it, whoever fell into some offence carrying a reservation would be forced to undergo the shame and inconvenience of presenting himself to the head of the Church or of his diocese to receive absolution for his offence, humbling himself like Naaman the Syrian before Elisha to show him his leprosy.[4] It also grants certain privileges for a time of interdict, that mournful time in which, for some offence or profanation of the sanctuary, the church doors are closed to the celebration of the divine offices, with some exceptions. Those who receive this Bull may assist at the sacrifice of the Mass, or celebrate it if they are priests, in the churches where the celebration of the divine offices is permitted at that time, or in their private oratory erected and visited by the Ordinary, even an hour before daybreak and an hour after midday. They may attend the offices with their servants and relatives to the fourth degree, provided they have not caused the interdict themselves nor hinder the lifting of this censure, and provided they pray, each time they use this privilege, for peace among Christian princes and victory against the infidels. Also, during this time, they may receive the Sacraments in the said oratory, except the holy Eucharist on Easter Sunday. And lastly, during this same time, their bodies may be buried with moderate ceremony, unless they are excommunicated.

7. This Bull also grants the use of milk foods on forbidden days, except for ecclesiastics, for whom another Bull has been granted, as we shall see presently. At the same time, when someone in poor health is in doubt whether or not he may eat meat on days when the Church forbids it, the Bull grants that, with the advice of both physicians, the spiritual and the bodily, he may set the doubt aside and eat wholesome meats. To this indult may be reduced the one the Church now grants us of eating meat on fast days and days of Lent, according to the rules and dispositions indicated in the particular summary given for this, which must be taken as I have said and as the Commissary General of the Crusade explains. This is the most special content of the general bull we are speaking of. Let us now say something of what concerns the particular summaries, which the lord Commissary General of the Crusade has drawn from the general bull, and which must be taken separately in order to enjoy their graces and privileges.

The Bull of the Dead.

8. The Church makes partakers of her graces not only the children who dwell in what is called the Church militant, that is, we who are still in temporal life, but also those of the Church suffering, who are the souls of those who died in grace and are making satisfaction for their sins in holy purgatory. We are all of one Church, united by grace to our head, Christ. Therefore the graces of the Crusade reach the dead too. For this there is a bull by which it is granted to whoever takes it, giving the fixed alms, that he may apply a plenary indulgence for the soul of the departed person he intends. This bull should not be taken for the souls of purgatory in general, but for a particular one, as for the soul of John or of Peter, whose name must be written in it. But if the name of one departed person were written with the condition that, if he did not need it, it should serve for some other, it would no doubt avail, provided the names of both were written. According to the literal wording of the common bull from which this particular bull of the dead is drawn, two bulls may be taken in one year for the same soul, or for two, as I explained above. Yet it is very much in keeping with Christian piety to take as many bulls as possible, even for one and the same soul. For even granting that the plenary indulgence has its infallible effect, and that a single one would seem able to satisfy for the punishments a soul must suffer, nevertheless, since all depends on God’s good pleasure and on the merit of the departed person himself, indulgences are never idle, however much they are multiplied. Charity and mercy should move us to this, roused by the thought of the unspeakable torments those blessed spirits suffer, who cry out continually with Job: Have pity on us, at least you, my friends, for the hand of the Lord has touched us.[5] Do not stint, my brethren, the alms offered for these bulls of ransom for the holy souls; for perhaps they are those of your parents, who left you more than you can spend in relieving them.

The Bull of Milk Foods.

9. Besides the privilege contained in the common and general bull to eat wholesome meats on forbidden days, as I have already explained, there is another bull or summary derived from the first, properly called that of Milk Foods. The reason is that the indult of milk foods granted to every Spanish Christian excludes all ecclesiastics, however eminent the dignity they enjoy. So that these may not be left without this relief granted to the laity, there is another bull, expressly named the bull of milk foods, which they must take in order to be able to eat them in Lent, except Holy Week. There is no need to dwell further on the explanation of this bull, for those to whom it belongs are already instructed in it.

The Bull of Composition.

10. This grants to whoever takes it the faculty to compound, or make satisfaction, for debts he has contracted when the lawful owner to whom they belong is unknown. That is, the bull of composition gives permission for a sum, or for goods ill-gotten or ill-held, to be remitted in exchange for the charity or alms to be given on receiving the summary of this kind, when they cannot be restored to their owner, either because it is not known who he is or because restitution is impossible. It is said that Pope Alexander VI was the first to grant this bull, to quiet consciences about what was wrongly held; but always on condition that the owner is

unknown. If a doubt arises whether So-and-so is the lawful owner, and the person concerned, having made what inquiries he can, has not been able to resolve it, he must pay the owner in proportion to the doubt. But if the doubt is to which of two or three persons the goods I hold belong, there is then no room for composition; all must be handed over to them. And so composition is valid only for those goods which for some reason must be handed over to the Church or to the poor.

11. Two conditions must be observed for the lawful use of this bull of composition. First: that no one acquire goods unlawfully in the confidence that he will afterwards compound for them by the bull of composition; to such a man the bull is of no use at all, as if someone were moved to steal, trusting to get out of his difficulty by the bull with a smaller sum than he ought to pay. Second: that the summary or bull be received with his name written in it, and the fixed alms given for it. There is no need to keep this one; on the contrary, it should be torn up or cancelled out of regard for the good name and reputation of the recipient. And what sum can be compounded with this bull? Fifty bulls of composition may be taken each year, and with each one satisfaction may be made for fifty-eight *reales de vellón* and twenty-eight *maravedís*; so that each year two thousand nine hundred and forty-one *reales* and six *maravedís* may be compounded. But if the debt should exceed this sum, no more bulls may be taken for that debt, either in that year or in the years following; but recourse remains to the lord Commissary of the Crusade to compound for the excess. If someone owes, for example, thirty *reales* and takes a bull to discharge it, it does not serve him for the other debts he may contract in that year, even though he does not know the owner to whom they belong. If, after the composition has been made by means of the bull, the true owner of the compounded goods should appear, the one who compounded is not obliged to restore them, for the lord Commissary says in the bull that he may hold them as his own without any obligation.

12. See here, my brethren, what it has seemed fitting to explain to you on this day, doing so simply and in the manner of the most classic authors who treat this matter, though I have summarized what they set out more fully. Receive, then, this bull, and receive it as a gift from heaven: a gift that Jesus Christ sends you, enriched with his blood, through his Vicar on earth, the Roman Pontiff. A precious gift, with which, as Solomon said, all good things have come to us:[6] good things for the soul, through the indulgences and other graces; good things for the body, through the indult for meat and milk foods; good things for your temporal interests, through the composition; and good things for the souls of your dead. Value this diploma; do not listen to the blasphemies the enemies of the Church spew against it. And do not think, when you receive the bull, that you are buying this paper, as they say. Certainly not: what is given on receiving it is an alms for the holy ends I have explained, and to this alms is, as it were, tied the communication of these graces, which help so much to obtain heaven. Amen.

The Modern Bull of the Crusade.

For the use of parish priests and confessors it has seemed fitting to us to add here, as an Appendix, the following observations on the modern Bull of the Crusade compared with the old. They were published in the *Boletín eclesiástico* of Orense and drawn up, by commission of the Most Illustrious Prelate of that diocese, by the Rev. Fr. Master Fr. Manuel Fernández:

“Since some important changes have been introduced in the new concession of the Bull of the Crusade, granted for twelve years by our most holy father Pius IX on 11 May 1849, compared with the old one of Gregory XIII which had been in force until that date, we think it fitting to note the differences or modifications His Holiness saw fit to make in some graces and privileges. In their light the parish priests and confessors may proceed with security and correctness in directing the faithful in the use of the new Bull of the Crusade.

“In the first place, we note that to gain the plenary indulgence His Holiness grants to those who take the Bull during the year of its publication, its application by a confessor chosen for the purpose is no longer

necessary, as hitherto. For the faithful to gain it, sacramental confession and devout communion are enough; and as for those who cannot receive these Sacraments, the desire to receive them will be enough, provided that in due time they have fulfilled the precept of Easter confession and communion.

“Confessors, therefore, should no longer make this application; otherwise they would claim for themselves a faculty they no longer have.

“Second, we observe that His Holiness does not grant a plenary indulgence for the point of death, and consequently its application to the dying under the old concession must have ceased. But His Holiness has made up for this lack by another means no less easy and ready, namely the faculty he has granted the Prelates to give the dying the papal blessing, themselves or through priests delegated for the purpose.

“Third, both in the Brief of Gaeta and in the Spanish Summary the old and indispensable condition of taking the Bull in order to gain the other graces and indulgences granted by the Apostolic See seems to have been suppressed.

“Consequently, all and any pontifical graces and indulgences may now be gained without taking the Bull, except those granted by the Bull.

“Fourth, it should be noted that, although the Spanish Summary says that a plenary indulgence may be gained by visiting five altars (or, failing that, one altar five times) on each of the eighty-seven days on which there is a station in Rome, this is granted only to those who do it having confessed and communicated. Those who do not fulfil these requirements will gain only partial indulgences, except on Maundy Thursday, Easter Sunday, the day of the Ascension, and the third of the stations on the day of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. On these days he left them plenary as before, without requiring confession and communion.

“On the requirement of confession and communion for gaining the indulgences that ask for it as a condition *sine qua non*, it will not be out of place to note here the decrees issued by the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences on this point.

“By a decree of 9 December 1763 His Holiness granted to persons who are accustomed to confess and communicate every week that they may gain each and all of the indulgences occurring in the week that require previous confession, without need to repeat it, provided, however, that they have not fallen into grave sin since their last confession.

“By another decree, of 12 July 1822, Pius VII granted, even to those who do not have so praiseworthy a custom, that they may gain the said indulgences requiring confession during the eight days after their last confession, provided they are still in grace. He declared besides that communion may be received in advance on the eve of feasts that carry an indulgence, the indulgence beginning to be gained from first Vespers.

“By another decree, of 15 December 1841, it is granted that with a single confession all the indulgences occurring within the following eight days and requiring this disposition may be gained.

“Lastly, by a decree of 19 March of the same year 1841, Pope Gregory XVI declared that by confession and communion made on Easter Sunday one gains the plenary indulgence attached to the papal blessing the bishop gives on that day, and at the same time fulfils the ecclesiastical precept of Easter confession and communion.

“Fifth, it must be kept well in mind that His Holiness Pius IX limited to once in the year, and once at the point of death, the faculty that the old Bull granted to absolve those who took it from synodal reserved cases *toties quoties* (as often as they confessed them). Therefore the confessor, by virtue of the present Bull, can absolve from reserved cases, both synodal and papal, only once in life and once at the point of death, and twice in either case if two bulls are taken. There is always, however, an exception for mixed heresy, and for the confessor’s own complicity *in turpi* with his penitent, which Benedict XIV excludes in his constitution

Sacramentum poenitentiae.[7] Also excepted, by express prohibition of Pius IX, is the censure, that is, the major excommunication *ipso facto*, incurred by the confessor who absolves his accomplice *in turpi* outside the case of extreme necessity, namely at the point of death when no other priest is available, as the Benedictine Constitution says.

"Sixth, as regards the commutation of vows, two differences between the modern Brief and the old should be observed. The old one said that the commutation should be made *in aliquod subsidium huius expeditionis* (into some aid for this expedition); now His Holiness says *ut fiat in alia pia opera, atque iniunctum his subsidium aliquod* (that it be made into other pious works, with some aid laid upon them as well). So the principal thing in the commutation now is the pious works, and the accessory, though necessary, is the alms for the pious ends of the Crusade. The other difference arises because Pius IX now adds that the alms or aid to be imposed in the commutation is *Executori harum litterarum transmittendum* (to be sent to the Executor of these letters). From this clause it clearly follows that this aid or alms must be temporal or monetary, since it is to be handed to the lord Commissary for the upkeep of worship and clergy. Nor does it in any way harm this concession of the Bull that, under the last Concordat,[8] the Crusade funds are now administered in each diocese by the diocesan Prelates; for the purpose is the same, and it is the Apostolic See that has so disposed.

"Seventh, it should be noted regarding the so-called bull of milk foods that, while in the previous prorogations it was not granted to regular clergy, in that of Gaeta it is extended to them as well, *spectata horum temporum conditione* (in view of the condition of these times). So, if regular priests, like secular priests who have not reached sixty years of age, do not take the bull of milk foods, not only may they not use them in Lent, but neither could they use the indult to eat wholesome meats, as is said in the summary of the said Bull and in the apostolic indult for the use of meat. From now on, then, what the authors rightly said before will no longer be true, that for Regulars there is no bull of milk foods.

"Eighth, it must be kept in mind that from the composition for revenues not earned through omitting the recitation of the canonical Hours by one obliged to it, previously granted without limitation of persons, Pius IX excepts those who have the care of souls attached to their benefice or are bound to personal residence.

"Ninth, it is to be noted that Pius IX also excepts from the dispensation the lord Commissary may grant for certain irregularities anyone who remains in them for six months, a limitation not found in the Gregorian Brief.

"Tenth and last, it should be observed that the prayer required for obtaining and using some graces and indulgences must be directed to asking God for peace and concord among Christian princes, instead of their victory against the infidels, as was previously ordered.

"Such are the chief and most important changes observed in the new concession of the Bull of the Crusade, compared with the old; and such are the observations we have been able to make with the deliberation and care that so delicate and far-reaching a matter requires. But if, despite our diligence, we have fallen into any error, we wish it to be held revoked from this moment, for in everything we submit our judgment to that of our learned superiors, and above all to that of the Holy Apostolic See. Orense, 31 July 1854. Fr. Manuel Fernández."

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[9] Luke 16:1–8.

[10] Matt. 21:33–41.

[1] Gen. 2:10.

[2] Job 6:2–3, paraphrased.

[3] Some *censures* remain reserved to the Apostolic See (*CIC* cann. 1355–1357, 1367, 1370, 1378, 1382, 1388).

[4] 2 Kgs. 5 (Vulgate 4 Kings).

[5] Job 19:21.

[6] Wis. 7:11.

[7] Benedict XIV, *Sacramentum poenitentiae* (1 June 1741).

[8] Source note: “Art. 40.” The Spanish Concordat of 1851.

66. Rogation for Lack of Water, or Drought

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 66, pp. 294–303. Gospel: Leviticus 26:19 (theme only). Original preacher not named.

Propter peccata vestra, dabo vobis caelum desuper sicut ferrum, et terram aeneam (Lev. 26:19).

For your sins I will make the heaven above you like iron, and the earth like bronze.

1. There is no water, there is no water: you see it, my brethren, and you feel it to your sorrow. The parched earth foretells our ruin. The dry fields cannot give us the food we need. The crops cannot grow; the trees and plants have no moisture to make them increase; the hills are left without grass for the beasts meant for man’s service, and the ponds and pools without water to quench thirst. And what follows from this? The desolation of the people. Famine follows, the greatest of all plagues: David would not accept it when, as punishment for his sin, he was given the choice of it, pestilence or war.[1] More, says Scripture, have died under the force of this scourge than by the edge of the sword.[2] In short, a whole host of tribulations, misfortunes and even crimes follows. And I ask: why do we suffer this most lamentable need? Why do the clouds not distil their waters at the proper time? Some of those who do not recognize the providence of God in everything will answer that it is chance: that the north winds, the Aquilon, drive away the kindly clouds that promised us abundant rain. This is what is commonly answered by those who do not hear the voice of God, who says through Job: The Lord alone sends rain on the earth… he binds up the waters in the clouds and does not let them fall.[3] God makes it rain when he pleases, or holds back the waters when it is his divine good pleasure. And does a God full of compassion and mercy take pleasure in seeing a people perish, reducing it to unhappiness and misery, drying up the earth that was to feed us with its sap? Yes, my brethren. The Lord offers to give us rain, and with it relief for our needs, but on the condition that we keep his divine commandments. Transgressing them brings about all our misfortunes. Hear how God himself says it in the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus, which serves as my text: For your sins I will make the heaven above you like iron, and the earth like bronze. That is, the Lord, angered by our sins, hardens the heaven, making it like iron so that the needed waters may not fall, and dries the earth like bronze so that it bears no fruit. So, then, there is no other recourse to free ourselves from this distress than to turn to God with tears of true penance. This is what I mean to persuade you of. Our sins bring on the drought and barrenness: the first part. Our penance will move God to give us relief: the second part.[4]

First Part

2. God, as I have said, is the one who gives or withholds the waters, for he is their Lord. God is the one who feeds us by making the fields fruitful; and although by his ordinary providence he has decreed that the earth should yield its fruits through the benefit of the rains, he can also give us sustenance from its fruits without them. On the third day of the creation of the universe he commanded the earth to bring forth plants and every herb; and indeed, as Moses says, it had not yet rained nor had dew fallen on it.[1] This was to show us that he alone is the one who keeps us and gives us the sustenance we need. And therefore, although he now wills the earth to be prepared for its produce by the waters the clouds distil and the springs pour forth, he suspends the rains when it is his will, and the earth becomes unable to bring forth our harvests. This, as I mean to prove, and as he says expressly in Leviticus, is brought about by our sins, by which we make ourselves unworthy of so necessary a help. The drought we suffer is not a failure of God’s mercy, no, but justice he carries out against us who so openly abuse his mercy. Holofernes ordered all the aqueducts that carried water to the city of Bethulia, which he had besieged, to be cut, so as to make sure of taking it;[2] and Scripture does not say that

he dried up the springs that produced the water. This signifies that the living spring from which the rains, and with them our food, come to us is the mercy of God, which never dries up or runs out. But the aqueducts that bring the water to the earth sometimes do dry up; and the one who cuts them to deprive us of irrigation is the Holofernes of sin, who has our soul under siege. God says it expressly in the twelfth chapter of Jeremiah: The earth shall mourn, he says, and all the grass of the country shall wither, for the wickedness of its inhabitants.[3] Sins cannot dry up the spring of divine compassion; but they can dry up the conduits, so that the divine spring does not pass on to us the waters we need.

3. And what sins are they that lay a ban on the rains? Ah, my brethren, the countless ones we see in the world. Lack of faith: for it has been all but reduced to a skeleton in our kingdom. There are many in it who, though they pride themselves on being Christians because they have received Baptism, either do not believe the sacred mysteries faith proposes to us through the Church, or, if they believe them, contradict them by their irreligious works. The people of Israel were in this state in the time of King Ahab: they said they worshipped the true God, and at the same time they paid worship to the idol Baal. That is why the prophet Elijah announced to them on God's behalf a most terrible drought; and, closing the heavens by his prayer, he punished them with three and a half years without rain, the barrenness causing the most dreadful famine and the most disastrous deaths.[4] The churches are seen deserted, with no one coming to them to hear Christian doctrine; and even when people attend the celebration of the divine offices, it is without spirit, without devotion, staining with profanations the house to which holiness belongs. See here why it does not rain. God has threatened it so in the first chapter of the prophecy of Haggai: Because my house lies deserted, therefore the heavens are forbidden to give rain or dew.[5] The house of God deserted of doctrine, of reverence, of worship, of adornment: then dryness, dearth, famine, misfortunes. More: either the tithes and first-fruits are not paid, or they are paid badly and from the worst of the produce; and it even seems that what is given to God for his service, the support of his ministers and the repair of the church is given like a crust to a dog, good for nothing else. Then let there be no rains; let their sown fields dry up, says the Lord.[6] He promises in the Proverbs that our barns will be filled, but on the strict condition that we offer his divine Majesty the tithes of all our produce.[7] So much swearing, so much blasphemy, so much impiety as impious tongues spew out: what can they do but shut the floodgates of heaven and put obstacles in the way of our relief? With lack of water God punished his kingdom in the time of King David, because Saul had broken the oath he made to the Gibeonites.[8]

4. But there are still more sins. How is purity observed? How is the sixth commandment of the Decalogue kept? Is the fidelity owed between spouses kept in marriage? Do men go to assault another's bed, committing adultery? Do we treat our body as a living temple of God and a member of Jesus Christ,[9] taking care not to stain it with fornication? Do maidens try to behave with modesty and decency, as those who are, as Tertullian said, priestesses of chastity?[10] Ah, perhaps the very opposite happens; and there are few who keep the vessel of their body in sanctification, as the Apostle commanded.[11] Nothing is seen but indecency in words, in actions, in dress, in gatherings; and lewdness seems to have become the general sin of the whole world. And do we expect the Lord's mercy to give us the rains at the proper time? Hear what he says through his prophet Jeremiah: You have polluted the land with your lewdness, and for that, for that very reason, the clouds have been forbidden to distil their waters.[12] Let the lustful man perish of hunger; let the earth not produce for him what he needs for his sustenance. His fruits are fruits of corruption: then let his fields bear nothing but barrenness and misery; and though he be powerful now, and though at present he seems to lack nothing, let him lose all he has as the drought goes on. So the Lord hurls the punishment of the impure, and he sets before us the example of the prodigal son, who, though full of treasures, squandered his fortune in lewdness and dealings with loose women, and came near to perishing of hunger.[13]

5. But there are still other offences for which the just God brings down the scourge of his severity on us. I cannot set them all out; but I will not fail to mention one, which is among those that most provoke the Lord

to this punishment, according to the teaching of the Fathers: lack of charity and mercy towards the poor. Judgment without mercy, says the Lord, will be done to him who showed no mercy to his brethren.[14] How is God to have pity on the misery to which this lack of rain is going to reduce us, making the fields barren, when he sees that the poor and needy hardly find anyone to give them a piece of bread for their relief? We see the earth dry, broken apart, gaping open in mouths from the drought. But this signifies the lack of union and charity among Christians. The better-off do not come to the help of the needy, and these continually open their mouths to beg an alms and cannot close them because there is no one to give it. The Lord always punishes us, said St. Augustine, in the crops and fruits of the fields, because we do not do good to the needy. Ah, what a discourse the Father St. Basil makes on this in his eighth homily![15] Let us hear some of his words: God does not open his generous hand to give us the rains, he says, because we close our hands of brotherly charity. That is why the fields are barren: because love of neighbour has grown cold. In vain is the voice raised begging relief from this plague, when we make ourselves deaf to the cries of the poor. What is certain, my brethren, is that the Lord, full of compassion, offers to give us all we need, but on the indispensable condition that we give to the one who is in need. Give, and it will be given to you, says the Gospel.[16] We give no alms: let us not expect rain.

6. In a word, God's threat in Leviticus must be fulfilled: for our sins the heaven will be iron for us and the earth bronze, so hard and unfeeling will they be to form clouds that might console us with waters. And are we to perish? Is the Lord to have no pity on us? Is the poor farmer to see his labours made useless, with no hope of the fruits that were to feed his family? Is distress to come upon innocent children asking for bread, as Jeremiah said,[17] with no one able to give it to them? Are our sins, which brought on this plague, this drought, to have no forgiveness? Like this seems to have been the complaint the children of Israel made to heaven in the time of Jeremiah when they found themselves afflicted with a like punishment. But read the third chapter of this Prophet, and you will see what the Lord answers.[18] You will have heard it said, my prophet (so God speaks in substance), you will have heard it said that if a married woman leaves her husband and gives herself to another master, she deserves to be cast off by him for ever. Tell my people, then, that it has forsaken me, turned its back on me, insulted me, and, ungrateful for my unspeakable favours, has played the harlot and given itself to the greatest disorders. That being so, should I not depart from it for ever? I sought it by means of trials; I forbade the clouds to rain on its fields; but even so, my rebellious Israel did not return to me. I ought to give it a bill of divorce and lay my heavy hand much more heavily on my children. But no, I do not do it. Tell them that I am their father, I am their God, and I will not be angry with them for ever. Cry out and say these words to them in my name: Return to me, rebellious Israel, return to me, for I offer you pardon and will bring you out of the distress you suffer. Ah, my dear ones! In these words it is clearly seen that, if sins have barred the rain from us, turning back with tears of penance to the God we have offended will make the punishment cease and soon give us relief. This last is what I am going to prove in my second part.

Second Part

7. Take away the cause, and the effect ceases. Since, then, our sins have angered the Lord, who is the author of rain and of drought, of the fruits of the earth and of its barrenness, of our misery and of our abundance, we have no other means of getting him to turn our tears into joy than to turn back to him with a contrite and humbled heart,[1] fearing the Lord from now on, so that he may not afflict us again with this scourge of his divine vengeance. This is what the prophet Jeremiah preached to the people of Israel in a like situation. My children, he said, let us fear the Lord, who, if he pleases, gives us rain in due season and abundance of fruits for our relief.[2] Thus repentant and armed with the holy fear of God, the rogations and supplications we make will have effect, putting forward as mediators most holy Mary and the Saints our patrons. Among the other supplications Solomon made to the Lord on the day of the dedication of the magnificent temple he had built in his honour in Jerusalem, one of the chief was this: Lord, if perhaps the heaven is shut up and there is no rain because of the sins of the people, and they come to pray to your name in this temple doing penance, and

are truly converted from all their sins, in view of their affliction hear them from heaven; forgive them their sins… and give them rain upon the earth.[3] When that Monarch finished his prayer, which contained various petitions, the Lord appeared to him and, granting all he had asked, said to him: I have heard your supplications… and in this temple you have built me… I will always be attentive to your prayers.[4] See here, my brethren, the remedy for our plague: penance joined with prayer or rogation. This is the only way to appease God when he punishes us for our sins. Scripture sets before us countless examples of this; let us give a few.

8. Let the first be what happened to the people of Jezreel in the days of the prophet Elijah, of which some mention has already been made. That man of God, seeing that the people limped between two sides, dividing their worship between the true worship of the supreme Being and that of the idol Baal, swore to them in the name of the Lord that they would see neither rain nor dew except when he willed. And in fact it did not rain for three and a half years. But when this time of punishment had passed, Elijah spoke to them again; and through his preaching and a wonder the Lord worked through him, King Ahab and a great part of his kingdom repented; and then, the Prophet himself praying to God, a most copious rain fell, with which the fields were refreshed and soon restored what had been lost.[5] We can expect this fruit if, sincerely recognizing the cause of our misfortune, which is nothing but our sins, we weep for them with compunction and turn to the compassion of God, begging him for the water of which we find ourselves deprived. The second example is that of Bethulia. Holofernes, as has also been said, cut the conduits from the springs that brought the water to the city. But when the people of Bethulia were already thinking of surrendering to the Assyrians, the priests of the people went to the heroine Judith and, prostrate at her feet, begged her, saying: Pray to God for us, for you are a holy and God-fearing woman. That mother of Israel promised to do so; but she pointed out to them that because the people had forsaken the Lord's precepts, he had punished them with so terrible a calamity, and that they were in danger of perishing of thirst. She told them to do penance for their sins, and in satisfaction for them to proclaim a general fast to the people, and so to hope for deliverance from that strait.[6] The people did so, repenting of their past disorders; and through Judith's prayer and a certain stratagem she carried out at God's prompting, Bethulia saw itself free of its enemies and supplied with the water it had lacked at such peril. The third is shown in the fourth book of Kings. The three monarchs of Judah, Israel and Edom resolved to attack the Moabites; and when they were in a vast wilderness with their armies, they found themselves so short of water that men and animals were dying of thirst. Joram, the wicked king of Israel, in a tone of despair reproached God for this lack, thinking that he had brought them there that they might all perish: a fault seen in many Christians, who, impatient in their misfortunes, call the Lord cruel to them, as if this conduct were a good way to come out of their tribulations. On the contrary, the holy king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, learned that the prophet Elisha was in that country, and urged the other princes to go to him together and humbly ask him to pray to God to deign to relieve them with the water they lacked at the risk of their lives. The three kings went down to where Elisha was to make their rogation. The first to speak to make his petition known was Joram; but the Prophet, turning to him with a stern face, said to him: Go to the prophets of your father and of your mother. Were it not for the regard due to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would have paid no attention to you, nor even looked at you. In the end Elisha prayed to God for the merit of the holy King, and not for the wicked Joram, and they received abundant water.[7] But, my brethren, let us weigh this event a little for our instruction. We often make rogations to the Saints and to the Queen of them all, most holy Mary, as those kings did with Elisha. But perhaps, hearing the prayers of some sinner who implores their intercession to obtain rain, they will say to him silently, as the prophet did to Joram: Go and ask this favour of the gods you have served and courted until now. Go to that avarice, that revenge, that lust, those drunken bouts, those usurious dealings, those crimes that pleased you so much, and through which the devil has drawn you away from the love and service of your God: go to them, ask them for water. But I will not make myself your advocate to free you from the distress that oppresses you; only the merits of penitent and just men will move my compassion and mercy.

9. So it is, my brethren: the Saints do not ask the Lord for us the graces they know he does not wish to grant. And since he does not hear, and will not hear, the sinner when he asks to his own harm and while clinging to sin,[8] his servants not only do not pray for such people but are rather pleased that the Lord refuses their rogations, to see whether in this way they will leave their ways of iniquity. We see this clearly in the fourteenth chapter of Jeremiah. When Judea found itself tormented by a frightful drought, because of which men and beasts were deserting the country so as not to be consumed by thirst, the Prophet prayed to God for a remedy; but God gave him to understand that the people's offences made them unworthy of his kindnesses. Do not pray for this people, he said to him.[9] Jeremiah knew that their hearts were still impenitent, for he saw the refusal of a just God; and a little before, the Prophet himself had asked him not to help them until they were contrite. Lord, he said to him, if we continue in our iniquities, uphold your honour, take satisfaction from us, for our sins are many.[10] Ah, perhaps it is our patrons who, at the sight of our sins, beg God to continue the drought, to see whether, with the fields laid waste by barrenness, the springs without water to drink, the barns empty of food and the farmers without the fruit of their toil, we will turn back to God repentant. Then indeed they will pray for us to the Lord, and he will give the waters to the earth, and the earth its fitting fruits. Let us do so, my brethren, if we do not wish to perish. Let us take from our hearts the sins that tie the hands of infinite mercy and deny us this grace. Let us sincerely confess all our sins and, repenting of them all, prostrate ourselves at the feet of a Lord who does not will the death of the sinner, but that he repent and live.[11]

10. Yes, my God; yes, Redeemer of my soul. We are convinced that our sins have angered you, and that for our punishment you have commanded the clouds to grow hard as iron so as not to distil rain on the earth; and the earth, parched, dry and turned to bronze, cannot give us the food we need. Here we are, Lord, contrite and repentant, and the change in our behaviour will be a witness of our sorrow for our sins. Have you resolved, my God, to make an end of our people? Granting that we are unworthy of your mercy, must those who have never strayed from your holy law suffer the same misfortune? Will you punish the just equally with the wicked? These innocent children, who have not even the discretion to offend you, must they suffer the same need as we who have offended so much? Is perhaps the unhappy prophecy of Jeremiah to be fulfilled, that the children will ask for bread and, because of their parents' poverty, there will be no one to give it to them? Did you not promise Abraham, Lord my God, that for only ten just men found in Sodom you would have spared that sinful people and prevented its destruction?[12] Here, then, Lord and Father of mercies, here you have before you these innocent creatures, who ask you for water to relieve the earth. Here you also have other souls that have not bent the knee to Baal,[13] that is, virtuous souls. Protect us for their merit; join it to our penance. Give us the rain we need, my God, in whom we live and move and have our being,[14] so that, helped in temporal things, we may strive to attain blessedness. Amen.

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[15] 2 Sam. 24:12–14 (Vulgate 2 Kings).

[16] Lam. 4:9.

[17] Source note: The text is Job 5:10 and 26:8 (cf. 36:27–28).

[18] Lev. 26; Deut. 28. Luke 13:1–5; John 9:2–3.

[19] Gen. 1:11–13; 2:5.

[20] Jdt. 7:6–7 (Vulgate).

[21] Jer. 12:4.

[22] 1 Kgs. 17:1; 18 (Vulgate 3 Kings); Luke 4:25; Jas. 5:17.

[23] Hag. 1:9–11.

[24] Cf. Mal. 3:8–11.

[25] Source note: "Prov. iii" (Prov. 3:9–10).

[26] Source note: "ii Reg. xxi" (2 Sam. 21:1).

[27] 1 Cor. 6:15, 19.

[28] Cf. Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* II, 1 (*sacerdotes pudicitiae*).

[29] 1 Thess. 4:4.

[30] Jer. 3:2–3.

[31] Luke 15:13–16, 30.

[32] Jas. 2:13.

[33] Source note: “Hom. xlvii”. St. Basil the Great, *Homilia dicta tempore famis et siccitatis* (Hom. 8).

[34] Source note: “Luc. vi” (Luke 6:38).

[35] Lam. 4:4.

[36] Jer. 3:1–3, 12–14, paraphrased.

[1] Ps. 50:19 (Vulgate; Ps. 51:17).

[2] Source note: “Cap. v” (Jer. 5:24).

[3] 1 Kgs. 8:35–36 (Vulgate 3 Kings); 2 Chr. 6:26–27.

[4] Source note: “iii Reg. ix” (1 Kgs. 9:3).

[5] 1 Kgs. 18:21, 36–45 (Vulgate 3 Kings).

[6] Jdt. 8:28–31 (Vulgate 8:29); 8:11–27, paraphrased.

[7] 2 Kgs. 3:9–20 (Vulgate 4 Kings).

[8] John 9:31; Ps. 65:18 (Vulgate; Ps. 66:18).

[9] Jer. 14:1–6, 11.

[10] Jer. 14:7, paraphrased.

[11] Ezek. 33:11.

[12] Gen. 18:32.

[13] 1 Kgs. 19:18; Rom. 11:4.

[14] Acts 17:28.

67. On Plague, Whether Feared or Already Suffered: Rogation to Some Patron Saint of the Town

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 67, pp. 304–313. Gospel: Exodus 9:15 (theme only). Original preacher not named.

> *Extendens manum, percutiam te et populum tuum peste, peribisque de terra (Exod. 9:15).*
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> *Stretching out my hand, I will strike you and your people with pestilence, and you shall perish from the earth.*

1. How unhappy man has been since the first transgression of Adam! He sinned; but he did not bring the curse of God, and the trials hurled in it, on himself alone. We all share in his calamities and miseries. So it is that the whole life of man is a continual warfare on earth, as Job said.[1] All creatures oppose him as soon as he comes into the world, through their inborn aversion to his sin; and even the very elements that seemingly ought to serve his happiness and life sometimes conspire against him and seek his destruction. That is why we suffer now droughts, which make barren the fields that should feed us; now floods, which destroy our gardens and buildings; now earthquakes, which open graves for us; now wars, which lay waste our cities; now plagues… Plagues… Ah, what a terrible scourge this is! Its mere appearance, its mere echo, is enough to startle and crush us. Plague… It seems to me that any other scourge is less than this, and that all the others meet in it. There is no doubt that we must all die, and in one way or another we must all undergo this lot; but there is something, I do not know what, about dying struck down by a plague that fills hearts with terror merely to hear of it. The one who dies of it: what a death he undergoes, so full of torments and dangers in body and soul! Bodily care is usually scarce or altogether lacking, and sometimes no one is even found to give spiritual help. Trade is shut off, and so there is not even what is necessary for life; and if it is obtained, it is at the cost of money, which the poor lack. All is horror, all fright, all fear; and to see oneself surrounded by corpses that there is hardly anyone to bury makes a man truly envy the lot of the dead. A terrible scourge! But a scourge, my brethren, that we may with reason fear to suffer soon. We are surrounded by towns that are already suffering it, and we hear, not without grief, of the havoc it is causing. We know that a father is

already weeping for the loss of a son who was all his consolation, or of a wife who was all his delight; that a wife is already weeping for the death of her dear husband; that little children are suffering the most dismal orphanhood. And we even know there are houses in which the whole family has perished. Will our misfortune be the same? We are exposed to suffering it. And who causes this epidemic? Ah, a thousand natural causes have brought this calamity to our country, many say. And have natural causes alone brought the epidemic? Only one who has not heard the voice of God will say so. God says in his Scripture: He who sins in the presence of his Maker shall fall into the hands of the physician.[2] Among the many punishments with which God threatened Pharaoh for his crime and incorrigibility was the one described in the ninth chapter of Exodus, in the words I have taken as my text: Stretching out my hand, I will strike you and your people with pestilence, and you shall perish from the earth. Various reflections can be drawn from these words. First, that plague comes from God, who moves the secondary causes to produce it: I will show this in my first part. Second, that it is sin that provokes God to punish peoples with this scourge: I will say this in the second. And this being granted, it will be easy to find a remedy to put an end to it: I will say this in the third.[3]

First Part

2. Shall there be evil in the city which the Lord has not done? So the prophet Amos said to the Israelites,[1] to show them that every adversity we suffer, in our towns and in ourselves, all comes from that God who has done whatever he willed in heaven and on earth,[2] and without whose permission not even the smallest leaf of a tree can stir. It is true that creatures often harm us and cause our ruin; but what could they do if the First Cause, an almighty God, did not direct and order the secondary causes? Without any doubt they would see all their designs frustrated. Pharaoh could not make an end of the Hebrew children, however strict the orders he gave the midwives of Egypt.[3] Nebuchadnezzar tried to burn the three youths of Babylon in a furnace, and did not succeed, however hard he tried.[4] Holofernes could not take Bethulia, however many stratagems he used in his siege against it. It was not God's will, and their efforts were useless. If so, who has sent, my brethren, the plague that afflicts and torments us? Ah, it has been sent by that Lord in whose hands are the health and sickness, the death and life of men.[5] But as a rule men do not recognize the almighty hand that strikes them. Judging epidemics to be the effect of mere chance, they try to avoid them by human means alone, forgetting God, whom they ought first to appease, acknowledging him as the principal mover of their misfortunes.

3. The mere suspicion of plague already obliges the magistrates to close the towns, cut communications, post guards, form sanitary cordons, and severely punish those who break the precautionary orders the authorities have laid down. Skilled and experienced physicians are sought; fumigations are made with aromatic gases; a thousand preventives are used. People flee the infected towns to seek refuge from the putrid miasmas in places where the pestilential symptoms have not yet appeared. This is done, and this ought to be done, unless we wish to show our little love for our neighbour and our country. God himself, who sends us the scourge of diseases, wills that we use every human resource to free ourselves from the plague, and not look for health from the patronage of the Saints and the divine mercy alone. The error is to trust in our own strength and means alone for preservation from the contagion, presuming that it comes from natural causes. Guards are posted, lazarettos built, edicts published, health passes inspected: well done. But unless the Lord guards the city, says David, he who tries to guard it labours in vain.[6] How can the whole country be closed off? However many watchmen there are, and however many inspections the certificates of health undergo, may not one of them be forged and false? Has not the avarice of many who wish to enrich themselves at the cost of their country's ruin often smuggled in infected goods, evading the vigilance of the authorities? Have not favour, intrigue and even misguided compassion often hidden some infected person, whose illness has been the seed that ruined a town, a province or a kingdom? What more? Can barriers be put to the air?… Let us not tire ourselves: supernatural causes are what infect our bodies; and although human industry, and all the means we use to avoid the disease, are indispensable, health must come from God alone, who alone heals all our infirmities. What efforts did the Philistines not make to drive from their army that epidemic which killed

their men with loathsome sores?[7] Who was able to check the plague that devoured all the firstborn of Egypt, only they dying, without infecting those who lived in the same houses and slept in the same beds?[8] What means did the men of Sennacherib's army find to stop the contagion that in one night made an end of a hundred and eighty-five thousand of his soldiers?[9] Ah, the hand of God worked this havoc, as we read in sacred Scripture, and against it all the precautions of men cannot stand.

4. Physicians are necessary for the cure of diseases; God himself commands us to honour them and to have recourse to their knowledge when need requires.[10] But in vain do we trust our health to their skill when the Lord has decreed our destruction. As a rule, in time of plague there is a lack of practitioners to attend to the relief of the infected. The most charitable, and the most zealous in fulfilling their duties, are usually the first victims of an epidemic. Others, fearful of the risk that threatens them, avoid taking a pulse, approaching a sick person, or even entering the house of a plague victim. Even when duty or force compels them to attend the sick, the disease is beyond their knowledge. Either, as was revealed to my mother St. Teresa of Jesus, God puts a bandage over the physician's eyes so that he may not recognize the illness he wills to be the last; or it is hard to get the measure of a disease that has already become epidemic. All plagues agree in being mortal, but they vary greatly in their symptoms; and so the medicines that help in one kind of epidemic often do harm in another, and even what heals one person kills another, according to the diversity of constitutions. What more? God, seeing that all confidence is placed in the remedies of the apothecary's shop and in medicinal herbs, is often provoked and increases the illness until he gives death to the one who trusted more in human medicines than in the infinite goodness and power of the Almighty. So it happened to Asa, of whom the second book of Paralipomenon, chapter sixteen, says that he fell sick in the thirty-ninth year of his reign… he did not seek God in his illness, he put all his trust in the skill of the physicians;[11] and it cost him his life.

5. Nor is fleeing from infected towns any protection against infection. Ah, who does not see how far human blindness goes! Where shall we go where the God who causes plagues is not? Where shall I go, said David, to get away from your spirit? Where, that I may flee from your face?[12] Look, my brother, look for a place where there is no God, where he does not exercise his power, and where his mighty arm cannot reach. But since this is impossible, so it is impossible, says St. Paschasius, for one pursued by divine vengeance to be healed. What relief does a man with fever get by moving from one bed to another? None: he carries the illness with him, and wherever he is, the fever he suffers torments him there. So, if we always carry God with us, it will do us little good to change our place to avoid catching the illness he has decreed against us. Wherever you go, you take your sickness with you, said the pagan Seneca.[13] Our chief sickness is sin; and so, according to St. John Chrysostom,[14] go where you will, you cannot avoid it; you carry with you the tinder of the plague, for it is sin that provokes the Lord to punish you with this scourge, as I will say in my second part.

Second Part

6. Sin makes peoples miserable, said Solomon in the Proverbs;[1] and the havoc a devouring plague is causing in our neighbourhood has perhaps been brought about by our sins. Where do epidemic diseases come from, if not from sin? So spoke St. Lawrence Justinian.[2] Divine and human history sets before us countless examples of peoples on whom the Lord brought down the scourge of plague with the greatest severity; and sometimes the sin of one man alone was enough for many to be punished in this way. David sinned, and in a few days seventy-two thousand of his subjects died of plague.[3] Constantine Copronymus sinned, and so terrible an epidemic broke out in his city of Constantinople that, the fields and vineyards being full of corpses, there was hardly a hand's breadth of ground left to serve as a grave. Let us leave other examples. But let us not reason about the origin of our misfortune when we are witnessing the multitude of offences by which we all continually provoke divine vengeance. Because Jerusalem sinned, the prophet Jeremiah lamented, it did not

remain in the state of health and prosperity it enjoyed.[4] If we have sinned, why wonder that the Lord deprives us of the health, the peace and the life we had enjoyed until now? God sees our iniquities; nothing is hidden from his eyes. He can punish them, for his power is infinite. He wills to punish them, for he is just and loves justice. And so, seeing man trample on his law, break his commandments and depart from his service, he takes up the scourge of his severity and, using a destructive plague, makes a show of his sovereignty by laying all his enemies low on the ground.

7. Plague usually arises, according to the natural philosophers, from corrupt vapours that come out of the caverns of the earth and from putrid miasmas that rise from the corruption of corpses; Seneca says the same. This is in the natural order; but I discover the moral cause that has produced our scourge: the pestilent breaths that rise to heaven, exhaled by the depraved corruption of morals. What do we see in the world? Men who glory in being Christians, but whose conduct is that of pagans. Men, says St. Paul, who profess that they believe in God, but deny him by their works.[5] Men whose faith is without a soul; it is a dead faith, for it lacks charity, the love of God and of neighbour. Faith without works is dead, says Scripture.[6] From a corpse of faith, what corrupt vapours will rise to the throne of the Most High, so that his justice may cause our bodies to be infected? I say more: put your hand on your breast, Christian; take the pulse of your faith. Is it alive or is it dead? Do you keep the commands that faith laid on you in Baptism? Do you renounce Satan and all his pomps? Do you know Christian doctrine? Do you put into practice what it teaches you? Are you a branch of the vine that is Christ? Are you united to him, following his law and imitating his virtues? If not, you are dead, you are dry, and consequently you are fit only for the fire of the plague that has broken out in our country.[7] From a man dead to faith nothing can come but infected breaths to corrupt the commonwealth.

8. Let us look further into this matter. What do we see in the towns? We see mouths of hell, from which countless oaths and blasphemies against God, against the most sacred Virgin and against the blessed continually pour out, to the scandal of the people. They are corrupt vapours, which, as the Gospel says, the criminal heart casts out, the heart being the source of all offences.[8] See there, my Christian, the origin of our scourge as well. With the earth infected by the corruption of words in no way fitting for a Christian, is it any wonder that so many signs of divine vengeance are seen in it? This moved the emperor Justinian to forbid oaths and blasphemies in his realm. For, he says in Novel 77, if such words spoken against men never go unpunished, those who speak them against God himself become deserving of the greatest punishments… Through such offences famines, earthquakes and plagues are brought on.[9] This wise Emperor, moved by a heartfelt love for his people, exhorted them to the fear of God and to bridle their mouths, so as not to break out into words offensive to the Lord and scandalous to their neighbour, so as to spare them these scourges of divine justice.

9. There is yet another corruption, capable of infecting a kingdom, a whole world: the one produced by unworthy communions. St. Paul, treating of the holy Eucharist, first dwells on the goodness and mercy of our most lovable Saviour in instituting a Sacrament in which he feeds us with his own flesh and blood. He then points out the dispositions with which we must receive him and the different effects it produces in those who receive it worthily or unworthily. Lastly, having said that whoever communicates in sin eats his own judgment and condemnation, he says these words, worthy to be engraved on our inmost hearts, which are a proof of the truth I am setting out: That is why many among you are sick and weak, and many die.[10] Many fall sick and die because of unworthy communions. Every day we see the sacrilege of Judas renewed in the churches, God himself being handed over into the hands of the demons who possess sinful souls. No distinction is made, says the same Apostle, between earthly food and the body of Jesus Christ. The ark of the new covenant is set beside the idol Dagon, which is our sinful passions.[11] That is why there are plagues; that is why the country is contaminated with such pestilential diseases; that is why the churches are filled with corpses and the most populous cities are emptied. Indeed, the sacred host is without doubt the living bread that came down from heaven;[12] bread that gives life, and not only eternal life but bodily life as well. Many

Saints took no other food but this heavenly one; and that bread baked in the ashes given to Elijah, which was no more than a symbol of this Sacrament, gave him strength to walk forty days and nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.[13] But if it is life for the good, it is death for the wicked; and whoever dares to come to this wedding of the Lamb without the wedding garment of grace will suffer being bound to a bed by the bonds of a pestilential disease, and then being cast into the outer darkness of the abyss, says the Gospel.[14] In short, my brethren, it is sins that provoke God to punish us with plague. This scourge comes from him, and natural causes are no more than instruments of divine vengeance.

Third Part

10. O plague, sword of God, how long will you not rest? I will say with the prophet Jeremiah.[1] How long are your rigours to last? How long are the effects of your commission to go on? Are you perhaps to destroy all our towns and cities? Come, go back into your sheath, rest and be still: do not make an end of a people that adores God and fears him. How long, how long? I seem to hear this question answered in the same way Joab answered the wise woman of Abel. In the twentieth chapter of the second book of Kings it is told that the treacherous Sheba, who had so persecuted King David, fled from that Prince's officers and took refuge in the city of Abel. The general Joab laid siege to this city; and when he was pressing it hardest, a woman revered there for her wisdom came out on its walls and, crying out to the besieging army, said: Joab, what are you doing? Why are you destroying our city and seeking to overthrow this inheritance of the Lord? It is not so, Joab answered; I do not wish to destroy the city. But Sheba is in it, who lifted his hand against my king… Hand him alone over, and we will withdraw from the city and raise the siege.[2] Ah, my brethren! This is what the plague answers us. I do not wish, it says, nor does God my master wish, to make an end of the whole people, no; for if he is just, he is also merciful. He wills that men be surrounded and besieged by malignant diseases; but there is a traitor to God, which is sin. Hand it over by means of sorrow, tears and penance, and when this is done, we, the ministers of an offended God, will raise the siege, and the plague will cease. Yes indeed. Once it is recognized that this illness has come from the Lord, but from the Lord angered by our sins, there is no better means of destroying this scourge than to appease God by the sorrowful confession of our iniquities.

11. We will seek a thousand means of health to free ourselves from the contagion, but they are useless without penance. Let physicians come, let medicines be applied; but it is impossible, says St. Paschasius, by any medicine of the art to heal one whom divine vengeance chastises, unless he repents of his sins. Let us flee the town, let us seek safety for our health in another that is healthy: this is nothing without a change of life. God threatened through Jonah the destruction of Nineveh, to be carried out within forty days. And what do the Ninevites do? Do they flee elsewhere so as not to be crushed by the ruins of their city? Nothing of the kind. They knew from the Prophet's preaching that the threatened destruction was a punishment for their abominations; and so they would gain nothing by fleeing, because they would take their sin with them. What, then, do they do? They fasted, put on sackcloth and ashes, and wept bitterly for their sins; and God at once withheld his hand, and the threat was not carried out.[3] This is the means to avoid our destruction. What more? Rogations are made; the intercession of Christ, of his Mother and of the Saints is implored: all this is little without penance. The friends of God love the punishment of his enemies, and never intercede for the temporal health of those who will use it to offend their God more. How many kindnesses did the Lord do Israel by means of the ark of the Covenant? Yet the Philistines take them as prey; and, punished with a horrible plague, the Israelites turned to the ark for a remedy, and the slaughter went on with greater fury.[4] So neither the prayers of Jesus Christ to the Father, nor the intercession of Mary, nor the influence of the Saints our patrons, will do anything but ask God for the continuation and increase of the plague, as long as we keep a criminal and impenitent heart.[5] There is no help for it, my children: either plague or penance. What do you say?

12. Do you wish to go on in your profanations of the church, in your blasphemies, in your impurities, in your offences, giving the just Lord God cause to make an end of us? Will you have the heart to see the havoc the exterminating plague is producing, hearing the clamorous cries of the suffering and the anguished voices of the dying, and the whole town turned into a hospital full of horrors, and this because you will not give up that lewd occasion, that indecent intimacy, those usurious dealings? Will you look without pity on so many unhappy children, who, left without parents to care for and support them, must be the plaything of misfortune, misery and ill luck, and this because you will not repent of the sins that, besides killing your souls, bring death to your fellow townsmen? Do you want plague, disasters and deaths, so as to go on in your wickedness?

13. No, my God, no, Father full of compassion. If my sins have provoked your sovereignty to use natural causes to produce this plague that is wiping us out, so that we may be destroyed, see, Lord, my heart now repentant. Look on this people, which, cast down at your feet, weeps bitterly for its sins. Hear us, Father of clemency; turn and look on us again with mercy, for we turn back to you with tears of repentance. A penitential rogation appeased you in Rome at the time of a fatal and devastating epidemic; and the pope St. Gregory saw that, at the cries of a repentant people, the destroying Angel sheathed the sword that had left countless dead as signs of divine vengeance.[6] Do the same with us, so that, the people being restored to its former health, we may all render you thanks worthy of your regard, by which we may merit glory. Amen.

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[7] Job 7:1.

[8] Sir. 38:15.

[9] Luke 13:1–5; John 9:2–3.

[10] Source note: “Cap. iii” (Amos 3:6).

[11] Ps. 134:6 (Vulgate; Ps. 135:6).

[12] Exod. 1:15–20.

[13] Dan. 3.

[14] Deut. 32:39; Wis. 16:13.

[15] Ps. 126:1 (Vulgate; Ps. 127:1).

[16] 1 Sam. 5:6–12; 6 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[17] Exod. 12:29–30.

[18] 2 Kgs. 19:35 (Vulgate 4 Kings).

[19] Sir. 38:1–12.

[20] 2 Chr. 16:12–13.

[21] Ps. 138:7 (Vulgate; Ps. 139:7).

[22] Source note: “Lib. ii, epist. xxvii” (Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 28, 2: *tecum fugis*).

[23] Source note: “Hom. v.”

[24] Prov. 14:34.

[25] Source note: “De perfec. grad. c. 1” (St. Lawrence Justinian, *De perfectionis gradibus*).

[26] 2 Sam. 24:15 has seventy thousand.

[27] Lam. 1:8.

[28] Titus 1:16.

[29] Jas. 2:26.

[30] John 15:5–6.

[31] Matt. 15:18–19.

[32] Justinian, *Novella* 77 (AD 538), on blasphemers and swearers.

[33] 1 Cor. 11:27–30.

[34] 1 Cor. 11:29; 1 Sam. 5:2 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[35] John 6:51.

[36] 1 Kgs. 19:6–8 (Vulgate 3 Kings).

[37] Matt. 22:11–13.

[1] Source note: “Cap. xlvii” (Jer. 47:6).

[2] 2 Sam. 20:14–22 (Vulgate 2 Kings).

[3] Jonah 3.

[4] 1 Sam. 4–5 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[5] Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1–2.

[6] The procession of 590, recorded by Gregory of Tours (*Hist. Franc.* X, 1). *Legenda aurea*.

68. Rogation in Time of War

Vol. III (Second Year), Plática 68, pp. 314–323. Gospel: Isaiah 1:20 (theme only). Original preacher not named.

Si me ad iracundiam provocaveritis, gladius devorabit vos (Isa. 1:20).

If by your iniquities you provoke me to anger, the sword shall devour you.

1. A terrible threat, my brethren, the one we have just heard, which God hurls through his prophet Isaiah. The sword shall devour you. That is, you shall be afflicted with the scourge of war; but a war in which nothing will be left unharmed: this is what the word “devour” denotes. As punishment for your sins you will have a war with sackings, which will rob you not only of the precious things in your houses but of what you most need for food and clothing. A war with violence, in which your wives, daughters and sisters will be victims of others’ lust. A war in which your peace, calm and quiet will be taken from you. In it your sons, and even you yourselves, will be forced to leave your homes and take up arms to defend the king and the country, buying victory perhaps at the cost of your life or your captivity. A war in which your towns and cities will be demolished and turned into a heap of rubble, and your fields and groves laid waste, as much by the enemies who pursue you as by those appointed to defend you, who must of necessity make the clearings needed for defence. In short, a war, the scourge that gathers in itself all the scourges of divine justice, for after it follow hunger, dearth, misery, sickness and death. This is what God threatens to a transgressing people; and heaven and earth will pass away before his words fail to be fulfilled.[1] And in view of this, what do we say? Around us the trumpet is sounding, continually calling to arms; the enemies of our kingdom have turned their weapons of war against us; we are already suffering the effects of a bloody and devastating war. What do we think about the cause that has produced it? Ah, the injustice of foreign nations and the lack of firmness of our own are usually blamed for the trouble that oppresses us. But no, my brethren. The Lord sets out the cause in the words of my text: we have provoked the anger of the God of armies by transgressing his holy law, and he is the one who directs the troops of our enemies to plunge us into the depths of tribulation. We are enemies of God, and until we are reconciled with him, men will not cease to be our enemies. And see here what I mean to show you while we are praying the Lord, through the intercession of the Saints, to give us victory and restore the peace we have lost. The cause of war: I will set it out in the first part. The way to conquer our enemies: I will put it forward in the second.

First Part

2. So that you may know at once the chief cause that stirs up against us the wars that so continually afflict Spain, and that for many years have deprived us of peace and impoverished our towns, I tell you plainly: it is sin, and the shamelessness with which we break the laws of the Lord. I would not dare to say this if I did not have countless testimonies in Scripture and history to prove it. That God who showed himself so generous with his people Israel, who by wonders and with a strong hand brought his children out of the slavery and power of Pharaoh, who had many times made them triumph by the ruin of their enemies, came at one point to speak in anger to Joshua, making this terrible threat ring in his ears: Israel will no longer be able to stand before its enemies; it will flee from them.[1] What is this? Were their soldiers fewer, did they lack skilful

generals, were they short of provisions and munitions? Nothing of the kind. But the Lord's threat was fulfilled at the siege of the city of Ai. Though a little before they had entered Jericho as victors, a city stronger and more impregnable than Ai, they were defeated: the heart of the people was afraid, says the place cited, and melted like water. Joshua, amazed, asked God the cause of this misfortune, and he said to him: Israel has sinned and has broken my covenant. Here it is clearly revealed that sin is the cause of our adversaries' triumphing over us in battle. And from the context of this sacred history it can also be gathered that it is not necessary for everyone in a people to be a sinner to draw the fury of enemies upon it: the treachery of one alone is enough. Only the soldier Achan sinned, stealing certain valuables from the plunder of Jericho against the express order of the Lord; and for this sin alone the whole army of Israel lost heart, and did not recover its former vigour until that sinful man had been punished. So that, says the Father St. Basil, the sin of that one man harmed not only himself but his wife, his children, his whole house and all his people; and the cruel storm of that man's sin devoured all Israel like a consuming fire.[2] And if the sin of one man alone does this, and so stirs up war and the victory of enemies, how much more will the many and frequent sins committed throughout the kingdom do it? It will not be able to stand before its enemies… because it sinned and broke the covenant and commands of the Lord.

3. There is no need to tire ourselves. God, provoked by the sins of the inhabitants of a kingdom, stretches out his arm to punish them, using foreign troops as instruments of his vengeance to destroy and finish us, and sometimes native troops, as we have experienced to our sorrow. Many monarchs joined together to besiege Babylon; the multitude of troops gathered at that siege from the most remote nations was terrifying. The whole country was laid waste; a great part of the besieged Chaldeans perished by hunger, by the sword and by the desolation of the city. And who gathered these victorious troops there? The prophet Isaiah answers: God, he says, the Lord of armies, allied those monarchs and led those soldiers from the ends of the earth. God and the instruments of his indignation sent them to lay waste the whole land… I, says God, have sent the troops I willed; in my anger I called my valiant champions, who will carry out the enterprise gladly, not for their own glory but for mine.[3] What cries of resentment are heard when we see the scourge of war upon us! Ah, they say, what taxes and conscription lots are demanded of us! How our forage is taken, not only for the enemies' horses but for our own protecting troops! How we are forced to leave our bed and house for billeting! The fault for this, they say, lies with our princes, who without cause have provoked our enemies' hostility, and with the indulgence of the commanders, who let the soldiery do whatever it likes… Is this not the common complaint at such a time? Well then, my brethren, complain of God, who sends the armies against you. Or, better said, complain of your criminal conduct, which has angered God, so that he has promised, and even commanded, the enemy troops to oppress you with war. Sin is the cause. What, someone will say: are the soldiers who fight against us and triumph over our efforts not sinners? Are they innocent? We have often heard this argument. But you must know that, as the Lord says in the place of Isaiah already cited, our enemies do not fight for their own glory but for God's. Though they be sinners, heretics or atheists, they are instruments of the Lord, who chooses them to punish us and avenge the outrages to his honour. The very warriors who conquer us will be punished by God once their commission is done, for they are instruments of his anger. It is like a father who, angry with his dearest son, takes up a rod to punish him: not because he loves it more than the fruit of his own body, but so that it may serve as the instrument of his justice; and once the son is corrected, he throws the stick he used for the punishment into the fire.[4]

4. This is what St. Jerome said, speaking of the victory the enemies of the Roman people had won over them, though they were weaker than the soldiers they defeated. Know, he said, that God makes the barbarian nations strong because of our sins; our vices have conquered the Roman army, and our enemies have not grown mighty by their arms but by our iniquities.[5] St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom say the same. The latter adds that God permits our enemies, who are also his, to triumph over us because of our sins and to rejoice in their triumphs; but that in the end, perhaps for the very unjust war they have declared on us, they are afterwards conquered and laid low by other nations. So is fulfilled what David says in Psalm 149, which he

expounds with the words quoted.[6] Ah, my brethren! What increases the strength of our adversaries is not so much their squadrons, their horses, their arms, as our offences. That war we always keep open against God, breaking his precepts, and against our neighbour, wounding him with our revenges, our hatreds, our backbiting, thefts and insults: that is what makes our enemies strong. God, provoked by the crimes the Philistines committed in taking vengeance on their neighbours, threatened them through Ezekiel that he would take vengeance on them, killing them by a destructive war. Hear his words: Because the Philistines have practised revenge and have taken vengeance to their full satisfaction, killing and avenging old grudges, I will stretch out my arm over them and slay the slayers.[7]

5. It is indeed a sharp grief that a nation like Spain, which for so many centuries made itself formidable and the terror of foreign nations, should be seen to give way before arms that on other occasions lay prostrate at its feet. This is caused not by lack of strength but by abundance of sins. Who was stronger than David? He tore apart the jaws of bears and lions; he conquered the Philistine who was the reproach of Israel, proving himself superior to his armies; he made himself feared by all the power of King Saul. And yet, as the Father St. John Chrysostom points out, he once found himself full of fear of a single subject of his, called Uriah. What do you fear, David, says this Saint, what do you fear? Are you not king? Have you not the power of your kingdom? Have you not arms? Are you not most mighty? Ah, the same Saint answers for David: So it is; I am king, I am strong, I have power, but I have committed a grave sin.[8] The sin he committed with Bathsheba, the wife of that soldier, made him tremble, and seems to have taken all his courage and strength from a prince accustomed to conquer in every battle. Let the Spaniards be strong; let them have crowned themselves many times with the humbling of formidable powers. Even so, if they have sinned, if there are crimes among the people, they are weak, they are feeble, they will be conquered. If they are transgressors of the law, God, provoked, will bring numerous armies to punish them with the terrible scourge of war, and with seeing themselves laid low by less valiant people. It matters little that neither we nor our princes have given them cause to declare war on us; it matters little, if we have provoked God by our sins to use it to punish us. Ahaz in no way offended the King of Israel to make him wage the bloodiest war on him, in which he slaughtered a hundred and twenty thousand men of the tribe of Judah, of which Ahaz was king, and, with the great booty he took in the plunder, carried off two hundred thousand persons as captives to Samaria. It was an unjust act on the part of Pekah, king of Israel, but not on the part of God, who willed by this means to punish the iniquities of the Jews. They did not offend the King of Israel, but they did offend God, and for this that misfortune came upon them. Because they had forsaken the God of their fathers, says the sacred text.[9] Sin is the cause of war.

Second Part

6. To avoid war is not easy. Either foreign powers provoke it, and in that case force must be repelled by force; or our sovereigns undertake it, and then, since we subjects are not to inquire into the reason they have for it, we must regard it as just and fitting for our country. To avoid its havoc, to conquer the enemy and sing victory over him, is not so difficult. To free ourselves from the fury of our adversaries we usually use various human means: placing batteries on high ground, forming large and disciplined armies, calling on the help of an allied power, and above all making rogations to God, putting forward most holy Mary and the Saints our advocates as intercessors for the happy success of our arms. None of this is useless, and it must be done; and even the almighty Lord, who works no miracle without cause, wills that we do what is possible on our part to come out victorious. But since, as I have proved in my first part, it is God who moves the enemy armies to make war on his offending children, there is no other way to conquer them than to make ourselves allies of the Lord by repentance for our sins and conversion of life. As long as we are not friends of God by his grace, we will not lack human enemies fighting to destroy us. And so fortifications, fleets, coalitions with other kings, and even the invocation of the Saints, will all be fruitless for us if we do not disarm the arm of God raised in anger against us. You will see this clearly from irrefutable testimonies.

7. The city of “Estevon” seemed well fortified. Being surrounded by waters that were not very deep, large vessels could not reach it, nor did the enemy soldiers have firm ground on which to lay a siege. For this reason its inhabitants lived given up to the disorder of their passions, and laughed when they heard of the disasters war was causing in the surrounding cities, saying: Who will ever be able to come near our walls? But God assured them of their ruin as punishment for their sins through the prophet Jeremiah. He announced to them that to punish their iniquities he would drain all the waters in which they trusted for their defence, and that in the very place where they enjoyed kindly lakes there would come a flood of enemy troops. I will send upon it, God said to it, fright and terrors from all the neighbouring nations.[1] Not in vain are cities fortified to make them impregnable; and if this were not done when an enemy invasion is feared, the omission would have to be charged as rash. But if the avenging God is the one fighting against us, he will cause all the works prepared for our defence to be destroyed.

8. Nor must we trust in the strength of our troops, fleets and munitions alone; for the Lord is the one, says David, who, when he pleases, breaks the bow and arrow, destroys the weapons and burns the shields to ashes.[2] That is, when wars come from the multitude of our sins, the Lord knows how to make useless all the means we prepare for the fight, so that we may be conquered and become the prey of our enemies; and most especially when, forgetful of God, we put all our trust in earthly safeguards. This happened to the Moabites, to whom he said through the prophet Jeremiah: Because you have put your trust in your strongholds and treasures, you too shall be taken; all the cities shall be plundered, not one being left.[3] The army of the Midianites was very numerous, its soldiers strong and seasoned in war, when Gideon attacked it by God’s command. Yet that general of the Lord’s people conquered them with a handful of soldiers. The reason is that Midian gloried in the number and discipline of its men, and Gideon had God on his side, by whose order and help he took the field.[4]

9. I say the same of the confederations and leagues that kingdoms usually make with friendly powers when they find themselves invaded by others more powerful. There is no doubt that this is a fit means of coming out victorious, and Spain has experienced it many times, helped by the favour of other allied princes. But this holds if we first make an alliance with God by detesting our sins; otherwise alliances can do us harm, the Most High so disposing it, so that our sins may not go unpunished. So it happened to the transgressing king Ahaz. After losing so ignominiously the battle the Israelites gave him, which I mentioned in my first part, he found himself attacked by the Edomites and then by the Philistines, and called the king of the Assyrians to his help. But they were so slow in coming with their army that they gave the Edomites and Philistines time to do a thousand kinds of havoc in the kingdom of Judah; and when the Assyrians arrived, they committed such oppressions and robberies, under the name of provisioning, that it cost more to drive the allies out of the kingdom than it had cost to bring them to its help. The text says so plainly: King Ahaz sent an embassy to the king of the Assyrians asking for his help; and God sent Tiglath-pileser, king of the Assyrians, who harassed and ravaged him, with no one to resist him.[5] The league did him harm. If, after suffering the first blow from the army of Israel for having forsaken the God of his fathers, he had been reconciled with him by sorrow for his crime, God would have favoured him, and the alliance in which he trusted would not have been ruin for his kingdom.

10. Rogations to God through the intercession of his Saints are also most useful, as they ought to be, for the overthrow of the enemies who trouble us. For what victory have the Spaniards not won through the mediation of Mary our Lady, who is terrible as an army set in array?[6] The feast we celebrate of the Patronage of this Lady is a witness to the countless victories that King Don Jaime and other princes won by her intercession over the Mahometans and other enemies of our heroic nation. Many Saints have done the same: invoked by the faithful in the conflict of war, the Lord through their prayers set them free from the hands of their oppressors. But God does not hear the prayers of his friends, nor do they present them before the throne of the Godhead, on behalf of those who are his enemies by sin. And if at times we clearly feel their

intercession and at other times not, this arises from the disposition of those who pray to him through such powerful advocates. The children of God's people had won countless victories over their chief enemies by means of the ark of the covenant, as can be seen in the Old Testament. But Eli sinned by the criminal indulgence he showed his sacrilegiously offending sons. Seeing that his army had been humbled by the Philistines, he had the sacred ark brought into the camp, since it was the propitiatory where the Lord looked on them with compassion and through which he poured out his most copious blessings on them. But the outcome did not answer to their desires. The sword of God was drawn against the people for the crime of its ministers, and so the ark served only for their ruin. The battle was lost; the chief commanders died; Hophni and Phinehas perished; Eli ended by a sudden death; and above all the holy ark fled from Israel, the Lord permitting it to fall as booty into the hands of the Philistines.[7] A like fruit, my brethren, we may expect if we ask God for help in our wars through the intercession of most holy Mary, the holy ark in which God looks on us with favour, without first washing the soul with tears of sorrow from the stains of sin, which is the cause of this calamity. This was all I proposed.

11. This being so, my dearly beloved brethren, let us make peace with God, so that God may give us peace and victory over our enemies. Let us be reconciled with the just and strong God; and if, as his Scripture says, he gives victory only to those who are worthy of it, let us use the means to obtain it and make ourselves deserving of his kindness. All human industry will be of little use for our defence if the Lord is not appeased by our acknowledgment of our guilt. Let us weep for the sins that brought on our misfortunes; let us remove the obstacle that makes our happiness impossible; and then let us ask for the help that can come to us only from on high. This we do today, my God. Look on us with eyes of pity, for our heart is contrite and humbled. Have compassion on your children, and free them from the terrible havoc of a savage war, in which, as Jeremiah lamented in that of Jerusalem, the priests weep for the ruin of the sanctuary, the virgins of Zion for the humbling of their purity, and the whole holy city is seen weeping like a sad widow, finding herself desolate and afflicted.[8] Hear us, Lord, and taking the words of Judas Maccabeus when the wicked Nicanor attacked him: You who once sent a good Angel on behalf of Hezekiah, who slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the army of Sennacherib, send now, O Sovereign of the heavens, your good Angel before us, that those… who come against your holy people may fear.[9] We say the same to you, God of clemency. Would that we might obtain, like Judas Maccabeus, the fruit of this prayer, which was the death of Nicanor and of thirty-five thousand of his soldiers! So we hope, that by your grace we may come out victorious on earth and reign afterwards in heaven. Amen.

Note in the source. For a thanksgiving for any benefit, there is enough material in Plática 41.

End of Volume Three.

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[10] Matt. 24:35.

[11] Source note: "Josué, vii" (Josh. 7:12; then 7:5, 11).

[12] Achan: Josh. 7:1, 18–26.

[13] Source note: "Cap. xiii per tot." (Isa. 13:3–5, paraphrased).

[14] Cf. Isa. 10:5–15 (Assyria, the rod of God's anger).

[15] Source note: "Epist. ult. lib. i". The text is St. Jerome, *Ep.* 60, 17 (to Heliodorus): *nostris peccatis barbari fortes sunt*.

[16] Source note: "Psalm. cxlix" (Chrysostom, on Ps. 149:6–9).

[17] Source note: "Ezech. xxv" (Ezek. 25:15–16).

[18] Source note: "Hom. in Psalm. l" (Chrysostom on Ps. 50/51).

[19] 2 Chr. 28:5–8.

[1] Jer. 49:3. *inducam super te terrorem… de omnibus qui sunt in circuitu tuo.*

[2] Ps. 45:10 (Vulgate; Ps. 46:9).

[3] Source note: "Jerem. xlviii" (Jer. 48:7–8).

[4] Judg. 7.

[5] The source says “chapter xxxvii of Jeremiah”, a slip. The account is 2 Chr. 28:16–21 (cf. 2 Kgs. 16:7–9).

[6] Song 6:3, 9 (Vulgate).

[7] 1 Sam. 2:12–36; 4:1–18 (Vulgate 1 Kings).

[8] Lam. 1:1, 4.

[9] 2 Macc. 15:22–23, 27.

Index of the Pláticas in This Third Volume

Translation of the Index printed at the end of Vol. III (pp. 325–326). Page numbers are those of the 1858 edition. The printed index gives 234 for Plática 62, a slip for 254; it has been corrected against the text.

- **Plática 35.** Seventh Sunday after Pentecost: On Adoration and True Worship — p. 5

- **Plática 36.** Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precept of Almsgiving, and the Benefits of Giving Alms — p. 15

- **Plática 37.** Ninth Sunday after Pentecost: On Sin, and How Worthy of Our Sorrow and Tears Are the Effects It Produces — p. 26

- **Plática 38.** Tenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Seventh Commandment — p. 34

- **Plática 39.** Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: On the Ceremonies of Baptism, and the Remembrance of Them We Must Keep for the Christian Life — p. 43

- **Plática 40.** Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precepts of the Decalogue, and the Contempt Men Show for Them in Following Those of the Devil — p. 51

- **Plática 41.** Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On Gratitude for God’s Benefits — p. 60

- **Plática 42.** Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Fourth Petition of the Our Father — p. 69

- **Plática 43.** Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Eleventh Article of the Creed, the Resurrection of the Flesh — p. 78

- **Plática 44.** Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Capital Vice of Envy — p. 87

- **Plática 45.** Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Second Article of the Creed — p. 96

- **Plática 46.** Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On Rash Judgment — p. 105

- **Plática 47.** Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Fifth Article of the Creed: He Descended into Hell — p. 114

- **Plática 48.** Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: On the Last Petition of the Our Father: Deliver Us from Evil — p. 123

- **Plática 49.** Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost: On the Precept of Forgiving Injuries — p. 133

- **Plática 50.** Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost: On the Duties of a Subject towards His King — p. 142

- **Plática 51.** Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost: On the Honour Children Owe Their Parents — p. 152

- **Plática 52.** Twenty-fourth and Last Sunday after Pentecost: On the Angels — p. 162

- **Plática 53.** The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: On the Third Article of the Creed: Born of the Virgin Mary — p. 172

- **Plática 54.** The Circumcision of the Lord: On the Mystery — p. 182

- **Plática 55.** The Epiphany of the Lord: On the Mystery — p. 190

- **Plática 56.** The Ascension of the Lord into Heaven: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Fifth Article of the Creed: He Ascended into Heaven — p. 198

- **Plática 57.** Corpus Christi: On the Institution of This Feast, and the Ways to Celebrate It — p. 206

- **Plática 58.** The Most Pure Conception of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Dogma of Original Sin — p. 215

- **Plática 59.** The Nativity of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and the Blessings That Came into the World with Our Lady's Birth — p. 224

- **Plática 60.** The Annunciation: On the Mystery, and Explanation of the Hail Mary — p. 234

- **Plática 61.** The Purification of Our Lady: On the Mystery, and the Virtues Most Holy Mary Practised in It for Our Imitation — p. 244

- **Plática 62.** The Assumption of Most Holy Mary: On the Mystery, and on the Reward of Humility and the Punishment of Pride — p. 254

- **Plática 63.** For a Parish Priest's First Appearance before His Parishioners in His Church — p. 263

- **Plática 64.** For a Parish Priest's Farewell When He Is Transferred to Another Parish, or Leaves His Own for Another Reason — p. 274

- **Plática 65.** For the Day of the Publication of the Bull of the Holy Crusade — p. 280

- **Plática 66.** Rogation for Lack of Water, or Drought — p. 294

- **Plática 67.** On Plague, Whether Feared or Already Suffered: Rogation to Some Patron Saint of the Town — p. 304

- **Plática 68.** Rogation in Time of War — p. 314

End of the Index of the Third Volume.