St. Anthony Mary Claret

THE TEMPLE AND PALACE OF GOD OUR LORD

El templo y palacio de Dios nuestro Señor

From the Spanish of the first edition (Barcelona, 1866)

English translation

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

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About this translation

Translated from *El templo y palacio de Dios nuestro Señor* (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1866). The translation is complete.

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

The Temple and Palace of God Our Lord

Prologue

God our Lord has created our soul in his own image and likeness;[1] he has created it so that it may know, love and serve him here on earth, and afterwards be happy for all eternity in heaven. God has created the soul and united it to a body, and body and soul form one complete being, which is called man.

God, creator of heaven and earth and of all things that are in them, is the owner of them all, because he created them and preserves them; he is in all of them by essence, by presence and by power; but he dwells in a very particular way in just and humble persons; in them he takes his delight, in persons who practise both the contemplative and the active life.

When Jesus Christ, our divine Redeemer, was going about preaching his holy Gospel, he lodged in the house of Mary Magdalene and Martha. Mary was listening very attentively to the words of Jesus, while Martha was very busy with the work of the house.[2]

These two sisters were figures of the active or exterior life, which is a good life, and of the contemplative or interior life, which is better. Martha represented the first, Mary the second. It is true that Jesus Christ said that Mary had chosen the better part, but he did not say the best; for, says St. Augustine, the one who has chosen the best is he who has known how to join the two together.

And since we desire that every Christian be a house in which Jesus Christ is lodged, and that he find in that house both the contemplative life of Mary and the active life of Martha, we therefore urge both; and, using a comparison, we say that every Christian must do as a pair of compasses does, which fixes one of its two points at the centre and with the other sets itself in motion until it describes a perfect circle. So the Christian will fix his attention and interior care on God, whom he will never lose sight of. This will be the contemplative life. With the fulfilment of the duties of his state he will go round, like the other point of the compasses, and in this way he will do all things well and with perfection. Such is the purpose of this little book: to do all things well and with perfection, sanctifying oneself in the very things one must of necessity do in fulfilment of one's duty. May all be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls. Amen.

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[1] Cf. Gen 1:27.

[2] Cf. Lk 10:38–42. Cf. *Escritos autobiográficos* \[BAC, Madrid 1981\] pp. 549, 568.

Chapter I. God makes his dwelling in the loving soul, as the Gospel says and its expositors explain

Jesus said: "If you love me, keep my commandments. He who keeps my commandments, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. If anyone loves me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will both come to him and make our dwelling with him."[1]

If anyone will love me by keeping my commandments, both my Father and I will at once come to him; not by local movement, but by a life-giving operation and the infusion of new grace; and so, perpetually, though in an invisible way, the Father himself and I will be present in him, together with the Holy Spirit.[2]

In reward for this fidelity and love, he will be the object of the affection of the whole Most Holy Trinity, which will dwell in him permanently \[*de asiento*: "settled", as a resident rather than a passing guest\] and in a very particular way.[3]

Jesus Christ, our divine master, teaches us that the true love of God is not idle and does not live as it pleases, but works to fulfil the will of God;[4] and this contains three goods. The first is to be loved by the heavenly Father with special signs of love.[5] And if it is so great a good to be loved and cherished by the kings of the earth, how great a good will it be to be loved by the King of heaven, since nothing can be lacking to one who stands in favour with such a King \[*priva con tal Rey*: *privar* is the old courtly verb for enjoying a monarch's favour, as a *privado* or favourite\]? The second is that the Father and the Son, and consequently the Holy Spirit, will dwell within him and will be in his soul, governing it, cherishing it and taking special care of it.[6] The third is that Christ will manifest himself to them,[7] in this life by the light of faith, made very bright by the grace of contemplation, and in the other by the beatific vision, by which God is seen clearly. Oh, happy those who love Christ by keeping his commandments, for such great goods will they gain by it! O Christian soul, love by obeying and obey by loving, so that you may be purified by this obedience of charity, and, being thus purified, the Most Holy Trinity may dwell in you continually! So you will obtain that peace which Jesus Christ gives:[8] peace with God, peace with the angels and saints of heaven, peace with your conscience; a peace that consists in finding rest and happiness in God alone, even in the midst of the greatest adversities and trials. This peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.[9]

St. Paul calls the just the temple of God;[10] St. Teresa calls them the palace of the King of heaven and earth;[11] and Tirinus says that they are the temple of God and the most pleasant and desired palace of God himself, in which the Holy Spirit dwells, not only by grace, faith, hope, charity and his other gifts, but also by himself, in whom he dwells, works and takes his pleasure in a new and special way.[12] And Fr. Scío: "You," he says, "are the temple of God, but in a manner much more august and glorious than material temples are, since not only does God dwell in you by his adorable presence, but also his divine Spirit by his love, by his grace and by a very close union."[13] If anyone violates or profanes the temple of God (which you are) with bad doctrines, or bad examples, or bad conduct, God will punish him,[14] unless he repents and does serious penance.[15]

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[1] Jn 14:15, 21, 23.

[2] Cf. Tirinus, J., *In Ioannem* 15:23: *Commentarius in universam Sacram Scripturam* (Venice 1795) vol. 3, p. 91.

[3] Cf. St. Augustine, *De Spiritu et littera* ch. 22: PL 13, 223 \[so the source\].

[4] Cf. Mt 7:21; Lk 6:46; Jn 5:30.

[5] Cf. Jn 16:27.

[6] Cf. Jn 14:23.

[7] Cf. Jn 14:21.

[8] Cf. Jn 14:27.

[9] Cf. Gal 5:22.

[10] Cf. 1 Cor 3:16.

[11] Cf. *Way of Perfection* ch. 28 no. 9: *Obras completas* (BAC, Madrid 1962) p. 270.

[12] Cf. Tirinus, J., *In Rom* 5:5; *In 1 Cor* 3:16: op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 137, 154.

[13] Scío de San Miguel, F., note to 1 Cor 3:16: *La Sagrada Biblia* (LR, Barcelona 1854), New Testament vol. 2, p. 59 (literal quotation).

[14] Cf. 1 Cor 3:17.

[15] Cf. Scío de San Miguel, F., note to 1 Cor 3:17: op. cit., p. 59.

Chapter II. God makes his dwelling in the loving soul, as St. Teresa of Jesus teaches

1. "Now see what your Master says: *Who art in heaven*. Do you think it matters little to know what heaven is and where your most sacred Father is to be sought? Well, I tell you that for wandering minds it matters a great deal not only to believe this but to try to understand it by experience, for it is one of the things that greatly binds the understanding and makes the soul recollect itself. You already know that God is

everywhere. Clearly, then, where the king is, there is the court; in short, where God is, there is heaven. Without doubt you may believe that where His Majesty is, there is all glory. For see that St. Augustine says that he sought him in many places and came to find him within himself.[1] Do you think it matters little for a distracted soul to understand this truth and to see that it has no need to go to heaven in order to speak with its eternal Father, or to speak loudly in order to take delight in him? However softly it speaks, he is so near that he will hear us. Nor does it need wings to go and look for him, but only to put itself in solitude and look at him within itself, and not be surprised at so good a guest, but with great humility speak to him as to a Father, ask of him as of a Father, tell him its troubles, ask him for a remedy for them, understanding that it is not worthy to be his daughter. Let it leave aside a certain timidity that some persons have and that they think is humility. For humility does not lie in refusing a favour the king does you, but in accepting it and understanding how far beyond your deserts it comes, and rejoicing in it. A fine humility indeed! \[*¡Donosa humildad!*: ironic, "a pretty sort of humility!"\] That I should have the Emperor of heaven and earth in my house, who comes to it to do me a favour and to take his pleasure with me, and that out of humility I should not even wish to answer him, nor stay with him, nor take what he gives me, but leave him alone? And that, while he is telling me and begging me to ask of him, I should out of humility remain poor, and even let him go away because he sees that I cannot make up my mind?"

2. "Do not trouble yourselves, daughters, with humilities of this kind, but deal with him as with a father, and as with a brother, and as with a lord, and as with a spouse; sometimes in one way, sometimes in another, for he will teach you what you must do to please him. Stop being simpletons \[*Dejaos de ser bobas*\]; take him at his word \[*pedidle la palabra*: literally "ask him for his word", that is, hold him to his promise\], since he is your spouse and treats you as such. See that it matters greatly to you to have understood this truth, that the Lord is within you and that we should stay there with him. This way of praying, even if it be vocal, recollects the understanding much more quickly, and it is a prayer that brings many goods with it. It is called recollection because the soul gathers together all its faculties and enters within itself with its God, and its divine Master comes more quickly to teach it and to give it the prayer of quiet than in any other way; because there, withdrawn into itself, it can think about the passion and picture the Son there and offer him to the Father, without tiring the understanding by going to look for him on Mount Calvary, and in the garden, and at the pillar."

3. "Those who are able to shut themselves up in this way within this little heaven of our soul, where he dwells who made it and the earth, and who grow accustomed not to enter or stay where these exterior senses are distracted, may believe that they are travelling an excellent road and that they will not fail to come to drink of the water of the fountain, because they go a long way in a short time. It is like one who travels in a ship: with a little good weather he reaches the end of his journey in a few days, while those who go by land take longer. These are already, as they say, out at sea; although they have not altogether left the land, for that while they do what they can to free themselves from it by recollecting the senses."

4. "Likewise, if the recollection is true, it is felt very clearly, because some operation takes place (I do not know how to make it understood; whoever has it will understand) in which it seems that the soul rises up with the game, for it already sees that the things of the world are a game \[*se levanta el alma con el juego*: a gaming phrase for rising from the table with the winnings; Teresa plays on *juego*, the things of the world being mere play\]. It rises up at the best moment, and, like someone who goes into a strong castle so as not to fear his enemies, it withdraws the senses from these exterior things and so turns its back on them \[*dales de tal manera de mano*\] that, without its understanding how, its eyes close so as not to see them, so that the sight of the soul's eyes may be more awake. So whoever goes by this road nearly always keeps his eyes closed when he prays, and it is an admirable custom for many things, because it is a forcing of oneself not to look at the things here below. This is at the beginning; afterwards there is no need. It costs him more when at that time he opens them. It seems that one is aware of a strengthening and invigorating of the soul at the cost

of the body, and that it leaves the body alone and weakened, and takes provisions there for use against it."

5. "And although at the beginning this is not understood, because it is not so great (for there is more and less in this recollection), yet if one grows accustomed to it (although at first it is hard work, because the body claims its rights, not understanding that it is cutting off its own head by not admitting defeat), if one practises it for some days and we force ourselves in this way, the gain will be clearly seen; and they will understand, as soon as they begin to pray, that the bees are coming to the hive and going into it to make the honey. And this without any care on our part, because the Lord has willed that, for the time they have held to it, the soul and will should have merited this mastery, so that at a mere sign that it wishes to recollect itself the senses obey it and gather to it. And although afterwards they go out again, it is a great thing that they have already surrendered, for they go out as captives and subjects and do not do the harm they could have done before; and when the will calls them again, they come more readily, until after many entries of this kind the Lord wills that they should remain altogether in perfect contemplation."

6. "Let what has been said be well understood, for although it seems obscure, whoever is willing to put it into practice will understand it. So they travel by sea; and since it matters so much to us not to go so slowly, let us speak a little of how we may become accustomed to so good a way of proceeding. They are safer from many occasions; the fire of divine love catches more quickly, for with a little blowing of the understanding they are close to the fire itself; with one tiny spark that touches them, everything will be set ablaze. As there is no exterior hindrance, the soul is alone with its God; there is great readiness for being kindled. Let us suppose, then, that within us there is a palace of very great richness, its whole building of gold and precious stones, in short, as befits such a Lord; and that you have a share in making this building what it is (as is truly the case, for there is no building of such beauty as a soul that is pure and full of virtues, and the greater they are, the more the stones shine); and that in this palace is this great King, and that he has been pleased to be your guest, and that he sits on a throne of very great price, which is your heart."

7. "This will seem at first an irrelevant thing (I mean making up this fiction to make it understood), and it may be that it will help a great deal, you especially; for, as we women have little learning, all this is necessary so that we may truly understand that there is something else within us, incomparably more precious than what we see outside. Let us not imagine ourselves empty inside. And please God it may be only women who go about with this carelessness; for I hold it impossible, if we took care to remember that we have such a guest within us, that we should give ourselves so much to the things of the world, because we should see how base they are in comparison with what we possess within. For what more does a beast do, which, on seeing something that pleases its sight, satisfies its hunger on the prey? Surely there must be some difference between them and us."

8. "Perhaps they will laugh at me and say that this is very obvious; and they will be right, because for me it was obscure for some time. I understood well enough that I had a soul; but what this soul deserved and who was within it (because I blindfolded my own eyes with the vanities of life so as not to see it), that I did not understand. For, as it seems to me, if I had understood then, as I understand now, that in this tiny palace of my soul so great a King has room, I should not have left him alone so often; I should sometimes have stayed with him and taken more care that it should not be so dirty. But what a thing to marvel at, that he who with his greatness could make a thousand worlds should shut himself up in so small a thing! So he willed to be contained in the womb of his most sacred Mother. As he is Lord, he brings his freedom with him, and as he loves us, he makes himself to our measure. When a soul is beginning, so as not to alarm it by seeing itself so small to hold so great a thing within it, he does not make himself known until he gradually enlarges this soul, according to what he understands is needed for what he places in it. That is why I say that he brings his freedom with him, since he has the power to make this palace great. The point is that we give it to him as his own with complete determination and clear it out so that he can put things in and take them away as in his own property. This is his condition, and His Majesty is right; let us not refuse it to him. And as he has not

forced our will, he takes what we give him; but he does not give himself wholly until we give ourselves wholly to him (this is certain, and because it matters so much I remind you of it so often); nor does he work in the soul as when it is wholly his, without hindrance; nor do I know how he could work. He is a friend of all good order. Now if we fill the palace with low people and trinkets, how is the Lord to find room in it with his court? He does a great deal by staying a little while amid so much clutter. Do you think, daughters, that he comes alone? Do you not see that his Son says: *Who art in heaven*?[2] Well, such a King, you may be sure \[*a osadas*: an old adverb, "I dare say"\], the courtiers do not leave alone, but are with him praying to him for us for our good, because they are full of charity. Do not think it is as it is here below, where if a lord or prelate favours someone, for some purpose or because he wishes to, at once there are envies and that poor man is ill thought of, though he has done nothing to them, so that the favours cost him dear."

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[1] *Confessions* X, 27: *Confesiones de San Agustín* (LR, Barcelona 1868) vol. 2, p. 285.

[2] Mt 6:9.

Chapter III. Interior retreat according to the teaching of Blessed Margaret Alacoque

The interior retreat that St. Teresa of Jesus taught so earnestly serves not only professed nuns and souls advanced in perfection, but also novices and beginners on the way of virtue, as can be seen in the life of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. When she was appointed assistant and took leave of her novices, whose novice mistress she had been until that day, she impressed on them with the greatest tenderness the love of Jesus Christ and the fulfilment of the promises made to His Majesty, charging them not to do knowingly anything that might displease him, so as not to hold back his graces; and she assured them that she would not refrain from suffering anything to obtain that they might all belong to the sacred Heart of the Lord and that it might reign in theirs, giving themselves up to its loving government and saying among themselves: Since this divine Heart is mine, what can I lack? If I am his, what can harm me?

She recommended them to make of their heart an oratory in which to adore and love the Heart of their divine Spouse, entering it three times a day. In the morning, to render it their homage, adorations and sacrifices, as to their prince and sovereign deliverer, consecrating to it all they would do and suffer, so as to dedicate everything to its love, honour and glory, uniting all they did to the divine Heart and its holy intentions, and renouncing whatever was contrary to this. At midday, they were to return to the sacred Heart to make the same acts and petitions, uncovering to it the poverty and wounds of their soul, as to their sovereign physician. At night they were to repeat the same acts and give it thanks for all its benefits, asking its pardon for all their faults with lively sorrow and a firm resolution to die rather than fall into them again; and they were to make a crown of all the virtues they had practised and offer it to soothe the pricks of the thorns of their faults, begging it to repair the evil they had done by the good it did them. And in order to take their rest in complete safety, they were to enter the sanctuary of the loving Heart of Jesus and shut themselves in it with the key of an entire confidence and abandonment to its care. If they were troubled by any fear, they were to tell their soul not to fear, because they carried the Heart of Jesus, which is the treasure, strength and delight of heaven and earth. They were all to bear their trials without complaining; and when they went to prayer, they were to enter the Heart of Jesus as into a sacred desert, offering His Majesty's own divine prayer to make up for theirs, loving him with his own love, adoring and praising him with his adorations and praises, doing and wanting nothing but the fulfilment of his will. If they were faithful to this divine Heart, it would be for them a fountain of every good; but if, on the contrary, they abandoned it, it would come to be unfeeling towards them. "Farewell, my beloved sisters," she said to them; "let us all belong to our Beloved; let us give him our heart and affections. I wish you his pure love, and that it may consume you in its sacred fire. Remember that you have made him so many promises, and he cannot be mocked. Carry them out constantly at any cost. No more attachment to creatures or to yourselves; but be all of you for this divine

Heart, to which I give you up entirely."

These were the holy counsels of the good mistress to her beloved disciples, counsels that contain a compendium of all the others and are a summary of all perfection. This good seed did not fall on barren ground: the holiness of the novices and the fervour of the community were proof of it.

O Christian soul, you must know that there is nothing more holy, nothing more useful, than to walk always in the presence of God; for the divine presence will free you from sins, fill you with virtues, make you perfect[1] and like the guardian angels, who, though occupied in guarding the souls of little ones, never lose sight of the face of the heavenly Father.[2] And if you wish to know where you will find God, I must tell you that God is everywhere, but that nowhere will you find him more easily than within yourself, provided that you know how to dwell continually within yourself. God is within you; and therefore, before God, with all humility, like a chaste bride, you will say to yourself, and often: The Lord is here; the Lord is looking at me; the Lord is listening to me. And as you say these words, you will attend to the Lord as if you saw the divine essence itself before you, and you will behave as if there were no one in the world but God; and you will rejoice within yourself to see that you have found God, and found him in yourself. If at times the business you cannot avoid, or the words you must necessarily speak, do not let you attend to God as freely as you would wish, you must not lose heart on that account. Here is the conduct you must follow: by affection you will unite yourself to God; with attention and care you will carry out that business with the aim of pleasing God; and as soon as it is finished you will turn again to God as one hungry for God, like the thirsty deer that runs to the waters.[3]

Jesus said to his beloved disciples, and to you and to all who have been, are and will be: *Behold, the kingdom of God is within you*;[4] as Tirinus explains: because I, who am your King and your Messiah, am among you; and that by which I decreed to reign within you also exists within yourselves: faith, grace and the other spiritual and heavenly goods that I have come to communicate to you, not as visible things outside you, but within you, invisible things hidden in your soul.[5] From this one will at once see the great need each person has to mortify the senses, such as sight, hearing, speech and, above all, the imagination, abstaining from idle and useless thoughts, castles in the air, plans for gaining honour, comfort and money, and all that the world loves and seeks. The bodily senses and the imagination are doors and windows through which thieves often enough come in to rob and kill our soul. These senses are like cracks through which the water runs out.[6] We must, then, ask God every day and many times a day: *Thy kingdom come*,[7] so that no other may reign in us but God, and that with him peace may reign, as it reigns in men of good will. For these is peace, as the angels sang at the birth of the Lord.[8]

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[1] Cf. Gen 17:1.

[2] Cf. Mt 18:10.

[3] Cf. Ps 42:2.

[4] Lk 17:21.

[5] Cf. Tirinus, J., *In Lucam* 17:21: op. cit., vol. 2, p. 67.

[6] Cf. 2 Sam 14:14: *Tamquam aqua dilabimur* \["we run away like water"\].

[7] Cf. Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2.

[8] Cf. Lk 2:14.

Chapter IV. Interior retreat according to the teaching of St. Catherine of Siena, taught by Jesus Christ himself

Interior recollection is most useful not only to those who live in the cloister, but also to those who live in the midst of household tasks. To this end we shall relate what St. Catherine of Siena practised. This young woman gave herself to the service of God our Lord from early childhood. At eight years of age she made a

vow of chastity with the permission of her spiritual director. As she grew in age, she grew also in grace, in virtue and perfection, and even in natural beauty, before God and men. When she reached marriageable age, a young man of good standing from the same city fell in love with Catherine and asked her parents for her hand. As these parents knew nothing of the perpetual vow of chastity their daughter had made, and seeing, moreover, the great advantage that young man had over their daughter in riches, with which he could make her happy, they promised her to him in marriage without even speaking first to Catherine, counting on her docility, so as not to lose a moment and to take the opportunity of so advantageous a match.

With great satisfaction and joy the parents informed their daughter of the word they had given to the young gentleman who had asked for her hand. Catherine heard her parents' words with surprise, and at once replied with the deepest humility and modesty that she could not agree to this proposal, since she had resolved not to marry nor to have any spouse but Jesus Christ. On hearing so unexpected an answer from their daughter, the parents were filled with indignation against her; and she, so that they would not trouble her further to accept the marriage, shut herself in her room and cut off her long and beautiful hair. When her parents saw her so disfigured, their indignation reached its height, and in the heat of their annoyance they gave the most terrible orders, and at the same time the most painful for Catherine: they forbade her to leave the house to go to church to practise her devotions, and, dismissing the kitchen maid, they put Catherine in her place. The family was quite large (twenty-two persons in all), and as she had to cook for all of them, she was hard pressed, with neither time nor place to practise the devotions and prayers she had formerly made with such fervour.

Finding herself one day in the press of the kitchen, she complained lovingly to the Lord of her great deprivation. Jesus Christ appeared to her and consoled her, instructed her and told her to build within her soul a cell, into which she could withdraw and from which no one could take her or disturb her. Instructed and encouraged by Jesus Christ, Catherine with the greatest promptness and obedience set to work on building her interior cell, and she built it in this way. For foundation she laid the knowledge of her own nothingness, or the deepest humility; the walls were the presence of God by faith, whom she always kept before her; the roof that sheltered her from so many mishaps and floods of persecution from all her household was hope in God; the furnishings of this cell were charity and the other virtues; finally, the door that closed so precious a dwelling was forgetfulness of everything created. In this retreat she lived more solitary than some dwellers in the deserts of the Thebaid and Calidumea \[so the source; perhaps Idumea is meant\], for these were never deserts unless interior solitude went with them. Neither the bustle of the twenty-two persons who made up the family, nor the commotion of the dyer's workshop, which was her father's trade, nor her own tasks of scrubbing, sweeping and preparing the meals drew her away from the contemplation of her divine Spouse Jesus. For just as the mother-of-pearl, though placed among the waters of the sea, opens to nothing but the dew of heaven, to enrich itself with pearls, so Catherine, among so many bitter waters and waves of occupations and insults, opened the doors of her attention to heaven alone; only the dew of the Holy Spirit found entrance into her soul, and her life was a sharing in the life of God, who lives only by knowing and loving himself.

That is why, being so proficient and experienced in this mystical desert, she afterwards advised her spiritual children to fashion a little chamber within themselves, where the soul might remain with God alone whenever they had to be occupied in some exterior work. This is a very necessary teaching, and true solitude consists in it; for it matters little to live in the most hidden cave if the heart stays in the world. For the distracted, the desert is a world; for the recollected, the world is a desert. For David, the palace was a wilderness; and for Eve, paradise was the place of her fall, through her lack of recollection. To enter the interior wilderness, the soul must strip itself of every affection and even of itself; the understanding must wish to think of God alone, and the will must attach itself to the sovereign Good alone, which is God himself. Placed in this state, the soul will enjoy the loving presence of God even in the midst of exterior occupations.

Chapter V. Imitation of the virtues of Jesus Christ

As soon as Jesus Christ sees that a soul has made this interior retreat or spiritual solitude, he speaks those words of the prophet Hosea: *Behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart*;[1] and he says to her: *I will espouse thee to me for ever; and I will espouse thee to me in justice and judgment, and in mercy and in compassion. And I will espouse thee to me in faith*,[2] keeping my covenant and my promises with inviolable fidelity.

I also address my word to your heart and say to you: *Learn of me, my bride, for I am meek and humble of heart*.[3] The bride must give all her care to studying the inclinations of the bridegroom and imitating his virtues; and since you see that all my inclinations are of love, you will love your Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.[4]

You know well, my soul, that Jesus Christ is true God and true man; that as God he is the Son of the eternal Father, and God like the Father and the Holy Spirit; and that as man he is the son of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, and has a body and soul as we have. As God he is eternal; but as man everything began at the moment when the mystery of the incarnation of the Word was accomplished in the most pure and virginal womb of his Mother by the work of the Holy Spirit. Supposing this great truth of faith, you must know, my soul, that at the moment when human nature found itself united to the divine hypostatically, that is, in the second person of the Most Holy Trinity, who is the Word, that most holy soul of Christ exercised in that first instant the greatest and most heroic acts of virtue towards God. For indeed, as on the one hand it saw the divine essence clearly, and on the other it saw the innumerable benefits it had freely received from God, there sprang forth at once with great force four excellent affections, like the four rivers that flowed out of paradise:[5] namely, a most ardent love of God; a very great gratitude for such benefits; a most profound humbling of itself in his presence, seeing the nothingness it had of itself; and a most ready offering to obey him in all that he might will,[6] desiring that an occasion might be offered to show all this in deed.

It is fitting, my soul, that you should know how Jesus loved God, so that you may strive to imitate him. It is true that the soul of Christ enjoyed the clear vision of God; but the clear vision of God did not take away this soul's freedom, nor prevent it from exercising its love with complete spontaneity. And from this point of view Jesus Christ is proposed to us as a model in his love for God, as in everything else, to us who are here on earth in the state of faith. And it was very necessary that his love should be free, since it was meritorious for him and for us, and that he willed to give the proofs he gave of this love through an express consent. We can, then, and we must imitate Jesus Christ, loving God according to the whole extent of the grace that has been given us for it.

Let us see, then, how Jesus Christ loved his Father.

1. He loved him with his whole spirit, according to the knowledge he had of God, who is infinitely good and lovable; and he loved him as much as he knew him to be lovable. Here is the rule we must follow, and this is how we must love God with our whole spirit. It is true that we cannot know God as much as the soul of Jesus Christ knew him; nevertheless, we know that God is infinitely good and most perfect and that he is our Father; we know that God is the sovereign, the only good, the only good lovable for its own sake, and that the chief motive for loving him must be taken from him and not from ourselves, nor from our interest, nor even from our gratitude. Here, then, is the first motive of love of God, a pure and lofty motive. Let us love God, then, because he is infinitely good. So Jesus Christ loved God, and he himself invites us, urges us, obliges us to love him in the same way. We must strive to attain the purity of this love and, without excluding the other motives, make it the dominant motive of our affections. Thus we must love him with a love of preference, because he is the supreme goodness.

2. Jesus loved his heavenly Father with his whole spirit for the great benefits he received from him. We must be grateful to our heavenly Father in imitation of Jesus. We know that from God we have received existence,

preservation and all the goods there are in the order of nature. In the order of grace, the favours we have received until now are beyond telling; those we shall receive hereafter here on earth, and finally those we shall enjoy eternally in heaven, are so great that eye has never seen, nor ear heard, nor has thought been able to form an idea of the beauty, greatness and worth of those eternal goods with which the Lord will make us happy.[7] We know too that God has no need whatever of us for his own happiness; that if he has created us, if he has destined us to an eternal bliss, it is out of an entirely gratuitous goodness. I pass over in silence all the other personal benefits, which, linked together, form the long chain of all the days and moments of our days. Reason and faith speak to us very loudly and tell us that we must love and thank God, who first loved us;[8] and this love and gratitude must be in proportion to the age of this love and to the proofs of this love he has given us. Who is not astonished at these two things! The love is so ancient that he has loved us from eternity.[9] And the proofs are so great, so good and so profitable to ourselves, that they could not be greater or better. Finally, we must love God because it is the only payment, the only recompense he asks of us for all the love he has for us: he loves so that we may love him.

3. Jesus Christ loved his Father with his whole spirit from the first instant of his life to the last breath he breathed out on the cross. All his thoughts, desires, words and works, he did and directed all of them to the glory of his eternal Father. This is another lesson we must take from our master Jesus Christ. Oh, if we truly loved God, how many useless thoughts we should avoid, how many idle words we should keep back, and with what pleasure, joy, promptness and care we should do all our works! He who truly loves God can think of nothing but God; he speaks of God, works for God, and desires and strives that all should know, love and serve him and that no one should offend him.[10] Let us love God, and let us make others love him with all fervour and perseverance.

4. Jesus Christ loved his Father with complete submission; all that he said and did came from his continual dependence on the heavenly Father. His judgments, his thoughts, his desires were none other than those of his heavenly Father. This is one of the best ways of showing the love we have: to do all things with this holy aim, with this dependence; delighting in this holy dependence, not by force but with great pleasure and joy. We must be subject to God and to all the persons who represent God to us; this love is the finest humility.

St. Bernard says that there are two kinds of humility: one of the understanding and the other of the heart.[11] That of the understanding is the humility by which a man knows that he is nothing, judges himself the worst of all and worthy to be despised by all. The second kind of humility is when the affection of his heart is in harmony with the judgment he has formed of himself. Therefore he wishes, seeks and is pleased that others should hold him for what he holds himself. This second kind of humility alone was in Jesus Christ, since the first could not be in him; and that is why he said: "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart."[12] But in us both kinds must be present, since the first without the second is false and deceptive: it is pride. The second alone is virtue, the daughter of charity, which cannot be obtained except by prayer and by submission to lowly things and dependence on all persons. The truly humble man continually thinks of three things, namely: 1. His nothingness. 2. The sins he has committed in all his life, besides the original sin he contracted. 3. The eternal pains of hell that he has deserved. So he always holds himself the worst of all.

He who is truly humble never despises anyone; in his own estimation he always places himself below all, and in deeds he takes the last place, as Jesus Christ taught by deeds from the manger to the cross, and by words.[13] The humble man, though he live soberly, justly and piously,[14] never despises anyone, even if it be the worst person in the world, because he thinks that that person may be converted and become, like Saul, a great saint in heaven, while he himself may fall into sin, like Lucifer, and be damned like that unhappy one. The truly humble man is charitable, and charity thinks no evil.[15] Even if he sees someone who has committed a very grave sin, he thinks that it must have been the result of a strong temptation; that if he had found himself in the same situation he would have done worse; and that if that other were in his place, he would be better than he.

[1] Hos 2:14.

[2] Hos 2:19–20.

[3] Mt 11:29.

[4] Lk 10:27; cf. Mt 22:37–39; Mk 12:30–31.

[5] Cf. Gen 2:10.

[6] Cf. Heb 10:7–9.

[7] Cf. 1 Cor 2:9.

[8] Cf. 1 Jn 4:10.

[9] Jer 31:3.

[10] Cf. Aut. no. 641.

[11] *Sermo 42 super Cantica*: PL 183, 987; *Obras completas de San Bernardo* (BAC, Madrid 1955) vol. 2, pp. 287–295.

[12] Mt 11:29.

[13] Cf. Lk 14:10.

[14] Cf. Titus 2:12.

[15] Cf. 1 Cor 13:5.

Chapter VI. The same subject continued

Jesus Christ loved his heavenly Father with his whole heart.

1. The first thing he did on coming into the world was to give it to him by an entire, absolute and irrevocable donation.[1] And this was not a vague, general gift without a determined object, but a gift of everything and of each thing in particular. Jesus Christ in the first instant knew, to the last detail and in the most distinct way, everything to which that gift bound him; he knew what the will and designs of his heavenly Father were concerning him, how rigorous they were, and the sacrifice that was required of him; and yet he accepted this sacrifice, consecrating himself to him with the strongest and most generous love. From that moment a volcano of love set ablaze and devoured that adorable heart. In all his most holy life he thought of nothing else but doing and suffering,[2] but with such pleasure and desire to consummate this great sacrifice that he was as if in a press \[*estaba como en prensa*: "straitened", echoing Lk 12:50, "how am I straitened until it be accomplished"\] until the moment came to drink this chalice and to be baptized with this baptism of pains and trials.[3]

Imitation. The habit of charity or love was infused into our hearts in holy Baptism, and the obligation presses on us to give our heart to God from the time we have reason enough to know him; and yet, who would believe it!, this gift of our heart, which God asks for with such insistence and force, this gift which is so rightly and on so many titles owed to God, and which, moreover, all the reasons drawn from our own interest urge us to grant him, this gift, I repeat, is the thing in the world that costs us most, the loss of which we feel the greatest repugnance for, and which we refuse him with the greatest obstinacy. God must snatch it from us by a special grace, without which he would never obtain it. What a shame for us, and what an excess of misery, the daughter of sin and of our self-love! How long will we be heavy of heart? How long will we love vanity and run after lies?[4] Let us learn from Jesus to love God with all our heart, to love him always and to make continual sacrifices of all things, and especially of ourselves.

2. Jesus Christ loved his heavenly Father with his whole heart; all his affections were directed to him in all the extent and with all the vehemence of which he was capable. He loved nothing except out of regard for his Father, and with the same love he had for him, never dividing it with anyone. His heart always went straight to God without the least deviation, with a movement so lively and a speed so inconceivable that it can be said that his sacred heart was continually plunged in God. It is true that the heart of Jesus loved his most blessed Mother, loved St. Joseph, loved the apostles, loved men; but he loved them for God and in God. Let us learn from Jesus to love the persons and things it is lawful for us to love, to know how to love them solely for God and in God.

3. Jesus Christ loved his heavenly Father with his whole heart. He never turned his love back upon himself, never cast upon himself the least glance of complacency, never loved anything with reference to himself. In Jesus Christ self-love did not and could not exist, because he had no other "I" than the "I" of the Word. Jesus Christ loved his soul and his body, but he loved them as united to the Word, as belonging to the Word, and with the same love that, as the Word, he bears the Father from eternity. It is true that we cannot attain this ineffable purity of love; but we must aspire to all the purity that God desires and of which his most holy grace makes us capable, fighting with all our power, helped by divine assistance, against self-love, this irreconcilable enemy of the love of God, weakening it more every day and pursuing it into the last corners of our heart. We love God only in so far as we hate self-love. And to hate self-love as much as it deserves, and even to know it as it is, we need a supernatural light and grace, which God grants only by degrees to those who are resolved to love him with all their heart. Let us love God, then, with all our heart, *quoniam bonus*, because he is good, because he is the supreme goodness.[5] Let us love God in imitation of Jesus Christ, who loved him with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind.

4. Jesus Christ loved his Father with all his strength, and he used his body only as an instrument destined to second the soul in the proofs it gave him of its love. He employed his strength in acting and suffering for God; he gave it food and rest only to put it in a condition to bear new labours and new sufferings; in the end, out of love, he gave up his body to every torment, shed his blood to the last drop and offered it as a holocaust on the cross. Oh, if we reflected as we ought that this body of ours the Lord has given us not that we may pamper and idolize it, as unhappily is done, but that we may have in it an estate in which the victims of mortification may be gathered to offer to God, and that the body itself may be a victim of love! With this well understood: that all the natural satisfactions we grant it beyond necessity are so many thefts from the love of God. Every man, and especially every Christian, must know that if God has given him being, life, health, strength and the rest, it is so that he may consecrate it all to the love of God. He must also know that when we spare the body work or take excessive care of it to free it from what troubles it, bores it or makes it suffer, we go against the precept of love; and with all the more reason it will be said that we go against this precept when we so eagerly procure for it the pleasures of the senses, when we keep it in soft idleness, when we care for nothing but its well-being, and our soul makes an idol of it, devoting itself to its service instead of making it serve and sacrificing it to the service of God. Alas, how far we are from imitating Jesus Christ in this! The first thing Jesus Christ offered and sacrificed to his eternal Father was his most holy body. Jesus Christ took a body only to make it die a violent death. With this aim he fed and sustained it, never regarding or treating it in all his life except as a victim. And yet his flesh was innocent, holy and intimately united with the divinity; while ours is flesh corrupted in its origin, rebellious against the spirit, leading us to sin, the source of all our sins and the kindling of the disordered passions. Shall we have the nerve to pamper this wretched flesh in sight of the most holy flesh of Jesus, so mortified from the manger to the cross? Ah, such people are not Christians, but enemies of the cross of Christ.[6]

5. Jesus Christ loved his heavenly Father with all the powers and faculties of his soul. His memory, his understanding, his will, his imagination were filled with God alone, exercised themselves in God alone and were occupied only in serving him. The Word, by his divine action, gave impulse to the faculties of the soul, and the soul to the movements of the body; so that everything was ordered and directed by love, everything tended to and ended in the love of his heavenly Father. To this we must aspire; to this we must strive to attain. Our soul, which is always thinking and willing and whose activity does not stop for an instant, we must direct to the service of God; we must see to it that it always acts and suffers from a supernatural principle, for God. Here is what a Christian ought to be; here, at least, is what a Christian must tend towards with untiring ardour, if he wishes to love God, as he ought, with all his strength, in imitation of Jesus Christ. "That is impossible here on earth," you will tell me. And how do you know? If you speak like that, it is because you have not yet begun to love. Love, and you will see what will happen to you. When a house catches fire, everything is thrown out of the window. Love, burn in the fire of divine love, and you will throw

out of the window those little idols that you adore. Love, and you will see how love, once master of your heart, will take possession of all the rest, will take over the use and direction of your spiritual and bodily faculties, will teach you to consecrate to it your labours and sufferings, your pleasures and your pains. Love will direct everything to him and will reduce to its proper unity this multiplicity that divides you, scatters and dissipates you. Love begins by uniting and concentrating everything within, from where it then communicates itself to the exterior, and ends by possessing the whole man. It is a fire that spreads from the centre to every side, wins everything and transforms into itself all that it touches, after consuming whatever opposes it.

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[1] Cf. Heb 10:5–9.

[2] *Boletín de la Sociedad de San Vicente de Paúl en España* \[Madrid 1862\] p. 71.

[3] Cf. Lk 12:50.

[4] Cf. Ps 4:3.

[5] Cf. Ps 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1; Dan 3:89.

[6] Cf. Phil 3:18.

Chapter VII. Love of neighbour

The holy Gospel says: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.*[1] Until now we have spoken of the love of God; now we shall speak of the love of neighbour, since in the love of God and of neighbour is contained all that is written in the law and that the prophets have said.[2]

For love of neighbour to be true, constant and perfect, the one who practises it must make three reflections: 1. Who he himself is. 2. Who his neighbour is. 3. That all he does to his neighbour he does to God, and must do it solely for God.

1. *Who is he?* It is fitting that he know himself, see his misery and humble himself as much as he can; for if he is not humble, he will not love his neighbour as he ought, but will despise him. To know himself well he will ask light of God our Lord, and then he will reflect:

1. That he is dust, ashes, that he is nothing, and as such deserves to be despised.

2. That he is less than nothing, since nothingness has not sinned, whereas he was conceived in sin and has fallen into sin many times; therefore he deserves still greater contempt than nothingness itself.

3. That for his personal sins he deserves the punishment of the eternal pains of hell; and that if he does not end up there, it will be because he has made a good confession and the divine mercy has pardoned or forgiven him; and still he does not know whether he is worthy of love or of hatred, as holy Scripture says.[3] These three reflections, well made, are able to clip the wings of thoughts of vanity and of the effects of pride and arrogance with which the neighbour is despised instead of being loved as he should be.

To love is to wish well. We must wish our neighbour well; we must feel his sorrows and rejoice in his good fortune, never envy it; we must try to relieve his needs in the best way possible. To make this love of neighbour easier, the one who loves must consider not only his own miseries, as we have said, but also the excellences and prerogatives of his neighbours, at least these six: 1. That he is an image of God.[4] 2. That he is a child of God.[5] 3. That he is a brother and friend of Jesus Christ.[6] 4. That his soul is the bride of the Holy Spirit.[7] 5. That he is redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ.[8] 6. That he is destined for the kingdom of heaven.[9] The Christian who considers all these titles attentively in each of his neighbours cannot help loving him with the most tender and effective affection.

But all these titles rise higher still if one considers, as one should, that the motive for loving the neighbour is the love of God: it is because God wills it, commands it and requires it as a proof of the love we say we have

for God himself; and he has said that everything we do to our neighbour for love of God, he will take and reward as if it were done to God himself.[10] Truly, if we really love God, we cannot help loving our neighbour, and the greater our love for God, the greater will be the love we bear our neighbour. He who loves God much will love his image, which is the neighbour; he who loves God much will love his child, which is the neighbour; he who loves Jesus Christ much will love his brothers and friends, who are our neighbours, redeemed with such precious blood. Finally, if one considers that even the most wretched of the poor, if they live well and die holily, will be like kings who will reign with Christ for all eternity, who will be able not to love them? In our neighbours, and in each one of them, we must consider the person of Jesus Christ; and so, when he comes to judge us, he will tell us that whatever we did to the poor we did to him, and he will reward it as done to him.[11]

And when our neighbour does something for us or serves us, we must see in the one who serves us or does us a kindness the very person of Jesus Christ, as the apostles saw Jesus when he washed their feet; and, like St. Peter, we must be amazed and exclaim: *Tu mihi lavas pedes?* "Do you wash my feet?"[12] It is true that if in society we are of a higher rank and have servants, we must allow them to serve us; but within ourselves, in our interior, we must think and say what St. Peter said: You, to me? My servant, in you I see the image of Jesus, and you serve me? One may also reflect and say to oneself: This servant of mine who serves me today, if he is more virtuous than I, will be much more than I in heaven. And who knows whether he will be saved and have great glory, while I, alas, may be lost, like the rich glutton, who was damned, while poor Lazarus was saved.[13]

The poor, servants, workers and all dependants and subordinates must see God our Lord in the person of their superiors and masters. These represent his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his providence and his other divine attributes, and to despise them is to despise God. Jesus Christ gave us an example of this submission, obedience and respect: he was completely subject to St. Joseph and to Most Holy Mary, his Mother;[14] he obeyed the authorities, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.[15] What is more, he taught the obedience that is to be given to superiors even if they were bad, provided that what they commanded was not bad.[16]

St. Catherine, to soften the burden of service and to increase her merits in what she had to do out of obedience and necessity in the services and tasks of her house, imagined that her father was Jesus Christ, that her mother was Most Holy Mary, and that the others were the apostles and the holy women who accompanied the Lord; and so she served them all, inspired by this thought, with the greatest reverence and devotion. This is a very effective means of softening the troubles and pains of service and of increasing the merit of what one must of necessity do. All of us, poor and rich, noble and common, learned and ignorant, great and small, must help and assist one another for the love of God, each in what he can, bodily and spiritually, for time and for eternity. With works of charity or mercy, with good example and with prayer, we must all pray for one another, so that we may all be saved.[17]

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[1] Lk 10:27; cf. Mt 22:37–39; Mk 12:30–31.

[2] Cf. Mt 22:40.

[3] Cf. Eccl 9:1.

[4] Gen 1:26.

[5] *Pater noster, qui es in caelis*: "Our Father who art in heaven" (Mt 6:9).

[6] Mt 28:10. Lk 12:4.

[7] Song 4:12.

[8] 1 Pet 1:18–19.

[9] Mt 25:34.

[10] Cf. Mt 25:40.

[11] Cf. Mt 25:34, 40.

[12] Jn 13:6.

[13] Cf. Lk 16:19–31.

[14] Cf. Lk 2:51.

[15] Cf. Phil 2:8.

[16] Cf. 1 Pet 2:18.

[17] Cf. Aut. no. 265.

Ejaculatory Prayers

O my God, give me love, so that I may love you for all those who offend you.

Enlarge, my God, this heart of mine and make it all yours, so that you may rest from the weariness the weight of so many sins causes you.

O God of my heart! You, my God, are my eternal inheritance.[1]

My God and my all![2]

O my love! O my refuge!

O my glory! O my delight!

You are my treasure. Apart from you I want nothing.

What would all things profit me without you?[3]

My Jesus, mercy!

O my Jesus! When shall I die to myself?

When shall I love you with all fervour?

O sea of all sweetness, absorb me!

O fire of divine love, purify me from the dross of my imperfections!

O divine fire, melt me and unite me with you!

O most holy fire, change me into a fire of love!

O most sacred fire, consume me!

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[1] Cf. Ps 73:26.

[2] An expression attributed to St. Francis of Assisi (cf. Ribadeneira, P. de, *Flos sanctorum* \[Madrid 1761\] vol. 3, p. 186).

[3] Mt 16:26.