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INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE
MONTH OF MAY





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HOLY MOTHER OF GOD, PRAY FOR US!

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THIRTY-TWO INSTRUCTIONS
FOR THE
MONTH OF MAY

AND FOR THE
Feasts of the Blessed Virgin

From the French by

REV. THOMAS F. WARD

CHURCH OF ST. CHARLES BORROMEIO, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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✠ JOHN LOUGHLIN,
Bishop of Brooklyn.

NOV. 4, 1891, FEAST OF ST. CHARLES BORROMEO.

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To
THE CHILDREN OF
MARY
ATTACHED TO THE
CHURCH OF ST. CHARLES BORROMEO
• WHOSE NAMES ARE NOW ENROLLED AS MEMBERS OF THE
SODALITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN,
FOR THEIR TENDER DEVOTION TO OUR EVER BLESSED
MOTHER,
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY
THEIR PASTOR,
T. F. W.

CONTENTS.

INSTRUCTION	PAGE
I.—Opening Exercise of the Month of May, .	9
II.—The Immaculate Conception,	15
III.—The Nativity of Mary,	21
IV.—The Holy Name of Mary,	27
V.—The Presentation of Mary in the Temple, .	32
VI.—The Marriage of the Blessed Virgin, . .	38
VII.—The Annunciation,	44
VIII.—The Visitation,	49
IX.—Expectation of the Birth of Christ, . .	54
X.—Journey of Mary to Bethlehem, . . .	59
XI.—The Divine Maternity of Mary, . . .	65
XII.—The Purification,	70
XIII.—The Adoration of the Wise Men, . .	75
XIV.—The Flight into Egypt,	81
XV.—The Return from Egypt,	86
XVI.—Jesus is Found in the Temple, . . .	92
XVII.—The Holy Family at Nazareth, . . .	97
XVIII.—Mary at the Marriage of Cana, . . .	102
XIX.—Mary the Disciple of Jesus,	107
XX.—The Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin, . .	112
XXI.—Mary our Mother,	117
XXII.—Mary in the Cenacle,	122

INSTRUCTION	PAGE
XXIII.—Life of the Blessed Virgin after Pentecost,	128
XXIV.—Death of the Blessed Virgin, . . .	134
XXV.—The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, .	139
XXVI.—The Patronage of the Blessed Virgin, .	144
XXVII.—Our Lady of the Rosary, . . .	150
XXVIII.—Our Lady of Mount Carmel, . . .	156
XXIX.—Devotion to Mary, . . .	162
XXX.—Mary the Refuge of Sinners, . . .	168
XXXI.—The Sacred Heart of Mary, . . .	173
XXXII.—Closing Exercise of the Month of May, .	179

INTRODUCTION.

FROM time to time we have heard it regretfully asserted that books of devotion were . . . not sufficiently numerous among us. These regrets are spoken not only by religious, but by the laity also. Now, if this statement be true, it applies particularly to books of devotion which have for their object the increase of knowledge and love for our blessed Mother.

The fault is perhaps not wholly ours. For the last three hundred years our language has not been spoken by Catholics only, while the French, for example, has been the language spoken by Catholics always. It is little wonder, therefore, that Catholic literature in French is most abundant.

By accident a little "Month of May" written in French has fallen into my hands. After reading the instructions I resolved to give them an English dress. I utterly disclaim all authorship of the work, as I have almost slavishly adhered to a literal translation.

I have found these instructions glowing with a spirit of piety, eminently practical, and especially free from all sentimentalism—a characteristic which is frequently found in writings of this kind. They are written in that orderly and methodical manner so peculiar to the French mind. I think the doctrine is exact. I know they have been helpful to me when preparing to speak before sodalities and confraternities of the Blessed Virgin.

My earnest wish is that this may be the experience of some other priests who are actively engaged in the work of the sacred ministry. Then, just as they are, “without one plea,” I submit these instructions to the kind consideration of the Reverend Clergy and the devout clients of Mary. May they prove helpful and useful to increase devotion to her whom we love to call Mother of God and our Mother!

T. F. W.

Instructions for May and the Feasts of the B. V. M.

INSTRUCTION I.

OPENING EXERCISE FOR THE MONTH OF MAY.

"Come, children, hearken to me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord."—Ps. xxxiii. 12.

THIS sweet and maternal invitation the Blessed Virgin extends to all her children at the opening exercises of the month of May. Need I remind you that Catholic piety has linked to this month the sweet name of Mary, and the Church has especially consecrated this time to Mary's honor and praise? Now it is that our blessed Mother bids her children come to her with joy and fullest confidence. "It is I who call you, I who am your queen, your sovereign, your advocate—the Mother of your God, your own Mother. For every child my heart is full of love, my hands are filled with blessings." Who is there that can coldly listen to this invitation, who is there that will not respond to this appeal? Since we are the children of

God, brethren of Jesus Christ, we are also the children of Mary. Now she invites us to her sanctuary, now she calls us to her altars. She wishes to speak to us, to instruct us, to teach us by her own example the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of all wisdom and all perfection.

During this blessed month of May Mary calls us; we will respond to the invitation joyfully, we will hear her with docility, and we will imitate the example she has given us.

1. *We will respond joyfully.*—When I behold so many of the devout children of Mary present at the opening exercise of the month of May I am consoled, nay, more, I am encouraged. Your prompt attendance and respectful attention induce me to think that there is no need to employ arguments to bring you to Mary's shrine. The very name of Mary has for Catholic souls a charm sufficiently attractive. It recalls to us a perfection greater far than human creature ever attained. It is the symbol of love, of tenderness, and of mercy. It inspires respect, confidence, gratitude, and devotion; and when these sentiments fill our hearts we cannot but gather near the altars of Mary and give fullest expression to our devotion. If the Queen of Saba so earnestly desired to contemplate Solomon's glory and magnifi-

cence, if she wished to give expression to her admiration for his incomparable wisdom, how much more ardently should we desire to render our homage to the Mother of Him of Whom Solomon was only a weak and imperfect figure! Moreover, Mary is called by the Church the very *seat of wisdom*, and is, therefore, more worthy of admiration than the great King Solomon arrayed in all the splendor of his Eastern magnificence.

Mary is the all-powerful queen of heaven and earth. Is it not, then, most just and suitable that her faithful subjects should assemble and testify their respect and veneration for her—to thank her for the countless blessings which they owe to her inexhaustible munificence, and to give her again and again renewed proofs of their entire devotion? She is also the advocate and the refuge of sinners. What is more natural than to see unfortunate children hastening to cast themselves at her feet, to confide the care of their eternal salvation to her hands, to shield themselves under the mantle of her protection, that they may escape the chastisement which justice demands? These are some of the many motives which must prompt us to respond joyfully to the sweet invitation which is now given us.

2. *We will hear her with docility.*—If Mary

calls her children to her sanctuary, she wishes that they should be instructed. The exercises of the month of May will consist principally in readings or instructions on the life, the mysteries, the virtues for which the Blessed Virgin was remarkable. Prayer and pious songs will also form part of these exercises. Let us regard the instructions which we will hear during this month as falling from her own virgin lips. We cannot forget that our blessed Saviour when on earth told us that He had no other doctrine to preach to men than the doctrine of His Heavenly Father (St. John vii. 16). Nor has Mary any other teaching to give us now than that which she heard from the mouth of her own Divine Son. To-day she gives the same command she gave at the wedding feast of Cana: "Do whatsoever He will tell you." Throughout her life on earth her only aim had been to do God's will, to observe what He commanded. Hence, our blessed Saviour publicly eulogized His Mother for her faithful observance of God's law. "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee," cried a woman among the multitudes who followed Christ. Immediately He answered and said: "Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it" (St. Luke xi. 27, 28). By these words Our Saviour wished the

people to understand that the especial merit of Mary, His Mother, was that she heard the word of God with docility and made this word the guide of her daily life. This will be our disposition, also, while assisting at the pious exercises of the month of May. After the example of Mary, we, too, will hear the instructions given us with docility, and strive to make them the conduct of our lives each succeeding day, till God shall call us from this vale of tears.

3. *We will follow her example.*—Mary invites us to hear her teachings and strengthens us in the fear of the Lord. Here there is no question of servile fear, but of love, which forbids everything which can be displeasing to God, obedience to His law, and entire submission in all things to His adorable will. It is by the example of her own life that Mary will teach us the fear of the Lord. In the course of our meditations during this month we will find in Mary's life the perfect model of all the Christian virtues. In the temple she will teach young people the practice of recollection and flight from the world. In her marriage with St. Joseph you will learn to follow God's will in the choice of vocation. From her life at Nazareth mothers of families will learn the manner of fulfilling their duties, submission,

solicitude, and domestic obligations. Following the footsteps of Jesus, and on the hill of Calvary, she will teach all Christians fidelity, generosity, a spirit of devotion and sacrifice—in a word, all those virtues which must characterize the true disciples of a crucified God. With these dispositions we will ask of our good Mother to begin, continue, and terminate the exercises of this month consecrated to her. If we come to Mary now with confidence, we may reasonably expect that she will one day conduct us to the presence of Jesus, her Son, to share His glory in life eternal.

INSTRUCTION II.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

“Thou art all fair.”—CANT. iv. 7.

OF all the creatures who ever came forth from the creative hand of God, Mary . . . only is regarded as perfect and beautiful. The holy man Job, speaking of the heavens, says “they are not pure before the adorable majesty of God.” He adds that even “the angels are not stainless in His eyes.” As for men, all have inherited the iniquity of their first father, Adam, and from their birth have been an object of horror in the eyes of God, until the waters of baptism purified their souls from the original fault and gave them a place among the children of grace and adoption. The Blessed Virgin alone has enjoyed the rare privilege of being perfectly pure and beautiful from the first moment of her conception. I do not think it necessary to enumerate the proofs which Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Fathers furnish regarding the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This truth is now a dogma of our faith which we are obliged to believe. It is just as obligatory as

all the other articles of our creed, under pain of eternal reprobation. I wish to speak only of the sentiments which this solemnity inspires, and to strengthen you in the confidence you should have in Mary Immaculate.

In her Immaculate Conception Mary has been preserved from sin, filled with treasures of grace, and raised above all other creatures.

1. *Mary preserved from sin.*—God has such an aversion for sin that He has not permitted this Virgin whom He has chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of His Son to be subject to the slightest stain. All the children of Adam inherit this stain of sin and suffer its lamentable consequences. But the Blessed Virgin, destined to be the Mother of Jesus Christ and called to co-operate with Him in the redemption of the world, will be preserved by a special decree from this hereditary fault. From her conception she is the object of sweetest contemplation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We could almost say that the great Creator has made her all-beautiful just to console Himself for the guilt and universal defection of the human race. It is a thought replete with happiness that God can contemplate in the Blessed Virgin a perfect purity which He could not find among all the other children of men. It is, however, our unques-

tionable duty to labor earnestly to preserve or re-establish in ourselves the purity we have received in baptism. We can accomplish this by penance. Have we committed grievous, wilful sin? Let us hasten to efface and expiate our sins by the means which Christ Our Saviour has left us—by the sacraments, by tears, by fasting, by almsgiving, by the multiplication of good works which we can daily perform. Are we exposed to commit sin? Then we should surround ourselves with precautions. We must promptly avoid the occasions, avoid persons and places and circumstances which are dangerous, have recourse to vigilance and prayer. This is the counsel of the Gospel: "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

We must remember that we cannot worthily honor the privilege of Mary conceived without sin if we remain voluntarily under the shameful slavery of sin.

2. *Mary possessed all the treasures of grace.*—The magnificent words which the angel addressed to Mary when announcing the mystery of the Incarnation, "Hail, full of grace," were literally true on the day of her Immaculate Conception. At the same time that she was preserved from the stain of original sin her soul was filled with all the treasures of

grace. These graces were so abundant, according to the doctors of the Church, that she received more benedictions and favors than all the human race could possibly receive. These blessings Mary has manifested by all the eminent virtues she practised during her life. Therefore, she has become the accomplished model of all Christians in every condition of life. When a child she hastens to the temple to consecrate herself to the service of God and to learn His sacred word. In youth she lives in recollection, prayer, and labor. As the spouse of Joseph she is submissive and obedient to him. As Mother of the Saviour of the world she lives and breathes only for Him. During the public life of her Son she manifests the greatest desire to hear His words. And what virtues did she not practise during the passion of our blessed Lord! Patience, resignation, compassion. We cannot celebrate the Immaculate Conception better than by opening our hearts to the graces which God is always disposed to grant us. If the Immaculate Conception has obtained for Mary greatest graces from God, baptism, which is our conception to grace, is the assurance of all the favors which God has prepared for us in the other sacraments. The worthy reception of these sacraments will make us

participants in the countless mercies of God. Let us endeavor to receive them with fullest faith and joy and heartfelt gratitude.

3. *Mary is exalted by her Immaculate Conception above all other creatures.*—Having been preserved from sin and filled with every grace, Mary, by her Immaculate Conception, has been exalted above all other creatures. After God, the Blessed Virgin occupies the first place. In heaven she is queen of angels, archangels, and all the other glorious hierarchies. On earth she is also venerated as the queen of patriarchs and prophets, of martyrs, confessors, and virgins. The Church of Christ, her Son, never ceases to proclaim her praises. After the devotion to our blessed Lord and Saviour, there is no devotion more dear to truly Christian hearts than devotion to the Blessed Virgin. It is true to say that the Immaculate Conception is the principle, the foundation, of the grandeur and excellence of Mary. Oh, let us love to honor our blessed Mother, and with all our hearts and souls extol her Immaculate Conception! Let us place our fullest confidence in her who has been exalted above all other creatures only to exercise with God her great power in our behalf. Let this short invocation frequently fall from our lips: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us

who have recourse to thee!" Let us ask of the Immaculate Conception to be saved from sin, from the slightest stain of which she had the happiness to be preserved. Let us ask for a faithful correspondence to grace, the fulness of which she has received, and that by the practice of those virtues which characterized her life on earth we may merit to contemplate her in glory throughout the ages of eternity

INSTRUCTION III.

THE NATIVITY OF MARY.

“Hail, full of grace.”—ST. LUKE i. 28.

THIS is the salutation addressed to Mary by the angel when he came to announce . . . to her the mystery of the Incarnation. To-day, while we celebrate her nativity, these words naturally come to our lips, and we repeat with Gabriel his words of praise, “Hail, Mary, thou art full of grace.” The figures which symbolize her are at an end, the promises of her coming are fulfilled. She who had been the object of patriarchs’ prayers and the expectation of the past ages has now appeared.

It is Joachim, whose name signifies “the preparation for the Saviour,” and Anne, “full of grace and mercy,” both just and faithful souls, whom God has chosen to give to the world the future Mother of the divine Redeemer.

According to the learned Baronius, on Saturday, the 8th day of September, St. Anne gave birth to the most perfect and the most holy of God’s creatures. Let us celebrate with

the whole Church this glorious birth of Mary, who, according to the words of sacred liturgy, has been the joy of the entire world. "Thy nativity, Virgin Mother of God, announced joy to the world."

To-day we will consider the motives of this joy, for heaven, for earth, and for hell—not, indeed, a joy for the place of eternal punishments, but for limbo, the place in which just and pure souls were detained previous to the coming of Christ.

1. *For heaven.*—The birth of Mary was the occasion of greatest joy for heaven. If God, as we read in the first chapter of Genesis, was pleased at each of His creative works, with what satisfaction did He contemplate this immaculate infant, the masterpiece of His omnipotence! On Mount Thabor God the Father gave testimony to His Son Jesus in these words: "This is My own beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." May we not conclude that He had spoken these words before, when He beheld her who by so many titles was His daughter of predilection? What joy also for the Divine Word, when He looked on that blessed child whom He should one day call by the sweet name of mother! If the Eternal Wisdom finds "His delights in dwelling with the children of men," what was His

joy at the first pulsations of her heart, which will be henceforth His brightest throne? *Seat of wisdom.* Yes, the Holy Spirit had already sung her praises in transports of love. In the inspired books He calls her His Own, His Chosen One, His Spouse.

The birth of Mary was also the joy of the angels. The song of glory which those happy spirits sang when they announced to the shepherds the birth of Christ in Bethlehem they also sang with heavenly joy near the cradle of Mary. They bade the world rejoice, and saluted her as queen of angels and of men. If, as our blessed Saviour declares, the conversion of a single sinner is for the angels a greater subject of joy than the perseverance of ninety-nine just souls, what must have been the joy of the angels at the first smile of her whom the Church calls the salvation and refuge of sinners and the depositary of graces for their conversion!

2. *For earth.*—Not only was the birth of Mary a sign for joy in heaven, but the occasion also for greatest joy on earth. During four thousand years the world anxiously looked for the coming of the promised Redeemer. The prophets called Him the Just One, and raised their sublime accents to heaven. “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let

the clouds rain the Just" (Isaias xlv. 8). At length Mary appears. She is the refreshing cloud which will shower on weary souls that refreshing dew of heaven, and pour out the torrents of grace so long desired. Darkness had obscured the earth, and the nations were buried under the shadow of death. Mary was the radiant Morning Star which announced the coming of the Sun of Justice. Through her the darkness has been dissipated, while on earth men of good-will are established in grace and truth.

Near the lowly crib of Bethlehem the angels sang, "I bring to you great joy, which shall be for all people" (St. Luke ii. 10). Their words are applicable to all men to-day. Yes, greatest joy for all, but for the poor and the lowly and the miserable especially. These see in Mary's birth the prelude of their exaltation. Very soon they will hear her canticle, "He has cast down the powerful and exalted the humble." There will be joy for poor sinners, whom she will snatch from the power of Satan, and whose refuge she will always be. Joy for all Christian people, who will find in her a sure assistance in all their necessities. "Help of Christians, pray for us!" Joy, in fine, for the whole world, because she, the merciful Mother,

will deliver men from eternal death—Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope!

3. *For hell.*—The birth of Mary brings joy even to the dread abyss. There is no question here of those who weep eternally, the demons, the reprobates; we refer to that place called limbo, in which the souls of the just were detained, shut out from the joy and gladness of heaven, previous to the coming of Our Saviour. There the patriarchs were who preserved for posterity faith in the Messiah promised from the beginning of the world. There the prophets were who, inspired by God, had announced His coming. There the just were who died in the hope of one day seeing Him face to face. Oh, what joy for these holy souls when the echoes of heaven and earth brought, even to them, the glad tidings of Mary's birth! The ages of their captivity were ended. But a few years more, and they will sing in the train of their risen Saviour the triumphant hymn of their deliverance. Heaven will be at last opened, and they will take possession of their inheritance forever.

Yes, O Mary, thy nativity has been for the whole world a message of joy and gladness! To-day we prostrate ourselves before thee to

offer thee our homage, our veneration, our love, and our thanks! With the archangel Gabriel we salute thee, Hail, full of grace! Make us participants of thy merits, that we may be worthy to contemplate thee one day in glory!

INSTRUCTION IV.

THE HOLY NAME OF MARY.

“And the virgin’s name was Mary.”—ST. LUKE i. 27.

AFTER the adorable name of Jesus, that name which is above all others, before . . . which every knee must bend, in heaven, on earth, and in hell, there is another name very dear to all Christians and most worthy of veneration and love and confidence. That name is Mary. The Church of God on earth, which desires to publish at all times and in all places the praises of the august Mother of God, has consecrated to this blessed name a particular feast. She has blended this name in her prayers, in her hymns and canticles, and she exhorts the faithful never to separate it from the holy name of Jesus. Let us enter into the spirit of the Church, which is the pillar and ground of truth, and, therefore, our infallible guide in the devotion which we should give to our blessed Mother. In this instruction we will consider the excellence of the holy name of Mary and the precious advantages of invoking this name.

1. *Excellence of the holy name of Mary.*—When God gives a name to especially designate some one of His creatures, this name usually indicates the functions or qualities of the person to whom it is given. This truth is strikingly evident in the ever-adorable name of Jesus, and also in the name of His holy Mother. The name Mary signifies sovereign, queen, patroness. To whom do these glorious titles apply more than to Mary? With St. John Damascene we may say: “Mary has become the sovereign of all creatures in being the Mother of the Creator.” Hence the magnificent titles which the Church and the saints have given to Mary. She is styled by them the mistress of the universe, the queen of heaven, the dispensatrix of all graces, the all-powerful mediatrix between God and man. All except God are inferior and obedient to her. In heaven the angels stand prepared to execute her slightest wish, and on earth men experience each day the effects of her powerful protection.

The name of Mary also signifies “divinely inspired.” Who can ever tell the treasures of science, in the order of nature and grace, which filled the mind of the august Virgin? “Does she not know all things,” says St. Gaudentius, “who gave to the world Knowledge

itself?" Is it not with reason the Church invokes her under the glorious title, Seat of wisdom? St. Bernard justly calls Mary the Abyss of wisdom. The divine perfections of God unveiled themselves to her mind more sublime and clear than to angels or seraphim, or to the whole heavenly court. To the knowledge of the divine attributes Mary united the knowledge of Jesus, both as God and Man, as Redeemer and Head of the Church. Moreover, it is to Mary that the Church attributes the glory of having dispelled everywhere the dense darkness of heresy, which threatened the existence of God's Church on earth.

The name of Mary also signifies "Star of the sea." In fact, we salute her as the light, the consolation, and the guide of all who traverse the sea of this world. Oh, how she makes known to us the darkest dangers of this tempestuous sea by the brightness of her own example! How safely she will conduct us through the countless dangers, if we journey under her protection! The temptations of the demon, the seductions of the world, the countless snares to which we are exposed—these render the sea of life most dangerous; but confidence in Mary will save us from disastrous shipwreck and conduct us safely to that secure haven where no danger may assail us. Oh,

blessed Star of the sea, thy name is the consolation of the afflicted, the terror of demons, the source of greatest joy in heaven and on earth!

2. *Precious advantages of invoking this name.*—The pages of secular and religious history are replete with the most striking circumstances which attest the protection of Mary for the faithful who invoke her holy name. We could not recount them all. In the year 1099 the Christians, with Godfrey de Bouillon at their head, entered in triumph the city of Jerusalem. They all attested that they owed their complete victory to the intercession of the Mother of God, after they had recited the Little Office daily in her honor. In the year 1572 a great naval victory was gained over the Turks in the Gulf of Lepanto. The great Pope Pius V., in memory of the signal protection of Mary, added to the Litany the invocation "Help of Christians." The Rosary was recited in all the churches of Rome during the engagement between the Turks and the Christians. In fact, the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary was instituted precisely to commemorate the brilliant victory of the Christians in the battle of Lepanto. In our own days, and under our eyes, we see pious pilgrims wending their way toward the sanct-

uaries consecrated to the Blessed Virgin. Is it not the name of Mary which charms and attracts them? Is it not this blessed name which they are going to invoke with confidence? And for what do they ask? Is it some special grace or favor? Do they ask for some miraculous intervention on the part of the Mother of God which they could not expect except through her? With the loving and firm confidence of children they hope to receive every blessing through her intercession. They pray for the Church and for the Sovereign Pontiff. They pray for themselves, their friends, and enemies. They pray for poor sinners. The name of Mary is on their lips and in their hearts. To repeat this name again and again is all their joy and their hope. The great St. Bernard declares that the holy name of Mary has never been invoked in vain. With this doctor of the Church I say, whoever you may be, just or sinner, lift up your eyes toward Mary. Invoke her name in all the circumstances of your life, at all times, in all places. Call upon her in life and at the moment of death. This holy name will be your greatest consolation and the pledge of your dearest hopes for eternity.

INSTRUCTION V.

THE PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE.

"Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear: forget thy people and thy father's house."—Ps. xliv. ii.

THE holy Fathers, who were the custodians of the old traditions, assure us that at . . . the early age of three years Mary was presented in the temple by her parents, and was then consecrated to the service of God forever. We have another instance of this custom among the Jews. The devout Anne dedicated her son Samuel to the service of the Lord, and destined him to serve in the temple during his whole life, under the orders of the great high-priest. In the vast temple there were apartments destined for the young girls who were consecrated to God in this particular manner. At an age when children hardly manifest the first indications of intelligence Mary possessed the plenitude of reason. Already she had heard and fully understood the words which the Holy Spirit addressed to her: "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear: forget thy people and thy father's house." To-day let us follow this child of three

years making the complete offering of herself to God in the temple. Her example will teach us to give ourselves to God promptly, fully, and irrevocably.

1. *Promptly*.—If the Blessed Virgin had judged of this matter according to the prudence of the world, how many motives would she not have had to refuse God her service and postpone or delay her presentation in the temple!

At the age of three years did she not need the protection, the care, and the assistance of her parents? Would her extreme delicacy permit her to endure the severity of the rules then prevailing at the temple? The young girls consecrated to the service of the temple were employed in the making of sacred ornaments, vestments, and those articles which were used in the public service; of what utility could she be in this work? Was not her self-sacrifice premature? Was it not unnatural for her to abandon her parents and friends? And was it not a severe trial for her parents, who were now advanced in years? How often are these objections advanced in many a Christian household to-day, when there is question of a sacerdotal or religious vocation, ay, even when there is question of performing the ordinary duties of a Christian life! But such

reasoning is not found in Mary's conduct. Well does she know that God is the first Father, the first Master, and, therefore, has the first claim on her service. She has heard His sweet invitation. She responds as her beloved Son, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (John iv. 34).

We belong to God, and for the same reason as Mary. For the same reason we should promptly offer Him our service. In the Sacrament of Baptism we have been consecrated to His service. What blindness and ingratitude on our part to refuse to serve Him from our youth, and to give Him only the remnant of a life spent in the folly and vanity of the world! With the great St. Augustine we should weep bitterly for the years we have passed far from the service of God. With this saint we can say: "It is too late, O Lord, that I have commenced to love Thee and to serve Thee."

2. *Fully*.—The generosity of the Blessed Virgin in giving herself to the service of God is equalled only by her desire to do so fully. In presenting herself to the Lord in His temple she gives herself to Him without the slightest reserve. And here her conduct condemns that sacrilegious compromise which so many half-hearted Christians make between

Christ and the world, between heaven and earth, between the Church and what is called modern society. Some thought, indeed, they give to religion, some points of the law are really observed, some religious observances in the family are preserved; but beyond these—in the affairs of life, in their relations with the world—they show that their heart is divided, and they long for their share in the joys and pleasures of the present life. But we must not forget this truth—God is a jealous God. He cannot endure unfaithful souls who strive to serve two masters. By the mouth of the prophet Elias He tells us: “If the Lord is your God, then follow Him.” Thus we see Mary cheerfully ascending the steps of the temple and making to God the entire offering of her mind and heart, her thoughts and affections, her will and all her works. And this generosity marks her whole life. Such will you find her later on at Nazareth, at Bethlehem, in Egypt, on Calvary with Jesus her Son, in the cenacle with the apostles, at Ephesus, and at Jerusalem with St. John. She belongs to God in her youth, she will be engaged in His service during life, she will be His faithful one even to death.

3. *Irrevocably.*—The offering which Mary gave of herself to God was final, beyond recall.

ing, irrevocable. Far from ever relaxing in her devotion to God, we see her in the temple, even as her divine Son, "increasing in wisdom and in age and in grace before God and men." Oh, what inconstancy do we see in men who have once devoted themselves to God's service! After having served Him for a time, they abandon and even betray Him Whom they had vowed to serve always. How long are the baptismal engagements observed—the good resolutions of a first communion, the promises renewed at the mission or retreat? Oh, how little it requires to disturb even pious souls and separate them from the service of God! Oftentimes the merest trifle suffices—the applause of men, the greed of gain, a trifling pleasure, a passing glory. Again, a temptation, a trial, even a slight reverse, and the timid soul is discouraged. But see the lifelong example of Mary. Does she ever recoil before suffering, sorrow, or sacrifice?

No, she constantly manifests herself the ever-faithful Virgin, as the Church styles her when chanting her praises. After her example, from this day forward let us generously vow our service to God, and without reserve. Let Him be the absolute Master of your soul, your body, your goods, your life, and your death.

Make this offering, once and for all, irrevocable. "Lord, to whom else shall we go?" "Thou alone hast the words of eternal life." With Mary we wish to belong to Thee in time, that we may be Thine also in eternity.

INSTRUCTION VI.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

"And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary."—ST. MATT. i. 16.

THE first time that the evangelist St. Matthew pronounces the name of Mary . . . he shows her to us united in the bonds of marriage with Joseph, the son of Jacob and the descendant of the royal race of David.

According to tradition, Mary remained in the temple, where she had consecrated her virginity to God, until she was fifteen years old. Her pure soul had tasted the charm of this pious retreat. There she enriched herself every day in grace and merits, by prayer, silence, and useful labor. There was, however, a law among the Jews which allowed of no exception. This law imposed on the daughters of Israel the obligation of marrying—each one in her own tribe—under the penalty of falling a victim to the reproach and opprobrium of all. The time having come for Mary to depart from the temple, there were many who aspired to the honor of her hand. But Heaven attested by a miracle

that the humble and just Joseph was alone worthy to become the husband of Mary. Then they united their hands and hearts in the presence of the high-priest of the Lord, according to the sacred rites and ceremonies then in use. The holy marriage of the Blessed Virgin will be to-day the subject of our reflections. We will see how this marriage was for her an occasion of merit, of consolation, and of glory.

1. *An occasion of merit.*—Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mary had irrevocably consecrated herself to God by the vow of virginity. Rather than violate her sacred engagements, she would even renounce the eminent dignity of Mother of God. “How can this be,” she said to the angel, “for I know not man?” It was only when the will of God was manifested to her that she consented to unite herself to the husband who was presented to her. Thus her marriage became for her an occasion of greatest merit, viz., the merit of obedience to God. Even then she was not aware of His designs on her. It was impossible for her to comprehend for what purpose He wished her marriage. But long since she had learned how great was the virtue of obedience, and therefore she submits herself entirely to the will of God.

Another merit of the Blessed Virgin was to appear in the eyes of the world as an ordinary woman, while she was indeed whiter than snow and purer than the angels themselves. In fact, men regarded Joseph and Mary as husband and wife like to all the others who lived in their midst. In fine, to all her merits she will add the merit of obedience and perfect submission, which she invariably manifested to St. Joseph. God, wishing to give to men perfect models in every state of life, presents for their imitation the marriage of Mary and Joseph. If, to-day, the married state, instead of being an occasion for merit, too often becomes a state of shame and confusion for those who engage in it, is not the reason to be found in the unworthy dispositions of the contracting parties?

The will of God in the marriage is rarely taken into consideration. It seems to count for nothing. They consult only passion, caprice, interest, or fortune. Instead of pledging and observing mutual obligations, as did Mary and Joseph, the examples of every virtue, the marriages of modern progress and civilization are only too often the subject of greatest scandals.

2. *Consolation.*—Mary also found her marriage the occasion of consolation. The first

was that her honor was protected and she was shielded against the incredulity and malice of the Pharisees. The synagogue, incapable of understanding the miraculous maternity of Mary, would regard her only as a guilty woman, and, consequently, worthy of punishment as the law prescribed. But God would not permit even a shadow of suspicion to rest on His blessed Mother. This is the reason He had destined her marriage of Joseph to veil the mystery, and that Jesus should pass in the eyes of the world as the son of Joseph. Another consolation for Mary was that she had a faithful guardian—one who would watch over her and her child in all the sorrowful vicissitudes to which she was exposed. Even as the Saviour at the end of His mortal life recommended Mary to the care of St. John, so God now confides her to St. Joseph, to be her protector and support. It is Joseph who conducts Mary to Bethlehem, accompanies her to Egypt, and returns with her to Nazareth. He shares her fears, her sorrows, and her solicitude to save the Divine Child from His enemies. And thus should the Sacrament of Matrimony be for Christian people the source of sweetest consolations. Yet the sad truth remains, that only too often marriage is regarded merely from a civil point of view;

and, as a consequence, deception, distaste, and disappointments are sure to follow. Oh, how true it is that where God is there is peace and happiness, and where God is not there is only bitterness and unhappiness! Hence separations are frequent and numerous, and on account of so many badly assorted households men have arrived at the unfortunate conclusion that divorce is a social necessity.

3. *Glory.*—The marriage of the Blessed Virgin served not only as a safeguard for her honor in the eyes of the people of Israel; it had also the effect of attesting before the world her incomparable virginity and her miraculous maternity. What more reliable witness could be found than Joseph to declare and affirm that Jesus was born of a virgin mother? The very silence of Joseph, says St. Jerome, is a manifest proof of the virginity of Mary. The Church has always confounded the enemies of Mary's purity by opposing them with the authority of St. Joseph. For all Christians the marriage of Mary and Joseph is an occasion of glory, because they who contract marriage are at once raised to the rank of co-workers with God Himself in the multiplication of the children of the Church and heirs to heaven. Marriage viewed in this light is indeed, as St. Paul declares it, "a great sacra-

ment in Christ." But without the blessing of Christ and the Church we can well understand how marriage will be the occasion of shame and confusion in the eyes of men, and will open the easy pathway which conducts to eternal reprobation. Happy are they who seek in this holy state principally their own sanctification. Then will they imitate the virtues of Mary and Joseph, and the happiness which they will experience on earth will be only the prelude of what they shall enjoy in heaven.

INSTRUCTION VII.

THE ANNUNCIATION.

"The angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, and the virgin's name was Mary."—ST. LUKE i. 26, 27.

MARY was with her holy spouse at Nazareth, expecting with a lively faith, a . . . firm hope, and an ardent charity the coming of the Desired of nations. She humbly asked of her God the favor of serving her whom He would choose to be the Mother of the Messias. The honor of being herself the woman blessed among all others is the recompense of her humility. God calls one of the princes of His court and sends him to the earth. "An angel was sent by God." With the Venerable Bede, we cannot but marvel at the admirable designs of Divine Wisdom in the redemption of the world. God wishes that the original fault should be repaired as it had been committed, in the same order, by the intervention of the same personages. The mystery of the Annunciation is, in a manner, the counterpart of the scene in the earthly

paradise. We will consider to-day the fall in Eden, the reparation at Nazareth.

1. *The fall in Eden.*—While our first parents were in possession of that grace and innocence with which the Creator had endowed them, their days passed happily away in the terrestrial paradise. The fallen angel, jealous of their felicity, presented himself under the appearance of a serpent, “the most cunning of all the animals.” He addresses the woman, whom he judges the weaker and more easily deceived. “Why hath God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of Paradise?” said the serpent. Let us mark it well; he begins by formally and sacrilegiously attacking the attributes of God—His wisdom, His power, His goodness, His truth.

And thus it is he always tempts men to sin and rebel against God. Why those commandments, why those prohibitions which interfere with fullest liberty? Why not satisfy desires, passions, appetites? Why deprive yourself of all that which the senses plead for? At first Eve hears the voice of conscience. She answers: “God hath commanded us that we should not eat lest, perhaps, we die.” A doubt begins to exist in her heart—“perhaps.” But God did not say “perhaps.” He said positively “you will die.”

Satan, the father of lies, continues: "You will not die. God knows that your eyes will be opened. You will have the knowledge of good and evil, as He has; you will recognize your greatness, your rights, your independence." This is liberty. "You will be as gods; no one shall be superior to you." This is equality. "No one will have the right to command you or forbid you. You will be equal to God in science; you will share with Him all His attributes." This is fraternity. These are the three grand principles of all who have ever revolted against authority—from the tempter in the Garden of Eden to this very hour. Eve listened to the tempter with pleasure; his promises deceived her. She will be a goddess, Adam will be God! What honor, what glory! To attain to all this we have only to eat of a single fruit. God is forgotten. His prohibition is despised. Now, is not this the same method which the demon employs to-day? Put faith and obedience aside. Listen to science. Religion keeps you in darkness and in ignorance. Soon your eyes will be opened, and you will see things clearly. You will be set free from every disagreeable burden. Eve at length yields to the tempter; she eats the forbidden fruit. Her eyes are indeed opened. She desires to

conceal herself, but all in vain. This is the sad history of the fall of our first parents and of our consequent ruin. Let us see now the wisdom of God in our reparation.

2. *The reparation at Nazareth.*—An angel, one of the heavenly court, is sent by God to Mary. Standing face to face with the humble Virgin, he salutes her with greatest respect: "Hail, full of grace!" The angel does not say to her that she will be like to God, as Satan falsely declared to Eve. He assures her, however, that the Lord is with her—in her mind and heart. Mary is troubled at this strange speech. Eve, on the contrary, was pleased at the lying words of Satan. The angel reassures her: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God." Then he tells her of the designs of God in her regard: "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David, His father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (St. Luke i. 31–33). Mary is not deceived by the splendor of these promises as Eve was by the deceit that she would be like to God. That which troubles her most is the care to preserve

her virginity. The heavenly ambassador must instruct her in this mystery. "How can this be done?" The angel answered: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee." Mary at length consents and pronounces the divine *fiat* which has been the salvation of the human race. The consent of Eve to the suggestions of the demon has been their loss. Eve had wished to equal God. Mary humbly proclaims herself His servant. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word!" The holy Fathers compare this word to that which God Himself pronounced in creating light, "Be light made!" In the mouth of the Blessed Virgin this *fiat* has given to earth Him Whom St. John calls "the light of every man coming into this world." All that we have lost through the disobedience of Eve has been restored to us by the humble submission of Mary expressed in this short word *fiat*. What powerful motives we have of gratitude toward Mary! Let us, therefore, repeat again and again the words of the angel on the day of annunciation, "Hail, Mary, full of grace!"

INSTRUCTION VIII.

THE VISITATION.

"Mary went unto the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda."—ST. LUKE i. 39.

THE Blessed Virgin, on hearing from the angel that her cousin, St. Elizabeth, had . . . conceived, hastened to the mountains of Judea to visit her. The Gospel tells us that she departed instantly, without delay, to congratulate her relative on her happiness. The journey between Nazareth and Hebron, the home of Elizabeth, will take at least five days to accomplish. Furthermore, this journey must be made on foot. Neither the length of the journey, nor the difficulty in traversing the wild mountain places, nor the weakness of her sex, hinders her for an instant. She departs, as the Gospel tells us, in haste for the home of her cousin, situated in the mountains of Judea. Her holy spouse Joseph accompanies her, as her protector and guardian. At last the journey is ended; she enters the house of Zachary, and salutes her happy

cousin. The infant which Elizabeth carries in her womb leaps with joy at the sound of Mary's voice. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaims: "Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence this happiness, that the Mother of my Lord should come to visit me?" Limiting ourselves to this short historical account, we can learn from the example of Mary three characteristics of charity toward our neighbor—zeal, humility, and generosity.

1. *Zeal*.—Hardly had the Blessed Virgin learned from the mouth of the angel the signal favor accorded to her cousin Elizabeth than she hastens to offer her congratulations. She longs to exchange sentiments of mutual joy, and to speak with her relative of the goodness and mercy of God, the source of all their happiness. What an admirable charity is here manifested, and how worthy of imitation! In our ordinary relations of life, even in the visits which we make, Christian charity should be evident. It is by this standard we can distinguish the motives of men. Only too often there is found jealousy, hypocrisy, and falsehood. Not infrequently men congratulate each other on the success of some temporal advantage, on some exaltation to rank, or the possession of a lucrative position. Yet, be-

hind all these flattering words sentiments of jealousy are easily discernible. The most affectionate and cordial demonstrations are only mere ceremony, and are quickly changed to unjust censure and cruel criticism. They never dream of considering the fortunate circumstances of their neighbor as so many blessings of Heaven. Grace and supernatural favors are counted as nothing. Mary's prompt visit to her cousin should teach Christians the motives which should inspire charity toward their brethren. Nor can we forget this truth: what we should admire above all, what should be most worthy of our congratulations, are the graces and the supernatural favors which it pleases God to bestow on our brethren.

2. *Humility*.—The charity of the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the visitation was as humble as it was zealous. When Elizabeth beheld Mary she exclaimed in admiration and astonishment: "Whence have I this honor, that the Mother of my God deigns to visit me?" Mary, by her incomparable dignity of Mother of God, was more exalted than Elizabeth; however, by her marvellous condescension she makes the first advances. The mountainous journey is long and difficult, but no obstacle can arrest her charity. She is only too happy to offer to her cousin her heart-

felt congratulations. Mary is the first to salute Elizabeth and to compliment her on the favor God has given her. Mark well, not one word escapes her lips which will proclaim her own exaltation. Not a word of the marvel which is wrought in herself by the visit of the angel, the miraculous incarnation of the Messiah, of all that had been predicted of her Son's royalty. It is Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, who praises and congratulates Mary, in her turn, for having believed all the angel had announced to her on the part of God. What an admirable example of humble charity Mary and Elizabeth here give us! Mary is unmindful of her eminent dignity, and is first in her congratulations to Elizabeth; whilst Elizabeth thinks only of proclaiming the glory of Mary. Thus both demonstrate the truth that humility is the inseparable companion of true charity.

3. *Generosity*.—God is charity, the Holy Scripture tells us, because He loves to give Himself to us. Mary, saluted full of grace, thereby participates in the divine nature more than any other creature, and brings with her the superabundance of heavenly gifts to enrich us. In fact, see the blessings she carries with her to the mountains of Judea! Hardly has she opened her lips to salute Elizabeth than

John the Baptist leaps with joy in the womb of his mother, as a sign of his own innocence, which later on will be fully established. Elizabeth herself is filled with the Holy Spirit, and enlightened on the great mystery of the salvation and redemption of men. "And Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she exclaims, Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!" From her mouth falls for the first time this eulogy of Mary, which the Church has only borrowed to repeat again and again. Before Mary returns to Nazareth, after the birth of the Holy Precursor, Zachary regains his speech of which the angel had deprived him in punishment of his incredulity. Thus it is from the visitation the Blessed Virgin appears to us as the dispensatrix of spiritual and corporal blessings which we may hope to receive through the mercy of God. By her example she teaches us, also, to place no limit to our charity for our neighbor, by assisting him as far as we can in the needs of his soul and body. As Mary did, we should refer all glory to God for the good He is pleased to accomplish in us and in others. We should reflect on the words of her admirable canticle, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," in time and in eternity.

INSTRUCTION IX.

EXPECTATION OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

"Mary abode with Elizabeth about three months, and she returned to her own house."—ST. LUKE i. 56.

THE evangelist St. Luke informs us that Mary remained with her cousin St. . . . Elizabeth about three months, and performed for her those duties which only tender charity and affectionate devotion can perform. The words which these two holy women exchanged at their meeting in Judea were words of mutual congratulations, but they tell us plainly enough what must have been their conversations and pious meditations during Mary's visitation. If, as St. John tells us, "the divine Word is the light of every man coming into this world," what must have been the brightness which shone round about the happy inhabitants in the home of Zachary? The prophetic words of Elizabeth, the canticle of Mary, the inspired words of Zachary, the joy of the Holy Precursor in the womb of his mother—are not all these circumstances as so

many rays from the light of the Incarnate Word?

According to tradition, Mary assisted at the birth of St. John the Baptist. After she had saluted him as the "Prophet of the Most High," she returned to Nazareth, there to await the birth of the Messias, Whom she carried in her chaste womb. So important is this fact in the eyes of the Church that she has consecrated a festival day for the *Expectation*.

She now proposes for our meditation the desire of Mary for our salvation, her devotion in the service of Jesus, and the dispositions which she brings to His coming.

1. *The desire of Mary for our salvation.*—After having been instructed by the angel in the ineffable mystery, Mary knew that she carried in her virginal womb the Eternal Word of God. "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David, His father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end. And, therefore, the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (St. Luke i. 31, 32). He Whom she had conceived, and to Whom she will give birth, will be called Jesus,

that is to say, Saviour. Nothing, therefore, is wanting for the complete happiness of Mary. Elizabeth may truly proclaim her "blessed amongst all the women of the earth," since she alone possesses Him Whom the angels contemplate and adore. But the Blessed Virgin knew also that the fruit of her womb was the Desired of all nations and the Salvation of the world. If the Incarnate Word had chosen Mary for His Mother, it was for us and for our salvation. Through love for men she desires His birth, and would hasten it by her prayers. In her solitude at Nazareth she repeats the prayer of the prophet, "Drop down dew, ye heavens, and let the clouds rain the Just." Before the birth of Jesus, Mary shows herself a mother. She longs to be our Mother in the order of grace, by giving us Him Who is the source and principle of grace. Mary, by her example, teaches us to forego even spiritual consolations to secure the salvation of our neighbor.

2. *Her devotion in the service of Jesus.*—Unquestionably, the dearest wish of Mary's heart was to devote herself entirely to the service of Jesus, and to consecrate to Him all the care of her maternal love. She longed to look upon the most beautiful of the children of men, to press Him to her heart, to cover Him with

kisses, to nourish Him at her breast, to adore Him in His crib—in a word, to live **only** for Him. Is it not the dream of happiness for the young mother to see the day when she can caress her own cherished child? What joy for her heart to hear His first wailings and behold His first smile! These tender and deep emotions are not, however, without some bitterness, since mothers according to the flesh must suffer the malediction pronounced against our first mother: “Thou shalt bring forth in sorrow.” Mary, however, was not included in this malediction, because of her immaculate conception and the privilege attached to her divine maternity. Her childbirth is an ecstasy of supernatural love, and her first act toward her divine Infant is an act of profound adoration. We, too, like Mary, should desire to render to Jesus the real and effective service of our works. If we cannot exercise our devotion for His adorable person, we can show our affection for those who represent Him. Our blessed Saviour assures us that whatsoever we do for the least of His little ones, He will regard it as having been done for Himself.

3. *Dispositions of Mary at the birth of Christ.*—We can easily understand what were the admirable dispositions of Mary whilst awaiting the birth of Christ. We can almost hear her

literally repeat the words of St. Paul, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). Her life is passed in the constant exercise of those virtues of which Jesus will one day be the example. Mary is constantly engaged in the study of the prophetic books. There she reads in detail the future conduct of her divine Son, and His life as foretold by the prophets is the subject of her daily meditations. It is true of her now, as later on: "Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." Jesus was the rule of her thoughts, her desires, her actions. He was her Guide in all her relations with God and her neighbor.

The dispositions which we find in Mary's life should be evident in ours also. Even as she conformed to her divine Son by the practice of all the virtues and by daily increasing in perfection, so also should we, as disciples of Jesus Christ, strive to reproduce His life in our own. The Christian, says a holy father, is another Christ. The labor of our whole life should be to imitate Christ, to reproduce in ourselves a copy like to the model He has given us, that we may merit at length to be associated with Him in glory.

INSTRUCTION X.

JOURNEY OF MARY TO BETHLEHEM.

“There was no room for them in the inn.”—ST. LUKE ii. 7.

THE evangelist St. Luke vividly recounts the circumstances which immediately . . . preceded the birth of Christ. He says: “In those days there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled, with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child. And it came to pass that when they were there her days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born Son, wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inns of Bethlehem.” Here, related in a few simple words, is the account of the most important

event in the whole history of the world. Every circumstance of interest to the world is closely linked to that journey of Mary to Bethlehem; in fact, whatever we possess dates from the birth of Our Lord and Saviour. The public acts of the entire universe, as well as the most trivial document, are commenced by the statement, "in the year of Our Lord, 1800," etc. The journals which have been most hostile to religion have not been able to adopt another date than the birth of Him Whose holy name they blaspheme. Let us follow Mary in her journey, at Bethlehem, and in the humble stable.

1. *In her journey.*—The prophet Micheas had predicted that the Chief promised to the people of Israel would come from Bethlehem. To accomplish this prophecy God will employ the powerful masters of the earth. "Princes of the world," says Bossuet, "behold what you do! The world is disturbed by your desire to make an enrollment of your subjects. You wish to know your strength, the tributes which must be paid, the number of your future soldiers. This is doubtless your wish, but God has other designs; and these designs you will execute, thinking only of your own conceits, which are purely human. His Son must be born in Bethlehem. He had predicted this by

His prophet more than seven hundred years ago, and now the world is stirred to accomplish this prophecy." Mary obeys the order of Cæsar. In him she respects the authority of God Himself. Without pretext or excuse she departs from Nazareth. Neither the rigor of the season, nor the length of the journey, nor the fatigue, will hinder her. With Joseph, her holy spouse and guardian, she begins the toilsome journey to Bethlehem, the birthplace of their family, which was of the royal race of David. What an admirable example of obedience and submission to the legitimate powers of the world! For the present generation Mary's obedience is especially worthy of admiration. It is evident on all sides that the fierce fever of independence and unbridled liberty has gained ascendancy and is carried so far as to throw off the yoke of all authority, even the most legitimate. From the womb of His Mother, Jesus would teach us the maxim which later on He will repeat, and which will be the safeguard of society: "Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's and to God the things which are God's."

2. *At Bethlehem.*—After a long and difficult voyage, Mary and Joseph arrive in the city of David. But here new trials await them. It is vain that they seek admission. The inhospitable

pitiable doors are closed against them. In the words of the evangelist "there is no place for them." Mark well, he does not say there is no room vacant. Yes, there are plenty of vacant places, but there are none for Mary and Joseph. The appearance of Joseph gives evidence that he is fatigued and worn by the long journey. There is nothing in the appearance of Mary to attract the attention or curiosity of the people about them. The poverty of both is apparent, and they are therefore despised, rejected, destitute. But the time for the birth of her Son has come. The Incarnate Word is about to appear in the world. Does it not seem that all the inhabitants of Bethlehem should vie with one another in offering an asylum to the Virgin who will give to the world the Messiah expected for so many ages? But no; the people of Bethlehem are occupied with their own affairs, their pleasures, and the events occasioned by the edict of the Emperor Augustus. They have forgotten the words of the prophets and the promises of God, and have no anxiety for all that regards their salvation. Mary sees with sorrow the utter disregard for her Son Jesus, and even then realizes the words of the beloved disciple spoken later on: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (St. John i. 11). Although it is He Who has

created the vast world, yet He cannot have for Himself the smallest place in a little village.

3. *In the humble stable.*—What must now become of Mary and Joseph? They are rejected by the rich, who occupy the accommodations of Bethlehem, and are strangers in the city of their ancestors. Whither will they go, where seek a refuge? In what lodging will they find a crib for the Infant God? In the suburbs of the city they find a sort of grotto, or abandoned ruin, which served as a stable for animals. This is the only resting-place which is offered to the Blessed Virgin after the fatigues of a long and painful journey. The night will be long and cold, and the 25th of December is midwinter. Ordinary travelers would have reason to complain of the poor, miserable hut, open to the winds on every side. But the young Virgin Mother is now in the hour of childbirth. He who accompanies her is her holy spouse, her protector, and her guide. But He Whom she will now give to the world is the Son of God, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. At the sight of this poor stable, in which Mary is obliged to seek a refuge, who is there that does not feel the blush of shame and indignation arise? The grandest and most consoling mystery of Christianity will soon be accomplished! The

angels are prepared to make it known to the world! And yet Mary and her divine Son must suffer all the rigor of a winter night in their rude and unprotected dwelling! Let us enter with Mary into this palace of poverty; let us prostrate ourselves with her before the divine Infant. Instead of the worldly goods which He despised, we will offer Him that which He desires—the sincere and irrevocable homage of our hearts.

INSTRUCTION XI.

THE DIVINE MATERNITY OF MARY.

"She brought forth her first-born Son."—ST. LUKE ii. 7.

A SENTIMENT of profound compassion takes possession of our hearts when we . . . consider the cold reception and the contempt which the inhabitants of Bethlehem manifest for the ever-blessed Virgin. However humble and poor she may appear, her sex, her youth, and her condition should win for her the kindness and attention of even the most indifferent. But our blessed Saviour on His entrance into the world did not wish to have even a stone whereon to rest His sacred head. It is He Who permits men to reject His blessed Mother and to refuse her hospitality, precisely that she may be compelled to take refuge in the miserable hovel which He has chosen from all eternity for the place of His birth. The illustrious Bossuet says: "At midnight He comes from the womb of His Mother, as a ray of light comes from the midday sun. Mary is astonished. This

childbirth is exempted from sorrow and pain. He has been miraculously conceived. He is still more miraculously born." If Mary has experienced the contempt of the people at Bethlehem, in her august maternity she receives all glory from God, from the angels, and from men.

1. *From God.*—Mary is a virgin and remains a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ. This is the grand mystery, this is the miracle announced by the prophet Isaias (vii. 14): "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel," that is, God with us. Mary herself did not understand how this could be, and she asks the angel for an explanation. She was assured that her virginity would be inviolate, and the vow she had made from childhood would be sacred. However difficult to understand, she recognizes that "nothing is impossible to God." And now she realizes that she is honored with the most august maternity in the world. She contemplates her Child, and adores Him as her God. She has only a miserable stable to offer Him as a shelter from the rude winter blast; she can only fold His delicate limbs in poor clothes. A manger from which the animals eat and a little straw must serve as His cradle. Oh! who can understand this utter

destitution of the Man-God? Yet this poverty and this complete privation have been marked by the prophets, and only add still greater lustre to the divine maternity of Mary. Hence the great Bossuet exclaims: "Whoever will come to the crib of the Saviour must have the courage to divest himself of everything, at least in spirit. He must leave everything and become poor, to follow the King of the poor. Instead of being glorified by our rich surroundings, we should blush to be adorned whilst Jesus is naked and abandoned."

2. *On the part of the angels.*—The maternity of Mary is not only glorified by God, but also by the angels, in the stable of Bethlehem. Hardly has our blessed Saviour appeared than the heavenly spirits leave their happy dwellings and come to earth to render their homages to the newly-born Infant. In silence they adore the Son of the Eternal, but at the same time they proclaim the glory of Mary, His Mother. With what veneration, respect, and love do they repeat the salutation of the angel Gabriel! "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee!" It is in your chaste womb He has taken a body and soul, and now He appears in the world, full of grace and perfection.

Whilst the earth is buried in silence and sleep, the angelic choirs, transported with joy,

sing their heavenly canticles and proclaim the praises of the divine Infant and the grandeur of Mary's maternity. One from among the heavenly host speaks to the shepherds who are guarding their flocks in the neighboring country. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David" (St. Luke ii. 10, 11). Immediately the blessed spirits make the heavens resound with those words so often repeated by the Church: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." This song of triumph gives a new joy to the divine maternity of Mary.

3. *On the part of men.*—To repair the outrage and indifference of the people of Bethlehem, men are called upon to render homage to the Virgin Mother. At the voice of the angels the shepherds arise and say: "Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word which is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us. And they came with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger." At once the shepherds proclaim throughout the country the wonders they have seen. All who heard them were in admiration. Oh, happy shepherds! You are

the first adorers of the Saviour on earth; you are the first to celebrate the divine maternity of Mary.

Let us unite with these poor and humble shepherds to do homage to the amiable Virgin. She regards them as the most preferred people of her divine Son. We cannot fail to observe that if we wish to go to Mary and Jesus the pathway of humility, simplicity, and poverty is the surest and the shortest. The shepherds, whilst saluting Mary as the Mother of God, recognized her also as their own Mother, and even as they, we should love to give to Mary this title, which is at once her glory and our happiness.

INSTRUCTION XII.

THE PURIFICATION.

"After the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they carried Jesus to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord."—ST. LUKE ii. 22.

ACCORDING to the prescriptions of the Mosaic law, forty days after the birth of a . . . son the mother must present herself in the temple, there to be purified, and to consecrate her child to the Lord. On these occasions the wealthy sacrifice a lamb, whilst the poor usually offer two turtle doves. Forty days have come and gone since that blessed Christmas night, and Mary, bearing in her arms the divine Infant, journeys to Jerusalem to present herself in the temple and submit to the law of purification. Joseph follows her, carrying the two doves for Mary's offering. This is all that their poverty will allow them to offer for the sacrifice. Mary, having been exempt from the original stain, was not subject to the law of purification. She had not contracted the slightest stain, neither in her conception nor

in the birth of Christ the Saviour. However, we must admire her obedience, her humility, and her charity.

1. *Her obedience.*—The Blessed Virgin, in complying with this law, gives us an example of perfect obedience to the authority of God in all things. Although this law was not obligatory on her, still she obeys it, just to teach us we should omit nothing which is commanded us. How many pretexts, excuses, or reasons, more or less specious, are often alleged to dispense us from the duties which religion imposes! On each Sunday or festival day, to assist at the Holy Sacrifice is an imperative obligation. But a visit must be made or some duty must be performed. Perhaps we have a slight indisposition, or we are obliged to walk some distance to the church. To the eyes of faith and to ordinary piety these obstacles present nothing serious. It is only a half-hearted Christian who will consider these difficulties for a moment. The law of the purification of conscience by the reception of the Sacrament of Penance obliges all, at least once a year. And yet, because we can say we have done no wrong to our neighbor or committed no grievous sins, the law is not obeyed, and the Church vainly threatens with the menace of her anathemas. Mary is wholly innocent

and pure. He to Whom she has given birth is sanctity itself; however, she tells us, as her divine Son, "it is becoming for us to fulfil all justice." During forty days she does not appear in public, as if she had contracted the legal stain, as other women. This time has passed, and she presents herself in the temple to obey all that the law prescribes for her purification. Let us resolve to imitate her obedience and fidelity to the law of God.

2. *Her humility.*—In the mystery of the purification Mary gives us an example of the most perfect humility. Although she enjoyed the singular privilege of being conceived without sin, although the holiest and purest of creatures, and exalted to the incomparable dignity of Mother of God, still, she does not hesitate to humble herself to the rank of ordinary women and to mingle with mothers who, according to the prophet, have conceived their children in iniquity. Well does she know the miracle which God has accomplished in her by uniting virginity and maternity. But she and her holy spouse, St. Joseph, are alone in the possession of the divine secret. In the eyes of the Jews, and even in the estimation of the priests who see her presenting herself in the temple, she is only regarded as the wife of a poor workman. They believe that she

has come to the temple as other women, in obedience to the laws and to observe the sacred rites. Her humility is also apparent to us in her offering of two doves, the ordinary gift of the poor. Could she not have spoken a word to unveil the mystery? Could she not say that the prophecies were fulfilled, and that the little Child she had just presented in the temple was the long-promised and expected Messiah? The sure proofs were not wanting. But no; not a single word escapes her lips. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians tells us Jesus humbled Himself even to annihilation to lift us up even to Himself. Mary, also, wished to annihilate herself, to teach us that humility is the first trait of resemblance which we should have with Our Lord and Saviour.

3. *Her charity.*—In submitting to the law of purification, Mary at the same time offered Jesus to God, His Father. From the time when the Lord had put to death the first-born of the Egyptians, to save the children of Israel, He had commanded that all the eldest sons of His people should be offered and consecrated to Him, as well as the first fruits of the harvest, and even the animals. It is to comply with this prescription that Mary presents her Son in the temple. What a splendid proof she gives us of her charity and of her tender-

ness by offering the very victim which will one day redeem us, and by devoting her well-beloved Son to death! What a sacrifice for the heart of a mother! But Mary knows the designs of God; she knows that the world cannot be redeemed except by the blood of her adorable Son. There remains but one more act, and that is to immolate herself with her Saviour God. This also she is prepared to do. Listen to the holy old Simeon. Inspired by Heaven, he predicts that "a sword of sorrow shall pierce her soul." According to St. Jerome, Mary was the first martyr, because of the great and incomprehensible sorrow which she had to suffer in her heart—by sharing the persecutions, the sufferings, the passion, and death of her divine Son. Let us show our gratitude to our tender Mother, and, since she did not hesitate to offer her only Jesus for our salvation, on our part we should place no limits to our generosity to make known her devotion and her glory.

INSTRUCTION XIII.

THE ADORATION OF THE WISE MEN.

“Entering into the house, they found the Child, with Mary His Mother.”—ST. MATT. ii. 11.

IT was unquestionably a touching spectacle to behold the shepherds eagerly hastening . . . to the poor stable of Bethlehem to adore the Infant Saviour. Ere they prostrate themselves, they look in wonder at the Child of Whom the angels had told them. However, another spectacle, no less remarkable, attracts the attention of the whole country. The Wise Men, coming from the East to Jerusalem, earnestly ask: “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and are come to adore Him.” Having learned that Bethlehem was the place where the great King should be born, they continue their journey. A miraculous star conducts them until they reach the place in which the divine Infant lies. Entering the humble stable, they find the Child with Mary His Mother, and prostrating themselves they

adore Him, and opening their treasures they present Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Again Mary discovers that she is a part of the divine plan. She it is who receives the Magi. In the name of her Son Jesus she accepts the gifts which they offer, and she communicates to them the graces which they will receive in recompense of their devotion. We will therefore consider how great was their faith, the signification of their gifts, and the graces they received in return.

1. *What was their faith?*—The Magi were men at once learned, rich, and powerful. They were also kings in their own country, since the feast of the Epiphany is also commonly called “the feast of the kings.” In their far-off eastern homes, Persia, Media, and Chaldea, they had preserved the prophecy of Balaam. The prophet declared that from Jacob a star would appear, which would be the sign that a great king should be born in Israel. The Wise Men had studied astronomy, and they constantly scanned the heavens in search of the miraculous star. The expectation of this predicted luminary and their desire to discover it was their first disposition to receive the expected Messias. Faith alone could enlighten these attentive souls, whilst the Inspired Word assures us that God is not

found in disturbed or troubled hearts. At length they discover this extraordinary star. Interiorly enlightened by grace, they recognize it as the sign of the great King. The Wise Men immediately depart from their country to seek and adore their King. Behold the simplicity of their faith! Difficulties are not considered. The reasons or pretexts which could be alleged to deter them from a long or perilous journey were of no account. During the journey the constancy of their faith will be severely tested. Having arrived at Jerusalem, the star which had thus far conducted them disappeared. However, they courageously enter the capital of Judea and ask, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" They are told that Bethlehem is the place, and at once they resume their journey. As a recompense for their fidelity and constancy the star reappeared to them, "and they rejoiced with great joy." At length they reach the miserable place, and instead of finding a king surrounded with all the pomp of sovereignty, they see only a little Child with Mary His Mother. Although they find Him enveloped in swaddling-clothes, their faith, which is generous and simple and constant, finds in Him the King of heaven and earth. At once they prostrate themselves and adore Him. At

the same time they offer to Mary their respect and veneration as the Mother of their Saviour and their God. The example of the Wise Men will teach us to yield to the inspirations of grace, to follow the light of faith, and thus secure our eternal salvation.

2. *The signification of their presents.*—The Magi prostrate themselves before the Infant God and at the feet of Mary, whilst they offer to their King gold, frankincense, and myrrh. According to the interpretation of the doctors of the Church the gold signifies charity, this pure gold, which comes from heaven. The incense signifies prayer, which ascends as a sweet perfume even to the throne of God. The myrrh, which is a bitter substance, symbolizes sacrifice, penance, sorrow. When the Wise Men presented gold they recognized in Jesus the powerful King to Whom they were obliged to pay tribute. By their offering of incense they adored Him as their God. By their offering of myrrh they honored His sacred humanity. Never was profession of faith more explicit or more perfect. The Wise Men, the first fruits of the Gentile world, have given to us a complete formula of our faith in the mystery of the incarnation.

It is true they offer their gifts to Jesus, but it is Mary who receives them; she is, there-

fore, the intermediary between men and her divine Son. Mark it well; the Gospel tells us that the Wise Men found Jesus and Mary His Mother—and why? Because they are inseparable. Jesus cannot be born without Mary. She is the minister of the incarnation. We cannot find Jesus without Mary. She it is who ministers to His wants. Jesus is not crucified without Mary; she is the companion of His passion. After the example of the Wise Men, let us offer to Jesus, by Mary's hands, the gold of our charity, the incense of our prayers, and the myrrh of our generous sacrifices.

3. *Graces they receive in return.*—In return for their lively faith, with what superabundance of grace were the Magi compensated! The miraculous star alone filled them with joy. But what was their joy when they beheld Him Who is the Sun of justice itself? What was their joy to behold her who is more radiant far than ever was silvery moon? What tongue can ever tell the consolations which their hearts experienced in the humble stable at Bethlehem? The splendor of that lowly place surpassed infinitely the magnificence of their own palaces. But now the time has come for them to return to their homes. For faithful servants Jesus has always particular favors.

The Wise Men are warned in sleep that if they would escape the hypocritical curiosity of cruel Herod they must return to their homes by some other way than that by which they had come. He assists them in their journey through unknown regions, and conducts them safely to their own country. Throughout their lives they afterward became the zealous preachers of the name of Christ, His faithful followers, until, full of merits, God called them hence to life eternal. Therefore, when we also shall have found Jesus and Mary and offered to them the gold of our ardent charity, the incense of our fervent prayers, and the myrrh of our repentance and penance we may reasonably hope to receive the most abundant treasures of God's blessings. Nay, more, when we shall have entered the pathway of piety, sanctity, and justice, we will have the untold happiness to reach our own true country, which is heaven.

INSTRUCTION XIV.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

“Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt.”—ST. MATT. ii. 13.

WHEN the Wise Men had departed for their own country an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said to him: “Arise, take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt. Remain there until I tell you to return, for Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him.”

Immediately Joseph arose and took the Child and His Mother to Egypt. There they remained until the death of Herod. The words of the prophet Osee are realized: “I have recalled my Son from Egypt.” The cruel King Herod soon discovered that the Wise Men had not obeyed him. They had not returned to indicate the birthplace of the Saviour, and being exceedingly angered, he commanded that all the children of two years of age and under who could be found in Bethlehem and the surrounding country should be

put to death. The infamous persecutor believed that he included his victim in this wholesale massacre, but at the moment this cruel decree was carried out the Infant Jesus tranquilly slept in the arms of His Mother, whilst in heaven His angel crowned the multitude of these first martyrs whom the Church calls the Holy Innocents. Our eyes are still fixed on the Virgin Mother, and we will follow her in her departure, in her journey, and in her exile.

1. *In her departure.*—Mary has already felt the point of that sword which Simeon had predicted would pierce her heart. What a blow for this tender Mother when Joseph, warned by the angel, said to her: “Arise, take your Child, and follow me. We must go at once to Egypt, since cruel Herod seeks the Child to destroy Him!” Imagine how this unexpected news, terrifying in itself, becomes still more so on account of the circumstances! It is in the stillness of the night that Joseph receives the warning. Perhaps the persecutor and his satellites are already at their horrible work, and are now prowling in the darkness to surprise their innocent victim. The cruelty of Herod is well known. The time is short. They must start on their journey without preparation. Tradition thus presents the

picture: Mary holding the Divine Infant in her arms and Joseph accompanying them in silence. It is in this modest manner that the Holy Family is obliged to go into exile. The angels form their escort, and conduct them safely over the desert plains which lie between Judea and Egypt. Can we reasonably complain of our trials and sorrows when we see that God has not spared even the Infant Jesus and His blessed Mother? What a subject of bitterness for the heart of Mary to see Jesus pursued to be put to death! She cannot save Him, except by concealing Him in a far-off country—unknown, and a stranger to their belief and manners and customs! When, therefore, we are in affliction let us imitate the calm resignation of Mary. Let us abandon ourselves to Providence, as she confided herself and Child to the conduct of Joseph.

2. *In her journey.*—To conceal the divine Infant from the cruel hands of Herod, Mary and Joseph are obliged to follow a route which is dangerous, deserted, and long. It requires more than two months to complete the journey. How can they procure the necessaries of life in this vast solitude? Where will they find a refuge or a place to rest during the night? Dwellings are rare in these abandoned countries. Oh! you who for the shortest journey

anticipate every want and provide every comfort, how can you be unmindful of the privations which Jesus and His blessed Mother endured for you during their flight into Egypt? Whilst the Holy Family continued their journey into exile, the soldiers of Herod, changed into executioners, went through Bethlehem and around about in every direction, cruelly murdering every child who fell under their hands who was two years old or under that age. The prophecy of Jeremias is accomplished to the letter: "A voice is heard on high of lamentation and great mourning, Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted because they are not."

Although the Gospel does not tell us, we can readily believe that Jesus did not leave His Mother in ignorance of the massacre of the Holy Innocents. We can understand also how the tender heart of Mary had pity for the tears and sorrows of countless young mothers, like herself, who were obliged to witness the immolation of their children by the fury of a cruel man like Herod.

3. *In her exile.*—At length the Holy Family arrived in Egypt, after the fatigues of a long journey and privations of every kind. It is believed that a city of the Thebaide, called Heliopolis, was the place of their exile. There,

in a small and humble dwelling, lived Jesus, Mary, and Joseph during seven long years, as obscure and poor strangers. Pious authors assure us that during this time Mary daily toiled at lace-making and needlework, whilst Joseph, on his part, plied his humble trade, to procure the necessaries of life for themselves and the Infant Jesus. Only to think, the sovereign mistress of heaven and earth a refugee in a strange country, occupied as the poorest of women, earning her livelihood and fulfilling the ordinary duties of a mother of a family! Tradition tells us that at the entrance of Jesus in Egypt the idols and the temples were overthrown. However, it is not related that the Blessed Virgin performed any miracle. But as she is everywhere and always our model, even in Egypt she gives us the example of every virtue. Although the royal blood of Juda flows in her veins, although she is Mother of God and Queen of angels and men, in the eyes of the Egyptians she is regarded as a stranger and treated with indifference and even contempt. Let us imitate this divine Mother. Let us love to remain, as she did, obscure and unknown in the eyes of men. May our whole consolation consist in striving to live with Mary and in the society of her Son Jesus.

INSTRUCTION XV.

THE RETURN FROM EGYPT.

"Joseph took the Child and His Mother and came into the land of Israel."—ST. MATT. ii. 21.

THE evangelist St. Matthew relates that at the death of Herod the angel of the . . . Lord appeared to Joseph in Egypt and said to him: "Arise and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead that sought the life of the Child." Joseph at once took the Child and His Mother, and returned to the land of Israel. He had learned, however, that Archelaus, the eldest son of Herod, still reigned in Judea in the place of his father, and Joseph feared to return to the same place. But God still watches over the Holy Family, and again sends His angel to warn Joseph. Then he went to dwell in the city of Nazareth, that the words of the prophet might be fulfilled: "He will be called a Nazarene." The Gospel always maintains an admirable simplicity when recounting the different circumstances in the life of Jesus and Mary. Joseph is always regarded as the head

of the family. The angels, as messengers of heaven, speak to Joseph as the principal. Mary contents herself in obeying the commands of her spouse. Therefore, to-day we will consider her simplicity, her generosity, and her perseverance and obedience.

1. *Her simplicity.*—The characteristic of truly humble and simple souls is to blindly obey all that is commanded them and which is not sinful. It suffices for them to see God in the person of their superiors, to promptly execute the commands which they receive. The obedience of Mary to St. Joseph has always been marked with this character. Never has the least observation escaped her lips, even under the most trying circumstances. In obedience to the edict of Augustus she goes to Bethlehem, and follows her holy spouse without the slightest pretext concerning the length of the journey or the difficulties attending it. In a dream Joseph is directed to fly at once into Egypt. It would have been easy for Mary to say that the apparition of an angel during the night was only an illusion. Was it really necessary, to escape the hands of Herod, to undertake a journey of two months? Was it not an easy matter to seek a refuge in some country not so distant?

But no; Mary places herself entirely under

the direction of her spouse, because she sees in him the guide and the protector whom God has given her. Joseph conducts her to Egypt, and she cheerfully goes there. It is true that it is a strange country, inhabited by pagans. How shall he take her and her Child, or how will he provide for them the indispensable necessities of life? She leaves everything to the care of Joseph. And how long must she remain in this exile? These are questions she does not even think of asking. When, after seven years of exile, the angel commands Joseph to return to Judea, Mary returns with him without recalling the fatigues and privations of the first journey. It is with this simplicity we should obey those who, on the part of God, command us, and who are charged with our guidance. Our parents and our superiors hold the place of God for us; we should therefore be obedient to them as Mary was to Joseph.

2. *Her generosity.*—Mary in her obedience manifested the greatest generosity. It is easy to understand how severe it was for the weak and timid Virgin to undertake this long and fatiguing journey, and to seek a refuge in an idolatrous country and amongst a people who were naturally hostile to the Jews. She has not time to prepare even what is necessary in their

hurried departure. With her holy spouse she journeys through the vast and unknown solitudes without assistance, without a refuge.

And if she succeeds in concealing the divine Infant from the fury of Herod, will she find this land of Egypt more hospitable, will the life of Jesus be more secure? What difficulties, what agony, what fears present themselves! Mary, however, is not discouraged. She does not hesitate for an instant, but with fullest confidence in God she generously undertakes the painful journey. During her long sojourn in Egypt she patiently endures obscurity, poverty, and labor. Well does she know that Jesus is the King of kings, and that the Pharaohs of Egypt are only her subjects, since she is the Mother of the Ruler of men; nevertheless, she submits to the magistrates, the officers, and the common employees of the country. In a word, the generosity of Mary's obedience has no limit. Oh! what lessons for us, who find so much difficulty in submitting to the most legitimate precepts, and who are so inclined to discuss the rights and authority of those who command us! Let us imitate the humility of Mary, and it will be easy for us to be obedient, even as she was, in the most trying and difficult circumstances of life.

3. *Her perseverance in obedience.*—Mary's obe-

dience was as continuous as it was simple and generous. The dignity of the Mother of God placed the Blessed Virgin not only above the laws, but above the makers of the laws. Still her love for obedience was so great that this virtue dominated every act of her life. When a child she knew the will of her parents only. In the temple she recognized in the priests and the sacred ministers the authority of God Himself. Her marriage with St. Joseph was only the consequence of her perfect submission to the Holy Spirit. At Bethlehem, on the way to exile, in Egypt, at Nazareth, we can only admire her perfect submission to Joseph, the head of the family. Later on her divine Son will speak of her, and then He will praise her obedience to the word of God. "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." Oh! how the continuous perseverance of Mary condemns our carelessness and weakness and indifference! We are obedient when the duties to be performed are not difficult; we are obedient in moments of zeal and fervor; we submit for a time, and soon we forget our good resolutions and most sacred promises. Our life is very far from being an act of constant obedience. It is, on the contrary, a continual revolt against the commandments of God. Let us ask of

Mary to obtain for us, by her intercession, the grace of being faithful as she was in our duty of obedience. Then, when we shall have imitated her on earth, we will merit to contemplate her in heaven.

INSTRUCTION XVI.

JESUS IS FOUND IN THE TEMPLE.

"Son, behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."—ST. LUKE ii. 48.

WE have now to record one of those circumstances when the heart of Mary was submitted to the severest trial which can afflict a mother. Let us hear the narrative from the Sacred Word of God. The Holy Family dwelt in the little city of Nazareth ever since their return from Egypt. Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem every year to attend the feast of the Passover. When about twelve years old Jesus went with them to the city, and after the days of solemnity had passed Joseph and Mary returned, but the Infant Jesus remained in Jerusalem. His parents were not aware of this fact, but thinking He was in their company they continued their journey. Not having found Him amongst their relatives and acquaintances, they return to Jerusalem, seeking Him everywhere. It was only three days afterward that they found Him in the midst of the doctors, hearing them

and asking them questions. His Mother said to Him: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." He answered: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" And He went down with them and came to Nazareth. We will meditate on the sorrow of Mary at the loss of Jesus, the care with which she sought Him, and her happiness at finding Him.

1. *Sorrow of Mary at the loss of Jesus.*—What a bitter sorrow must have pierced the heart of Mary when the evening came, after a long journey and far from Jerusalem, she discovers that Jesus is not with them! She believed He was in the company of His relatives or friends. But no one had seen Him, no one could say what had become of Him. The darkness of night had come on, and the well-nigh distracted Mother looks in vain for her Son. What fear, what terror, what agony then seizes the heart of this tender Mother! To conceal the divine Infant from the cruelty of Herod they found it necessary to carry Him to Egypt. Joseph, justly fearing Archelaus, the son and successor of Herod, did not dare to fix his residence in Judea. Could it be possible that the enemies of Jesus had at last succeeded in recognizing Him, taken possession of Him to put Him to

death? All these thoughts saddened the heart of Mary; and as Jacob had mourned for the loss of Joseph, she, too, believed that her beloved Son had fallen a victim to the cruel beasts that thirsted for His blood.

We also can lose Jesus, in two ways. The first and the saddest is when we separate ourselves from Him by sin, and the second is when Jesus separates Himself from us to test our love and friendship. In both instances we should feel, like Mary, a lively sorrow at the absence of our blessed Saviour.

But, oh! what a reason for bitterest sorrow when we voluntarily abandon Him! And if Jesus conceals Himself from us, for a time, let us imitate the patience and resignation of Mary. He has not wished to spare even her from this great sorrow.

2. *The care with which she seeks Him.*—Mary can never know repose until she will have found Jesus. Joseph also shares her sorrow and all her solicitude. Not finding the divine Child amongst their relatives and friends, Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem and seek for Him everywhere. We can see Mary, accompanied by her holy spouse, going through the city and repeating with the spouse in the canticle: “I sought Him Whom my soul loveth; I sought Him and found Him not. I will rise

and will go about the city; in the streets and the broad ways I will seek Him Whom my soul loveth." At length, after three days of unrest and fatigue, they found Jesus.

When we have had the misfortune of losing God by grievous sin, do we seek Him with that earnestness, that care and solicitude which characterized Mary and Joseph? Sin robs us of our greatest consolation. It is in vain that we seek to regain it by mingling with men or engaging in the distracting affairs of life. It is in vain that we seek the city or the country; we can never escape from ourselves. Jesus only can give us the peace and happiness we are longing for. It is He Whom we must seek at every sacrifice, and with the same dispositions which Mary and Joseph manifested in their desire to find the Infant Saviour.

3. *Her happiness in finding Jesus.*—Mary and Joseph had the supreme happiness to find Jesus in the temple. A pious writer remarks that He was not found at the theatre, or in the public place, or in amusement, but in the sanctuary of prayer, where God assists those who confide in Him. Was it not a consolation for Mary and Joseph to hear the doctors of the law speak of His wisdom and prudence in response to their questions? Mary received Jesus in her arms with joy and tenderness.

Although her words seem to convey reproach, yet they are full of love and tenderness. "Son, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." His response manifests His divinity. He returns with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth, and by His sweet presence consoles them for all the agony they experienced at His loss. And what consolation, what happiness for us, also, to find Jesus after having been separated from Him! The more we seek Him in bitterness and sadness, the sweeter it will be for us to find Him. And happy shall we be to live in His adorable company, like to Mary and Joseph in Nazareth.

INSTRUCTION XVII.

THE HOLY FAMILY AT NAZARETH.

“He was subject to them.”—ST. LUKE ii. 51.

ALL that we know of the life of Jesus from His twelfth until His thirtieth year is . . . contained in these few words, “He was subject to them.” He was found in the temple by His parents, and He returned with them to Nazareth. From this time until He begins the preaching of His Gospel—a space of eighteen years—we have only to contemplate in Him one feature—His perfect submission to Mary and Joseph. The Gospel merely adds that He “advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men.” The example given by our blessed Saviour, and expressed in such few words, is most salutary for all men, without exception. The child, the youth, and even the man of thirty years have the greatest need of lessons in obedience and submission. They only who have learned to obey are capable of giving commands. We will consider in the life of the Holy Family at

Nazareth the conduct of each member in particular—of Joseph, of Mary, of Jesus.

1. *Of Joseph.*—As the family is the principle and foundation of all human society, therefore God has wished to give us a perfect model in the family of Nazareth. To the father of the family belongs the right to command. He it is who should have authority and vigilance and solicitude for all that pertains to the household. In a word, the spiritual and temporal care of the family devolves upon him. This grand and sublime mission Joseph exercised with regard to Mary and Jesus. Since he was united to Mary by a legitimate marriage, he had for her all the sentiments of a husband animated by the spirit of God. As he was the father of Jesus, by adoption, he fulfilled all those duties which the august title imposed upon him. In all the mysteries relating to the sacred Infancy we always see Joseph and the Virgin Mother inseparable. It is to him that the angel communicates the commands of Heaven: “Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt.” “Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel.” Heaven always treats with him as the head of the family. He it is who is warned to fix his dwelling in Nazareth. Once established in the little city, he continues

to discharge the august duties of foster-father to Jesus. It is certainly worthy of remark that neither the sublime dignity of Mary nor the divinity of her Son in the least diminishes his authority. Jesus wishes to be submissive to him in His conduct and to receive His orders from him. "He was subject to them." As an humble workman Joseph labored to gain the daily bread and to provide for the maintenance of the family. His life at Nazareth is an humble one—obscure, laborious, and passed in the accomplishment of the duties of his state. What more perfect model could we find for Christian men on whom devolves the twofold honor of husband and father?

2. *Of Mary.*—In the family the mother holds the second place. Whilst it is her duty to be submissive to her husband as head of the household, still, she shares with him his authority over the children. It is she who must take special care of the first education of the children. We have seen how St. Joseph at Nazareth is entitled to the honor of being regarded as the perfect model of a father. We will now consider the conduct of Mary. The whole life of Mary may be summed up in these words: entire submission to Joseph and tender solicitude for Jesus. See her complete abandonment to the guidance of Joseph in the

journey to Bethlehem, in her flight to Egypt, in her long exile, in her return, and in the choice of a dwelling-place. Joseph receives the message of the angel; Mary humbly and faithfully follows the orders of her guide, in whom she sees the authority of God Himself. At Nazareth she still observes the same dependence, the same submission. Jesus, also, wishes to be constantly submissive to her as His Mother. She surrounds Him with her tenderest care, and fulfils for Him all those duties which her state in life demands. In this perfect household Joseph does not take the second place. When Mary speaks to Jesus she tells Him of the mutual solicitude they have for Him. "Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." At Nazareth Mary is engaged in the humble and simple duties of her state. Joseph had the care of the external affairs pertaining to their home, but the Virgin Mother preserved in her heart all that she saw or heard concerning her Son Jesus.

3. *Of Jesus.*—We have seen at Nazareth Joseph and Mary, the perfect models of parents in the Christian household. Now Jesus gives us a model which children should faithfully follow. We can sum up His life in these words: "He was obedient." With what sentiments of admiration and humility did

Mary and Joseph command this Child, Whom they worshipped as their God and their Saviour! They saw Him not only obedient to His father and Mother, but also submissive to strangers, for whom He did not refuse to labor. The world knew Him as a workman and the son of a poor carpenter. Ah! contemplating this example of a God obedient, we can understand the words of St. Bernard: "O man, learn to obey! A God humbles Himself, and thou art exalted. A God submits to men, while thou desirest to rule men. Man wishes to take precedence over his Creator."

O Jesus, submissive to Mary and to Joseph, teach us to imitate Thy hidden, humble, and obedient life at Nazareth! Joseph, teach us devotion to the duties of our state of life and love for a life of labor! Mary, be our model in the practice of all virtues, and especially to preserve, as thou didst, the teaching and example of thy divine Son in our hearts!

INSTRUCTION XVIII.

MARY AT THE MARRIAGE OF CANA.

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the Mother of Jesus was there."—ST. JOHN ii. 1.

AFTER having lived in the humble dwelling of Nazareth until His thirtieth year, . . . constantly giving by His obedience the example of every virtue, our blessed Saviour commenced His public life. By a magnificent miracle He manifests His divinity to men for the first time. What is the occasion? "There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the Mother of Jesus was there. Jesus was also invited, and His disciples, to the marriage." The wine failing, the Mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus answered, "Woman, what is to Me or to thee?" His Mother then said to the servants, "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." Now, there were set there six water-pots of stone, each containing two or three measures apiece. And Jesus said, "Fill the water-pots with water." And they filled them. And Jesus said to them,

“Draw out, now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast.” And they obeyed Him. Then they discovered that the water had been changed into wine. By this first miracle at Cana of Galilee Jesus manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. The presence and the conduct of Mary at the wedding feast suggest these three reflections: she knows and anticipates our needs, she presents them to her divine Son, and indicates the means by which our petitions may be heard.

1. *She knows and anticipates our needs.*—The presence of the Blessed Virgin at the wedding feast of Cana assures us that she assisted at the marriage of some of her relatives. She was present not only as one of the invited guests, but also as a devoted friend, to aid in the necessary preparations for the feast. What a subject for admiration! Mary deigns to be occupied in the festivities, and arranges with greatest care all the details which the occasion requires. In her watchfulness and vigilance she observes that they have not provided sufficient wine. What a disappointment for the guests! What confusion for the young married people and their friends if they have only water to serve for the rest of the feast! This circumstance reveals all the charity and tenderness of Mary’s heart. At once she

approaches her divine Son. She knows that He is God and can do all things. Did she not give Him to us in His humanity? It is most suitable that she should also reveal to us His divinity. She deems it sufficient to say to her divine Son, "They have no wine." It seems that our blessed Saviour had attended this nuptial festival precisely to manifest His divinity. The result of Mary's request proves this abundantly.

Behold the part which Mary takes in this manifestation. She sees our needs, our necessities, our indigence. With all her maternal devotion she makes them known to her divine Son, and she has fullest confidence that her petitions will never be disregarded.

2. *She presents our needs.*—We cannot fail to observe the simplicity, the brevity, and especially the power of Mary's petition at the wedding feast. That which she asks is nothing less than one of the greatest miracles which can be imagined. They have no wine. To create a single drop of wine requires a power as great as to create the whole world. The quantity does not matter. If Jesus has the power to produce a single drop of wine, it will not be more difficult for Him to create an ocean of it. Mary, however, obtains this miracle from Jesus, and it suffices for her to merely

make known the necessity. True, indeed, "His hour is not yet come," but His Mother has spoken, and what request can He refuse her? To the words of Our Lord, "Woman, what is to Me and to thee?" some have endeavored to give an interpretation which the circumstances do not warrant. The sequence proves that Jesus was as obedient to Mary now as when they dwelt in their humble home at Nazareth. In fact, it is clear to the least reflecting that on this occasion Jesus wishes to give the most conclusive proof that He can refuse His blessed Mother nothing. At the wedding feast "they have no wine." It is only something which is material, yet He grants the request, through love for her, and grants even more than is requested. Had He wished He could have increased the quantity already in use, and the miracle would have been just as great. But this was not enough to prove His love for His Mother. He not only creates a new wine, but He wishes that this new creation excel by far all that had hitherto been thought of by the guests who attended the festivities.

3. *She indicates the means by which our petitions may be heard.*—Naturally the question rises to our lips, Whence comes this power which Mary exercises? Whence comes it that

she has merely to make known the needs of her friends and her petition is answered? It is because she has been always faithful to keep the word of God in her heart and to put this word in practice. Her cousin, St. Elizabeth, extolled her because she believed in the accomplishment of all that had been said to her by the angel. And what are the means which we should employ to render our petitions efficacious? After having exposed the indigence of the newly-married people and the needs of the guests, Mary said to the waiters, "Do whatever He will command." We are the servants of Christ. It is to us that Mary's words are addressed. Do we not desire to obtain Mary's intercession in our behalf? Do we not earnestly wish that God would fill us with His gifts, and if necessary work a miracle to secure our eternal salvation? Then let us faithfully do what He commands. Let us observe the precepts of His holy law. This is the expression of His will in our regard. The lesson which Mary teaches us to-day is to do the will of her Son, and He will show us the splendor of His glory.

INSTRUCTION XIX.

MARY THE DISCIPLE OF JESUS.

“Who is My Mother, and who are My brethren?”—ST. MATT. xii. 48.

THE holy Gospel, in recounting the public life of Our Lord, does not speak of Mary, . . . except in one circumstance, from the wedding of Cana until she stands on the hill-side of Calvary. St. Matthew tells us that one day as Jesus was speaking to the multitudes His Mother and His brethren were waiting to speak to Him. Some one said to Him, “Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without, seeking Thee.” And Jesus said, “Who is My Mother and who are My brethren?” And stretching forth His hand toward His disciples He said, “Behold My Mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.” If in this circumstance Jesus seems to make no distinction between His Mother and His disciples, it is only because He wishes to present her to us as the model

of those who believe in His name and follow in His footsteps. What was the conduct of Mary during the public life of her Son?

She heard His words, reflected upon them, and put them in practice.

1. *She heard His words.*—There is no doubt but that Mary was the first to hear the words which fell from the sacred lips of her divine Son when He commenced the preaching of His Gospel. Our blessed Lord seems to convey this thought in the text which we have quoted. He says, "Who is My Mother, who are My brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." While speaking these astonishing words He designates the disciples who stand about Him. His words clearly show that if He regards as His brethren and His mother those who believe His words and put them in practice, He considers His blessed Mother as the very first of His disciples. In another circumstance a woman full of admiration for Him exclaimed, "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee and the paps that gave Thee suck." What is the answer which Jesus gives to this eulogy of His blessed Mother? "Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." The greatest glory of Mary is indeed that she is

the Mother of Jesus, but her particular glory is that she has heard His divine words. Hence we can justly conclude that if she obeyed the word of God when spoken by the prophets and the angels, what must have been her joy and her desire to accept the words which fell from the lips of her divine Son! After the example of Mary, we should be most anxious to hear the word of God.

2. *She reflected on His words.*—His words, which Mary heard with the most pious disposition, she preserved in her heart and made the subject of her fervent meditations. The Gospel does not inform us of those sweet spiritual conversations which Mary had with the shepherds or with the Wise Men prostrate at the feet of Jesus. We are not informed what Mary said to Simeon and Anne in the temple, nor even to Joseph, who was also a witness of the wonders which accompanied the birth of Christ. But St. Luke carefully records, even twice, in his gospel, that Mary piously preserved in her heart all that she had seen and heard, and made these things the subject of her spiritual reflections—*conferens in corde suo*. She was the constant witness of the miracles and teaching of her divine Son, and her mind and heart were constantly nourished with this heavenly food. She learned from His divine

lips that "not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (St. Matt. iv. 4). Do we wish that the divine word which we hear so often and in so many different ways should be useful for us also? After having heard this sacred word attentively, we should preserve it in our hearts as a precious gift. We should meditate upon it piously and with greatest recollection. It must be in our hearts, the very germ of serious reflection. In fine, His divine word must be as the seed, which can only bring forth good fruit when it has fallen on the ground which has been well prepared to receive it.

3. *She puts His words in practice.*—Mary not only found in the words of her divine Son the spiritual food for her soul, but she made His word the rule of her daily conduct. What precept, ay, what counsel has Our Saviour given that Mary has not faithfully practised? What virtue of the Son which has not been faithfully imitated by the Mother, and with as much perfection as a creature can attain? Jesus has wished to be born poor; in fact, the first words which fell from His sacred lips in His public life were, "Blessed are the poor." Mary has lived in poverty. Jesus has become obedient, even to His death on the cross. Has

He not taught us that "His food is to do the will of His Father Who sent Him?" Behold how submissive Mary is to the will of God in all things. Jesus is born of a Virgin Mother, and has taught the merit of virginity. Mary, also, ever docile to the divine word, is the first to raise the standard of virginity in the world and to practise the queen of virtues in her own life. Behold the model which is given us as disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore, like Mary, we should hear the words of our Master, we should preserve them in our hearts, meditate on them with piety and devotion, and especially should we put His words in practice. Let His divine word be the rule of our thoughts and judgments, of our conversations, of our works, and of our whole conduct. His word will be our sweet consolation in this life, and it will be also the principle of our eternal happiness.

INSTRUCTION XX.

THE SORROWS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

"There stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother, and His Mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene."
—ST. JOHN xix. 25.

WE are fully informed concerning the three years of the public life of Our Lord, but the Gospel is silent concerning the Blessed Virgin during this time; yet when the solemn hour of sacrifice has come we find Mary near her divine Son. The presence of Mary on Calvary, her firm and courageous position at the foot of the cross, sufficiently indicate what have been her sentiments, her thoughts, and her conduct during the several scenes of the passion. Mingling among the multitude of the disciples while Jesus preached His doctrines and spread His blessings, Mary, with the holy women, generously gave her services to aid the cause of her divine Son. And now that the momentous hour had come, could she abandon Him when He was, by His sufferings and death, prepared to consummate the work of redemption? True,

indeed, we do not see the tender Mother at the Last Supper, nor in the garden of olives, nor in the tribunal of Caiphas. We do not see her in the pretorium of Pilate, nor at the court of Herod, nor on the way to Calvary. But when we do find her she is standing at the foot of the cross. There can be no doubt but that Mary has followed Jesus all through His sorrowful journey, and that she has shared in all His sufferings.

Let us also follow the Virgin Mother, and reflect on her sorrows. We will consider them in their extent, in their motives, and the teaching they contain for us.

1. *In their extent.*—Who can measure the extent of Mary's sorrows during the passion of her divine Son? The words of the Prophet Jeremias (Lam. i. 12) are particularly applicable to her. "O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow." Do you wish to consider the sorrows of Mary in their duration? You will find the duration long, since she has suffered during her whole life. But a few days after the birth of Jesus the holy old man Simeon said to Mary, "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce." This sword pierced her heart deeper and deeper, day by day, until on Calvary the prophecy was fulfilled. Do you wish to calcu-

late the sorrows of Mary? They are beyond computation. At every step which Jesus took from the garden of Gethsemani, at every word from His bitter enemies, at every instant of the sad drama which passed before her, there was a new pang for the compassionate heart of Mary. Not a word, not a circumstance, escaped her, for she had made the details of the passion the meditation of her whole life. In fine, do you wish to meditate on the intensity of Mary's sorrows? The extent, or the height, or the depth of that abyss of sorrow cannot be conceived. The prophet compares Mary's sorrow to a shoreless ocean. The holy fathers declare that the combined torments of the martyrs are not comparable to the sorrows of Mary. Therefore it is that the Church, the interpreter of their sentiments, does not hesitate to salute the Virgin Mother by the glorious title of Queen of martyrs.

2. *In their motives.*—Is it not surprising that the Blessed Virgin, conceived without slightest stain of sin, raised to the incomparable dignity of Mother of God, more holy and more perfect than all other creatures, yet should suffer such a long and such a painful martyrdom? This destiny is calculated to shock our faith, if we did not know that sufferings and the cross are the inheritance of the purest souls

and the dearest friends of God. It is most suitable that Mary should resemble her divine Son in all things. If Jesus is called in Holy Scripture "the Man of sorrows," because of the unspeakable torments He suffered during His passion, the Blessed Virgin justly merits the title of Mother of sorrows, since she shared in the bitter chalice of her Son. She could not manifest her love for Him in a more perfect manner.

Our blessed Saviour declares in His Gospel, "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence." He Himself did not enter into the possession of His glory till after having suffered poverty, contempt, persecution, outrage, and the ignominious death of the cross. He has wished, also, that even for His own Mother heaven should be the recompense of the sorrows she had endured on earth. Her throne must be higher and more splendid than any other, precisely because her sufferings and humiliations were like to the sufferings of her Son—the Model and King of martyrs. Suffering, therefore, is the proof of our love and the pathway which conducts to life eternal.

3. *The lesson which her sorrows teach us.*—What salutary lessons the sorrows of Mary teach us! If Mary has suffered because she was the Mother of Jesus, and because she

must resemble Him in all things, how can we claim to be His disciples and children of Mary if we refuse to carry the cross as they have carried it? St. Bernard says: "Is it proper for the servant to be crowned with roses when he sees his master crowned with thorns?" Is he a child of Mary, the Mother of sorrows, who lives only a life of pleasure? No; the true disciples of Jesus and Mary are found walking the way which conducts to Calvary, and the greater their love the nearer do they approach the way of the cross.

In fact, it is at the foot of the cross that Mary gives us the example of the sublimest virtues. What unalterable patience! What perfect resignation! What heroic generosity! What love for God! What charity for our neighbor! To her Jesus is dearer far than her own life, yet she does not hesitate to offer Him as a sacrifice for the redemption and salvation of sinners. Therefore, if we wish to give to Mary a proof of our love we should keep her sorrows in loving remembrance; since it is for us that she has suffered. Let us, with Mary, stand at the foot of the cross. This is the place for the just, with St. John; this is the place for sinners, with Magdalene. If we suffer with Jesus and Mary on earth we will merit to reign with them in heaven.

INSTRUCTION XXI.

MARY OUR MOTHER.

“Jesus saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother.”—
ST. JOHN xix. 27.

WE love to give to Mary the sweet name of Mother, yet have we ever understood all that is rigorously just and true in this title? The Gospel narrative will teach us how Mary is really our Mother. “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother and His Mother’s sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus, therefore, had seen His Mother, and the disciple, standing, whom He loved, He saith to His Mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own.” All the doctors of the Church are unanimous in declaring that in this solemn circumstance Our Lord has given Mary as a mother to men, in the person of St. John. The terms which are employed—“Woman, behold thy son,” “Son, behold thy mother”—

clearly prove that He spoke as God. Consequently, by a decree of His omnipotence Mary has been bequeathed to us as a mother and we have become her children. Let us then consider how Mary fulfils for us the duties of mother. We cannot fail to observe that we are born to her in sorrow, that she nourishes us and gives to us all her love.

1. *We are born to her in sorrow.*—Our mothers, according to nature, give us our corporal life in greatest sorrow. In punishment for her disobedience Eve was condemned, with all other women, to bring forth children in suffering and in tears. Mary, having been preserved from original sin, did not fall under this common malediction. Without sorrow or agony she gave birth to the Saviour of the world. But, says St. John Damascene, the martyrdom she was spared at the birth of her divine Son she must undergo on the day of the passion, when she becomes the mother of men according to grace.

And, in fact, what must it have cost Mary to give us supernatural life! St. Anselm tells us that "all the agony which the martyrs endured physically was not comparable to the sword of sorrow which transpierced Mary's heart at the foot of the cross." And St. Augustine adds, "the wounds of her Son are

her wounds, His cross is her cross, and His death is her own death. From the hillside of Calvary she can tell us: 'O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow!' " What mother has suffered more than Mary—in her body, in her soul, in her heart—to give life to her children? And yet she has endured these incomparable tortures for each of us. We are the price of her agonies and her tears. For each and every one of us her divine Son Jesus has been sacrificed, and Mary has consented to immolate Him to redeem us from death and to secure for us life eternal.

2. *Mary provides our nourishment.*—The second duty of a mother is to provide the nourishment of her children. Mary has done this and more, since she has given us the body and blood of Jesus, her Son. Listen to the song of the Church in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, the heavenly food which is provided for faithful souls: "Hail, O true body born of the Virgin Mary!" It is she who has formed in her chaste womb this adorable body, and when we receive it in Holy Communion we can truly say that it is our Blessed Mother who has provided this nourishment for us.

While our mothers according to nature are contented with providing our nourishment for

some months only, our mother according to grace secures for us our spiritual sustenance during our whole life. Her love for us is greater still, since in the participation of the Blessed Eucharist we become transformed into the very substance of Jesus, her Son. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abideth in Me and I in him." Each time, therefore, that we approach the holy table we render a new homage to Mary our Mother. It is from her that we receive this substantial nourishment which fills our souls with renewed grace and gives to us the pledge of all our future glory.

3. *She gives to us all her love.*—From the very moment that Mary was proclaimed our Mother, at once she conceived for us a tender love, a compassion without limit. This is also the characteristic of a true mother. So that Mary has not only the name and title of mother, but is indeed a mother by her solicitude, by inclination, and by love. On Calvary Mary generously sacrificed herself with Jesus for our salvation. To testify her love for us she freely sacrificed the life of her Son, Whom she loved a thousand times more than her own life.

In fact, we can say of Mary that she so loved the world that she gave her only Son for its salvation. As long as she lived on earth she

was a most tender mother for all the faithful. Now that she is in heaven she continues every day to give us the most signal proofs of her maternal love. Count, if you can, the sick that have been healed, the afflicted that have been consoled, the miserable that have been solaced, the dead that have been restored to life, and the sinners that have been converted by the protection of this incomparable Mother. And now, since she has devoted herself to us so unreservedly and has given to us all that was dearest to her, is there anything that we can refuse her in return? After the example of the well-beloved disciple, let us give to Mary our love and greatest devotion in her service. "And from that hour the disciple received her as his own."

INSTRUCTION XXII.

MARY IN THE CENACLE.

“They were persevering with one mind in prayer, with Mary the Mother of Jesus.”—Acts i. 14.

THE Gospel tells us nothing more of Mary after she had been given to us as a . . . mother in the person of St. John. By this silence it would seem that we were invited to meditate on the incomprehensible sorrow which this tender Mother experiences at the death of her beloved Son on the cross. The consolations and the joys which are reserved for her on the day of the Resurrection are in proportion to the sadness and suffering she endured on Calvary, but the Holy Spirit has not judged it suitable to reveal these mysteries to us. The Gospel is silent on all this.

Having been intrusted to the love and care of the beloved disciple, Mary remains in the company of the apostles and the holy women. Thus, after the ascension of our blessed Lord, we see her united with them in the cenacle, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit, Who

had been so frequently and so feelingly promised them. "They were persevering with one mind, in prayer, with Mary the Mother of Jesus." This was, indeed, for the apostles and disciples, who were saddened by separation from their Master, a sweet consolation. The presence of Mary, His Mother, in their midst served not a little to light up the darkness of their desolation, since she instructed them, encouraged them, and edified them.

1. *She instructed them.*—Mary, by entering the cenacle with the apostles and the disciples, fulfilled her duty as Mother. Was it not by this title that our blessed Lord before His death had given her to St. John and to all Christian people? When we read in the Acts of the Apostles that they were persevering in prayer, we do not understand they were constantly engaged in prayer and meditation. They had also their time for conversations and pious conferences on the memorable events of which they had been witnesses. Their mission was to make known to the whole world Christ crucified. Therefore they must be instructed in detail concerning the mysteries of His birth, His infancy, and His life until He commenced His public mission. No one was better calculated than Mary to impart this information, since she had not only been

a witness of His life, but was intimately associated with Him. St. Ambrose, speaking on this subject, says: "The presence and the life of Mary among the apostles after the ascension of Our Lord was necessary for our faith. Although they were instructed by the Holy Spirit, Mary, by the same Spirit, had a more profound knowledge of everything. She could reveal to them the facts concerning her divine Son, not only because she possessed this knowledge, but because she co-operated with Him in His work, in her character of Mother and co-redeemer." St. Bernard affirms that we should believe that Jesus revealed and made known to Mary all the facts relating to the Church—her combats, her victories, her humiliations, and her triumphs. And now while the apostles were preparing in prayer to receive the strength from Heaven which was necessary for the accomplishment of their sublime mission, the Blessed Virgin instructed them in the designs of God for the salvation of the world, and disposed them for the preaching of the Gospel.

2. *She encouraged them.*—Well did Mary know the destiny of God's Church on earth, and that its establishment in the world would cost the blood of millions of martyrs. The apostles, like their divine Master, suffered

contempt, persecution, and death. They, too, drank of the bitter chalice of sufferings. In the retreat of the cenacle the principal subject of meditation for that holy assembly was the passion and death of the Saviour. But Jesus had not only suffered on Calvary; even from His birth in Bethlehem He had been the object of hatred and persecution by His enemies. Mary, who had been the inseparable companion of her Son, could tell the story of His life—the indifference of the Bethlehemites, the fury of Herod, the hurried flight and exile in Egypt, the poverty, the privation, and the fatigues of that obscure and laborious life at Nazareth. It was only after so many trials, finally crowned by an ignominious death on the cross, that Jesus entered into His glory. By recalling these mysteries to the apostles Mary encouraged them to suffer with patience, with resignation, and with joy all the trials which awaited them on their departure from the cenacle. If they will drink of this chalice with their Master, so, too, they will one day participate in His glory. Before leaving them did He not speak these words of encouragement: “I go to prepare a place for you”?

3. *She edified them.*—The presence of Mary in the cenacle was for the apostles a subject of

edification. "They were persevering with one mind in prayer, with Mary the Mother of Jesus." If our blessed Saviour has said in the Gospel that when two or three will be gathered together in His name He shall be in the midst of them, it was to make us understand how agreeable it is to Him that the faithful should unite in prayer. What, we can conclude, must have been the perfection and the merit of the prayer of the apostles in union with Mary in the cenacle? Where shall we find a more edifying model of humility, recollection, and fervor? We may say of Mary and the apostles what is recorded of the first Christians: "They had but one heart and one soul." All the conditions which are necessary for fervent prayer they found in Mary, and after her example they formed themselves to the practice of prayer, which must henceforth be the principal exercise of their life. Like the apostles, we are in need of being instructed, encouraged, and edified. Like them, we should enter into the cenacle of retreat and interior recollection. There we will find the lessons, exhortations, and instructions of our blessed Mother. Let us ask of her the light to know our blessed Lord more and more. In our trials and tribulations let us have recourse to her. She has known what sorrow is and will en-

courage us to patience. If we persevere in prayer, in union with her, our petitions will be heard. If we fulfil all our duties with Mary the Mother of Jesus, we will have the happiness one day to reign with her.

INSTRUCTION XXIII.

LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AFTER
PENTECOST.

“Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end.”
—ST. JOHN xiii. 1.

OUR Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ could not give to His disciples a greater mark . . . of His love than the Blessed Eucharist, in which He left to them His body, His blood, His soul, and His divinity. He had promised to be with them until the end of the world, and He kept His word in a manner which surpassed all the fondest expectations of the apostles. But even this was not enough for those whom Jesus loved. Before consummating His sacrifice and resuming His glorious life He wished to leave them His own blessed Mother, as the last mark of His tenderness for them. The work of redemption was ended. It seemed that after the resurrection and ascension Mary had only to follow her divine Son into eternal glory. She was with Him during His passion, she should be with Him also in His triumph. And, in-

deed, with what happiness would she quit this world that she might not be separated from Him Whom she loved! But the Saviour had said He would not leave us orphans and He wished that this tender Mother should survive Him on earth for several years. And why? That she might be the counsel, the model, and the assistance of the apostles and the first Christians.

1. *The counsel.*—The Church, speaking of Mary, declares that she possesses all science and wisdom, and even adds that she is the very seat of wisdom. According to the words of the angel she is full of grace, and on the day of Pentecost she received the fulness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But these gifts must be distributed among the children of the Church. Her title of mother is not an empty one. During the time she remained on earth, after Jesus had ascended to heaven, she showed herself really a mother to the first Christians. She instructed them in the mysteries of religion and the truths of faith, while by her counsels she formed them to the practices of all the Christian virtues. They invariably had recourse to Mary to dissipate their doubts. By her advice they wisely regulated their conduct. This admirable Mother could say with the apostle St. John: “Nothing is

more agreeable to me than to see my children walk in the way of truth." That which consoled her during her weary exile in this world was to see the number of her Son's servants daily augmented, to see them strengthened in the faith and directed in the way of perfection. Very often, perhaps, we have envied our fathers in the faith because they have had the happiness to live with the Blessed Virgin, to enjoy her presence, and to hear the ravishing words which fell from her lips. We should not, however, complain; we have not been disinherited. The Gospel constantly proclaims the happiness of those who believe without having seen. "Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed." Indeed, we do not see Mary with our corporal eyes, but faith shows her to us everywhere present and always attentive to our needs. Is there a sanctuary, is there an altar dedicated to her name where she is not presented to us as the sweetest, tenderest, and most compassionate of mothers to all who invoke her with confidence? "Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope!"

2. *The model.*—Our blessed Saviour tells us: "I have given you an example." At the outset of His public life, before the preaching of His Gospel, He wished to give us Himself as a model for all the virtues. Mary, His blessed

Mother, is His most accomplished and most perfect image. He left her to the first Christians that they might have in her a perfect model of Christian life. Her appearance alone was sufficient to elevate the minds of men to heavenly things, more than all the discourses and all the exhortations which could be spoken by human tongues. If the mission of the apostles was to make known all that Christ had taught them, Mary confirmed the truth of their words by being the first to observe the precepts and counsels of the Gospel. She was the living example of humility, of modesty, of piety, of fervor, of poverty, of obedience, and of charity. All men, without exception, found in Mary the model of every virtue, and suited to their age and state and condition and rank. Apostles, confessors, martyrs, and virgins saluted her as their Queen. Parents and children, old and young, rich and poor, learned from the divine Mother to sanctify their respective lives. And even in our own day, if the Church possesses some favored souls whose virtues recall the first ages, is it not to the example of Mary that all credit is due? You will not find one single disciple of Christ, in the cloister or in the world, who does not profess a special devotion for Mary, or who does not propose to imitate her in the interior dis-

positions of her soul and even in the smallest acts of her earthly life.

3. *The assistance.*—Our blessed Lord prolonged the sojourn of Mary in this world precisely that the infant Church might have in her greatest support and assistance. On leaving the cenacle the apostles were confronted with multitudes of enemies whose hearts were filled with the malice of Satan. Christ Our Saviour had already warned His disciples. He told them that the disciple was not above the master, and if the master was persecuted the disciple could not claim exemption. But Mary, who had stood at the foot of the cross and had witnessed the agonizing spectacle of the crucifixion, now also stood near these valiant defenders of truth to protect and defend them from their persecutors. Like the mother of the Machabees, Mary was ever near the disciples, to tell them: "My children, look up to heaven." Your Master is there, after His martyrdom of the cross and the immolation of Calvary. Follow courageously on that pathway which He was the first to walk. You are the children of a Mother who during life had a sword of sorrow plunged constantly in her heart. Mary was there also to combat the rising heresies. The holy fathers attribute the strength which St. John employed in his

gospel against those who denied the divinity of Christ to the particular assistance which he received from the Blessed Virgin. Let us place our fullest confidence in the powerful assistance of this good Mother, whom the Church invokes as the Help of Christians. She will obtain for us the completest victory of time and eternity.

INSTRUCTION XXIV.

DEATH OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you tell my beloved that I languish with love."—CANT. v. 8.

CAN it be that the Blessed Virgin, whose grandeur, perfections, and immaculate . . . beauty we have loved to contemplate, has been subject to death, the common lot of the children of Adam? St. Paul calls death the wages of sin. Why should the Mother of God be compelled to pay a debt which she never contracted, or undergo the penalty of sin, the slightest stain of which she never knew? Christ Our Saviour, the God of all sanctity, has submitted to death, and His blessed Mother, who must resemble Him in all things, must also submit. The death of Mary, however, is not the frightful picture which is usually presented to us of death. The last agony which terminates the life of men on earth is a consequence of sin. But the Mother of Jesus, by the privilege of her immaculate conception, has been separated from the mass

of corruption in which the human race is enveloped. She could not share the ordinary lot of sinners. Mary's death was supremely happy because of her love for her divine Son, her detachment from the things of the earth, and the superabundance of her merits.

1. *Her love for her divine Son.*—The Blessed Virgin remained on earth after the ascension of her adorable Son that she might be the guide, the model, and the consolation of the first Christians. These children of her adoption were so dear to her that she consented to live long years far from the sight of Jesus glorious and triumphant in heaven. But her exile must at length terminate. She sighs after the moment when she will be allowed to quit this sojourn of tears and tribulations to be united to her God forever. Death, which men fear and which they can never contemplate without terror because of the circumstances and the inevitable judgment which follows it, had nothing terrifying for Mary. She regarded it as the necessary instrument to break the bonds which detained her in this valley of sorrows and to conduct her to the contemplation of the unspeakable beauty of her divine Son. If the apostle St. Paul cried out with so much ardor, "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ," how much did Mary sigh

for the day of her deliverance? O my Lord and my God, she could often repeat, deliver my soul from its mortal prison, that I may freely confess and praise Thy thrice holy name. This moment, so ardently desired, at length arrived. Mary, extended on her death-bed as a victim consumed by flames of unspeakable love, beheld her soul sweetly separate from her virginal body, without pain or sorrow or agony, and take its flight toward heaven to enter into possession of the incomparable throne due to her merits and her dignity.

2. *Her detachment from the things of earth.*—Mary's death was also happy because she was wholly detached from earthly things. Like the dove of Noe, whose flight over the waters was never arrested, Mary never placed in any creature the pure affection of her heart. Honor, glory, reputation had no charm for her; consequently she had none of these to leave mournfully behind. She had always been the humblest of creatures; and Mother of God as she was, she had never known another title except the "handmaid of the Lord." What goods, what riches, what state or fortune could she regret? This virgin, so humble, was also so poor she had not even a stone to offer her divine Son on which to rest His sacred head. There were no pleasures or

earthly joys to bind her to life, since she had known only tears and sorrows. Throughout her life she had always felt in her soul the sharp point of that sword which Simeon had predicted for her. Would she leave behind relatives and friends who would feel the bitter separation? Joseph, her cherished spouse, had long since preceded her to the tomb. With her own eyes she had seen her Son Jesus expire on the cross. There was, therefore, nothing in the world to bind her to it, and her pure heart, free from every earthly bond, took its flight in the eternal regions, to find there with her God all those whom she loved most on earth. Death, which strips the children of men of all things, now gives to Mary the complete possession of everything.

3. *The superabundance of her merits.*—How happy must have been the death of Mary, when she considered that heaven was the recompense of her meritorious life! If the eternal glory of the elect is in proportion to the virtues which they have practised during life, with what splendor is the immaculate Virgin surrounded whose sanctity was only second to the sanctity of God Himself! Was not her life on earth a continual exercise of the sublimest virtues and the most meritorious works? According to tradition, Mary lived seventy-two

years; and during these years, filled with heroic actions, there was not a sigh, not a pulsation of her heart, not a single word spoken by her which was not for her a subject of merit. She prayed, meditated, labored, and suffered with greater perfection than was found in any other creature. Her constant fidelity to God, her perfect correspondence to grace, her acts of mercy and charity toward her neighbors—in a word, all that she did, filled her soul with a holy joy and made her look upon death as the radiant dawning of eternal recompense. Do we wish that, notwithstanding the infirmities and miseries of life, our death should have some resemblance to Mary's death? Then we must imitate her love for Our Lord and Saviour. We must imitate her in her detachment from earthly things. We must imitate her in our desire to multiply our good works each day of our lives, and thereby increase our merits for eternity.

INSTRUCTION XXV.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

“Arise, my love, and come.”—CANT. ii. 13.

IF, to be like her divine Son in all things, Mary must leave this world by submitting . . . to death, she will therefore come forth from the tomb without suffering its corruption. St. Augustine asks: “How could God permit her virginal body to become a prey to the corruption of the tomb? Mary was not included in the common condemnation spoken against Eve: ‘Thou wilt bring forth children in sorrow.’ It was certainly most suitable to the glory of Mary’s motherhood that she should also be preserved from that other condemnation, ‘into dust thou shalt return.’ ” The immaculate body of Jesus and the immaculate body of Mary are identical in substance. If, therefore, it was suitable to the dignity of the Son of God that His body should not experience the humiliating decomposition of the tomb, the most pure body of His Mother must share in the same privilege. The third

day after Mary had been laid in the sepulchre by the apostles she heard the voice which had awakened Lazarus, "Arise, My beloved, and come forth from the tomb." This was for Mary the signal of her triumph. In meditating on the mystery of Mary's glorious assumption, we will find in it a subject of admiration, confidence, and imitation.

1. *A subject of admiration.*—St. John Damascene speaks as if he had been present at the triumph of Mary in heaven. He says: "The holy temple of the living God, she in whose womb the Creator was conceived, now rests in the temple of the Lord, which has not been constructed by human hands. David, her ancestor, rejoices at Mary's assumption. The angels sing their songs of joy and gladness, archangels celebrate the festival occasion. Virtues, principalities, and powers glorify her. Dominations and thrones are full of rejoicing, while cherubim and seraphim sing her glory and publish her praises." To the triumph awarded Mary in heaven we must add all the glory that earth could give. From the rising to the setting of the sun the universe resounds with songs of victory in honor of Mary the Mother of God. The prophetic words are realized: "All generations shall call me blessed." Never could the world behold a

grander spectacle than the glory of Mary on the day of her resurrection and her assumption. She has for her attendants all the heavenly retinue—the saints, the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, and the virgins, who with one voice proclaim her their Queen.

The scene of her triumph is not the city which rules the world, but the heavenly Jerusalem. Her triumph is not for time only, but throughout the ages of eternity. The three divine persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, place on her head the royal diadem, and address to her the words of the canticle: “Come, privileged daughter, come, take possession of thy throne and thy crown.”

2. *A subject of confidence.*—The triumph of Mary is also the reason of our greatest confidence. Mary still preserves in the splendor of her glory all those titles which are the foundation of our hopes. She triumphs as the Mother of God and the Mother of men. As the Mother of God she preserves all her empire over the heart of Jesus. If, at the wedding feast of Cana, by a single word she could obtain from Jesus that He should anticipate the time of His miracles, what could He refuse to His Mother’s love in their eternal festivities? As Mother of men Mary is always full of ten-

derness and mercy for them. By frequent marvels of grace, obtained through her prayers, Mary manifests her desire to associate her children in her triumph. The most splendid miracles attest the power of Mary with her beloved Son. There is no country which has not experienced the result of her intercession with Jesus, and from the remotest lands come the echoes which proclaim the royal munificence of Mary toward the unfortunate children of earth. In her assumption she triumphs as queen, and the privilege of a queen is to command. Moreover, all things yield to Mary's power. The invalid is restored to health and sinners recover the grace which they had lost. Why, then, should we not place our fullest confidence in this omnipotent Queen, in this Mother of all mercy, who appears to be so great and so exalted in heaven only to exercise absolute dominion over earth and to give us the most splendid proofs of her love?

3. *A subject of imitation.*—The assumption of the Blessed Virgin presents to us a subject worthy of our imitation. If Mary triumphs as the Immaculate Virgin and the Mother of Jesus, she is also crowned as the servant of God. Her splendid throne, her brilliant crown, her glory, her happiness—all these are

the recompense of her virtues and the reward of her merits. She is of all creatures the most exalted in heaven, and precisely because she was the most humble on earth. She is the omnipotent queen because she was the most obedient servant. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Complete dominion over all things has been given her because she renounced everything and lived in direst poverty.

When our blessed Saviour was just ascending to heaven He said to us, "I go to prepare a place for you." But we cannot forget that this place is a recompense which we must merit by fidelity to the divine commandments and by the practice of all the virtues of which Christ and His blessed Mother have given us the example. Our blessed Saviour has entered into the possession of His glory by carrying His cross. Mary, also, has triumphed by walking the way to Calvary after her divine Son. The glory of her assumption is measured only by the depth of her humiliations. We must therefore imitate our good mother in her humility, her poverty, and the purity of her life; then we will merit to celebrate her praises and to contemplate her glory throughout eternity.

INSTRUCTION XXVI.

THE PATRONAGE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

"Our salvation is in thy hands."—GEN. xlvii. 25.

BY these words the Egyptians expressed their gratitude to Joseph when he had . . . abundantly provided for them during the frightful famine which afflicted the other nations of the earth. In fact, they were indebted to the son of Jacob, to his wisdom and foresight, for having escaped death. Their preservation and their life were due to his kindness toward them. For a still greater reason we can apply this eulogy to Mary the Mother of God. To her powerful patronage we owe the preservation and the salvation of our souls. While we are truly miserable, deprived of grace and perishing, she opens heaven to all those who have recourse to her with confidence, to all who invoke her powerful protection. Yes, we must say to her, with the liveliest and profoundest sentiments of gratitude: It is in thy hands, O Virgin Mother, we place all our hopes for salvation. We should,

therefore, have the greatest esteem for the powerful patronage of Mary; we should constantly ask for it, and we should strive to merit it.

1. *Esteem for her patronage.*—A patronage or protection is just as great and powerful and efficacious as is the dignity and exaltation of the person who exercises it. God in His merciful solicitude for our eternal salvation has given us the angels and saints as our protectors, to aid us in this great work. Therefore it is we see kingdoms, provinces, cities, dioceses, and parishes especially confided to the guardianship of an angel or a saint. Each and every one of us has his guardian angel and patron saint. But we have also the Virgin Mother as our patron and advocate. In her quality of Mother of God she enjoys near her divine Son in heaven all the prerogatives attached to her sublime dignity. The holy fathers and doctors of the Church are unanimous in proclaiming the omnipotence of Mary. But let it be well understood that this omnipotence is not absolute, as is the power of God. It is an omnipotence of supplication, *omnipotentia supplex*, in virtue of which she can do all things. Mary is queen, and she commands as a sovereign. Are not men flattered by the protection which the great and powerful be-

stow upon them? We have still greater reason to rejoice in the patronage of the Queen of heaven and earth, since there is no favor, spiritual or temporal, which we may not reasonably expect from her.

This patronage of Mary is universal and extends to all times and all places. From the very cradle of Christianity we see Mary exalted, praised, and invoked. Everywhere that an altar is reared to the honor of Jesus another is erected and adorned in honor of Mary His Mother. Countless are the sanctuaries and places of pilgrimage to which faithful souls eagerly hasten. These shrines of Mary tell in language which is unmistakable that she is the refuge of sinners, the help of Christians, the consolation of the afflicted, and that her patronage excites in every heart confidence, hope, and love. There have been countless miracles wrought through Mary's intervention, which attest her mercy and power and love for fallen man.

2. *We should ask her for it.*—We should permit no day to pass without imploring the glorious patronage of Mary. Are we not in need of her assistance? Unquestionably we are; and the least reflection will serve to convince us of the depth of our weakness and the extent of our miseries. If we are engaged in some

temporal affairs which we cannot successfully arrange, then we secure the assistance of skilful and experienced men. If, for example, there is a lawsuit which will imperil our whole estate, at once we have recourse to one who is familiar with the law. If there is question of our health, we ask the advice and care of our physician. But of all our interests there is certainly not one of greater moment for us than the care of our eternal salvation. Now, how shall we successfully treat this important and difficult matter without supernatural assistance? How shall we escape the dangers which surround us, if we do not shield ourselves under the mantle of Mary's protection? How shall we conquer enemies determined to destroy us, if we have not her arms to defend us? We must therefore ask in fervent and persevering prayer this necessary protection of Mary. Ah, do not allow one day of your life to pass away without invoking this powerful advocate, this sweet mediatrix. Let your prayer be animated with a lively faith and an unshaken confidence. Feel your misery, learn your needs, and recognize your indigence.

Imitate the invalid who sighs under his affliction, the poor man who sees his poverty and nakedness, or the sorrowful who are well-nigh crushed with misfortune. If you are

faithful to invoke the protection of your good Mother during life you will be most sure to obtain her assistance in your last hour. At that decisive moment can she fail to assist him who has constantly invoked her? "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death!"

3. *We must merit it.*—In fine, to merit the protection of Mary we must lead a holy and Christian life. We can readily understand that our petitions will have no value in the eyes of the Blessed Virgin if she sees iniquity in our hearts and an affection to evil and bad habits. How can you be the servants and the children of Mary when by sin you remain the enemies of her divine Son? We can never forget that it was to St. John and to the disciples of Jesus that she was given as Mother, but not to the blasphemers and executioners of the Saviour. Do you wish, then, to experience the protection of Mary? Then endeavor to merit it by imitating the example she has given. As Mary was, be humble in your sentiments, humble in your words, humble in your conduct. Mary concealed herself from the eyes of the world. She loved solitude, silence, and recollection, while she prayed and labored with Jesus in their humble home at Nazareth. Throughout her life she exercised

the greatest charity toward her neighbor. Take Mary in all things for your model, and thus you will merit the tenderness of her maternal heart and experience the effects of her powerful patronage. You can then address to her in fullest confidence this beautiful prayer of the Church: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all evil, O glorious and ever blessed Virgin!" "Turn upon us thine eyes full of mercy, and after this exile, show unto us thine adorable Son!" *Et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende.*

INSTRUCTION XXVII.

OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY.

"Thou shalt honor thy mother all the days of her life."
—TOB. iv. 3.

THIS is the recommendation of the holy old man Tobias to his son. These words . . . naturally come to my lips at this time, when I wish to speak to you of one of those pious practices which is most popular and most agreeable to the Blessed Virgin. Every day we receive some marks of the love and the protection of this tender and merciful Mother; every day, therefore, we should be disposed to honor and to serve her. "Honor thy mother all the days of thy life." Now, one of the devotions which is most dear to Catholic piety, and the most excellent prayer which the true servants of Mary can address to her, is the Rosary. The Rosary, or crown of roses, is composed of several tiny grains, on each of which a "Hail Mary" is recited. We can consider these grains as so many fresh and fragrant flowers placed in garlands at Mary's

feet, or forming a precious diadem to adorn her royal brow. The Rosary, by its very simplicity, may be styled the book *par excellence* in which all may read and study well those truths which are of greatest importance. The learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the old and the young—in a word, there is no one who may not employ this devotion which is so agreeable to Mary.

To-day we will consider the origin, the end, and the effects of this devotion of the Rosary.

1. *Origin.*—It is the fair land of Catholic France that claims the honor of having first practised this devotion of the Rosary. About the middle of the thirteenth century the Albigensian heresy extended its ravages to the provinces of the South. To repress this error and arrest its progress the sovereign pontiffs employed every means in their power. The kings, menaced in their legitimate authority, had sent out their most valiant generals against these furious men who threatened civil society as well as religion. But all their efforts had failed to frustrate the designs of those perverse and bitter sectaries. St. Dominic, however, sustained by an unshaken faith in Mary, advanced to the combat against error without arms of any kind except a rosary. It is recorded that he alone converted one hundred

thousand of the Albigensians. These fierce men, thanks to the devotion of the Rosary, abandoned their heresy and penitently re-entered the old Church established by our blessed Saviour. It is indeed true that the pious practice of the Rosary was known before St. Dominic, but it was he who added to the recitation of this prayer the meditation on the mysteries of the life of Our Lord and His blessed Mother. The entire Rosary consists in the recitation of fifteen decades of the Hail Mary, accompanied by the meditation of five joyful, five sorrowful, and five glorious mysteries. These mysteries recall the birth, the sufferings, and the death of Our Saviour, the assumption and coronation of the Blessed Virgin in heaven. No practice of piety is more venerable in its origin. It is a devotion inspired by God and designated by Mary herself as most agreeable to her and best calculated to procure the salvation of souls. What respect, what esteem, therefore, should the servants of Mary entertain for the devotion to the holy Rosary!

2. *The end.*—The end which St. Dominic proposed in the institution of the Rosary is to honor the Blessed Virgin, to make her known, loved, served, and invoked by all the faithful, without exception. Could this devoted servant of Mary find a practice better adapted to his

design? The beginning of the Rosary is a profession of faith in all the truths taught by Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is composed of the Lord's prayer—the most perfect prayer which a Christian can address to God; then follows the angelical salutation, which contains in a few words the most beautiful eulogy, the most magnificent praises, which have ever been spoken of the Blessed Virgin: "*Hail, full of grace!*" The mysteries which are announced at the beginning of each decade recall the wonders of the incarnation and the life of our adorable Saviour, in which Mary had such an important part.

Thus the Rosary is really a summary of the Gospel. It is also a prayer most agreeable to the Blessed Virgin and within the reach and ability of all the faithful. The humble and poor shepherd who counts each grain of his beads on the lonely hill-side gives to our blessed Mother the same homage, the same honor, as the learned St. Francis de Sales, who piously recites his rosary in the quiet and recollection of his oratory. St. Louis on his throne and the poor man in his humble cottage by reciting the Rosary are united in mind and heart to celebrate the glories of Mary and to obtain her maternal favors.

3. *The effects.*—The marvellous results ob-

tained by St. Dominic in the establishment of the Rosary—the conversion of heretics, the confirmation of the faithful, the countless prodigies which it has wrought—all attest the powerful and salutary results of this devotion. And, in fact, is there anything more efficacious for the sanctification of souls? It is a truth of faith that we can do nothing without God's grace, and grace is assured us by prayer through the intercession of Mary. God's grace and the concurrence of our free will are necessary for our salvation. Another result of the Rosary is to excite, encourage, and fortify our will by recalling the examples of Our Lord and His blessed Mother in the different mysteries on which we meditate. The joyful mysteries teach us humility, recollection, and detachment from the things of the world. The sorrowful mysteries teach us patience, resignation, and the necessity of expiation and penance. The glorious mysteries inflame our charity, animate our hope, and sustain our courage in the midst of trials, by showing us the recompense promised to our fidelity. No prayer is better calculated than the Rosary to increase our confidence in the Virgin Mother and to give expression to our love and our devotion. Does the child grow weary in saying to his mother, "I love you"? This is precisely what

we say when repeating the formula of prayer in the recitation of the Rosary. Devout servants of Mary, may the holy Rosary be henceforth your book of prayer and meditation, your strong arm of defence against the enemies of your faith! By this sign you will conquer, and in return for this crown which you will present to Mary you will one day receive a diadem of glory.

INSTRUCTION XXVIII.

OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL.

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation."—ISAIAH lxi. 10.

THESE are certainly the words which are most suitable to address to the pious associates of Mount Carmel. They well express the sentiments of joy and happiness which rightfully belong to those who are members of the oldest and holiest confraternity authorized by the Church. Membership in this society is unquestionably a very great privilege, since to be clothed with the habit of Carmel is really to wear the garment of sanctification and salvation. Yes, associates of Mount Carmel, the blessed scapular in which you are enrolled is a special pledge of the love and protection of Mary. You can repeat with truth the words of the prophet: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, for I have received the garment of salvation."

To-day I wish to make you understand how legitimate is the joy which fills your heart.

On the part of the Blessed Virgin the holy scapular is a mark of distinction, a pledge of countless graces, a sign of predestination and salvation. On your part you must respect this noble livery and cause it to be respected by others. You must strive to merit the graces of which the scapular is the pledge and to co-operate in the work of your own sanctification. The subject of our reflections will be what the Blessed Virgin has done for the associates of Mount Carmel and what they in return should do for her.

1. *What Mary has done for the members of Mount Carmel.*—The holy scapular is for those who are enrolled in it a mark of honor, a splendid livery, which distinguishes them from the rest of the faithful. As Christians, followers of Christ, we are all unquestionably children of Mary. Yet because the charity which marked the first Christians has grown cold, because faith and piety have lost their splendor in the eyes of men, Mary has wished to choose for herself privileged servants, who will propagate devotion to her on earth, and by their good example will revive the virtue of the first ages. To distinguish these children of predilection she gives them these sacred insignia which we call the scapular. It is the livery of the queen of heaven and earth, the sover-

eign of angels and men. It is, if I dare to say it, the uniform of soldiers who profess to fight under the standards of the Mother of the King of kings and the God of armies. To wear the scapular is a constant testimony of love and devotion to Mary. The Blessed Virgin regards the children of Carmel as Jacob regarded his cherished son Joseph. He gave to him a garment of precious material and of different colors, to distinguish him from his brothers. The greatest monarchs have worn this mark of protection and love for the Blessed Virgin. Edward I. of England, St. Louis, King of France, deemed it an honor to add to their titles the still more glorious title of associates of Mount Carmel and children of Mary. The scapular is, moreover, the pledge of the most signal favors. The words of the Blessed Virgin, spoken to St. Simon Stock, assure us of this.

She said: "Receive, my dear son, this scapular of your order. It is a mark of the privilege which I have obtained for you and for all the children of Carmel; he who will die wearing this habit will be preserved from eternal fire. It is a sign of salvation, a safeguard in danger, a pledge of peace and of special protection." These words of the Blessed Virgin have been ratified by the sovereign pontiffs,

who have enriched the confraternity of Carmel with many plenary and partial indulgences.

What greater or more precious grace can be given us than the full, the entire remission of our sins? Another favor granted us is the participation in all the good works and merits of the members of Mount Carmel.

The scapular is, in fine, a mark of salvation because it is an authentic proof of devotion toward Mary, who will never permit one of her servants to perish. Moreover, this good Mother has promised to those who will have the happiness to die wearing the holy scapular that they shall be preserved from the flames of hell. In testimony to the truth of this promise we have the authority of one of the greatest saints, also of several illustrious popes: John XXII., Benedict XIV., etc.

2. *What the members of Mount Carmel must do in return.*—We must wear the scapular worthily and respectfully, since it is a garment of honor. It is not by the insignia which we carry about us that we shall be recognized as members of Mount Carmel, but rather by our piety and the regularity of our conduct. We must everywhere and always respect Mary's name and her glorious livery with which we are clothed. What should we say of a man of noble birth if we should see him shamefully

minge in the orgies of a vile populace and cast himself into the midst of the vicious? We should say he had lost all sentiment of dignity and honor. If the servant should sympathize with his master's enemies, would he not be justly called a perfidious traitor? If a soldier should allow his flag to be dishonored and his uniform to be insulted, would he not merit the execration of his general and his king? Well, such must be our estimate of the Christian who would not blush to profane his scapular by associating with bad companions, frequenting scandalous societies, and leading a life unworthy of faith and reason. As associates of Mount Carmel we also owe to the Blessed Virgin a generous correspondence to grace. The august Mother of God employs her omnipotence of supplication and intercession to fill our souls with all the gifts of heaven. Our duty, then, is to neglect nothing which will obtain for us these spiritual riches. Nor can we forget that the best manner of corresponding to the goodness and generosity of our Lady of Mount Carmel is to imitate her example, or, in other words, to prove our love by acts. And since the scapular is a pledge of predestination, we should show ourselves worthy of this grace by wearing it always and with faith, piety, and confidence. Under the protection

of the Mother of God, strive with zeal and perseverance to accomplish the work of your salvation. And when the last hour will come this holy vestment will be for you the pledge of eternal felicity.

II

INSTRUCTION XXIX.

DEVOTION TO MARY.

"Thou art the glory of Jerusalem; thou art the joy of Israel; thou art the honor of our people."—JUDITH xv. 10.

THESE are the eulogies which the people of Israel addressed to the illustrious Judith after her triumph over the haughty Holofernes. These words of praise may be suitably applied to the Blessed Virgin, of whom Judith was only a figure. Glory of Jerusalem, Mary was the Mother of the Son of David and the rightful heir to the throne of Juda. Glory of the mystic Jerusalem, or the Church, to which she has given a Saviour, full of mercy. Glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, she is now seated on a throne above all others, and very near to her adorable Son. Joy of Israel, has she not given to the children of God the sweetest hopes and the greatest consolations? She is the honor of her people, since God has exalted her above all other creatures and has proclaimed her blessed among women. Thus the devotion to the

Blessed Virgin is particularly dear to the children of the Church, and you will not be surprised to learn that devotion to Mary has three characteristics worthy of our consideration, viz., its antiquity, its universality, and its sublimity.

1. *Its antiquity.*—We must go back to the very days of the apostles to find the origin of devotion to Mary. A very ancient author, St. Denis, the Areopagite, assures us that very many among them, and in particular the apostle St. Peter, returned from the most distant countries to see and admire once more before her death the Virgin Mother of God. They began the devotion to Mary by erecting temples in her honor: St. James at Saragossa, St. John in Asia, and St. Peter at Rome. This devotion was founded and propagated by the ancient liturgies which had been left as the rule and order of sacred rites, and to which the first churches were obliged to conform. The holy fathers and the most ancient writers, who had seen Mary, speak of her so tenderly and with such affectionate veneration that they reveal to us clearly the devotion which was given her in those early days, and the entire confidence which all the faithful had in her. Devotion to Jesus and to Mary His Mother were simultaneously propagated. In

the pictures of the old masters we see Jesus and Mary represented together, and the faithful are prostrate at the same time before the Son and His blessed Mother. They pray to Jesus as their God and to Mary as their advocate. Thus it is that the Church has commenced the devotion to Mary; and this devotion has come down through the ages which intervene until our own time.

There is this difference, however, that devotion to Mary has been daily increasing both in strength and extent, even as the torrent which descends the mountain-side, always growing greater and wider and deeper just in proportion to the course which it follows. Devotion to Mary, as all other beliefs and practices of Christianity, has encountered enemies. The hydra of heresy would question the motherhood of the God-Man and dispute her most glorious titles. But the ever-vigilant Church will never permit the least attack on the dignity or privileges of her queen. And thus at the Council of Ephesus she affirms the doctrine of Mary's divine maternity, as later on she proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

2. *Its universality.*—Not only is the devotion to the Blessed Virgin invested with the halo

of antiquity, but it has at the same time the character of being universal. The people of the whole world are unanimous in their praise of the Mother of God. Just go in thought from one extremity to the other of the Catholic world and see how many people are scattered over the earth, all differing in character, manners, and language; and yet you will not find one who will not cheerfully honor and praise the name of Mary. In the midst of busy cities and on the summits of the mountains, everywhere are found chapels or oratories dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. By actual computation, there are nearly two thousand sanctuaries which bear her name, and these are justly celebrated by the large concourse of pilgrims who visit them. These shrines of Mary are magnificently adorned, enriched by gifts of the faithful, and not infrequently the most signal miracles are wrought in them. In France alone there is Our Lady of Victory at Paris, Our Lady de Fourvière at Lyons, Our Lady de la Garde at Marseilles, Our Lady of France at Puy, Our Lady of Lourdes in the Pyrenées, Our Lady of Praise in the Alps, etc. Catholic piety has multiplied titles in honor of Mary. She is invoked as Our Lady of good help, of peace, of mercy, of grace, of consolation, of

hope, of refuge, etc. People of every age and rank and condition mingle at the foot of Mary's altar.

From the king on his throne to the humble laborer in his cot—all approach the shrine of Mary and offer to her their humble and fervent prayers.

3. *Its sublimity.*—The devotion which is rendered to Mary at all times and in all places is a devotion which is surpassed in sublimity only by the honor which we render to God Himself. The homage which we give to the Blessed Virgin consists especially of a profound veneration. How can we fail to recognize Mary as our queen and our sovereign when we consider that the Son of God Himself honored her as His Mother and faithfully obeyed her, even at an age when men regard themselves as free from parental authority? The sublimity of this veneration which Catholic piety has at all times given to Mary is contained in this title, *Our Lady*, and places her above all the angels and saints. The confidence which all Christian peoples repose in the Blessed Virgin gives to her devotion another character of sublimity. We pray to the saints to obtain this or that particular favor, but from Mary we ask all graces, because we regard her as the depositary of all the heavenly

gifts. What is there comparable to the devotion of intercession of which Mary is the object? Hymns, canticles, litanies, offices—in fact, all forms of language have been exhausted to celebrate the praises of Mary and to solicit her merciful protection. We do not fear to exaggerate the honors to which Mary has a just right. The devotion which we give to the ever-blessed Mother adds to the glory of our divine Saviour and attracts His choicest blessings upon us for time and for eternity.

INSTRUCTION XXX.

MARY THE REFUGE OF SINNERS.

"Now, therefore, pray for us."—JUDITH viii. 29.

THE inhabitants of Bethulia were on the point of perishing. Holofernes, already master of all the surrounding country, was now prepared to lay siege to the city itself. The priests and the chiefs of the people had despaired of assistance from Heaven. They were at length resolved to submit to the yoke of their enemy and thereby escape entire destruction. A woman, however, is found to raise their fallen courage. Judith exhorts the people to confidence, and promises that God will have pity on them and will never allow them to fall into the hands of cruel Holofernes. Reassured by her words, Ozias and the priests recommend themselves to her prayers. They say: "Pray for us, now, O thou who art agreeable to God!" The Church applies these suppliant words to the Virgin Mother, of whom Judith was only a figure. The especial title which we have to

the merciful intervention of Mary is that we are sinners. *Pray for us sinners!* The subject of our present meditation will be Mary the refuge and advocate of sinners. We will consider how Mary prays for sinners, shields them from divine chastisements, and obtains heavenly favors for them.

1. *Mary prays for sinners.*—If there be one truth more solidly established than another it is this, that Mary prays for the servants of her divine Son and that she is especially the refuge and advocate of sinners. The apostle St. Paul tells us that Our Lord Jesus Christ is always living in heaven to plead our cause before His Father, and may we not believe that such is also the charitable office of His blessed Mother? St. John tells us that we have in Jesus a powerful advocate before the Heavenly Father; in Mary we have a powerful advocate before the divine Son. When on earth our blessed Saviour said: “I have not come to call the just, but sinners, to penance.” He is pleased to add, “Who are they that have need of a physician?” He Himself answers, “Not they who are well in health, but the sick.” Therefore in heaven and on earth Jesus defends the cause of those who are spiritually sick before His Father, and it is precisely in favor of these unfortunate sinners that Mary

employs her omnipotent intercession. Her solicitude is so great that she is interested in all, prays for all, with an affection which is wholly maternal. Mary was pleased to reveal herself to St. Bridget, and said to her: There is no one, however sinful he may be, that will be deprived of my mercy during life. Poor sinners, however great and countless may be your crimes, however low you may have fallen, or however deeply rooted may be your vices, do not despair! Mary is powerful enough to obtain for you the grace of conversion, and has so much love for you that she will extend to you the fulness of her maternal affection on your return to God.

2. *She shields sinners from divine chastisements.*—Not only does Mary pray for sinners and become their advocate with her divine Son, but she is also their most assured refuge against the rigors of His sovereign justice. When King Assuerus, by the perfidious counsels of the impious Aman, was prepared to exterminate all the people of Israel, the presence of Esther and a word from her lips sufficed to turn the danger aside and save the life of a whole nation. This is at once a striking and faithful image of Mary's interposition between the justice of the King of kings and the multitude of sinners condemned to eternal punish-

ment. She appears crowned with the diadem of her divine maternity, covered by the royal mantle of her virtues and her merits, and recalls to Jesus the solitudes, the fears, the agonies, the fatigues, and the sorrows she endured for Him. She shows Him the thorns, the nails, the cross, and the precious blood which He has shed. At the sight of such remembrance how can the tender heart of Jesus fail to be touched by compassion for the guilty ones threatened by His anger? If God does not chastise the world now by scourges as terrible as in the ages which preceded the coming of Christ, in a great measure we owe this exemption to Mary. The holy fathers tell us that Mary interposes between God and us; Mary prays, Mary supplicates. Does she not manifest herself in a special manner the refuge of sinners, by opening so many venerated sanctuaries to which she calls the people from every land by miracles of grace precisely that sinners may do penance and thereby escape divine justice?

3. *She obtains heavenly favors for them.*—It is not enough for Mary to shield sinners from divine justice; her love prompts her to obtain for them favors of all kinds, for soul and body. Who is there that can say he has never received a blessing from her, spiritual or tem-

poral? Hence St. Bernard says: "Let him who has not experienced the effects of her love after having invoked her cease to praise her. The world is full of proofs of Mary's mercy to sinners." St. Germain says: "If I could interrogate the saints of paradise, all would answer that they have been saved by the intercession of Mary. The holy innocents would tell me that it was with Mary's assistance they preserved their robe of innocence stainless and persevered in good. The penitents would say that it was by the intercession of Mary that they obtained the pardon of their sins, through her they have been saved." And even in the temporal order see the countless ex-voto offerings hanging on the walls of all the sanctuaries consecrated to Mary. Do these not attest the innumerable favors obtained through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin? Do they not tell us of miracles wrought for the soul and the body of those who came to invoke her confidently? Sinners, have recourse to Mary, and do not fail to invoke her by that consoling title, Refuge of sinners, pray for us. Pray for us now and at the hour of our death, that after death we may pass from this vale of tears to the happiness of life eternal.

INSTRUCTION XXXI.

THE SACRED HEART OF MARY.

"All the glory of the King's daughter is within."—Ps. xliv. 14.

THE Blessed Virgin possessed many titles of distinction which would secure for . . . her the honor and consideration of the world. She had descended from the sacerdotal family of Aaron, was a daughter of the kings of Juda, and her direct ancestors were of the royal house of David. If men had been admitted to the secrets of the divine councils they would have seen in the humble Virgin of Nazareth a new Eve, destined to become the mother of regenerated humanity, and they would have saluted her as the ark of the eternal alliance. Still, however eminent was the dignity of Mary, however great was her external glory, she had besides titles which were more august and worthy of our admiration and respect. The Holy Spirit tells us that all the glory of this daughter of the King was concealed within herself; that is to say, that

all the beauty and all the perfections of Mary are in her immaculate heart. We will therefore consider these wonderful perfections and endeavor to imitate them, since the Church has consecrated a particular feast to the most sacred heart of Mary.

I propose to show you in this instruction how much this heart is worthy of our homage, by the perfections with which it is adorned, by the intimate relations which unite it with God, and by the love with which it burns for us.

1. *By the perfections with which it is adorned.*—What intelligence could ever conceive or what tongue could express the perfections of the immaculate heart of Mary? After the adorable heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing which ever came from the creative hand of God so beautiful or so pure as the heart of the Blessed Virgin. Mary's heart was a very sanctuary of predilection, in which was united all the grace, all the sanctity, that a simple creature could receive. By a privilege hitherto unknown, the heart of Mary is preserved from the stain of original sin. God beholds in her all the beauty, all the purity, of the original design on which He formed man. Her heart is a mirror in which God contemplates Himself, and in which He finds all the features resembling His own, but well-nigh

effaced in the rest of men. Hear the words which the Holy Scripture places in the mouth of God when speaking of the perfections hidden in the heart of Mary. "Thou art all beautiful, my beloved, and there is no stain in thee. As the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun!" The purest and most gracious images are employed in their turn to express all that this sacred heart contains which is ravishing. To consider her heart from a point of view which is most accessible to us, will it not suffice to say that since Mary is the Virgin, the Mother, the martyr, *par excellence*, she possesses all the charms of these three eminent qualities united? What treasures of grace, humility, modesty, simplicity, innocence, beauty are combined in the heart of a virgin, and especially when this virgin is Mary! What an ocean of love, tenderness, and devotion in the heart of a mother, when this mother is Mary! What an arsenal of strength, of courage, of generosity in the heart of a martyr, when this martyr is Mary!

2. *By the intimate relations which unite her to God.*—What shall we say of the intimate alliance between the Blessed Virgin and the three divine persons? She is at once the daughter, the mother, and the spouse of God.

The Lord had decreed in His eternal coun-

sels that the world should be saved by the incarnation of the Word, and, moreover, that this stupendous mystery must be accomplished in the womb of the Virgin and by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Hence the glory of the adorable Trinity required that nothing should be wanting in the perfection of a creature called to a dignity so sublime as that of Mother of the Redeemer. God the Father had a particular care of this daughter who should one day be the Mother of His Son, and from her immaculate conception poured out on her His choicest graces without measure. God the Son, the Eternal Wisdom, took delight in abiding in Mary's heart, which He had chosen for His dwelling: "My delight is to be with the children of men."

But what special delight He must have experienced in the heart of her whom He called His Mother! And it is in the virginal heart of Mary that the Holy Spirit will celebrate the celestial nuptials. If the Divine Spirit is pleased to enrich the hearts of men by His gifts, with what love does He endow the heart of Mary, His spouse, with all of Heaven's favors? In fact, we can never sufficiently admire all that the intimate relations of the Blessed Virgin with the adorable Trinity have produced in the pure heart of Mary. At least,

let us hope to contemplate in heaven that which we can only dimly surmise here on earth.

3. *The love with which her heart burns for us.*— But how can we speak of the heart of Mary without recalling the love which she entertains for us? A mother loves her child most when he has cost her much sorrow and many sacrifices. And what has the sacred heart of Mary endured for us? Did not Simeon tell her in the temple that a sword of sorrow should pierce her soul? From that day not a single moment of her life passed by that she did not feel the point of that cruel sword in her maternal heart. All that her divine Son Jesus had suffered during His life—persecution, contempt, cruel scourging, the torments of Calvary—the divine Mother has experienced in her heart; still she accepted these sorrows generously, because it was at this price only that we could purchase the life of grace. In all truth, we can say that we are the children of her sorrows. Just to what extent her heart has loved us we can never comprehend. We can say of our admirable Mother what the Saviour Himself has said of His Heavenly Father. Mary has had so much love for us that she did not hesitate to sacrifice Jesus, her only Son, for our salvation. Behold to what a

point the sacred heart of Mary has carried her devotion! Therefore we should love our august Mother. She has immolated herself for us at the foot of the cross. Let us be prepared to make every sacrifice to honor her, to serve her, and to testify our inviolable fidelity to her in time, that we may be worthy to love her forever in heaven.

INSTRUCTION XXXII.

CLOSING EXERCISE OF THE MONTH OF MAY.

“Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life.”—APOC. ii. 10.

AMONG the titles which the Church in her litanies gives to the Blessed Virgin there . . . is one which seems to me especially worthy of attention at the hour when we are about to terminate the exercises of this blessed month of May. This title is, *Virgo fidelis*, Virgin most faithful. Mary has been the faithful Virgin *par excellence*, and this character of fidelity is now her merit and her glory. If, before leaving this altar where we have so often assembled to honor and bless and invoke Mary, we have formed some resolutions to place at the feet of our good Mother, they should, I think, be summed up in these words, *Be faithful!* Yes, we will be faithful to Mary all the days of our life, as faithful as we have been during this month consecrated to her. Our fidelity must have a threefold character of duty, merit, and happiness.

1. *Duty.*—What are our relations to Mary? We are her children. Her love, therefore, expects from us fidelity to honor her, to think of her, to converse with her. We will find the most abundant opportunities. On her feasts which occur during the year, the day in each week which is consecrated to her, the hours of recollection, we will have to pay her the tribute of our heart. Can we ever forget our Mother? Moreover, we are the subjects of this august queen. What is it which distinguishes the true subjects from those who are not? It is fidelity. A promise is something sacred. Now, we have promised fidelity to our queen. This promise has been renewed on all the great occasions of our life. Again and again we have repeated our promise before the altar; then be faithful to-day, to-morrow, always. Again, we are the servants of her who has declared that she herself was the servant of God, *the handmaid of the Lord*. And what is the first quality of a good servant? It is fidelity. With what zeal does the good servant defend the interests of his master! How jealous he is of his master's honor! What care, what application, does he employ to do his master's will! Let this be your fidelity to Mary. Be her devoted servants. And what

does she ask of you above everything? There is one word in the Gospel which admirably expresses Mary's most ardent desire and her dearest wish. Speaking of her divine Son at the wedding feast of Cana, she said: "Do whatsoever He will tell you." You have the Gospel of Jesus, you know His precepts. Faithfully fulfil them. Let even the divine counsels, as far as your condition and your state of life will allow, be the rule of your conduct. Thus it is that you will discharge your duty of fidelity to Mary. Be faithful.

2. *Merit*.—Merit results from the disposition with which our good works are performed, from the perfection of these works in themselves, and also from the number of our good works.

Fidelity to Mary will preserve your heart and your will in that happy state which is called the state of grace. Could you ever consent to be traitors by being guilty of sin and accepting the degrading yoke of the demon? Fidelity to Mary supposes fidelity to grace. Works performed in this state will be meritorious. The simplest and most ordinary acts of your daily life will all have their reward. What glory you will render to Mary by faithfully fulfilling each day simply and humbly

the duties of your state of life! At Nazareth Mary gained her livelihood by labor, just as all the other women who had the care of a poor and humble household.

Merit also results from the perfection of your works. If you are faithful to Mary you will apply yourself as she did to practise what is most perfect in Christian life, according to your state and condition. You will profit by the example which our blessed Mother has given. It would be a good and salutary practice frequently to ask yourself the question: What would Mary have done if she were in my position? What did she do? What would she say? How would she act? After an instant of reflection you will surely imitate her conduct, since you propose to be faithful to her. In your zeal strive to multiply your good works, especially works of charity toward your neighbor. By these works you will manifest your fidelity to Mary and acquire the greatest merit before her Son, Christ Jesus.

3. *Happiness*.—Your supremest happiness will be your constant fidelity to Mary. Remember that happiness here on earth essentially consists in tranquillity and peace of soul. I am well aware that the world seeks for this happiness elsewhere, but the world is deceived.

But how will you find this peace of soul, this solid and enduring happiness? By your fidelity to Mary. If you are faithful to Mary you will also be faithful to God; and sin, the great disturber of conscience, will never take possession of your soul. Temptation, it is true, may disturb and trouble you, but it will never rob you of true and lasting peace. But perhaps you fear that the trials which are inseparable from life may be an obstacle to your happiness? However great or multiplied the trials of life may be, they will never take from you that happiness which is assured to the children of Mary.

Trials have been the heritage of all the saints. Like them, persevere in being the children, the subjects, the apostles, of our good Mother, and you will also share the happiness of the saints.

What now remains for us to do except to prostrate ourselves at the foot of Mary's altar and promise again our entire fidelity? In the presence of the venerated image of our august Mother, under the eyes of the heavenly spirits who surround the throne of our blessed Lord, before the tabernacle which contains the Living Treasure of our souls, let us promise to be faithful always.

O Mary, our Mother, our Queen, our Advocate, deign to receive the consecration which we make to thee of our minds, of our hearts, of our souls, and of our bodies! We are thy children now and forever. Amen.



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