

¡Adorada sea la Santa Faz de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo!

**IGLESIA CRISTIANA PALMARIANA
DE LOS CARMELITAS DE LA SANTA FAZ**

Residence: "Finca de Nuestra Madre del Palmar Coronada", Avenida de Jerez, Nº 51,
41719 El Palmar de Troya, Utrera, Seville, Spain
Apartado de correos de Sevilla 4.058 — 41.080 Seville (Spain)

One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Palmarian Church



TENTH APOSTOLIC LETTER

Generosity regarding the Priestly Life.

We, Peter III, Sovereign Pontiff, Vicar of Christ, Successor of Saint Peter, Servant of the servants of God, Patriarch of Palmar de Troya, *de Glória Ecclesiæ*, Herald of the Lord God of Hosts, Good Shepherd of souls, Aflame with the Zeal of Elias and Defender of the Rights of God and of the Church.

In Our Second Apostolic Letter, We spoke of Religious Vocations. We see the need in this one to speak of generosity regarding Vocations to the Priesthood.

We, as Vicar of Christ on earth, are inflamed with zeal for God, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

We are deeply saddened, for We see little generosity among male Palmarians towards the Priestly Vocation, towards the Religious Life, the most perfect and most important state in life. There are three states for serving God: the religious state, the married state, and the single state. The religious state is, and always will be, the most perfect state for serving God, Mary Most Holy and Their Holy Church in body and soul. A religious is at God's service the livelong day. He has therefore far more time for God, while married and single men have to work in the world to keep their families or themselves, respectively. It is certainly true that not everyone is suited to the religious life, and many marriages are needed to give children to the Church. But We cannot understand why there is so little generosity among male Palmarians. Do they love the world with all its dangers so much; do they love their comforts so dearly, are they so enslaved to their own self love?

Lately, in Palmar it has become evident that women are far more generous regarding the religious life. The difference in numbers between the latest vocations of friars and those of nuns is too great.

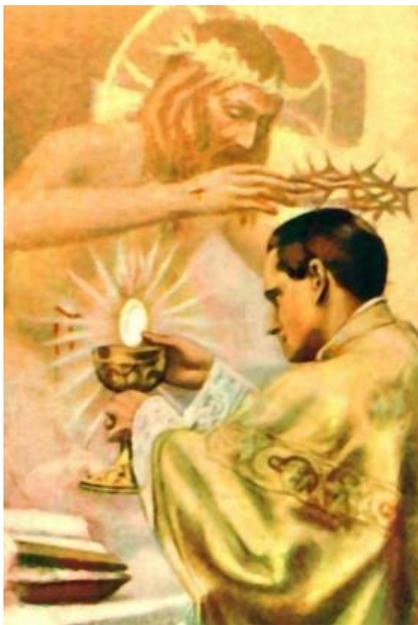
Often the education given by parents to their children is to blame. Very few parents realize the immense power they have to mould the character and form the future careers of their children. The little newborn baby comes from God's hands with vast possibilities for good or for evil; like the young tree, the soul can be trained to grow upright and beautiful, or bent and twisted, horribly deformed.

Forming character and directing youths' footsteps towards the Priesthood are in the hands of parents and schoolteachers. How many happy Priests daily thank their Creator for having given them "a wonderful mother", who sowed the first seeds of a vocation in their young hearts, and it was thanks to their parents' watchful care, to their prayers, to their example and to their holy lives, that they received the happiness of their sacred calling. God filled the place of honour in their homes, their young eyes ever beheld the image of Jesus' Priestly Heart, the names of Jesus and Mary were the first they learnt to lisp. They listened to the stories of God's friends, the Saints, while they lay in their little cribs, and their mothers' hands held them while saying their infantile prayers. Some years later, in all the glory of a spotless surplice and soutane, they knelt before the altar to serve Mass for the first time. Was it then, while moving among invisible angels, that Almighty God chose them to be His Priests?

Thus, step by step, the boy was guided by counsel and encouragement through the dangers of youth, until his own consecrated hands finally rested upon the bowed heads of those parents who had brought him to God's Altar, returning the child they had received from the Creator back to Him.

Sadly, some parents consider a vocation in the family to be a social calamity. Maybe in truth they do not directly crush the desire for a more sublime life, which God has sowed in the hearts of their children, but they give it no encouragement. They speak of the advantages of different professions, the lustre of having a good profession, the glory of succeeding in life, forgetting Saint Vincent de Paul's maxim: "There is no greater labour on earth than to form a Priest"; and forgetting that no calling is nobler or more honourable than to labour for the salvation of souls as Christ's ambassador. That being so, it is no surprise that so few young hearts are inflamed by this holy ambition, the noblest of all: the longing to serve the King of kings, to aspire to the indescribable dignity of the Priesthood.

An admirable example: Mrs. Vaughan, mother of the Cardinal Primate of England who died in 1903, spent one hour each night for twenty years praying for all her children to become religious; so that her five daughters entered convents, four of her sons became Bishops and two others, Priests. Are there no fathers and mothers left capable of encouraging their children to choose the grandest life of all, to serve the King of kings, battling for precious souls and spreading Christ's Kingdom; or is this to be ignored and never spoken of?



The great Swiss Cardinal Mermillod once wrote: "Christian women! Does divine love no longer burn sufficiently in your mothers' hearts so that your sighs form a Priestly heart? Oh! ask God that your families may give children to the Church; but ask Him, in turn, that you have the courage to make the sacrifice, and that precisely from you be born an apostle to speak to men of God, to enlighten the world, to serve at the Altar. Is that not for sure a grand and magnificent destiny?"

Including couples who do not have the blessing of a child can do much to help find recruits for God's wonderful army. A few simple words addressed to the soul of a boy can be the means to sow the seed of a vocation in his heart, moving him to think of what he too might become one day.

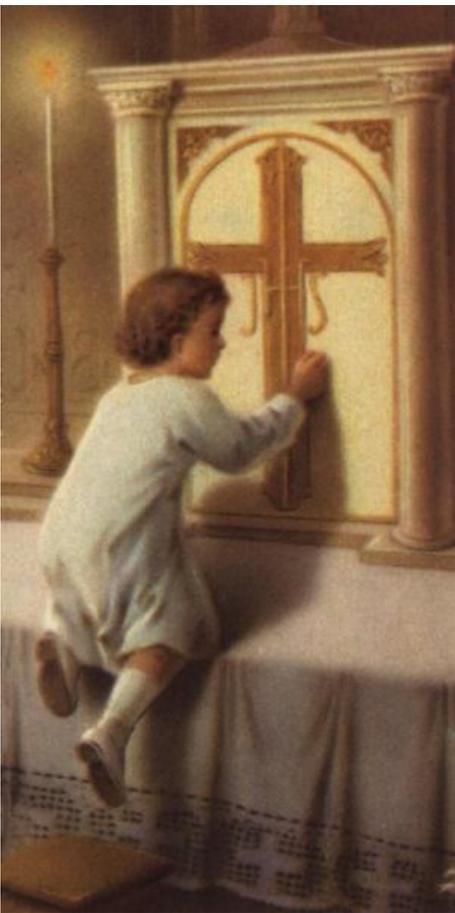
Over a hundred years ago, a wealthy Catholic lady devoted her life to the noble work of educating poor boys for the Priesthood. In a single year she helped three hundred and five seminarians, and in thirty years spent her vast fortune on the education of hundreds of Priests, many of whom would never have been able to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries were it not for her generosity and sacrifice. Even in this world she reaped her reward: "My young Chinese Priest baptized 1500 pagan children in the first year of his ministry. Owing to previous neglect by parents, the majority of them died shortly after baptism and went straight to Heaven. And these 1500 children, snatched from Satan, are only part of the fruits of his first year's labour as a Priest."

To give a son to God and to His work may be a sacrifice for a father or a mother, but no joy on earth can be compared to that of parents when they see, standing at the Altar, with the God of all holiness in his hands, the young man who owes his life, his everything, to them. Only they can understand the depth of feeling in the following letter, written by a mother the morning her son offered his first Mass:

"Bless God with me; I am now the mother of a Priest. When I gave birth to a son twenty-four years ago, you remember how I was almost overcome by the intensity of my joy. I saw him living at my side, I stretched out my hand to the cradle to assure myself that my dream, come true in flesh, was truly nestling there. How different, how loftier is the joy that fills my soul today with feelings never before experienced! Those hands, so tiny twenty-four years ago when I kissed them so fondly, are now consecrated hands, destined to hold the Bread of Life. That intellect, which through me received its light, is now set apart for God's service. That body, which I nursed and cared for, and underwent many sleepless nights when sickness sought to snatch him away, that body is now consecrated; it is the servant of the soul of a Priest, which will be spent in restoring life to sinners, teaching the ignorant, dispensing the Lord Himself to all who seek Him. That heart, that virgin heart, which has touched no other heart save mine, is now sacred. When God leads a wayward sinner across his path, how well will he know what words are best to strengthen that person and bring him back to the truth. Yes, he will go about doing good; he will be a Priest according to Jesus' Heart. There he stood, tall and serious. There was something glorious in his presence. I was not far from the sanctuary. Enraptured at what I saw, I dared not move. Presently I saw him kneel before the Sacred Host, and I seemed to hear his thoughts. I could not pray, but only stammer: 'Almighty God, I thank Thee, I thank Thee. This Priest was mine. I formed

him. His soul was kindled from my soul. He is no longer mine. He is Thine. Keep him from every shadow of evil. He is of the earth, earthly; save him from ever offending Thee. Almighty God, I love Thee, I love him, I reverence him: he is Thy Priest.' At Holy Communion, the altar boy saw me come and recited the Confiteor; the Celebrant turned to me and raised his hand; it was the absolution for his mother. My son! He sobbed, I believe; then he took the ciborium and headed towards me. What a union! God, His Priest, and I. Did I pray? I know not. A strange peace took hold of my soul, overflowing with love and gratitude. My God, and my son! I am almost too happy. There have been sweet days in my life, but this it the happiest of them all. For the first time I have an idea of how we will spend the unending instant of eternity with God."

The story of the holy picture in the booklet 'Good Communions!' is interesting. The boy René asked his mother: "But, mother, is Jesus really there behind that little golden door? Doesn't He ever go away? Doesn't He ever get tired? Is He never hungry or sleepy? And how did He get in there?" Two big eyes, full of eager questioning, gazed up at his mother's face, as if fearful that the story of Jesus, dwelling in the Tabernacle, might not really be true. "Mother, how did He get in there?" The lady smiled with pleasure at seeing how deeply her words had sunk into the heart of her little son, five years old; and lifting him up in her arms, as she sat before the altar in her castle chapel, she explained to him the mysteries of the Holy Sacrifice and the



wonders of the Real Presence. The child listened eagerly while she told him about those whom God had chosen to be His Priests, and of the power He had granted to them, and to them alone, of bringing the great God down from Heaven to live among us on earth. She told him all that a Priest could do; how he could wash away every sin and raise the dead soul back to life; restore peace and happiness to the broken-hearted; change the bread and wine at Mass into the living Body of Christ, and bear Him in his hands to be food for the rest. "The holy Priest does all that, René, and it is he who places dear Jesus in the Tabernacle that you may go to Him and ask Him all you wish. He is always glad to see you come to visit Him; He will never grow weary of your company and perhaps, if you ask Him, René, some day you too might become one of His Priests, and be able to hold Him in your consecrated hands." Passing by the Chapel late that night, the mother noticed the door ajar and, looking in, saw her little boy standing on the altar steps. The light of the sanctuary lamp shone upon his curly head, while, with a look of mingled awe and eager expectation on his face, he stretched out his chubby hands towards the Tabernacle and whispered: "Jesus, are you there? Mother says You are; but Jesus, is it really true?" With throbbing heart, the mother stood rooted to the spot, while she watched her little René bring up a chair and climb onto the Altar. "He must be asleep", he murmured, "I'll wake Him up." Tap, tap, tap, upon the Tabernacle door. The child paused, bending forwards to hear an answer. Tap, tap. "O Jesus", he cried, with a sob of disappointment, "I am so sorry that You are asleep, for I wanted to ask You to make me a holy Priest. I want so much to be a Priest so that I might hold you in my arms and kiss Your little Face as

often as I please. Good night, now, dear Jesus; but when You are awake tomorrow, I will come back to You again, for I do want, oh so much! to be a holy Priest one day." René was right in his eagerness, for the noblest ambition that can fill the heart of any boy is the desire to be one of God's holy Priests.

In our churches are kept the Sacred Vessels for the service of the Altar. They are guarded with zealous care, for their anointing with Holy Oils has given them sacred character; never again will they be profane, their contact with the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ has imparted to them something of His holiness. A Priest's body is also a vessel of holiness, set apart for the service of the Altar, blessed by the laying on of the Bishop's hands, consecrated by the holy oil of his ordination, separated from human love and earthly pleasures by a solemn vow of Chastity. Around that frail but sacred body, the Almighty has thrown His protecting arms, and thunders His woes against any violator so that no one touch the Lord's anointed, for He has separated him from others so that he be entirely His. The Priest has to be holy, innocent, immaculate, separated from sinners and strive hard to be worthy to serve God.

A most solemn moment in the Ordination ceremony is when the candidate kneels on the Altar steps and stretches out his hands to be anointed. He will lift up those sacred hands to bless the innocent and absolve the sinner, pour out the waters of Baptism upon the newborn babe, bless the sacred bonds of Matrimony and anoint the body of the dying Christian to prepare him for his journey to eternity. Often they will join in prayer and be outstretched before the throne of the Altar in silent supplication for the souls of men; their secret power will break the chains of sin, drive the spirits of darkness down into Hell and hold back the offended God's wrath from the wicked world. The hands of each Priest are sacred and holy: not only can they bless, absolve and strengthen, but they can also hold and touch the living Body of the Lord.

"See upon the hills the feet of One who bears the Gospel, and announces peace." Such are the feet of the messenger of God's love, ever ready to hasten to the bedside of the sick and dying, bringing hope and consolation, forgiveness and reconciliation to sinners. In the morning they go to God's Altar to offer the daily Sacrifice; they turn from the Tabernacle to the seat of mercy, the Confessional; night and day they hurry through the streets and byways of our cities, across the valleys and up the mountainside, whether hot or cold, or damp and rainy, for souls are ever crying out for the consolation they bring. Like the Master's feet, they are often weary in the pursuit of sinners, seeking out the lost sheep of the House of Israel; but the sound of their coming means salvation to God's beloved children, snatching them away from the fires of Hell. With these thoughts in mind, Saint Catherine of Siena used to throw herself on her knees and kiss the footprints of Priests on their mission of peace and mercy.

Holy too are the lips of the Priest, empowered to utter words no other man may speak. Holy lips, dedicated to singing God's praises and to interceding for mankind. Lips which speak in God's name to forgive the sins of the dying and assure them that they can appear in all confidence before their Maker. Holy lips, whose mission is to sanctify, to forgive and to console; whose commands the Lord of Hosts obeys! Always making earth brighter and Heaven closer by the marvellous power He has given them from on high!

Holy eyes which are closed to earthly things, since they must look so often upon the ravishing beauty of the Consecrated Host; eyes which meet the pure gaze of the Hidden God day after day during Mass. Holy ears, the trusted friend of countless souls, to whom are confided secrets none other may hear, into which are poured the sins, the sorrows, the miseries of the human heart, thus to lighten a little the crushing burden of earth's weary pilgrimage.

He is a Priest forever, set apart from the world to offer up the Holy Sacrifice for sins. As the ordaining Bishop lays his hands upon the head bowed before him, Christ stamps the soul of the Priest with His mysterious mark or indelible Character. The Ministers of God's Church bear, graven in their souls, the Sign of Ordination, which can never be effaced. In the eyes of God and His Heavenly Court he is no longer a man, a sinful child of Adam, but "another Christ".

"Were I to meet an Angel and a Priest," said Saint Francis of Assisi, "I would salute the Priest before the Angel." *Tu es Sacerdos in aeternum*: "Thou art a Priest forever," is written in his soul. Forever a Priest of the Most High with power over the Almighty. Forever, whether a saint on earth or wallowing in sin, whether glorious in Heaven or burning in Hell, "marked and sealed and signed" as God's most precious treasure which no earthly hand may touch. Yes, René was right: "Dear Jesus, I want to be a holy Priest," for there is no earthly career more glorious, none more honourable, than the life of those who are called to serve at the Altar and save souls.

Let us turn our thoughts back to the days of Our Lord, to the time when the meek Saviour lived amongst men. Out on the lonely mountain top with bowed Head and uplifted hands, the Divine Redeemer spends the night kneeling in prayer so that His Heavenly Father's blessing may come down upon the work He is about to do. And when day was come, He called His disciples, and He chose twelve of them whom He also named Apostles. Lovingly the Saviour must have looked upon the little band, for they were to be His Priests, the first ministers of the New Law He had come from Heaven to establish. They were only poor, rough fishermen, but armed with the divine commission to "teach and baptize," each of the twelve would carry their Master's name to the ends of the earth. To them He would give a power not possessed by the mighty angels, power "to bind and to loose," and to change bread and wine into His own Body and Blood.

"You have not chosen Me," He said, as He saw the shrinking humility of His astonished followers, "rather I have chosen you", for an honour and dignity unknown to the world before. "I shall no longer call you servants...But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father."

“You are the salt of the earth”, to season men’s lives with the savour of holiness; “you are the light of the world” to lead every straying soul to Me. Deeply conscious of his own great unworthiness, his faults and failings, many though they be, the Priest can never forget the excellence of his calling and that he is the elect of God. “I, who am God, have chosen you,” rings in his ears as others greet him. That “I have chosen you” makes him the welcome guest in every home, gives him the place of honour wherever he goes, while, should he be unmindful of the favours he has received, the uncovered head and reverence of those he knows bring home to him that others see in him the Priest, not a sinful man, but Christ’s dear friend, chosen for a holy work.

Saint Martin of Tours was once dining at the table of Emperor Maximus, in company with all the dignitaries of the court. Filling his goblet with wine, the emperor presented it to the Saint, asking him to bear it to the most distinguished guest in the banquet hall. Saint Martin rose, and passing by the princes and nobles of the royal suite laid the goblet before his chaplain, exclaiming: “Who is more worthy of this honour than a Priest of Jesus Christ?”



“A higher task than that of Priesthood,” a philosopher once wrote, “was allotted to no man! Is it not a towering honour therein to spend and to be spent!”

God has always willed to be adored by sacrifices. Abel offered him the most select among the firstborn of his flock, burning the victim, immolated as a holocaust pleasing to God. Noah, in thanksgiving for having been delivered from the Flood, built an Altar to the Lord; and so in every age the “sweet odour of sacrifice” daily ascended before God’s throne until, with Christ’s coming, Malachias’ prophecy was finally fulfilled: “in every place a pure offering is sacrificed and offered to My Name,” the adorable Sacrifice of Calvary repeated at Holy Mass. This is the Priest’s great work: to offer the Holy Sacrifice of Mass.

Sacrifice, which is a solemn public act of adoration, offered up in the name and for the good of the people, is an act of religion which can solely be performed by someone who has been specially chosen, called and empowered to discharge the office of sacrificer; therefore there can be no sacrifice without the Priesthood.

The Priest goes up every day to the Altar of Sacrifice, for the greatest and most tremendous of mysteries, to perform the office of mediator between the Creator and His creatures. The sins of the world clamour to Heaven for vengeance, but the Priest, the man whom God has chosen to place between Himself and the wicked

world, has the power to hold back the enraged arm of Divine Justice and obtain pardon and mercy for the sinner.

An eminent Irish Judge, who heard Mass every day in his own oratory before leaving for the law courts, was accustomed to show his chaplain every mark of respect and esteem. With his own hands he poured the water over the Priest’s fingers, holding the towel for him to wipe them; he helped him to put on the sacred vestments, served the Mass himself, and in many other ways strove to impress upon those present the dignity of his chaplain. “When I am in court,” he once said, “I always bear in mind that I am the representative of his Majesty the King, and I expect and demand that all should remember to show me the honour due to my rank; a Priest is the Ambassador of Christ, the King of kings, and therefore still more worthy of all the honour we can pay him.”

Ambassador of Christ! A glorious title, his! As Ambassador, sent by the King of Heaven and Earth to bring His message of peace and good will to all men; a Liberator, with power to break the chains of Hell and set free the souls held captive by the fetters of sin; a Consoler, bearing the balm of consolation to bleeding hearts, restoring happiness by the certainty of forgiveness; the Representative of God Himself, raised up to continue His divine work: “All power has been given Me in Heaven and on Earth. Go throughout the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. Go, then, and teach all peoples... Whoever hears you, hears Me; and whoever despises you, despises Me... See, I am with you all days until the consummation of the world”.

Is it any wonder, then, that a certain saint, to whom God had granted the favour of seeing his Guardian Angel in bodily form, noticed on the morning of his Ordination that the Angel, who had always gone before him, then walked behind. The Heavenly Court had seen the marvellous change wrought in the soul by the laying on of hands, though hidden from human eyes.

“I can rule the bodies of men,” exclaimed Napoleon, “but the kingship of a Priest is over souls; what dignity can equal that!”

Raised up and chosen by God to be His earthly representative, the guardian and protector of the Flock of Christ, a Priest is fitted for his lofty calling by the plenitude of grace poured out upon him by the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and given powers the magnitude of which he can scarcely realize.

And what to say of the miracle of Holy Mass. “There are now many Priests ordained,” says Saint Thomas of Kempis, “and Christ is offered up in diverse places.” Custom has made the Holy Sacrifice to be no longer considered a wonder, but if Our Lord had not said it, who would have dared to “do this in commemoration” of Him?



To prepare for the first Mass ever offered to God, the Sacrifice of His own beloved Son, many things were needed. Thousands of years of prayer and longing for the promised Redeemer had to pass by; the slaying of the Paschal Lamb, with its mysterious rites and ceremonies; the Birth of the Virgin Mother, with Her Soul beautified with every virtue to fit Her for Her glorious mission. Then came the thirty years of hidden life, the betrayal, the mocking and the scourging, till the innocent, bleeding Victim was finally immolated on the Altar of the Cross.

The bread and wine, the consecrated stone, a Priest, are all that is needed now, for “at any moment it is in his power with holy words to call the Lord of Glory down to earth, to bless Him with his lips, to hold Him in his hands, to receive Him into his mouth, and to distribute Him to the faithful, while at the same time the Angels stand about him in reverent awe to honour Him who is sacrificed.”

“The power of the Priest,” exclaims Saint Bernardine of Sienna, “can be compared to the power of the Blessed Virgin; Mary brought the Son of God once only into this world, the Priest can do so daily.”

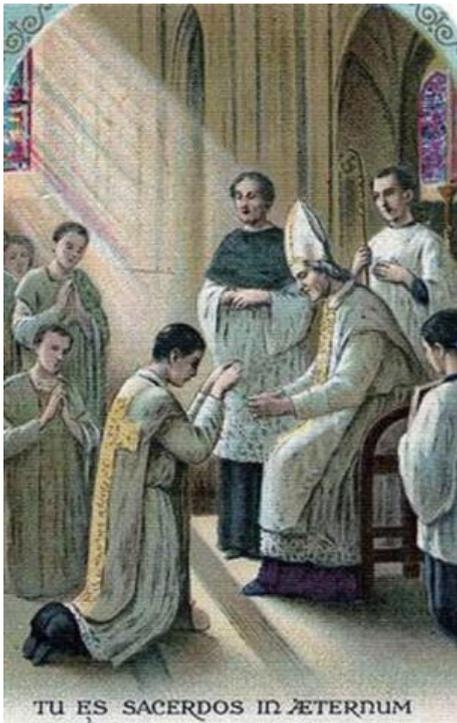
“All that you loose on Earth will be loosed as well in Heaven.”

Not content with humbly submitting Himself to the will of the Priest, God has given him the right to sit in judgment on the sins of men and release them from the debt they owe to His offended Majesty.

“Go, show yourselves to the Priest,” He said, which means: “he is My representative on earth, holding in his hands the power of God. No matter what your sins may be, no matter how numerous, or repeated times without number, he has only to forgive you, and then so do I. His authority, his right to forgive, is absolute, for I have said to him: “All that you bind on Earth, will be bound as well in Heaven; and all that you loose on Earth will be loosed as well in Heaven.”

Confident in that promise, for “God is faithful and cannot deceive,” the poor sinner kneels at his confessor’s feet. He knows that he is not speaking to an ordinary man but to “another Christ” and humbly but trustfully pours into his ear the secrets of his soul. His life has been a sad record of sin and shame. God’s love has been scorned, His mercy abused; crime and iniquity heaped up till his sins were more numerous than the sands on the sea shore. He has hurled the thunderbolt of destruction at himself; he is stripped of every particle of sanctifying grace and merit; the supernatural virtue of charity is gone, the Holy Ghost with His gifts has withdrawn, while at his feet yawns the bottomless pit of Hell for all eternity. What he has said in confession no one will ever know; sorrow fills his heart, he hears the words: “I absolve you of your sins,” and the hideous load of sin drops from his soul forever. Back hastens the Holy Ghost to His earthly temple, driving out the Powers of Darkness; grace and merit lost by sin are restored; the gates of Hell are closed; and the soul so recently God’s enemy, sealed with the sign of damnation, is once again His child, heir to the Kingdom of Heaven.

There have been some saints who have raised the dead to life, making the dead body live again, though one day it must crumble into dust; yet the miracle performed by the Priest is far greater, for he restores a dead soul, worthy of eternal damnation, and gives her the life of grace which, if not lost by sin, will win the person eternal life.



“Oh! Father,” exclaimed an officer as he finished his confession, “tell the world there is no happiness to be compared to that which I have found here at your feet. God has given me riches and glory. I have never refused myself any of the false pleasures and joys of passion, but all is nothing beside the joy of this day, the happiness of forgiveness.”

“Do You not know,” said Pilate, “that I have power to crucify You, and that I have power to set You free?” Jesus, however, replied: “You would not have any power over Me if it had not been given to you from above”. Conscious of the great powers bestowed on him at Ordination, the minister of God well knows that they are “given to him from above,” for the spiritual help of the flock entrusted to his care. To him they bring the little ones so that the waters of Baptism may make them God’s children; he alone can break the chains of sin and give back the Wedding Garment of grace. Were he taken from the world, the Mass must cease, and without Mass the bonds of communication between God and mankind would be sundered; Christ would no longer come down from His throne of glory, and the Tabernacle, divine prison where His living Body has lain concealed for centuries, would be left empty.

To the Priest is given the joyous task of preparing the Eucharistic Banquet, of sharing out the Bread of Life and feeding with the Food of Angels the souls of those who hunger for love. His hand can bless the marriage bond, heal the sick body by the holy unction, and strengthen the departing soul, absolved and comforted, on the way to Paradise. To him are even given the “Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven”. His power reaches out beyond the grave, for the power of “binding or loosing” means that what he approves in the tribunal of penance is ratified up above in the tribunal of Eternal Justice.

How little the world thinks of the Priest of God! How little it realizes all it owes to him: the chastisement for sin he has warded off, the graces he has won for others, the solace he has been to weary hearts, the souls he has saved from Hell. The Priest goes on his way, despised and hated by the worldly, his faults and failings often magnified, as if he were not a man of flesh and blood; but the power of God goes with him, the Grace of God envelopes him, while he receives love, respect and reverence from those who know all that they owe to the humble Priest, ambassador of Christ on earth.

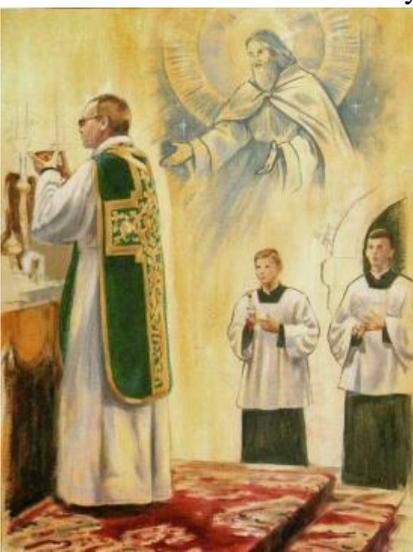
Armed with the weapons of his sacred calling, the Priest is ever an instrument for good; and if besides he is strengthened by the power of great personal holiness, he becomes indeed a terror to Hell.

In the little village Ars, near Lyons, lived and died a simple French Curé. He had none of the great gifts which the world looks for in her famous men. So deficient was he in learning that his Bishop hesitated to ordain him, and he did not shine for his talent or eloquence. Yet the holy Curé of Ars possessed a marvellous, secret power over men, the power of personal holiness. For the last thirty years his life never varied. At midnight, after a sleep of only three hours, he entered his confessional, where for eighteen hours he absolved and consoled the hundred thousand pilgrims who annually came to Ars. He revelled in austerities and humiliations, he hungered for prayer, winning souls to God and converting the most hardened sinners by the example of his heroic life and by the graces of his sanctity.

Francis Xavier was a saintly Priest too, and thus in ten short years was able to plant the standard of the Cross in fifty-two kingdoms and baptize, with his own hand, over a million pagans. The famous Cardinal Perronne used to say: “If learning only were needed to refute the calvinists, I should hope to bring it about; but in order to convert them, one must send them to the saintly Francis de Sales.” Holiness in anyone is a mighty force for good, but priestly holiness has a power which charms all men, terrifies Hell, and wins the Heart of God.

“To save souls” is an expression often on the lips of many people, but how few give a thought to all that lies hidden in those words! To save a life is an act of heroism which wins the admiration of everyone; to save an immortal soul and give it back to God, passes unnoticed in the world.

Some years ago in a city, a fire broke out in a ground storey warehouse of a building in whose upper storey there were living quarters, with such



rapidity that, in a few moments, the whole building was a blazing furnace. The inmates had barely time to save their lives, and a sigh of relief went up from the crowd which had gathered at the spectacle when it became known that all had got out safely. But suddenly a cry of horror burst from the crowd and every eye was turned to the top window, where a little boy of ten, with pallid face and terror-stricken eyes, was seen vainly striving to tear down the iron bars of the window. Piteously he stretched forth his hands, screaming for help, while the red tongues of fire, which would soon wrap round him in their fiery embrace, crept higher and higher.

Brave men rushed forward to enter that furnace in a mad effort to save the child, but were held back by others no less brave, who knew it was madness to enter the building now. "The stairs are burning," they cried, "at any moment the roof may fall in. God help the poor child, his sufferings will soon be over!"

One moment more and a fireman dashed into the burning building, right into the roaring flames. A death-like silence fell on the crowd; strong men's faces turned ghastly white, for none expected to see that hero again. Then, from every throat a cry of relief arose, for there at the window, the boy safely clasped in his arms, stood the gallant fireman. Quickly the escape ladder was run up, and in a few seconds rescued and rescuer stood safely on the ground, just as the blazing roof fell in with a tremendous crash.

It was a noble act, and all hearts admiringly acclaimed the nameless hero; yet, after all, what had he done? He had saved a boy's life; he had given the lad a few more short years to spend in this poor world, which, at its best, is but a Vale of Tears. Yet what is this in comparison to saving an immortal soul? To save a soul! What does that mean? It means rescuing some poor creature from the never-ending, everlasting pains of Hell, from the flames of the bottomless Pit, and giving him in exchange the unspeakable bliss of Heaven for all eternity. What comparison can there be between the two? If it is a noble and praiseworthy act to save a life, which can last but a few short years, what must we think of snatching a soul from endless misery? How content we should feel if, when we come to die, we could say, "There is one soul in Heaven now who would have been in Hell if it were not for me." What comfort would such a thought be to a dying man, with what confidence would he go before the Judgment Seat, if he could look back and say that in his life on earth he had helped to save just one immortal soul.

Who can measure all that a holy and zealous Priest does for the salvation of souls? Sometimes God gives him the happiness of absolving a dying sinner, literally snatching him at the last moment from the clutches of the demon, but most of his glorious work is hidden from his eyes. Still he goes bravely on, fighting the never-ending battle for the people who die daily, knowing well the infinite value of his Masses, the all-saving power of the Most Precious Blood he offers up for sinners, and how easy it is for a Priest to win from the Sacred Heart of Christ mercy and forgiveness for the souls He died to save.

It is moving to recall the ardent sigh that burst from the lips of Saint Francis Xavier shortly before dying, as he gazed upon the population he longed to evangelize: "Souls, souls! O God, give me souls!" The cry today is: "Priests, Priests! send us Priests!" for the harvest is waiting, but there are none to gather it in.

"What Christ did and suffered," says Père Grou, S.J., "He would have endured for the salvation of even a single soul. The salvation of a soul is, then, the price of the Blood of God, the price of the death of God, the price of the greatest sacrifice which Christ could possibly make, which proves that the value of a soul is beyond all understanding." Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi said: "If you were only to see the beauty of a soul, you would be so deeply enamoured of her that you would do nothing else but ask God for souls".

Knowing well the power of a Priest, the devil, "the enemy of the human race," strives might and main to choke the seeds of a vocation, and stifle the holy aspiration in the hearts of those who hope to stand one day at the Altar, because they spoil the work of Hell in the destruction of souls.

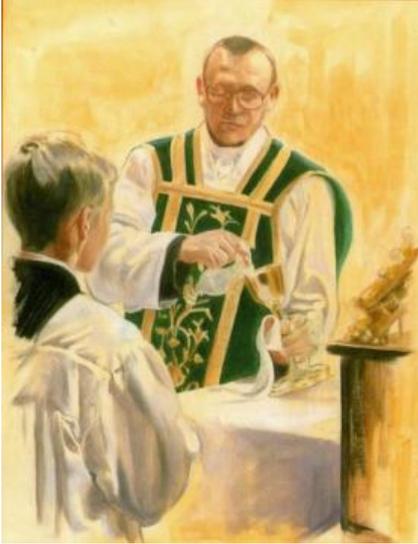
Many generous souls have felt their courage sink and their resolution waver on thinking of the immense responsibilities the Priest bears on his shoulders.

They consider, and rightly, that the power conferred on a man by way of Ordination and the dignity he receives are tremendous, and that "from everyone to whom much has been given much shall be demanded." They think of the purity of heart and hand, the holiness of life, the shining example of every virtue expected from the guardians of the Holy of Holies. They realize that the care of souls is a heavy burden, a charge not to be rashly undertaken and that, though priestly ordination bestows a vocation on a man, it does not follow that all are suited for the Priesthood. This can be seen in the case of Judas, of whom the Lord said: "It would be better for that man not to have been born."

Nonetheless, this conceals a clever snare of the evil spirit, which must be met by great confidence in the goodness of Him Who will never refuse His help to those whom He has chosen to do His work. "God never

calls,” says Saint Bernardine, “without, at the same time, giving to those whom He calls sufficient grace for the attainment of the end to which they are called.”

Though the dangers of the priestly calling are not few, its helps and safeguards are many. Temptations known only to the Priest himself spring up from the most unexpected quarters. He must tread warily to avoid the pitfalls set for his feet; he must be ready for dangers to soul and body; he knows that he can find himself “in danger from cities, in danger from desert, in danger at sea, in danger from false brethren,” and, above all, be prepared to struggle on in the battles born of the envy and hatred of Satan, desirous of sifting him like



wheat. Yet through it all the Priest remembers that Christ has prayed for him as well that his faith might not fail, which braces his courage for the fight, and strengthened by the grace which comes from Holy Mass, the recital of the Holy Penitential Rosary, and the fulfilment of his sacred duties, he rests secure, trusting in his Master’s promise.

Not a few are turned away from God’s service by a distrust of their own ability, or the fear of never being able to acquire the learning required in a Priest. In the acquisition of knowledge the swift do not always win the race; rather patient, plodding perseverance will do the same work more effectively than the erratic flights of the intellectual. Experience shows that solid judgment with modest attainments is far more serviceable to religion than brilliant talents combined with practical deficiencies. Occasions for the display of genius are rare; opportunities for the exercise of mother-wit and discretion occur at every hour. The Church has recently given the title of

Great Doctor to one who was so wanting in talent and capacity for study, that his superiors advised him, several times, to leave the seminary. Even as a Priest the Holy Curé of Ars often spoke of the labour and pain the preparation of his sermons cost him, calling it the greatest trial of his life. Yet no one was more frequently consulted in difficult cases, for his answers were full of sound common sense and of the heavenly wisdom he found in prayer.

When all else fails, the devil transforms himself into an angel of light, and plays the part of the humble devotee. He fills the soul of the young aspirant with a sense of his own unworthiness for such an exalted calling, because of his inclination to sin, recalling to his mind the failings of his early days, the times he yielded to temptation, and how lacking he is, even now, in solid virtue and holiness.

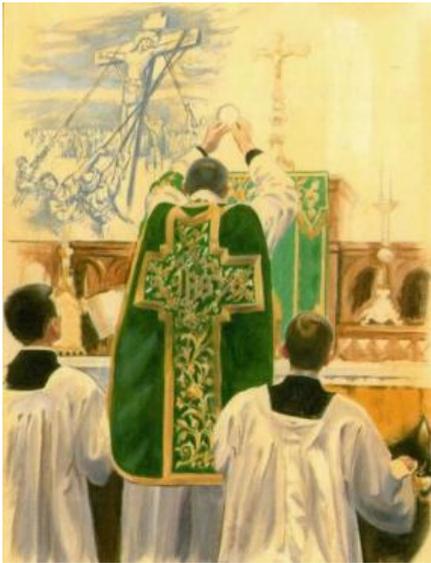
To those who have contracted the habit of some sin, the warning of Almighty God to Moses may be fittingly applied: “Do not come up close, ... because the place where you are is holy ground.” The handling of the God of Purity is not for them, until at least they can give abundant proof of being pure in hand and clean of heart.”

Still this does not mean that a sinful past life need bar a man from Ordination. Saint Peter, Saint Augustine, and many other holy penitents offended God deeply, yet He did not refuse to number them among His chosen ones. As Cardinal Manning very truly says: “There are two kinds of men who are called by Our Lord to be His Priests. The first are the innocent. The second are the penitents. The antecedents of the two kinds widely differ, but their end is one and the same. They go up to the Altar by very different paths; yet they meet before it in one mind and heart, conformed to the perfection of the great Eternal High Priest.”

To know whether God calls you to the religious life, do not expect God Himself to appear to you or send an angel from Heaven to make known His will. Nor is it necessary that a dozen or more learned men examine to see whether you should follow the vocation or not. It is necessary, however, to respond to the first movement of the inspiration and cultivate it. Nor does it matter much from what source the inspiration comes. The Lord makes use of many means to call His servants. Sometimes it is a sermon; at others a good book. Some, as Saint Anthony and Saint Francis, were called on hearing the words of the Gospel. Others were moved to leave the world and enter religion by the troubles and afflictions they had to bear. Persons who come to God moved by the sufferings they have had in the world, sometimes become greater saints than those who enter religion with an apparently more secure vocation, because they give themselves to God with their whole heart, their whole soul and their whole will.

It happened that a gallant and elegant cleric from a noble family was riding a spirited horse one day and making a show and demonstration of his horsemanship, doing all he could to appear to advantage before those who saw him. At the moment he went by performing at his best, the horse suddenly threw him from the saddle and he landed in a pool of sludge. Confused and ashamed he rose from the ground with his clothes,

hair and face plastered with mud. He had become a sorry sight before all the people there who laughed, mocked him and cracked jokes at his expense. The young man was so covered with confusion that he resolved there and then to leave the world with its amusements, worldly friendships and longing for grandeur: "Treacherous world!" he exclaimed, "you have made fun of me, so I will make fun of you. You have played a trick on me. I will play one back on you. No more will I feel at peace with you, and right now I resolve to forsake you and become a friar." And, in fact, he entered the Dominican Order and led a life of great fervour and holiness. He drew attention for his humility and apostolic zeal: a blazing furnace was enclosed in his heart, so that he preached the Word of God with fire, leaving everyone who saw him astonished at the ardour which burst from his lips and for the austerity of life accompanying him. The Church now honours him with the name of Saint Telmo.



In 1540, in Rome, Cardinal Farnesio had a gracious page with a cheerful and lively character. On a solemn occasion, his unthinking temperament led him to resent the action of another page, and at once a brawl began. The stately procession fell into disorder, and the eminent Cardinal felt dishonoured. The thirteen-year-old page, Peter de Ribadeneira, foreseeing what was coming his way, did not wait for events and fled. Not knowing where to go, he thought of someone who was everybody's friend, Ignatius of Loyola, and with dirty face, torn lace and feather drooping he went up to him. Saint Ignatius received him with open arms, and placed him among the novices. Poor Peter had a difficult time in the noviciate, since his caprices and rowdiness always brought him difficulties. But when grave Fathers frowned and novices were scandalized, Peter was always sure of Saint Ignatius' sympathy and forgiveness, who in the end felt pleased to see the boy become an extraordinarily capable religious, learned and virtuous. Peter's vocation was occasioned by his brawl, surely no favourable beginning; but he was always thankful that when he had asked Ignatius for entry, he was not rejected nor was he made to wait until he was older and more serious.

Saint Peter of Alcántara found it necessary to flee from his mother's home when he sought to enter a monastery and become a religious. In his flight he had to cross a river which he could not ford. He recommended himself to God and instantly found himself transported to the other bank of the river.

When the Saints felt moved to abandon the world, they left their homes without their families' knowing. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Philip Neri and Saint Louis Beltrán all acted thus. And it is recorded that God has shown even with miracles how agreeable these glorious flights are to Him.

Saint Stanislaus Kostka likewise fled from home without his father's leave. His brother took a carriage and set out after him in great haste. When about to overtake the young saint, the horses that drew the carriage suddenly refused to take one step further, in spite of violent urging. Only when they had turned back to the city did they begin to gallop at full speed.

The case of Blessed Oringa of Waldrano, in Tuscany, is famous. Against her wishes, her father had promised to give her in marriage to a young man. She fled from her parents' home in order to consecrate herself to God. Coming to the River Arno, she prayed to God for help. In an instant the water divided and formed two walls as though of glass, allowing her to pass between them without even wetting her feet.

It would seem that under no circumstances does the evil spirit use more formidable weapons than when there is a question of preventing those who are called to the religious state from carrying out their resolution.

The most dangerous enemies of an aspirant to the religious life maybe those of his own household. Saint Ambrose asks if it is right that a maiden should have less liberty to choose God Himself for Spouse than to choose a young man from the world. To a housewife who opposes her son's religious vocation, it could be said: "You married, and you did well. If they had tried to force you to enter a convent, would you have done so?"

In the life of Father Paul Segneri, we read that his mother, though much given to prayer, left no means untried to prevent her son from entering the religious state. Likewise in the life of Mgr. Cavalieri, we find that his father, a man of great piety and virtue, refused to allow him to enter a religious congregation and even went so far as to bring a suit against him in the ecclesiastical court, though without success. How many fathers and how many mothers, despite being devout and very prayerful, in such cases forget their prayer and their piety, and act as though they were envoys of the devil! Confounded by passion and their own interests,

without the least consideration they exhaust themselves and invent a thousand pretexts and excuses to obstruct their children's vocation. For Hell wages war without quarter and uses every means at its disposal to prevent those called by God to the religious life from putting their plans into practice. For that reason it is prudent to conceal your decision from friends who, if they do not actually counsel the contrary, will have no scruples or qualms in publishing your secret; by which the course you are contemplating will become known to others who will try to dissuade you.

The faithful need Priests to be able to benefit from the Holy Sacraments, which are the channels for the graces poured out through Holy Mass. And as Palmarian Morals states: "Without the Sacraments, supernatural life is not possible in the Church. For the Priest is the Mystical Heart which gives life and strength to the Church by way of Holy Mass, transmitting Graces by means of the Sacraments, which are the arteries which bear the life-giving Blood out to Christ's whole Mystical Body. The seven Sacraments are the all-sublime founts which perform the sacred mission of supernaturally feeding and giving life to the militant members of Christ's Mystical Body." Priests are the light of the world: "For, by Baptism, the Priest gives birth to new children of the Light; in Confirmation, he enlightens them further; by Penance, he rescues them from darkness, transforming them again into children of Light; at Communion, he gives them the Light itself to be their nourishment; in Extreme Unction, he comforts them for entering the Kingdom of Light; by Priestly Orders, he empowers those called to this Sacrament to become spreaders of the Light; and in Matrimony he sanctifies the union which is to multiply those subjects capable of the Light."

The lack of Priests hurts the whole world, especially Palmarian faithful who cannot receive the Sacraments with greater frequency because we no longer have enough Missionaries: only one for the whole of North and South America; only one to attend Ireland, Great Britain, the Philippines and New Zealand. Owing to the lack of Priests, Palmarian faithful cannot always be vivified and fortified by Sanctifying Grace received in the Sacrament of Confession, thus to regain peace of conscience; and cannot receive Holy Communion with due frequency for increase of Grace, greater union with God and as food for their souls. As you know, without the supernatural nourishment of the Holy Eucharist, man cannot persevere for long in the state of grace.

"Alas, alas, for those who die without fulfilling their mission!, who were called to be holy, and lived in sin; who were called to worship Christ, and who plunged into this giddy and unbelieving world; who were called to fight, and remained idle. Alas for those who have had gifts and talents, and have not used, or misused, or abused them! The world goes on from age to age, but the holy Angels and blessed Saints are ever weeping, 'alas, alas, woe, woe', over the loss of vocations, and the frustration of hopes, and the scorn of God's love, and the ruin of souls." Thus spoke Saint John Henry Newman.

"Good Master, what must I do to obtain eternal life?" That was the eager question of one whom fortune had blessed with the riches of this world, but who realized that eternal life was a far more precious treasure. He had gone up to the Divine Master to know what he had yet to do to assure himself of the great reward for which he was striving. He was young and wealthy, well-to-do in this world, one whose life had been without stain or blemish, for he had kept the commandments from his childhood.

Jesus gazed at him with pleasure, for his was a soul dear to the Sacred Heart, and told him: "One thing only remains if you want to be perfect: Go, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you shall have a treasure in Heaven; and then come and follow Me." There was a painful pause: nature and grace were struggling for mastery; the invitation had been given, the road to perfection pointed out. There was only one sacrifice needed to make him a true disciple, but it was a big one, too big for him who had just seemed so generous. Deeply afflicted, the youth hesitated, wavered, and then sadly turned away, with the words "Come, follow Me," ringing in his ears, for love of his great wealth had taken possession of his heart — a Vocation had been offered and rejected. Like the rich young man of the Gospel, many do not know how to benefit from the opportunities God gives us for our salvation.

You can buy the precious pearl, but the price is the same for everyone: you must offer all that you have in exchange, without holding anything back. Are you ready to make the deal? The rich young man was doubtless ready to give an alms, and generously, but not to sacrifice all his possessions and live in poverty; that went beyond his generosity.

All are invited, so that anyone can accept the invitation. If two calls were needed, one general and another individual, whoever has only the first one could say that he has only half an invitation, which would be ridiculous, and certainly goes against the almost unanimous teaching of the Fathers of the Church: Saint Thomas tells us: "We should accept the words of Christ given in Scripture as though we had heard them from

Christ's lips... The Counsel of Perfection should be followed by everyone, no less than if they had sprung from the lips of the Lord to each in particular." Saint John Chrysostom says that the gift of chastity "is given to those who choose it on their own account" and adds that "the help necessary from on high is prepared for all those who desire to overcome in the struggle against nature." Saint Jerome tells us that this gift "is given to those who ask for it, who desire it and strive to obtain it." Saint Basil affirms that "to embrace the Gospel way of life is everyone's privilege."



Nearly two thousand years have passed since then, but unceasingly that same Voice has been whispering in the ears of countless youths, "One thing only remains for you: come, follow Me." Some have heard that voice with joy and gladness of heart, and have risen up at the Master's call; others have stopped up their ears, or turned away from beside Him Who beckoned to them, while not a few have stood and listened, wondering what it all meant, asking themselves if such an invitation be for them, till Jesus of Nazareth went on His way and they were left behind forever.

To undecided souls, chiefly, Saint William Doyle offered this simple explanation of a vocation, part of which we record here, in the hope that they may recognize the movements of grace within their souls, or feel moved to ask that one day they too might share in that supreme gift of God's eternal love.

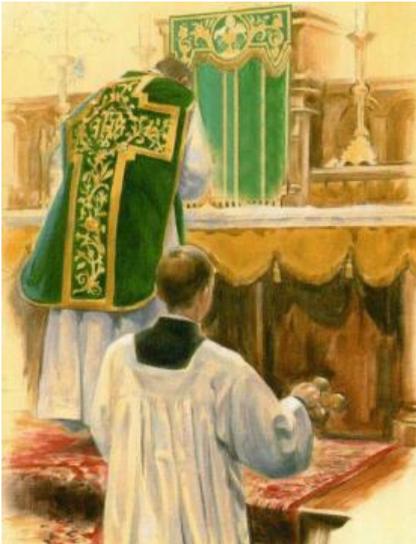
"How may I know whether I have a vocation or not?" How often has this question sprung from the lips of so many youths, who have come to realize that life has a purpose, only to be brushed aside with an uneasy "I am sure I have none," or a secret prayer that they might be saved from such a fate! How little they know the happiness they are throwing away by turning away from God's invitation! for such a question, and such a feeling, are often the sign of a genuine vocation.

In the first place, a vocation, or "a call to the Priesthood or to the Religious Life," in contrast to the general invitation held out to all men to a life of perfection, including in the world, is a free gift of God bestowed on those whom He selects: "You have not chosen Me," He said to His Disciples, "but I have chosen you," for Christ called those whom He so willed. Often that invitation is held out to those whom we would least suspect. Magdalen, steeped in sin, became the discipless of the Immaculate; Saul, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the followers of the Lord Jesus"; each heard that summons, for a sinful life in the past is no bar to a vocation.

Although this gift is of surpassing value and a mark of very special affection on His part, God will not force its acceptance on the soul, rather leaves her free to correspond to the grace or reject it. Some day the Divine Hunter draws near the prey which He has marked out for the shafts of His love; timidly, as if fearing to force the free will, He whispers a word. If the soul turns away, Jesus often withdraws forever, as He only seeks volunteers for His service. But if the startled soul listens, even though dreading lest that Voice speak again, and inclined to shrink back, grace is free to do its work and bring her captive to the Hunter's feet.

Unconsciously, in that first encounter, the soul has been deeply wounded with a longing for some unknown, as yet untasted, happiness. Almost imperceptibly, a craving for a nobler life has taken possession of the heart; prayer and self-denial, the thought of sacrifice, bring a new sweetness; the blazing light of earthly pleasures, once so dazzling, seems to die away; the joys and amusements of the world no longer attract or satisfy; their emptiness serves only to weary and displease the more, while through it all the thirst for that indefinable "something" tortures the soul.

"Sweet and tender Lord!, exclaimed Saint Henry Suso, "from the days of my childhood my mind has sought for something with a burning thirst, but what it is I have not as yet fully understood. Lord, I have pursued it many a year, but I never could grasp it, for I know not what it is, and yet it is something that draws my heart and soul, something without which I can never attain true rest. Lord, I sought for it in the first days of my childhood in creatures, but the more I sought for it in them the less I found it, as every image that presented itself to my sight, before I fully tried it, or gave myself up to it, warned me away thus: 'I am not what you seek.' Now my heart ardently seeks it, for my heart would be so glad to possess it. Alas! I have so constantly to experience what it is not! But what it is, Lord, I am not as yet clear. Tell me, beloved Lord, what indeed it is, and the nature of that which secretly agitates me."



Even in the midst of worldly pleasure and excitement there is an aching void in the heart. “How useless all this is! How hollow! How unsatisfying! Is this what my life always has to be? Was I made only for this?”

Slowly one comes to understand the excellence and advantage of evangelical perfection, the indescribable charm of virginity, and the nobility of a life devoted wholly to the service of God and the salvation of souls. Though having at times to overcome a natural repugnance for the religious state or fear of its responsibilities, the soul realizes that “The Master is here... and calls you” – that she has received a Vocation.

It can be said, then, that each youth is counselled and exhorted to stay virgin all his life. Each individual has the privilege of making his choice freely and willingly, and no one has the right to interfere with his choice. Someone who has no impediment other than his own will can easily imagine Christ before him saying: “My son, it would be more agreeable to Me if you stayed virgin for love of Me.” If you really had Jesus Christ

standing there before you telling you this, what would your reaction be? Would it be prompt and in accord with His desire, or would it be the rich young man’s?

Perhaps you say to yourself: “If God loves me so much as to make me this recommendation and ask for my heart to be solely His, I would be happy to give Him all I have and to make any sacrifice for His cause.” But God is already saying this to you in the Gospel, and what does your heart reply? Will you reject this singular show of love which Christ offers you? He is telling you: “I give you to choose between two gifts: marriage or virginity: virginity is far more precious and more agreeable to Me, but take the one you want.” Are you going to reply: “Give me the lesser gift and keep your greater treasures and greater show of love for my companions”? Make this reply if you want. Like the rich young man, God will still love you; but do not be surprised that He shows higher appreciation for other more generous souls. Take or reject the religious life, as you please. The decision is yours, to take or reject, but if you reject do not say: “I have no calling nor invitation to a better life.” You have the invitation right now, in common with other Palmarians; and generous souls are the ones who accept, because “Many are called but few are chosen.”; that is, few accept the invitation.

Some young people, mistakenly, imagine that Almighty God selects certain persons, without conferring with them, and destines them to the Priesthood or to the religious life, while excluding the rest from this privilege. In other words, they believe that God does everything.

Two lads with the same qualities, for example, have the general invitation from the Scriptures to a life of perfection; they both have the same grace, which one accepts and the other rejects. What does the vocation do? In the first case, the action of saying ‘yes’ to the invitation is the effect of the vocation. And why didn’t the other lad have a vocation? Because he said ‘no’ to the grace. God plays His part; He sends out the calling to all those free of impediments and obstacles. Whoever so desires can accept the invitation, and therefore, in a certain sense, make his own vocation, for God’s necessary help is always available to those who respond.

A vocation, therefore, speaking generally, is not the mysterious thing some people imagine it to be, but simply the choice God makes of a certain kind of life for a particular person.

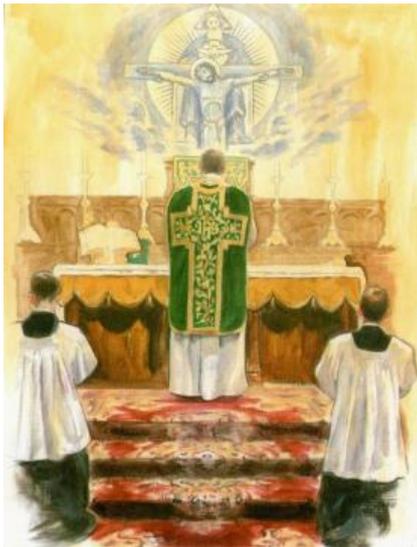
A vocation to the religious state usually supposes a supernatural inclination or a desire to embrace it, or a persistent attraction towards it. And a natural condition should apply, namely that we possess an aptitude or fitness for its duties: certain physical, moral and intellectual qualities. If God wills that someone follow Him, He gives him the means for doing so; and hence, if real obstacles stand in the way, e.g., serious illness, an elderly parent or children to support, etc., such a one is not called to enter religion, at least not just then. Occasionally God inspires a person to do something which in reality He does not want to be done. David longed to build a Temple to the Lord; Abraham was told to sacrifice his son solely to test his obedience and will; for Saint Teresa says, “Sometimes God is better satisfied by the desire to do something than by its actual performance.”

Saint Francis de Sales regards “a firm and decided will to serve God” as the best and most certain sign of a true vocation, for the Divine Teacher once said, “If you wish ... come, follow Me.” A genuine vocation is simply a firm and constant will desirous of serving God, in the manner and in the place to which He calls... I do not say this wish should be exempt from all repugnance, difficulty or distaste. Hence, a vocation must not be considered false because the one who feels himself called to the religious state no longer experiences that

same sensible feeling he had at first, and that he even feels repugnance and such coldness that he thinks all is lost. It is enough that his will be firm in the resolution of not abandoning his first design... In order to know whether God wills someone to become a religious, there is no need to wait until He Himself speaks to us, or until He sends an Angel from Heaven to express His will; neither is it necessary to have any revelation on the matter; but it is crucial to respond to the first movement of the inspiration, and then there is no need to be troubled if repugnance or coldness appear.”

The following is a list of some of the most common signs of a vocation, noted by the Jesuits. No one need expect to have all these marks, but if none of them are perceived, the person may safely conclude that he has no vocation.

1. The desire to have a religious vocation, together with the conviction that God is calling. This desire is generally most strongly felt when the soul is quieted, after Holy Communion, and in time of retreat.



2. A growing attraction for prayer and holy things in general, together with a longing for the hidden life and a desire to be more closely united to God and to His Most Holy Mother.

3. To feel distaste for the world, a conviction of its hollowness and insufficiency to satisfy the soul. This feeling is generally strongest in the midst of worldly amusement.

4. A fear of sin, into which it is so easy to fall, and a longing to escape from the dangers and temptations of the world.

5. It is sometimes a sign of a vocation when a person fears that God may call him; when he prays not to have one and cannot banish the thought from his mind. If the vocation is sound, it will soon give way to an attraction, though it should be said that there is no need to have a natural inclination to the religious life; on the contrary, a divine vocation is compatible with a natural distaste for that state.

6. To have zeal for souls, to realize something of the value of an immortal soul, and to desire to co-operate in their salvation.

7. The desire to devote our whole life to obtain the conversion of someone dear to us.

8. The desire to atone for our own sins or those of others, and to fly from the temptations which we feel too weak to resist.

9. An attraction for the state of virginity.

10. The happiness which the thought of religious life brings, its spiritual helps, its peace, merit and reward.

11. A longing to sacrifice oneself and abandon all for the love of Jesus Christ, and to suffer for His sake.

12. A willingness to accept assignment to any kind of work is proof of a true vocation.

A religious can say: “I am a religious willingly, by my own choice”, and should also admit: “I am a religious by the grace of God, Who prepared and helped me by external and internal means; He enlightened my mind and strengthened my will to embrace the life which He chose for me.”

In the same way, a daily communicant can say: “It is by my own will and desire that I receive Holy Communion daily; but it is God’s predilection that has impelled me to this grace, given me the opportunity and strength of will to carry it out and kept me faithful to it, so that it is by His grace and by Divine Providence that I am a daily communicant.” Other faithful as well could adopt the same practice of daily Communion, were they not so negligent in asking for or responding to this same grace.

Saint John Crysostom maintains that “the reason that not all accept Christ’s counsel is that they do not want to.” Many do not recognize God’s will, as they are hoping for Him to manifest it in an extraordinary or evident way. Christ’s invitation is general, but is destined to each person in particular, and if Palmarians kept their hearts freer from worldly amusements and applied themselves more to prayer and self dominion, volunteers would gather in far greater number around Christ and Mary.

There are many who excuse themselves by saying “I have no vocation”, but in general this is no truer than the different excuses made by the guests invited in the Gospel parable, none of whom dared truthfully to reply: “I am not going to the wedding because I don’t want to.” Like them, some who “have no vocation”, if they were sincere, would have to say: “Yes, Christ is calling me, but I don’t want to follow Him because I prefer to follow my own likings; I am not thinking of taking up that cross.”

Sometimes events occur which move a youth to respond. During the second Spanish republic, the communist hordes were profaning and destroying Churches. At their imminent arrival in a town, as there was no Priest, the parishioners had to act to save the Most Blessed Sacrament: they chose an innocent boy to distribute Holy Communion to the faithful, and in that way profanation was avoided. This event so impressed the boy that he understood the importance of the Priesthood, and some fifteen years later was ordained a Priest.



Saint Francis de Sales writes as follows: “Some enter religion without knowing why. They enter a cloister parlour, they see religious with calm faces, full of good spirits, modesty and temperance, and say to themselves: ‘What a happy place this is! Let us stay here. The world frowns on us; we do not get what we want there’. Others come to find peace, consolation and all kinds of sweetness, saying in their minds: ‘How happy religious are! They are saved from all the worries of home life, their parents’ continual ordering about and fault-finding; let us enter religion’. Such reasons are worth nothing. They must consider if they have sufficient valour and resolve to crucify and humble themselves, or rather allow God to do so. Being a religious is something that should be understood. It is being united to God by continuous mortification, it is to live for Him alone. The heart of a religious is always wholly dedicated to His Divine Majesty; his eyes, tongue, hands and all his members serve God continuously. Whoever wishes to enter should examine his heart well and see if he has sufficient

resolve to die to himself and live for God alone. The cloister is no more than a school of renunciation, of mortification and, above all, of love.”

As the call to religious life is supernatural, a vocation springing *solely* from a purely human motive such as those mentioned by Saint Francis de Sales, the desire of pleasing one’s parents, or some temporal advantage, would not be the work of grace. However, if the principal motive which inclines us to embrace the religious state is supernatural, the vocation is a true one, for Divine Providence often makes use of the trials and misfortunes of life to fill a soul with distaste for this world and prepare it for a greater grace.

Saint Romuald, founder of the Camaldolese, deeply impressed by a homicide committed by his father, went to a Benedictine monastery and consecrated himself to God. Saint Paul, the first hermit, fled to the desert to avoid persecution, and in solitude found the peace and joy he had long sought in vain. How many eyes have been rudely opened to the shortness and uncertainty of life by the sudden death of a dear one, and made to realize that the gaining of life eternal was “the one thing necessary”. Thwarted ambition, the failure of cherished hopes or the disappointment of a loving heart, have convinced many a future saint that the only Master worth serving is Jesus Christ, that His affection is the only love worth striving after.

Hence we may conclude with a learned theologian: “If anyone makes the decision to enter religion, well resolved to observe its laws and duties, there is no doubt that this resolution, this vocation, comes from God, whatever the circumstances which seem to have produced it.”

“It matters little how we commence, provided we are determined to persevere and end well,” says Saint Francis de Sales; and Saint Thomas lays it down that “no matter from what source our resolution comes of entering religion, it is from God”; while Suárez maintains that “generally the desire for religious life is from the Holy Ghost, and we ought to receive it as such.”

Should we encourage religious vocations? It is a curious fact that many pious and learned persons discourage aspirants to religious life in every possible way, and would scruple to give them any help or encouragement. “A vocation must be entirely the work of the Holy Ghost,” they say. In this vein, they paint the imaginary difficulties and trials of life in the cloister, and hint at the unhappiness sometimes to be found there; they speak of the long and serious deliberation necessary before taking such a step, and thus, unintentionally perhaps, but most effectively, extinguish the glowing enthusiasm of a youthful heart.

Some even assume a terrible responsibility by deliberately turning souls away from the path by which the Master is calling them, forgetting the warning: “It is not you who have chosen Me, rather I who have chosen you,” never reflecting on the irretrievable harm they are causing by spoiling God’s work.

Others calmly assure a postulant who has been unable to continue in a religious Order, that this is a sure sign that Almighty God does not want him, that he has no vocation and should not try again.

Saint John Bosco said that “to promote vocations among youth, morality has to be zealously cultivated among them. Morality is the seedbed for vocations and besides offers a guarantee regarding religious chastity.” Conversely, at the disappearance of public morality in the 1960’s, a vocations crisis arose and the decadence of the Church in Rome gathered speed.



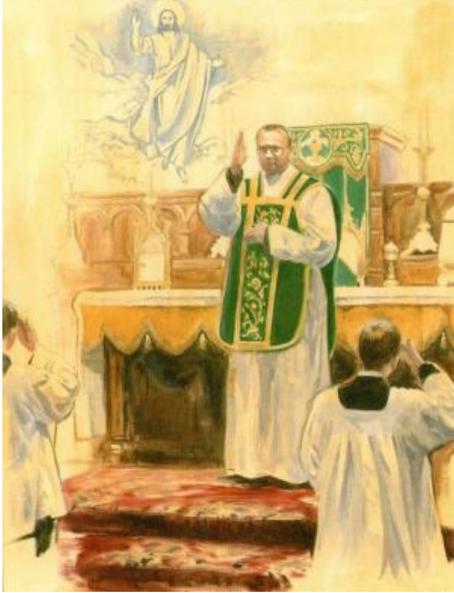
A mother can greatly influence her children’s vocations: At the refusal of a brother of his to become a Priest and his mother’s grief, Saint Theobald Matthew said: “Do not be upset, Mother, I will become a Priest.” To the great apostle of the Sacred Heart, Saint Claude de la Colombière, his mother on her deathbed had told him: “My son, you must become a holy religious.” At sixteen years of age he entered the noviciate of the Company of Jesus. To do so he had to overcome his repugnance for the religious life, since as a man of flesh and blood he deeply felt separation from the world and its renunciation. He himself said: “I well knew that when I became a Religious, I had a great aversion to the life I was to embrace. Plans made to serve God are never fulfilled except at the cost of great sacrifices.”

The Saints realized that God had destined them to help Him in the work of fomenting vocations. Saint Bernard’s father was a noble and honourable gentleman who dreamt of the greatest glory for his children, and his mother was a woman of deep faith who loved Jesus and Mary ardently, and was ever mindful of the Divine Will. When Saint Bernard decided to enter the Cistercian monastery of Cîteaux, his father and brothers tried hard to dissuade him from his purpose, but he, by his fervent exhortations, spoke so eloquently of the advantages of religious life that four of his brothers, and many other noble youths to the number of thirty, entered with him. When they left home, the only child to stay with the family was little Nivard. The eldest brother then embraced him and said: “My dear Nivard, we are leaving, and this castle and its lands will all be yours”. The boy, with a wisdom above his years, said that they were taking Heaven for themselves and leaving the earth for him; the distribution was not a just one. And from that day nothing could quieten the young Saint Nivard, till finally he protested: “You have chosen Heaven and leave me the earth. What kind of a reward is this you offer me!” And at thirteen years of age he was allowed to join his brothers as a monk. From then on his one thought was to be true to his motto: ‘To become like Jesus’. Whenever Saint Bernard left his Clairvaux monastery, he returned with many clerics and lay brothers who, seeking peace of soul, union with God and detachment from creatures, entered as monks.

It is interesting to note that Our Lord called His Apostles by indirect means. Saint Andrew and Saint John were sent to the Saviour by Saint John the Baptist: “Behold the Lamb of God”. “The two disciples heard him, and followed Jesus.” Andrew found his brother Simon, and took him to Jesus. Then Philip found his cousin Nathaniel, called Bartholomew, and told him: “We have found the Messiah”, and had to insist: “Come and you will see”, whereby Bartholomew also received the call to follow Christ. Thus, one by one the Apostles were brought to the awareness of the Messiah, under the influence of His grace, without which all human efforts to produce a vocation are useless. “Know well,” says Saint Thomas of Aquinas, “that whether it be by the devil’s suggestion or by man’s counsel that we incline towards the religious life and are thus prompted to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, this suggestion or counsel is powerless and ineffective as long as God does not draw us inwardly towards Himself. Therefore, the proposal of entering into religion, whatever the source, can only come from God. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me moves him by His Grace,” Jesus said; hence even if the religious vocation comes from an enemy, it ought to be accepted as an excellent counsel.”

The evil spirit strives in every possible way to hinder all the good he can. If he cannot turn someone away completely from the resolve of giving himself to God, he will work, might and main, to defer the moment as long as possible, knowing that a person in the world is constantly exposed to the danger of losing both the grace of God and “the pearl of great price,” his vocation. The ancient serpent knows that until the doors of the monastery have closed behind the young religious, he has every chance of snatching away that treasure. He will lay traps and pitfalls, stir up doubts and fears, make the attractions of a life of pleasure seem almost irresistible, causing the bravest heart to waver: “I never realised how dear the world was to me until I had to leave it” has been the painful lament of so many.

Under one pretext or another, he induces them to put off their generous resolve from day to day. “O Lord.” exclaims Saint Augustine, “I said ‘I will come presently; wait a moment.’ But this presently never came, and this moment did not end. I always resolved to give myself to You on the morrow, and never immediately.” How fatal this delay can be in responding to God’s call can best be told by those whom age or altered circumstances have hindered from carrying out their first intention.



If the vocation is doubtful, there is need of deliberation, and it must be serious, for hastiness and want of reflection would be unpardonable in such a matter. Yet so enormous are the advantages to be reaped from a life devoted to God’s service, that it would be a far greater tragedy to miss a vocation through excessive prudence than to mistake a passing thought for the Master’s call.

It is well to remember that a person who feels he has no vocation would not sin by embracing the religious state, provided he has the intention of fulfilling all its obligations and of serving God to the best of his ability; since in the opinion of the Angelic Doctor, God will not refuse the special graces necessary for the religious life to one who sincerely desires to promote His glory.

Our Lord tells us to learn a lesson from “the children of this world or lovers of this world” who, “regarding their worldly business, are more shrewd and concerned than the children of Light”; there is no hesitation about accepting a tempting offer of marriage, which binds one for life to a partner who is perhaps unsuitable; it is worldly wisdom not to delay in taking such a step when there is a chance of being well settled. Yet Saint Ignatius teaches that there is more need for deliberation about remaining in the world than for leaving it; he says: “If a person thinks of embracing a secular life, he should ask and desire more evident signs that God calls him to a secular life than if there were a question of embracing the Evangelical Counsels. Our Lord Himself has exhorted us to embrace His Counsels and, on the other hand, He has laid before us the great dangers of a secular life; so that we should rightly conclude that revelations and extraordinary tokens of His will are more necessary for a man entering upon a life in the world than for one entering the religious state.”

Endless harm is done by well-meaning people who, under the pretext of “trying a vocation,” keep their children from entering a religious house for years on end. They urge that getting “to know the world” will develop their faculties and enable them to understand their own mind better; that such a process will broaden their views and help them to judge things in their proper light; finally, that a vocation which cannot withstand such a trial, the buffeting by dangerous temptations, and the seductive allurements of worldly pleasure, after having been unnecessarily exposed to them, is no vocation at all and had far better be abandoned.

“One could not give a more pernicious counsel than this” writes Father Lessius: “What is it in reality except seeking to quench the interior spirit, under the pretext of a trial, and to expose to the tempests of temptation someone who was preparing to reach the port of safety? If a gardener were to plant a precious seed, requiring great care, in stony ground, covered with thorns; if he exposed it to the rays of the sun and every change of climate to try to see if it would grow in that unfavourable spot, who would not look upon him as a fool? Those who advise people called to religious life to remain for a while in the world have even less sense. A vocation is a divine inspiration; it is a seed fallen upon the earth to bear fruit for eternal life. It is planted in the human heart, a soil little suited to its delicate nature, and requires great care and attention. Watch must be kept that the birds of the air, the demons, do not carry it away; that thorns, the concupiscences and cares of the world, do not choke it; that men with their false maxims may not trample it underfoot. Whosoever wishes to preserve and see grow in his heart the seed which the Divine Sower has cast there, ought to fly from the world and reach a safe refuge as soon as possible.”

“Is the world the place for testing a vocation?” asks Saint Vincent de Paul. “Let the soul hasten as fast as possible to a safe haven.” The Church, realizing well the necessity of such a trial, prescribes at least a year of probation for every novice before admitting candidates to religious profession. In the cloister, safe from the contagious atmosphere of a corrupt world, with abundant time for prayer and thought, with freedom to remain or leave at will— following the first fixed period of trial—each one can try for himself the sincerity of the desire he felt to abandon all things and follow Christ, before he binds himself irrevocably by vows.

It follows from what has been said that once the voice of God is recognized, that is, when the thought of leaving the world has been more or less constantly crossing the mind for some time, and the soul realizes, even though she dreads it, that “the Lord has need of her,” the call ought to be obeyed promptly.



Saint Thomas holds that the invitation to a more perfect life ought to be followed without delay, for these lights and inspirations from God are transient, not permanent, and therefore the divine call should be obeyed instantly, or as soon as possible. As of old, when He worked His miracles and went about doing good, Jesus of Nazareth passes by, and if we do not take advantage of His passing, He may never again return. He stands at the door and knocks: “If anyone listens to My voice and opens the door to Me, I will go in to him, will sup with him and he with Me.” If not, that call may never come again.

“Make haste, I beseech you,” exclaims Saint Jerome, “and rather cut right through than loosen the rope by which your bark is bound fast to the land,” for even a day’s delay deprives a person of invaluable merit, which he would acquire in religion. Saint Genevieve

of Saint Teresa related to Saint Thérèse: “The day for my entry into Carmel had been fixed, and I had to be free at 6 in the evening. As I had settled all my affairs, my confessor told me that if I wanted, I could wait until the following day. But I replied: ‘Father, since I am free this evening at 6, I will enter at 6.’ Tell me, daughter, if that was not a good inspiration: on the day following my entry, I received a letter from the residence where my younger brother was boarding. It said that he was ill and that, with my care and the country air, he would not take long to get well. Hence, if I had not entered that evening on the day I was free, very likely I would have lost my vocation: the obstacles which arise one after another would have put the date back and perhaps ended by preventing me from entering Carmel.”

Delay is dangerous, and long deliberation unnecessary: “Of all the states of life, the religious state is, without doubt, that which demands the least deliberation, and its choice should cause the least misgivings and hesitation; for it is in this state that fewer difficulties are met with, and the best means found for saving our souls.”



It is well for a man to have borne the yoke of the Lord from his youth. Mindful of this counsel, and realizing that the pure hearts of youth receive impressions of virtue without difficulty and form good habits easily, and that youth is above all the time for greater earnestness and generosity, the Church has always encouraged her children to give themselves to her service from their tender years. Experience has shown the advantages of entering between sixteen and twenty years of age, rather than at a later age.

Special provision was made in the Rule of Saint Benedict for the admission of little children, who were offered by their parents to be educated and thereafter persevere perpetually in the Order. “The reception of a child in those days was almost as solemn as profession in our own. His parents took him to the church. They guided his hand, which held the petition, onto the sacred linen of the Altar, and in the child’s name they promised stability to God. Little ones of three or four years were brought in the arms of those who gave them life, to accept at their parents’ choosing the course in which their life was to run. They were brought into the sanctuary, received the cowl, and took their places

as monks in the monastic community.”

Some were but fourteen when they entered the cloister. Saint Catherine of Ricci professed at thirteen; Saint Imelda, who became a Nun at nine years, died in a Dominican Convent at the age of twelve, and Saint Rose of Lima had vowed her chastity to God when only six. Saint Thérèse was scarcely fifteen when she entered the Carmelite monastery at Lisieux.

“The Spirit breathes where He wills.” There is no rule for vocations, no age-limit for the Call. Innocence attracts the gaze of God, deep-rooted habits of sin, provided there is a firm will to overcome them, do not

repel Him. One comes because the world disgusts him, another loves it and abandons it with regret; docility draws down more graces, while resistance sometimes increases the force of His invitation. Sometimes the little child hears His soft voice, while others have not been called till far advanced in years.

As parents often exceed the authority given them by God over their children in the question of choosing a state in life, it will be well to quote here the words of a great Jesuit moralist: "Paternal power cannot take away the right which sons and daughters have to make their own choice of a state in life and, if they will, follow Christ's Counsels...Though parents can examine the vocation of their children before they enter, nonetheless it is not lawful for them to insist that they should first taste the pleasures of this world; and if they do, and afterwards their children's wishes become affected by this, parents have no reason for concluding that there had never been a true vocation; it may be that a true vocation was thwarted by wrongful means." Parents who prevent their children from entering religion sin mortally. "To make someone abandon a religious vocation", says Saint Jerome, "is nothing other than to slay Jesus Christ in another's heart."

There must be a response to a vocation. There is no moment more important in the life of a boy or girl than when they choose their path in life. When they were children, they spoke as children, they thought as children, but the days of irresponsible childhood are gone forever, and now they must launch their barque out alone on the stormy waters of life and steer its course towards eternity. It is a solemn moment, a time with great possibilities for good or for evil, since the youth is face to face with the question of what he must do with his future life, a choice upon which rests not merely his happiness on earth, but moreover his eternal salvation.

He has been made by his Creator and has been given precious gifts to make use of in a certain, definite way, marked out from all eternity by the hand of Divine Providence. For some, circumstances and surroundings clearly indicate what kind of life it is to be. But in the hearts of the rest a violent storm arises from the clashing of rival interests.

On the one hand, comes the call of the world, the pleading of human nature for a life of ease and pleasure; on the other, the Voice of Christ, softly yet clearly, "Come, follow Me, I have need of you; I have work for you."

This, then, is the meaning of his life, the reason why he was drawn out of nothingness, "to do the works of



God." Can he hesitate? Is it a matter of indifference for him to live in a God-chosen state of life or in a self-chosen one, now that his vocation is certain? To this question, Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori answers: "Not to follow our vocation, when we feel called to the religious state, is not a mortal sin; the Counsels of Christ, by their nature, do not oblige under this pain. However, regarding the dangers to which we expose our salvation by choosing a state of life against the Divine Will, such conduct is rarely free from sin, and much more so when a person is persuaded that in the world he places himself in danger of losing his soul by refusing to follow his vocation."

Hence, although the deliberate refusal to respond to a divine vocation does not necessarily mean sin, even when that call be clear and unmistakable, it is nonetheless a grievous responsibility, without sufficient reason, to refuse to respond to such an invitation, given with so much love and liberality; for a vocation not only shows God's eagerness for the sanctification of the person called to follow in His

footsteps, but implies that the Saviour looks for his constant co-operation in the most divine of all works, the salvation of human souls. Every Priest is the means for saving thousands of souls from losing themselves eternally in Hell. Can it then be wondered that, deprived of the special graces destined for them, the lives of those who have refused to follow, or have abandoned a decided vocation, are generally unhappy and, too often, sullied by great and numerous sins?

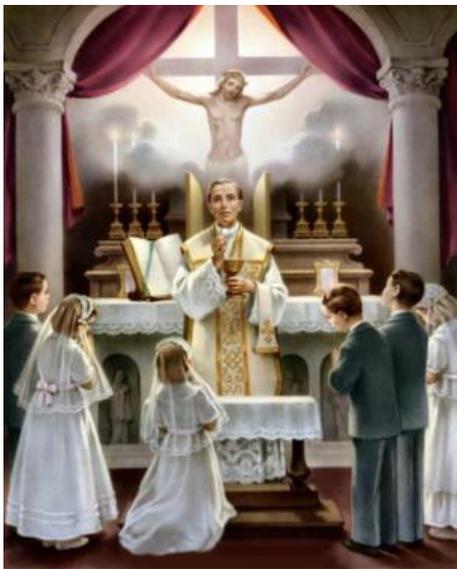
Seeing the immense importance of a vocation, and how much depends upon it, both for ourselves and for others, it is only natural to expect the evil one to stir up a hornet's nest of opposition. He will prevent it if he can and will not give up the fight without a fierce struggle. Checked and defeated in one direction, he renews his attacks, with greater audacity, in another, striving by delays, disappointments and interior trials to weary the soul and, in the end, turn her away from her resolve. It has been truly said that we never fully realize the number of enemies we have to contend with until the moment we make up our mind resolutely to serve God;

certainly we never knew how many people were so keenly interested in our future happiness, so anxious to warn us of the difficulties and dangers of our proposed step, until it became known that we were going to enter religion.

When a young man resolves to renounce the world, his so-called friends rally round, begging him not to be such a coward as to run away from what clearly is his duty. They remind him of all the good he might do by staying where he is. His conscience, however, assures him there is nothing better he can do than go where God, his Master, bids him. They ask him if he is a mad fool to give up all the amusements and pleasures he might lawfully enjoy; if it would not be better for him “to see life” first before he buries himself in a gloomy cloister? They taunt him with want of moral courage and call him hard-hearted and cruel to desert a loving father or a mother in her declining years.

Only someone who has been through all this knows what a tremendous struggle it all is. Including for love of Jesus and Mary, it is really difficult for flesh and blood to bear being told that one is simply selfish when one wants only to be generous; to meet with nothing but coldness, cynicism and discouragement when more than ever the soul longs for and needs kindness and sympathy. God, too, Who at first had disposed all things sweetly to wean the soul away from earthly love and draw her to Himself, in the end sometimes seems to hide His Face and abandon that soul. “It seemed to me,” the virtuous Mother Kerr used to say, “that all my desire for the religious life vanished from the moment I decided to follow it.”

Doubts and fears take over in place of the joy and yearning for a life of sacrifice which formerly filled the heart. Saint Teresa of Ávila, however, tells us not to fear, for this trial, if bravely borne, will lead to greater happiness. “When an act is done for God alone,” she writes, “it is His Will that, before we begin, in order to increase merit, the soul be fearful; and the greater the fear, if we succeed, the greater the reward and the sweetness later resulting. I know this from experience; so, if I had to advise someone to whom good inspirations come, I would never counsel that person to resist them through fear of difficulty in carrying them through. There is no reason for being afraid of failure, since God is omnipotent. Though I could not at first accustom my will to becoming a nun, I saw that the religious state was the best and safest. And thus, gradually, I resolved to oblige myself. The struggle lasted three months. I used to urge this reason against myself: The trials and sufferings of living as a nun cannot be greater than those of Purgatory, and I have well



deserved to be in Hell. It is not much to spend the rest of my life as if I were in Purgatory, and then go straight to Heaven; which is my wish. The devil put before me that I could not endure the trials of religious life, because of my weak constitution. I was subject to fainting-fits accompanied by fever, for my health was always poor. I defended myself against him by alleging the trials which Christ endured for me, and that it was not too much for me to suffer something for His sake; and, besides, He would help me to bear it. I remember perfectly well that the pain I felt when I left my father’s house was so great (he never gave me his consent to enter) that I do not believe the pain of dying will be greater, for it seemed to me as if every bone in my body was wrenched apart. When I took the habit, Our Lord at once gave me to understand how He helps those who do violence to themselves in order to serve Him. I was filled with a joy so great that it has never failed me to this day.”

We have been saddened on seeing several aspirants to the religious life enter here in El Palmar, and leave again after a few days, saying they had no vocation. That is not the right way to act. **We therefore establish that, from now on, postulants who enter the Order will have to undertake to remain here for a minimum of two months.** We explain:

The grace of a vocation and the grace of perseverance are two very different graces. Many, after having received from God the inestimable grace of a vocation, through their own fault became unworthy to persevere. No one will obtain perseverance, nor receive the crown which God has destined for those who persevere, if they do not play the part they should in combating manfully and overcoming their enemies.

Whoever enters the noviciate enters the service of the King of Heaven, who usually puts fidelity of His chosen ones to the test by means of trials and temptations, by which He allows Hell to combat them. “As you were acceptable to God, it was necessary for you to be tried by affliction,” said the Angel to Tobias. And the Holy Ghost, addressing those who abandon the world to give themselves up to God, tells them: “Child, when

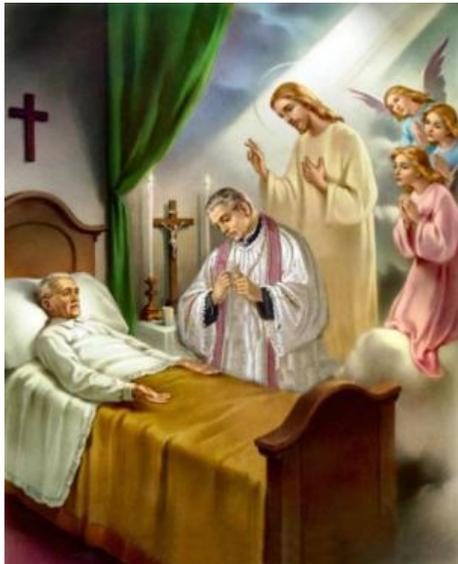
you enter God's service, persevere firm in virtue and in holy fear, and prepare your soul to face temptation.” Consequently the novice, on entering the noviciate, should be ready, not to receive consolations, but to battle against the temptations which Hell stirs up against all those who give themselves up wholly to God. And He warns that the devil tempts a novice so that he abandon his vocation with a tenacity bolder than he does a thousand laypeople, especially if the novice enters the Order of the Last Times. Satan places all his determination in this, for the novice, if he is faithful to God, will snatch thousands of sinners from his hands, saved by his ministry and prayers. Hence our common enemy will strive to win the novice over in a thousand different ways, and the better to dupe him, will bring into play every kind of artifice. “Blessed be the one who suffers temptation and trial with patience, since after being tried thus, he will receive the crown of eternal life God has promised to those who love Him,” says the Letter of Saint James the Less.

The most common temptations employed by Hell to tempt novices and force them to abandon their vocation are usually the following: love for relatives, fear of losing health, inconveniences of community life; desolation of spirit; doubts about vocations; in the world he was more pious; in the world he could win more souls for God; he is not called to this kind of life.

To make matters worse, many postulants and novices play into the Tempter's hands by listening to his objections, or build up for themselves imaginary fears which will perhaps never materialize, forgetting that, together with the calling, comes the special ‘Grace of a Vocation’, by which, as the Apostle assures us, they can overcome every difficulty. “I can do all things in Christ, who comforts me.” These difficulties or temptations are usually the following:

“I may not persevere.” — Were everyone to hesitate before a possible failure, little would be done in this world; but the Church wisely guards against this danger by giving the religious aspirant sufficient time, in the noviciate, to see if he is really called or suited for such a life. To find oneself dismissed from the noviciate is no misfortune, but simply shows that God has other designs on the soul. Saint Joseph of Cupertino was several times refused admission into the Franciscan Order as inept; he entered the Capuchins, but was sent away after eight months’ trial, because it was thought he had no vocation; out of compassion he was then received by the Franciscans, with whom he lived until his saintly death.

In this matter we should consider less our own strength and more the help of grace, for it is in God we must place all our trust. He will not desert us if only we are faithful to His inspirations. If He sometimes calls those who do not seek Him, how much more will He aid and protect those who have obeyed His call.



“If I only knew that I would persevere...”, says the author of the ‘Imitation’ “and presently he heard within himself God’s answer: ‘Do now what you would do then, and you shall be very secure’.”

‘Instead of being frightened at the sight of a few who have been inconstant in their vocation, ‘Saint John Chrysostom says, ‘why not consider the great number of those who, faithful to their pledges, find peace, happiness and salvation in religious life?’

“My health could break down.” No religious is sent away after Profession because of health problems. If God does not give him sufficient strength to do his noviciate duties, it is an evident sign that He wants the novice elsewhere. Thus Saint Benedict Joseph Labré, finding himself incapable of persevering with the Cistercians and with the Carthusians, and after having tried in vain, for two years, to enter the Trappists, saw that his vocation was elsewhere: the perfect imitation in the world of the humble and suffering life of his Master. Experience has shown that regular community life is highly beneficial to those with poor health, and God rewards the confidence and generous spirit of one

ready to serve Him amid illnesses by giving him fresh vigour and strength.

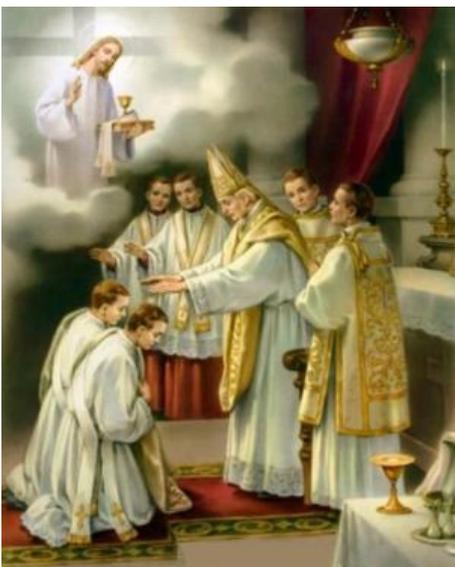
Saint John Joseph Surin counselled his mother to become a Carmelite nun at the age of fifty-six years. Her health had been so poor that she needed the constant assistance of four nurses; nonetheless, for the fifteen years she lived in the convent, observing all the austerities of the Rule, she never once entered the infirmary. Saint Bernard served God faithfully for over forty years, and ‘he never relaxed his penances, fasts or labours’, though as from his entry into religion his health was very poor and he constantly spat up blood.

One temptation with which the devil may often trouble the novice is the worry over his health: ‘Do you not see, he tells him, that with this kind of life you will lose your health and end up quite useless to God and

to the world?’ The novice should take no account of this temptation, placing his whole trust in God, Who, having given him the vocation will also give him the necessary health to conserve it. And if, as is to be supposed, he has come to the Lord’s House for the one purpose of pleasing Him, he should think within himself as follows: “I have neither hidden nor hide my state of health from the Superiors; they have received me, and if they do not now send me away, it is God’s manifest Will that I stay here; and if it is to God’s pleasing that I have to suffer and die, what does it matter? How many hermits withdrew to suffer in the woods, enclosed in gloomy caves! How many martyrs have given their lives for Jesus Christ! If it is to God’s pleasing that I lose health and life for His love, I am happy; I do not desire nor can desire anything better.” Thus should the fervent novice speak, one who in his heart harbours true desires of becoming a saint; if one is not fervent during the noviciate, be assured that he will never become so in his whole life. Yet be it understood that no one is born with a vocation, nor does one begin with a perfect disposition to holiness, but is comparable to a plant that begins to spring up. Still, be assured that by cultivating this plant called vocation with the virtue of perseverance, he will gain as reward all the fervour and zeal he desires to have in order to live united to the Divine Will.

“I would break my parents’ hearts.” When the devil spots a religious vocation in someone, he does everything possible to prevent him from following his inclination. But of all the means he employs, love for parents is perhaps one of the most persuasive and perilous. He makes it out to be so just and reasonable, he makes use of such specious sophisms, that the poor soul does not know which voice to heed, that which calls him on or that which prompts him to turn back.

Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori declared that the hardest trial of his whole life was when he made known to his father his determination of quitting the world. “Dear father, I see that you suffer for my sake. However, I must declare that I no longer belong to this world: God has called me, and I am determined to follow His voice.” For three hours, his father, weeping, clasped him in his arms repeating, “My son, do not leave me! Oh, my son, my son! I do not deserve this treatment.” If he had listened to this pathetic appeal the Church would have lost one of her greatest saints. Fortunately he remembered the words of Him Who is the kindest and gentlest of men: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but warfare. Since, because of My teaching, I have come to separate the son from his father, and the daughter from her mother, and the daughter-in-law from her mother-in-law. And those who believe in Me will have as their worst enemies members of their own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.”



A terrible responsibility weighs upon the consciences of some parents when, through selfishness or misguided love, they prevent their children from following God’s call, and unscrupulously hold back those whom He is drawing to Himself. They may perhaps have the satisfaction of keeping their children at home a little longer, but one day must answer to the Divine Judge for the immense good they have hindered, and the souls of those lost through their fault.

How many unhappy youths, out of the urge to please their parents, have lost their vocation, and sometimes their soul as well! History is full of such sorry happenings.

Be warned then, so that the devil may not make you lose your vocation in this way. The Lord, who has granted you the signal favour of abandoning the world to consecrate yourself to His love, demands of you not only to leave, but if necessary, to forget your country and your relatives. Note then, if you leave the Lord for love of your relatives, you will suffer great anguish and remorse at the hour of death on recalling that you abandoned God’s house; and will be surrounded by those relatives who, instead of supplying you with spiritual helps, of which you will have such dire need, will stand about weeping or, moreover, pestering you to leave them well assured of their inheritance, without any of them speaking to you of God; and, so as not to add to the anguish and distress you feel on dying, will seek to deceive you and feed you with vain hopes, and allow you to die without having prepared you for that supreme moment. It is good for the aspirant to meditate on the truths related to his vocation, considering the greatness of the divine favour the Lord has granted him, how well his eternal salvation is assured if he responds to it, and on the contrary, if he is unfaithful, how greatly he risks eternal damnation. Frequently bring to mind the remembrance of death, and

the remorse and torture of conscience you will then feel if you end your life in the world. Consider, on the other hand, how great will be the happiness you shall feel if, having been faithful to God, you have the happiness of ending your life amid your brethren in religion, who will help you to die a good death by their Masses, prayers and counsels, encourage you to hope in Heaven and, far from giving you vain hopes, will hearten you to die with joy.

Consider, besides, that while your parents love you with the deepest affection as from many years back, the Lord loved you long beforehand with ineffable tenderness. Your parents love you as from twenty or thirty years back, yet the Lord has loved you with unending love. True it is that your parents have made many payments and undergone no few privations on your behalf, but Jesus Christ has given His Blood and His Life for love of you. Consequently, when you feel your heart soften on thinking of your parents' embraces, and the gratitude you owe them moves you not to sadden them, you can say to yourself: "Beloved parents, if I leave you, it is to follow the voice of God, Who deserves to be loved more than you and has loved me more than you." Acting thus you will overcome this terrible temptation of blind affection for parents, temptation which has been the cause of perdition for many in this life and in the next.

"I could do more good in the world." Such a statement generally shows a lack of understanding of the immense advantages of religious life, and the merit which comes from living under vows.

This temptation can only come from Satan, as it is pure deceit. One might perhaps do more material good, but not greater spiritual good, that is, real and true good, as there is nothing so real as God and His rule over every order, spiritual and material; greater real good is never achieved by life in the world, neither for oneself, nor for relatives, nor for mankind.

Living in the world, one is doubtful and hesitant, unsure whether God wishes one to take up this work or that one; a religious, on the other hand, while obeying the Superiors, is sure to be pleasing the Lord in all his actions. Only religious are so happy that in all truth they can say: 'Happy are we, as we know what things are pleasing to God.'

Would Saint Francis, Saint Dominic, or Saint Ignatius have done more for God's glory had they led the life of pious laymen? Would not the world have been poorer and Heaven emptier if the many holy Foundresses of Religious Orders had refused the grace offered to them?



Another similar temptation that a young postulant can have: in the world he led a pious and recollected life. "When you lived in the world – the evil spirit will insinuate – you gave yourself up more to prayer, you were more devout and pious. Now you are restricted in performing such holy activities, and when the noviciate ends even more so, as then you will have to consecrate yourself to work and to study; the Superiors will entrust you with community tasks and obedience will charge you with other ministries, all of them origin of no few distractions."

A manifest deceit of Satan! Whoever lends an ear to this temptation shows that he has not yet come to understand how great is the merit of obedience. Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say that everything done in the cloister is prayer. Whoever offers God alms, fasts and penances, gives Him part of what he has, not everything; better said: he gives his things, but does not give himself; on the other hand, whoever renounces his will by the vow of obedience, offers himself entirely to God, in such a way that he can say: 'After having consecrated my will to Thee, Lord, I have nothing more to offer Thee'. The greatest privation for man is to deprive himself of his own will, and therefore that is precisely the most precious gift we can offer to God and which the Lord asks of us with the greatest insistence saying: 'My child, give Me your heart', that is, your will. Therefore the Lord also says that He holds obedience in higher esteem than all the sacrifices we can offer Him. Thus whoever consecrates himself to God by obedience, achieves not one, but every victory simultaneously: over the senses, over honours, over riches, over worldly pleasures and over everything else.

Whoever lives in the world wins merits by prayer and penance, there is no doubt; but as he does everything by his own choosing and willing, he wins far less than the religious, who always acts out of obedience. The religious stores up merits for Heaven, not only when he prays and takes part in Divine Worship, but also when he studies, goes out for a walk, goes to eat or retires to rest. Saint Louis Gonzaga

used to say that in the barque of religious life, those who do not row also make the voyage. Hence there have frequently been many given to piety and perfection who have wanted to place themselves under obedience by entering some religious community, convinced that the merit from actions performed of one's own choosing is inferior to those same actions done out of obedience.

Novices should dedicate themselves to Obedience in everything. By obedience we shall merit the Lord's blessings. This is no place for the lazy: by diligence they will battle and overcome the malice of their spiritual enemies. They should zealously observe the virtue of chastity and make every effort carefully to keep the rules by which they are consecrated to God. If the worm of pride or of other vices corrodes them, these should be overcome by generous efforts. This is achieved by way of prayer and humble obedience to the holy rules. A great reward is reserved for them, but God grants it only to those who persevere in the Lord's battles.

Father Pierre Olivaint, one of the Jesuit martyrs of the Paris commune of 1871, responded to the objections of a youth who wanted to remain in the world, in the following way: – “My parents have plans for my future... – But what does God want? – In this post I am offered, men will hold me in great esteem... – But God? – My natural inclination moves me in that direction. – But God? – I can surely save my soul in the world... – True, but does God want you to save it there?”

“*I may be unhappy in the cloister.*” Is the world, then, an earthly paradise, so full of love, peace and happiness that no sorrow is to be found there? Religious may have much to suffer, days of trials and desolation, bravely facing up to an unchanging round of duties, day after day; yet with Saint Paul they can exclaim: “Because just as afflictions abound in me for love of Christ, consolations coming to me from Christ super abound in me as well.”

“Father”, said an agèd Trappist monk, “I have such great consolation here amid all our austerities that I fear to have none in the other world.”

“One winter's evening”, wrote Saint Thérèse, “I was as usual carrying out my task. It was night, and cold. Suddenly, in the distance I heard the harmonious sound of a musical instrument. I then pictured to myself a brightly lit drawing-room, all resplendent with rich gilding; some young ladies elegantly dressed were exchanging all kinds of compliments and worldly courtesies. Then my gaze fell upon the poor sick nun whom I was supporting: instead of a melody, I heard now and then her pitiful moans; instead of rich gilding, I saw the bricks of our austere cloister scarcely lit by a glimmering lamp. I cannot express what occurred in



my soul. What I know is that the Lord enlightened my soul with the rays of truth, which exceed the tenebrous brilliance of earthly feasts in such fashion that I could not believe my own happiness. No, I would not exchange those ten minutes it cost me to perform that humble service of charity for a thousand years of enjoying worldly feasts.” She had found the secret of happiness: “I am happier in Carmel, even amid my interior and exterior sufferings, than previously in the world, surrounded by the comforts of life and above all the tenderness of the paternal home... At the end of my religious life I have led the happiest existence that can be imagined, because I have never ever sought myself. When one renounces oneself, one obtains the recompense on earth.”

Another temptation is unwillingness to bear the discomforts of common life: poor food with unfamiliar seasoning; little sleep; inability to leave the house; keeping silence and, above all, unable to do what each pleases. When the novice is assailed by this temptation, he should say as Saint Bernard said to himself: “Bernard, Bernard, what have you come to religion for?” He should then remember that he hasn't entered the cloister to lead a comfortable and easy life, but to become holy. Well then, can we attain sanctity by living amid comforts and pleasures? No, rather by suffering and overcoming all sensual appetites. “To think that God will admit easy-going, leisurely people to His close friendship is folly”, says Saint Teresa. And elsewhere she adds: “Souls who love God in truth cannot ask for rest.” Accordingly, no one who is not resolved to undergo all kinds of hardships for God's sake will ever become a saint.

Not only will he not reach sanctity, but neither will he obtain peace of soul. Has anyone ever found peace enjoying the goods of this world and giving free reign to his senses? Do the magnates of earth who swim in abundance and bathe in pleasures possess it? Surely they are the most wretched of men, continually slaking their thirst with gall and poison. *Vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit*, Solomon called the goods of this world, after having enjoyed them to satiety. When a man sets his heart on these goods, the more he has the

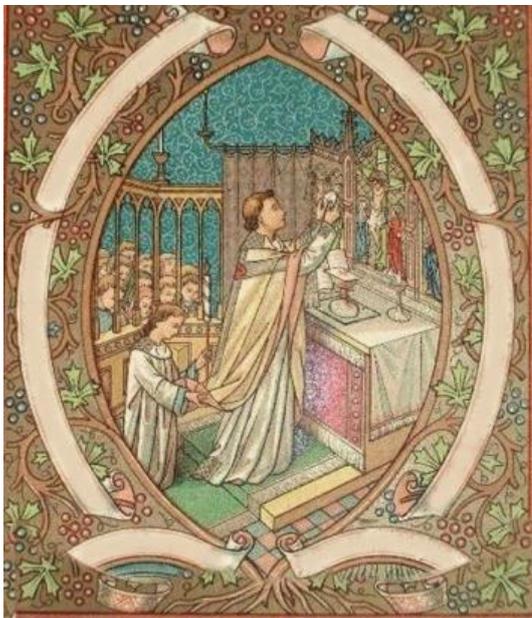
more he wants, and is never sated; and on the contrary, when he seeks his happiness in God, then he finds peace and rest in Him. Father Charles of Lorraine, the Duke of Lorraine's brother, enjoyed so much peace and contentment enclosed in his cloister cell, that he sometimes danced for joy. Blessed Seraphim of Ascoli, a Capuchin friar, said that he would not exchange one handbreadth of his cord for all the riches and honours of this world.

There is another deception by which Hell tries the novice when seeing him overwhelmed by some spiritual desolation: 'Can't you see, it tells him, that here you find no peace? You have lost your devotion, everything is boring, wearying: prayer, spiritual reading, Holy Communion and even recreation; an evident sign that the Lord has not called you to religious life.'

This kind of temptation is terrible and to be dreaded by novices fresh to the cloister and little accustomed to struggle. To overcome this temptation it is well to consider the nature of true peace for a soul in this world, which is a place for gaining merit, and therefore a place of trial. As we have seen, peace of soul is not found among worldly goods, neither does it consist in feeling spiritual consolation, for this neither increases the treasure of our merits nor does it make us more pleasing to God. True peace of soul is exclusively founded in conforming our will to God's Will; it is from this that the greatest peace and greatest rest for which we can wish shall come. It is to conform our wishes with God's; even when He chooses to detain us in spiritual darkness and desolation. How pleasing to God is the faithful soul who communes, prays and spends himself without any consolation in all kinds of spiritual exercises solely to please the Lord! How high the value of good works performed without any recompense in this world! To bear Jesus Christ's cross without consolation not only makes the soul run, rather fly along the path to perfection.

When the novice finds his heart parched and dry, he should say: 'Lord, since it is Your will that I live in desolation, deprived of all consolation, it is mine as well for all the time it may please You; I do not wish to abandon You, and am ready to undergo such hardships and labours all my life long and for all eternity, if Your will so disposes; for me it is enough to know that You have so disposed.'

This is the way the novice who truly desires to love God should speak; but he should know that he will not always live under the burden of the trial. The devil, to dishearten him, will try to convince him that his troubles will have no end, and that one day he will surely fall into despair and lose heart for the struggle. These are dreadful storms which Satan stirs up in the desolate soul, immersed in darkness. Still there is no reason to lose calm, for the Lord once said: "to whoever overcomes I will give to eat eternally of heavenly manna." Those who have patiently borne the struggle with spiritual dryness, and have overcome the temptations which Hell stirs up to make them to turn back, will be consoled by the Lord, and will be given to taste of that unknown delicacy which is interior peace. To be able to say: 'I am now doing God's Will, I am pleasing God,' gives such wellbeing as to surpass whatever the world can give, with all its diversions, festivities, theatres, banquets, honours and grandeurs. The Lord cannot fail in the promises He has made to those who abandon everything for His love. He has promised Heaven in the other life, and a hundredfold in the present one. But in what does this hundredfold consist? It consists precisely in the testimony of a good conscience, which far outstrips and greatly surpasses all the pleasures of this world:



"Truly I tell you that everyone who, for My Name's sake, shall leave home or brother or sister or father or mother or wife or children or land, even with the sufferings proper to the religious life, shall here in this world receive a hundredfold in homes or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or land; and afterwards shall possess eternal life. Since many who in this world are considered foremost in honours and riches, if they do not employ them in God's service, will be least in the Kingdom of Heaven; and those who, having left everything for My sake, are regarded as least in this world, will be foremost in the Kingdom of Heaven." And the Lord said in El Palmar on the 30th of December 1975: "Many are called, but do not respond to the call!... Many are those called, but not all accept the call." Whoever responds to Christ's call will certainly receive a hundredfold more, for he will leave father and mother, and will have God as his loving Father and the Most Holy Virgin Mary as Mother, by Whom he will be loved and treated as a son; he

will leave home and live in the House of the Lord; the Priest will have the Divine Mary as Purest Spouse, and countless spiritual children.

But we have not yet concluded; we have yet to speak of the most dangerous temptations. Those which we have dealt with up to now are based on our flesh and blood, and so we note that they are temptations from the devil; hence, with the help of divine grace, we can easily recognize and overcome them. The most fearsome temptations are those which appear under the cloak of piety or benevolence; since thus hidden and camouflaged, they may more easily seduce and deceive the unwary.

“Perhaps I never had a vocation.” Many have been tried by great doubts over their vocation, sometimes fearing they have deceived themselves, and that it would be impossible for them to obtain their salvation in the religious state. All sweetness and devotion seem to have vanished; everything has become wearisome! A clear sign, they think, that God never asked them to enter.

Theologians, and at their head Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori, lay it down as a principle that even if one were to enter religion without a vocation and persevere through the novitiate, God would certainly give one at the moment of pronouncing one’s vows. To hesitate or doubt when that step has been taken would be treason: “Whoever, after putting his hand to the plough, turns to look back, is not worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven”. We explained this matter at length in Our second Apostolic Letter.

The devil sometimes disturbs the novice’s mind with these or like reasons: ‘Who knows whether yours is a true vocation, or just a caprice? If God has not called you to Religion, you will lack the graces necessary to persevere; and it could well happen that after taking your vows you repent and end up by apostatizing, so then neither in the world will you obtain salvation, and in this case your perdition is assured.’

To combat this temptation it is enough to know how and when someone can be sure of his vocation. Saint



Alphonsus Mary explains: “A well founded vocation should meet three conditions: first, have a good purpose, that is, to escape the dangers of the world, to assure the salvation of the soul, greater union with God by a more intimate bond of love, etc.; second, that there has been no positive hindrance preventing you from following your vocation, such as lack of health, talent, parents’ poverty; once the postulant has explained these things to the Superiors plainly and simply, he should be at peace; third, that the Superiors accept the vocation. Well, then, with the concurrence of these three things, the novice should hold as certain that his vocation is true.”

Besides, that repugnance, and even aversion which some experience throughout their religious life, is no sign of the lack of a vocation, if they persevere; God is simply trying their fidelity to increase their merit. So then, do not let yourself be taken in by any of these false pretexts of Satan; and be assured that if you abandon the Order, you will regret it, as has happened to so many others, and you will only recognize your error when perhaps you can no longer put things right; for whoever leaves the Order, may have difficulty in being received again.

Sadly, there are many in the world today who say that God does not exist and persuade each other to hold that error by saying they have never seen God and that He has never appeared to them to show them otherwise. They act badly. Yet members of the Church act worse by saying they have no religious vocation because God has not miraculously shown them the contrary. All mankind has the obligation to recognize the sovereignty of the Creator, submit to His Law, and embrace the true religion; but more severe is the obligation of faithful Christians to love God and fulfil His Will. It is shameful that worldly people stop up their ears to the truth, for their one wish is to satisfy their sensuality and enjoy the present life; but more offensive to God is the way His predilect children, who have received countless graces from the cradle, prefer to live in sin when called to sanctity; fold their arms when called to fight for Christ and Mary; follow pagan ways when called to give worship to God; enjoy the world using the gifts and talents they have received for the salvation of souls. Alas for the rejection of vocations, for the scorn for divine love and the consequent loss of so many souls!

"It is not for me." There is yet another form of temptation through which many novices have passed. This temptation consists in Satan concealing himself, so that the novice feels no temptation to sin, and thinks that here in the cloister he does not sin. Thus at the beginning he enjoys peace. Soon, however, he begins to grow cold. The spirit of struggle dies away, so that he believes himself safe and that Satan is far away. Then come doubts about his vocation, but very camouflaged and not by way of great temptations, because the ancient serpent does not want to be discovered. If he starts to tempt openly, the novice knows that the devil is behind it all and takes refuge in prayer. Satan does not want that; for the moment he only wants the novice to abandon the Order, because he knows better than anybody that one single Priest or one single Nun reduces and combats his power on earth terribly. He only wants them to return to the world. There they easily sin and he gains greater power over their souls. So that this fraud may prosper, the motive for doubting the vocation has to be something quite normal so that the novice continues thinking that Satan is faraway. Something simple, for example: 'I like religious life, it is really nice here and I feel at home; but I realize that it is not for me.' It is strange indeed that the phrase "it is not for me", is so common among those who have left here. The reply should be: "But is it perhaps for me? No, it is not for me, because it never is for oneself... it is for God! And: I am for God! That is the thing! Sadly, many just said, "it is not for me", and lost their vocation for not having said, "it is for God!"

"Wait! Wait! Wait!" "If I were you I would not be in such a hurry." But Jesus would not let the young man remain in the world even to bury his father: "Let the dead bury their dead," as though telling him: 'Come and follow Me; hurry up and make no delay.' Whoever wishes to obey God's voice faithfully should make up his mind not only to follow it, but follow it without delay and straight away, if he does not wish to expose himself to the grave risk of losing the vocation. And if through special circumstances he is forced to wait, he should take pains to conserve it as the most precious jewel entrusted to him.



"You do not know the world." To which you reply: 'I know it is my worst foe, the friend and helper of my deadly enemy, Satan, and a danger I should fear and fly from.'

"You are too young, wait a while." You reply: 'Should I wait till the foul breath of the world has tarnished the beauty of the lily of my soul, which God loves for its irreproachable purity and wants for Himself?' It is a great advantage for a man to have borne the Lord's yoke from his youth.

All these vacillations only serve to prevent us from fulfilling God's Will. Hence we arrive at death without even having begun. They must be overcome with firmness and decision, saying with Saint Manuel Díaz Martínez: "I have decided once and for all to give myself up wholly to the problem of my sanctification. The time of indecision, of weakness, of lack of generosity, of love, is now over. I want to and can become holy. So I will. Jesus, I surrender myself to Thee without reserve! Do what You please with me! Ask and demand much of me! I will give You all You ask! Make me holy!"

This saying of Saint Bernard on the advantages of the religious life is famous: "A religious lives with greater purity, falls more rarely, rises more promptly, acts more cautiously, receives heavenly graces more frequently, rests more securely, dies with greater confidence, is purged more swiftly and is rewarded more abundantly."

The advantages of the religious state and the heavenly favours enjoyed by all those who are called to this life are remarkable. "What a glorious reign of the Holy Ghost is the religious state!" wrote a Jesuit Father. "It is like an island of peace and calm in the midst of the brief, changing and restless tide of this earthly life. It is like a garden planted by God and blessed with the fat of the earth and the dew of heavenly consolation. It is like a lofty mountain where the last echoes of this world are extinguished, and the first sounds of a blessed eternity are heard. What peace, happiness, purity and holiness it has poured out over the face of the earth!"

Neither is it surprising, since God is never to be outdone in generosity, and knows how to give a splendid recompense for sacrifices made in obedience to His calling.

Saint Peter said to Jesus: "See, we have left everything and followed You in the religious state. What then shall be our recompense?" Jesus told them: "Truly I tell you that everyone who, for My Name's sake, shall leave home or brother or sister or father or mother or wife or children or land, even with the sufferings proper

to the religious life, shall here in this world receive a hundredfold in homes or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or land; and afterwards shall possess eternal life.”

The Lord is gentle, but only those who have felt the happiness, peace and contentment of the cloister fully understand that they have chosen the best. Countless souls have spoken sincere words of gratitude to God and to His Most Holy Mother for the grace of their vocation. One who had to suffer greatly in order to sever the attachments which bound him to the world and to home, wrote: “It seems that I am gradually awakening from a long sleep. I am so happy that I don’t know if I am the same person or someone else. How can I thank God sufficiently for having brought me here?”

Saint Jerome compared religious who have abandoned the world with the Israelites freed from the slavery of Egypt, and says that God has shown them great love by changing their hard slavery for the sweet liberty of the children of God.

Many caricatures of friars and of nuns have been painted, presenting them as a bright and breezy company, revelling in the good things of this world, but no artist has ever depicted a religious community as a group of sad and gloomy souls. The very atmosphere of the cloister is one of peace and joy, its members happy and cheerful; given that, safe from the torments and problems of the world and from the insatiable longing for wealth, free from the worries and anxieties of home and family, sheltered from the disputes, struggles and base jealousies of life by the mantle of loving charity, they have at last found true happiness, which consists in peace of soul and joy of heart.

The world can boast of many things, but cannot pretend to give happiness to its partisans. The one who had most means to satisfy every desire, Solomon, sorrowfully exclaimed: “I did not deny my eyes anything they desired, nor forbid my heart to enjoy every kind of pleasure... I see that all was vanity and vexation of spirit... Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Fear God and keep His Commandments, because this alone avails man.”



The life of a religious, like that of any other human being, should be warfare to the end; religious have their crosses and trials, and God, to sanctify them, frequently sends great interior trials and sufferings; but in spite of it all, in the depths of their soul they feel the presence of Christ’s most prized gift: “Peace I leave you, My peace I give to you.” That peace of heart is a continuous feast unknown to the world and is something which earthly pleasures cannot give.

Hence Saint Lawrence Justinian says: “Almighty God has purposely concealed the happiness of religious life, for were it known, everyone would abandon the world and fly to religion.”

“An earthly paradise”, says Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi; and Saint Scholastica: “If men were aware of the peace which religious enjoy in their retirement, the entire world would turn into a great cloister.”

Firm in the possession of God, rejoicing in the promise of a glorious eternity, is it surprising that those who have left all to follow Christ find His yoke sweet and His burden light? A certain religious sums up this image of the true religious life in these words: “Happiness in Heaven purchased by happiness on earth.”

Happiness is to be found in the cloister and, what is more important, sanctity. Spiritual writers say that perfection in the religious state surpasses that of all other states, since it does away with the obstacles to attaining sanctity, and consecrates the person to God in the most perfect way. The world, with its whirlpool of entertainments and distractions, is the mortal enemy of piety, and even the best disposed people find it difficult not to be influenced by the predominating spirit of indifference towards spiritual things; or not to be affected by examples of so much negligence, and including ill-will, all around them. Many holy souls long for prayer and recollection, but discover that the cares of a family, the obligations of social duties, unavoidable visits and entertainments, occupy the restricted time they may give to God.

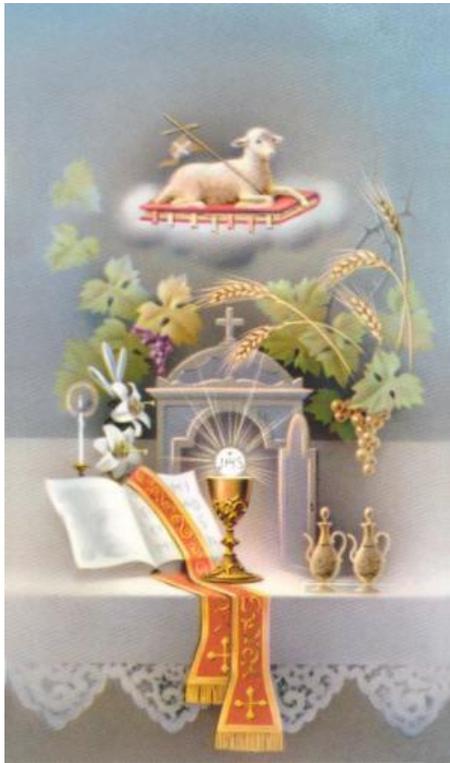
In religious life, care of the soul is the first and predominant duty; her progress and perfection is their life’s great undertaking. By a wise distribution of time, despite their many other occupations, religious can dedicate several hours a day to meditation, prayer, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the recital of the Holy Rosary, well organized so as not to become burdensome.

The Rules and the voice of Obedience make God's Will known to the friar, which he could never be sure of in the world; they protect him from a multitude of dangerous temptations, and exclude the possibility of sin in great measure. The company of so many chosen souls, their generous example and holy lives, spur him on to nobler things. Freed from all worldly longings, he can set his whole heart on God's love and service, and lead a life which is a sincere though humble imitation of his Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

Saint Alphonsus Mary affirmed that the majority of the highest thrones in Heaven will be occupied by souls sanctified in the religious state; for among the sixty persons canonized during the seventeenth century, there were only five who did not belong to religious Orders.

The essence of the religious life, that which constitutes it and gives it so much merit, is the observance of the three vows of Evangelical Perfection: Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. A vow is a solemn promise made to God, after serious deliberation and having fully understood his responsibility, by which the person undertakes to perform something good, under pain of sin.

It is certain that it is more perfect and agreeable to God to perform a good work after having obliged ourselves by vow, than to do it freely without that obligation. For as Saint Thomas says, an act of perfect virtue is always in itself more excellent than one of a lesser virtue. Therefore, an act of charity is more



meritorious than an act of mortification, since charity is a more perfect virtue than the virtue of penance. After the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, the most perfect of all is the virtue of Religion, by which we adore God; a vow is an act of this virtue, the noblest of the moral virtues, the Virtue of Religion, and therefore all actions realized by virtue of vows are raised up to the dignity of acts of Religion, not only by giving them far greater value in God's eyes and imparting constancy and firmness to the will in doing good, but also by enormously increasing the person's sanctity, since every action reaps a double reward, the merit of the act of virtue and the merit of the act of religion, conferred by the vow.

Of all the vows which can be taken, those of the religious state are the noblest and best. The Christian's perfection consists in renouncing the covetousness of earthly life, in treading the world underfoot, in breaking all the bonds which hold him captive, and in being bound and united to God by perfect charity. The three great obstacles which prevent him from acquiring this perfection, according to Saint John, are the concupiscence of the eyes through wealth, the concupiscence of the flesh through the pleasures of the senses, and the pride of life through the quest for honours. The vow of poverty destroys the first, the vow of chastity the second and that of obedience the third. By the vow of complete slavery to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, we live solely to serve

our Divine Queen and Her Adorable Son.

By these vows man makes a perfect sacrifice of himself to God: he offers himself as a holocaust for His glory, not only by delivering up to Him forever all the earthly and spiritual possessions he has or may have, but moreover by renouncing his own freedom and will: the most perfect immolation a human being can make.

Seeing how pleasing to God this lifelong sacrifice is, the Fathers of the Church, Saint Jerome, Saint Bernard, the Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas and many others, have called religious profession the "Second Baptism", by which the guilt and the punishment due to past sins are completely remitted.

"A religious lives happier and dies more trustingly", writes Saint Bernard; and he can well live thus, knowing that the vows which bind him forever to the service of God and Most Holy Mary have blotted out every trace of a sinful past; that the wrongful deeds of his life, though they be as numerous as the sands of the sea, with all the dreadful consequences they entailed, have been blotted out by the angel recorder, and that his soul is as pure and immaculate as when the Waters of Baptism made him an heir to Heaven: "No one has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friends", said the Saviour, and the Apostle adds: "Charity (the love of God) covers a multitude of sins."

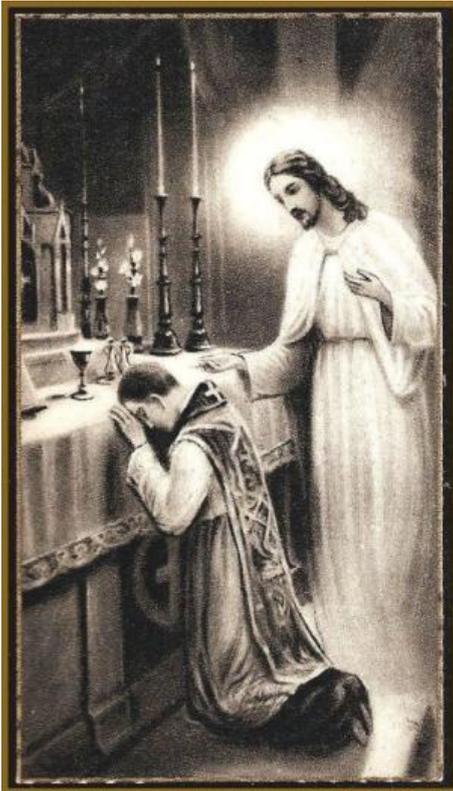
By his life's daily crucifixion, the religious makes this offering, of all that is dear to him, reach the hands of his Friend and Master, a martyrdom sometimes even more dolorous than that of blood, but which he knows will win him a glorious crown in Heaven and spiritual joy even on earth.

It can easily be understood then that those who have discovered the beauty and grandeur of a life "all for Jesus and Mary" in the cloister, who have tasted its sweetness and have seen the possibilities for towering sanctity within its walls, decide never to abandon it, and that their desire to belong ever more to God intensifies.

In previous pages, we have briefly seen the nature and obligations of a vocation, and glanced over some of its privileges and advantages. Nonetheless some, including among Catholics, might ask themselves: why the need for so many Priests and Nuns?

A long time ago, while the Saviour still dwelt on earth, in His apostolate, when He saw the people coming up to hear His word, He had compassion on them, for they were spiritually forlorn and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd. Therefore, comparing them with the harvest then ripe in the fields, He said to His Apostles: "The harvest is truly plentiful, but the labourers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest, that He send labourers to His harvest." The wheat fields waving far into the distance, the ears bowed under the weight of numberless tiny seeds, each with its germ of life, were an image of the vast multitude of human beings whom Christ had come to save, of the souls of those with whom He was living and of the myriads who would follow Him. The echo of those words has never ceased to ring. "The harvest is truly plentiful, but the labourers are few." In whatever direction we look, no matter where in the globe, we still see the vast number of souls, God's harvest, waiting to be gathered into the Master's granaries.

"Send me half a million Priests", wrote a missionary from India, "and I promise you that they will all find abundant work on arrival."



"For the love of God, come to us. I have found myself with millions of men here in Africa who need to listen to the words and works of Our Lord to become millions of good and happy Christians."

Another, while gazing at the Chinese population about him, exclaimed: "The ten thousand catechumens in my district would be a hundred thousand tomorrow if there were enough Priests and Nuns to instruct and receive them."

Now more than ever, the harvest is truly great, with thousands of millions who do not know the true Faith, and each with an immortal soul in danger of failing to obtain eternal salvation; but the labourers are few, and ever fewer, as the Lord forewarned: "When the Son of Man comes, however, do you think He will find Faith on Earth?" We are now living Christ's prophecy: "And wickedness shall spread to the point that charity will disappear in many, owing to the great apostasies. But whoever perseveres to the end shall indeed be saved." Now is when generous and zealous Priests are most needed to set the world ablaze: "I came to put fire on Earth. And what do I wish, but that it burn? For I have come to set the Earth ablaze with the Fire of Charity, to destroy the false peace the world gives."

"All of you, pray, then, – the Saviour still pleads from the Tabernacle, as He contemplates the enormous task still remaining, – pray all to the

Lord to send labourers, many and zealous, into His harvest."

Young Palmarians, you whose lives are opening up before you so full of promise, have you no nobler ideal, no loftier ambition, than to spend your days in pleasure and enjoyment while your brethren gaze at you pleading for help? Lift up your eyes and see the harvest awaiting you, the most glorious labour any man has ever performed: the salvation of immortal souls.

There is a great harvest to gather: thousands of millions of pagans to convert; more than 160,000 people who die every day. Are they all sure of Salvation? That is the labour you have before you, the labour God expects of you: to fortify and spread the Faith, preaching the truth to an incredulous world, sacrificing yourselves as did the Saints of the past, leaving homes and friends and, for love of God and His Most Holy Mother, laying down your lives so that others can be saved.

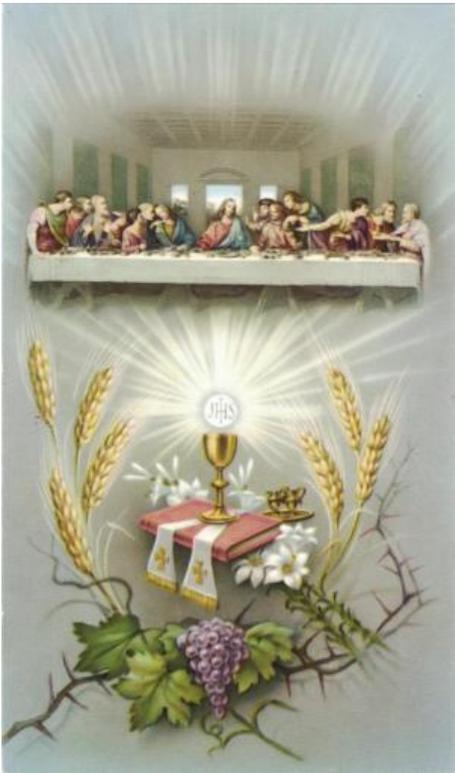
In all truth, a vocation is a gift of God, but for love of the souls whom He longs to save, God would willingly grant this gift to many Palmarians, if only they listened to His voice or prayed for this treasure.

Are you, dear son, one whose heart Jesus has been stirring for a long time, perhaps in vain, inviting, entreating and exhorting? “The Master is here and calls you;” He needs you for His work. Follow Him bravely and confidently; you will never repent. But if you have not yet heard His voice, remember His words: “Ask, and it shall be given to you”; ask Him for a vocation, not once but every day; ask with confidence, perseveringly, because He has given His word that He will hear you; everyone who asks shall receive; so that you too may share the happiness of those who serve the Lord, and so that “your joy”, like theirs, “may be complete”.

The Church suffers from lack of Priests and of vocations and should therefore increase their number. The need is ever more pressing: if things continue at this pace, the lack of Priests will mean desolation for the vineyard of the Lord. Men with solid piety and excellent dispositions are needed, ready to study, pray, work and obey. Let us seek the way to increase the number of good Priests, and soon.

This year it is 400 years since the entry into the religious life of Saint Mary of Jesus of Ágredda, who was then sixteen, and that of her whole family. The Saint’s mother, Catherine of Arana, had a revelation, confirmed by her confessor, according to which they should turn their house into a convent and the mother herself with her two daughters enter as nuns, while the father and the two sons should become religious in the

Order of Saint Francis. Faced with this, Saint Mary of Jesus gave her approval to the project. But the idea was so discordant that it met with resistance from the father of the household, and still more from a brother of his. The opposition of the neighbourhood was also general, and it was said to be “an offence against holy matrimony”. Nonetheless, opposition and difficulties were gradually overcome; the father changed his mind and, in 1618, with some prior reforms, the house became a convent for Nuns.



It was surely no ‘offence against holy matrimony’, for Christ instituted the Sacrament of Matrimony at the Cana Wedding, when Bartholomew and Susanna married to have children. However, moved by Jesus’ miracle at the Wedding, they decided to live apart in perfect continence, without the marriage they had contracted thereby becoming dissolved. It was the Divine Mary, most perfect model of Spouse and Virgin, who enlightened the Cana couple for them to see the worth of a more excellent union, that is, the spiritual espousal of perfect chastity consecrated to God, the fecundity of which is immensely more copious and beneficial to the Church than the union of marriage. Saint Bartholomew later became one of the twelve Apostles; the Holy Apostles Peter, Andrew, Philip and Matthew were also married and the other seven single. In accord with this, Palmarian Morals explains that among the just causes which make matrimonial separation licit is when,

by mutual consent, one or both enter the religious life.

If someone starts out along the right way, he can be sure that he is following the path to Heaven, by which he is called; and whoever does not follow it, does not go by the right way. Some ways are narrow, full of stones and overgrown with thorns, but one must keep up a good spirit: beside the thorns is God’s grace as well; and on the other hand, the reward awaiting us at the end is so great that soon all hurts will be forgotten.

Those who in general do not succeed in taking refuge beneath Mary’s mantle are those who are attached to the goods of this earth. Selfishness does not allow them to think of anything but themselves; they themselves are full of mire and incapable of making the effort to obtain the things of Heaven. They are those who set their hearts on the things of this world and do not think beyond earthly enjoyment, becoming rich and acquiring fame; and for Paradise, nothing.

It is very important that we value the need and grandeur of the Priesthood. Priests are Ministers of Christ, the intermediaries between Him and mankind. In the Holy Sacrifice of Mass, the Priest perpetuates the Reparation to the Father and the Redemption of mankind brought about in the Sacrifice of Christ and Mary on Calvary. And without this perpetuation there could be no possible salvation for mankind; that is, without

Holy Mass no one would be saved, nor would the world be able to subsist. “What would become of you without the Priests of the Lord! You would live like orphans and outcasts”, says Saint Paul.

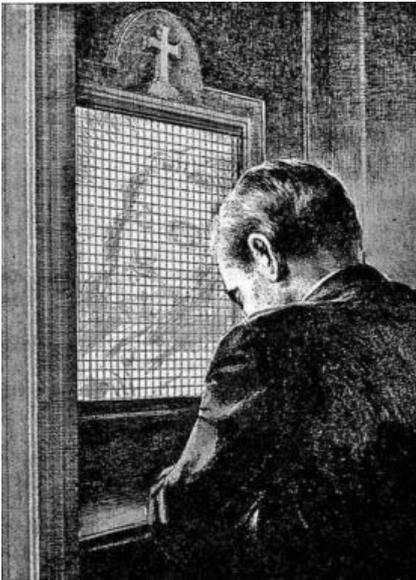
Christ commended the distribution of the graces of salvation to Priests; for Christ acts mystically in each Priest and labours in the Church through them, who are the authentic Mediators between God and mankind. These Ministers of God and Dispensers of His graces have to be irreproachable, just, pious, and zealous servants of Jesus and Mary. The Priest is a sacred person, though you see human weaknesses and miseries in him.

If it is not enough for you to consider the grandeur and the need for the Priesthood, remember as well that the Most Holy Virgin Mary is Most Pure Spouse of Priests; this Divine Spouse is enormously wealthy, gives without charge, lavishes Her love; will it still be necessary to move you with exhortations, counsels and arguments of a thousand kinds to choose Her as Spouse? And will you not abandon everything else with pleasure and even joy, in order to share in Her wealth, to enjoy Her treasures? And will you not give a thousand blessings to the Lord for having called you to take up this state, in which by renouncing the goods of this world, always miserable, though they be kingdoms and empires, you prepare yourselves to unite to such a good Spouse, so loving, so rich and so lavish with Her treasures?

Will this Spouse, infinitely beautiful, magnanimous and loving, be unable to find a little corner in your heart? Will it be so full of earthly love? And on the contrary, all the created things of this world, should they not appear in your eyes as more contemptible than utter dung compared to Her love?

Will there be any Priest of Hers who does not regard himself happy considering that he has left all for Her love? He can truly say: my whole treasure is my Spouse, who enshrines in Herself every kind of wealth.

She is the Spouse whom Priests choose. Brothers, during their time in the noviciate, in which they are preparing to celebrate their nuptials with Her, should not lose sight of the qualities of this Heavenly Spouse, with whom they are to unite with indissoluble bonds and, meditating on Her majesty and grandeur, let them not tire of congratulating themselves on the resolution they have made to despise all other things, as unworthy of their love, compared to that supreme good; and they should strive as well to acquire the treasure of virtues which are the adornment this espousal demands, above all fervent, disinterested and unalterable love for a Spouse so beautiful, so wealthy and so faithful; and let them not cease to repeat: ‘It is only Mary Most Holy and Her Divine Son whom I wish to love; I give myself entirely to Them, and promise Them eternal fidelity and love.’



As Saint Teresa was told, should you not feel deathly anguish seeing that Jesus and Mary are not loved by all men and are despised by so many unfortunates who judge Them unworthy of their love?

When a soul wills to belong wholly to God, the Lord acts to purify and perfect our love, and gives us opportunities to grow in His love and show Him how much we love Him. Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori offers us some excellent counsels on the trials of our love and fidelity inherent in the religious life: When someone, to obey God’s voice calling him to religion, has dominated all his passions and despised all the goods of the world, let him not think that from then on he will be free from trials and temptations, such as anguish, spiritual darkness and other different worries which God will send him in order to strengthen him ever more in his vocation. Even the Saints who have most loved their vocation have suffered now and then from great darkness, it seeming to them that they had been deceived and would be unable to save themselves in the kind of life they had embraced. This happened to Saint Teresa of Jesus, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Jane Frances de Chantal and others; but it sufficed them to commend

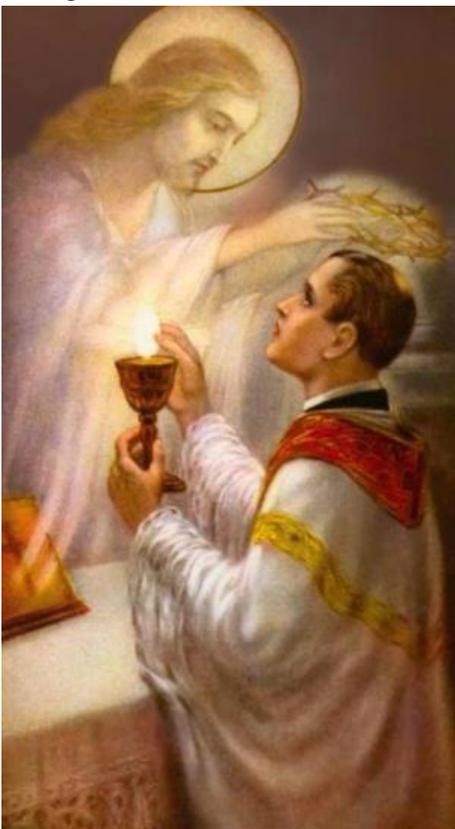
themselves to God in order for the darkness enveloping them to disperse and for them to recover peace. Thus does the Lord try His predilect souls, to make it evident whether they love Him or not.

Therefore it is necessary that the religious be ready to suffer toil and affliction. Sometimes it will seem to him impossible to keep the rule of the Order any longer; at others he will think he has lost peace never to find it again; at others, finally, that he will not succeed in saving himself. Well then, be very much on the alert, chiefly when the temptation appears enveloped in scruples or pursues the novice under the pretext of greater spiritual good to compel him to abandon his vocation. To overcome these temptations there are two chief means, namely:

1. *Turn to God and to Mary Most Holy.* The first thing is prayer; draw near to God for Him to enlighten us. It is impossible for whoever implores God's help to be overcome by temptation, just as it is impossible for the soul to come out victorious without turning to God. Perhaps he will have to maintain the struggle against temptation for whole weeks; but if the soul does not tire of calling on God, he will surely end up victorious, and then be more firmly based in his vocation and enjoy a peace yet gentler and sweeter.

Until this tempest has passed, from which no one is free, let the soul not feel secure. In this time of gloom and darkness, neither fervour nor abundant reasonings will be capable of restoring our lost peace, since amid so much obscurity all is confusion. It is a time to cry out to God, saying: "Lord, help me; my God, come to my aid." He should also turn to the Most Holy Virgin, who is Mother of perseverance, and ask Her trusting in Jesus Christ's promise: *Ask and you shall receive.* And it is evident as well that souls emerging triumphant from this kind of trial will afterwards find perpetual peace and repose in their vocation.

2. *Reveal your conscience to your superiors.* This second remedy, as necessary and important as the previous one for overcoming in this struggle, is to reveal the temptations which beset you to the superior or spiritual father; and this should be done at once, before the temptation gains greater strength and vigour. Saint Philip Neri used to say that "a temptation revealed is half overcome." And on the contrary, the greatest danger in these cases is to hide it from the superior, for then God withdraws His grace and favour, because the religious aspirant does not want to humble himself and manifest the temptation, which is gaining force, until it explodes. Be assured that whoever does not declare the temptations which assail him will end up by losing his vocation.



Just as infection easily enters a closed wound, likewise a hidden temptation causes great havoc, as experience shows. In effect, in temptation, almost all of those who are unsure which side to take and begin to debate whether to lean to the right or to the left, without giving any account to the Superior or Confessor, have lost their vocation. In such cases, they must struggle with themselves to open their heart to the Superiors; and God is so pleased by the novice's act of humility and in his struggle with himself, that of a sudden He will dissipate all the darkness and doubts of their spirit with a ray of His light.

This happened to Saint Thérèse, who said that the day before she took her religious vows "the greatest storm I had known in my whole life arose. Till then, never had a single doubt over my vocation crossed my mind. But I had to pass through this trial. At night, doing the Way of the Cross after reciting Matins, it entered my head that my vocation was a dream, a fantasy. The life of Carmel seemed quite beautiful to me, but the devil insinuated the conviction that it was not for me, that I was deceiving the superiors by insisting on following a path to which I was not called. My darkness was so deep that I could only see or understand one thing: I had no vocation! How to describe my anguish of soul? It seemed to me (absurd thought, which shows plainly that this temptation was from the devil) that if I told the novice mistress of my fears, she would not let me take my vows. Nonetheless, I preferred to do God's will and return to the world, than stay in Carmel doing mine. So I made

the novice mistress leave the choir and, full of confusion, made known the state of my soul. Thanks be to God, she saw more clearly than I and calmed me down completely. For the rest, the act of humility I had done finally put the devil to flight, who perhaps thought that I would not dare to confess that temptation. As soon as I had finished speaking, all my doubts disappeared. Yet, to complete my act of humility, I wanted to confide my strange temptation to our Mother, who just burst out laughing."

Saint John Bosco also said for his novices: "One of the things that can do them the greatest good is this: make themselves known to their superiors, have great confidence in them, be open and sincere."

We should be convinced that the most terrible temptations a religious can undergo are those against his vocation, for if Hell succeeds in overcoming in this matter, by a single battle it wins many victories, for it is well known that when someone loses his vocation and abandons the cloister, he will make no progress at all in the ways of the Lord. True it is that the devil will strive hard to make him believe that outside religious life he will enjoy more peace and will do more good; but be assured that once in the world he will feel his heart

torn by remorse, nor will he find the peace he sought, and please God that such remorse be not his torment for all eternity in Hell, into which one who abandons a vocation through his own fault can easily fall, as was said above. He can easily fall into such great tepidity and discouragement that he will have no mind to do good or even to raise his eyes heavenwards. It comes as no surprise that he abandon prayer, given that each time he takes up prayer, in his heart he will feel remorse and will hear the reproaches of his conscience telling him: ‘What have you done? You abandoned God, lost your vocation, and why? To satisfy your passions? To please your relatives?’ He will hear these reproaches his whole life long, and they will grow at the hour of death, when about to enter eternity, given that instead of dying in God’s house surrounded by his brethren in religion, he sees his life ending outside the cloister, amid his relatives, whom he sought to please and gratify, by displeasing God.

The religious should continually ask God for the grace to die rather than undergo such a great misfortune, which he will only understand in all its magnitude at the hour of death; which will entail no little torment, for at those last moments he can no longer put things right. Hence whoever undergoes temptations against his vocation, as long as the combat lasts, can best meditate on the torments and remorse he will feel, should he lose his vocation and die outside the cloister through his own fault and mere caprice.

Take note, then, whoever desires to enter religion, to be resolved to sanctify yourself and suffer all kinds of interior and exterior hardships to be faithful to God and not abandon your vocation. And if you cannot so decide, do not deceive superiors or deceive yourself, and consequently do not enter religion, for it is an obvious sign that God does not call you or, what is worse, that you do not want to respond as you should to the divine calling. As long as you maintain such poor dispositions, it is better for you to remain in the world, until you decide to give yourself wholly to God and undergo every kind of hardship for Him. Otherwise you will do harm to yourself and to religion, which you will leave under any pretext and, besides becoming



discredited before the world, in God’s eyes you will become guilty of a greater sin, that of having been unfaithful to His calling. You will lose your confidence in Him and will not take a single step along the path of virtue, and God alone knows what disasters and falls will follow this first fall.

How pleasing in God’s eyes is a community of religious whose members strive hard to please and gratify Him, who live in this world yet are not of this world, for all their thoughts are set on God!

The religious should solely aspire to win eternal life. Happy are we if we spend these few days of our lives in serving God! Those who have lost the best part of their lives in the world should put greater zeal into this. Let us meditate frequently on eternity, and then we shall undergo any hardship with pleasure and

joy.

Let us give thanks to God who is so liberal towards us, giving us so many lights and so many means to love Him with every perfection, and above all for having deigned to choose us with such kindness and love from among so many others to serve Him in religious life. Let us strive hard to progress in virtue so as to please Him, given that, as Saint Teresa told her nuns, through God’s grace, by renouncing the world and all its goods, we have already done the greater part in order to become saints; let us then do the lesser part which remains and climb up the holy mount of perfection. Hold as certain that Jesus Christ has prepared a glorious throne in Heaven for all who die in religion. In this world we will be poor and despised, and treated as mad and imprudent, but in the other life lots will be reversed.

Let us ever commend ourselves to our Most Beloved Redeemer and to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, hidden in the Tabernacle, to Whom all religious should profess the deepest love. Let us never lose hope: Jesus Christ has chosen us to be His courtiers, and we have patent proofs of the protection He dispenses to the Order in general and to each religious in particular. “The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom shall I fear?” – says David. May the Lord finish His work and grant that we live consecrated to His honour and glory, so that all the members of our Order may have the happiness of pleasing Him in everything, until the day of judgement, and win for His glory countless souls.

Sincere aspirants to the religious life should use the means necessary to preserve their vocations: One principal means is *to avoid deliberate faults*. Bear greatly in mind that the devil strives hard to get the novice to sin, not so much for the evil involved in the fault, but rather to make him lose his vocation, for it is well known that, by committing deliberate faults, fervour soon begins to fade: in prayer, at Communion and in all other acts of piety. The Lord, for His part, with every reason will not be so generous in granting His graces and favours, in accord with that general law of His Providence, of which Saint Paul speaks when he says: “Whoever sows sparingly, will reap sparingly.” This will occur above all to the proud; for just as God resists the proud, the devil, at the same time, wins greater influence over them. And thus it will happen that, on the one hand, with the increase in the novice’s tepidity, and on the other, deprived of divine light, it will not be difficult for Hell to achieve its aim: to get him to lose his vocation.

The essential means is *prayer*. Turn to God asking Him for holy perseverance, which, as Saint Augustine says, is won by force of supplication. Saint Alphonsus Mary de Liguori wrote: “But let the novice, who has



felt called by God and is then tempted to abandon Him, take note -- and I repeat --let him not turn to the Lord saying to Him: ‘Enlighten me, Lord, to understand what I should do’, because the light he asks for has already been given by God calling him; and it will happen that, by asking for it, the devil will easily transform himself into an angel of light, and succeed in fascinating him and making him believe that the infernal thought of leaving religion is a light from Heaven. The novice’s prayer should be: ‘Lord, since you have given me the grace of a vocation, give me as well the strength necessary to persevere in it.’ A certain youth was called by God to the religious state, and following lengthy trials, the Superior approved his vocation and the youth entered the cloister; but his parents troubled him so much that they succeeded in forcing him to withdraw elsewhere to examine his vocation at greater length. But instead of returning to the cloister he had left, he went back home, to the great pleasure of his parents and to the no less great displeasure of the Lord. And when I asked him why he had made such a sorry mistake, he answered me that he had asked the Lord to enlighten him saying: –‘*Speak, Lord,*

Thy servant listens’, and that on ending his prayer had decided to return to his parents’ home. I (Saint Alphonsus) then replied: “You were mistaken, my son; your vocation was a true one, based on a thousand evident reasons; you should not have said: ‘Speak Lord’, since God had already spoken to you, rather: ‘Lord, give me the strength necessary to follow your Will, since You have already made this known to me.’ As you did not pray thus to the Lord, you lost your vocation.” May this youth’s misfortune be a lesson to many. The novice should, moreover, note that at the time of temptation, a time of confusion and darkness, he should not look for reasons to calm his anxiety; rather let him offer himself anew to God and pray to Him in this way: ‘O my God! Since I have given myself entirely to You, I do not wish to abandon You; help me, do not allow me to be unfaithful’. And repeating this prayer with greater insistence when the temptation becomes stronger, and then making it known, as has been said, to the Superiors, victory will be his. Let him then commend himself in a special way to the Most Holy Virgin, Mother of perseverance.”

A young novice, overcome by temptation, was at the point of leaving the monastery. However, he first knelt down before an image of the Most Holy Virgin to pray a Hail Mary to Her; at once he felt as though nailed to the floor unable to move; thankful to the Mother of God for such a signal favour, he made a vow to persevere in religion, after which he rose up without difficulty, went to ask pardon from the Master of novices and persevered in his vocation.

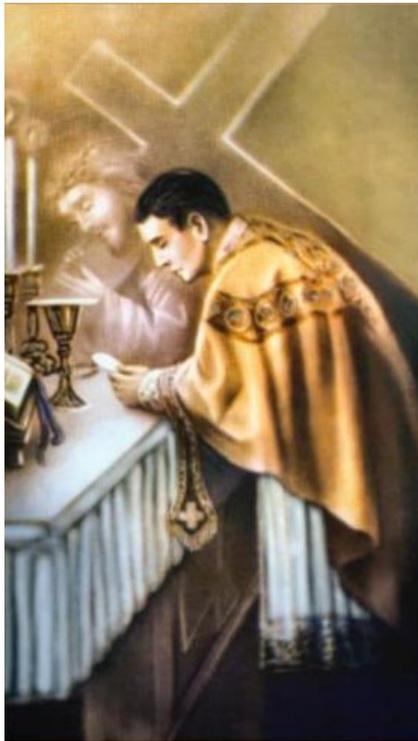
To the novice or aspirant to the religious life it is well to request him very earnestly that, whenever he is tempted against his vocation, he should pause to consider two things:

First, that the grace of a vocation, with which the Lord has favoured you, has not been given to many others of your circle, perhaps less unworthy of that grace than yourself; do not repay Him with ingratitude and betray Him; note that, being unfaithful to the Lord, you place yourself in great danger of damnation, and you can hold it for certain that you will not enjoy a moment of peace in this life, for remorse of conscience will break your heart up till death.

Second, when temptation assails you with greater fury and the enemy tries to persuade you that unless you abandon the Order you will lead the life of a convict and sooner or later will repent, then bring to mind the hour of your death and reflect that, if you were now at that supreme moment, you would not repent of having followed your vocation; quite the contrary, you would enjoy perfect peace and indescribable happiness, while bitter distress and great sorrow would be yours if you had been unfaithful to God's voice. If you bear this thought ever in mind, you will not be lost; in life you will enjoy untroubled peace and at the hour of death you will receive the crown of glory which God has prepared for His faithful servants.

Whoever enters religion must come with the necessary dispositions. One who feels called by God should not forget that the purpose of religious life is to follow, as closely as our frailty permits, the footsteps and examples of the sacrosanct life of Jesus Christ, who in this world led a life of mortification and detachment, fraught with labour and contempt. For that reason, it is indispensable that whoever decides to enter the Order should also be willing to suffer and deny himself in all things, as Jesus Christ Himself declares to those who want to enter His service: "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross each day and follow Me." Whoever wishes to enter religion should seek in it peace of conscience and holiness of life, and should be convinced that he will have much to suffer and put up with, for otherwise, once in religion, he risks being overcome by temptation when he feels the whole weight of the poor, mortified life led in the cloister fall upon his shoulders.

The religious should be very thankful to the Order, for he is freed from a thousand worries and is offered so many means for serving God in great peace and perfection, and for making progress every day in virtue, such as: the good example he receives from his brothers in religion, the recommendations of the Superiors, who watch over his spiritual progress, and spiritual exercises, so appropriate for obtaining salvation.



Nonetheless, if he wishes to obtain so many benefits and advantages, he must generously embrace all the labours and sufferings inherent in religious life; whoever does not accept them with love and generosity will lack that peace and purposeful happiness which God reserves to those who, to please Him, overcome and mortify themselves. The peace which God gives His loyal servants to enjoy is hidden from the eyes of worldly people, and therefore, seeing the mortified life they lead, instead of envying their lot, they feel compassion for them and call them unfortunate. Such individuals – says Saint Bernard, – see the cross, but do not see the oil that eases its weight; they see that God's servants are mortified, but do not come to understand the joy and happiness with which the Lord regales them.

There is no doubt that souls who devote themselves to piety suffer; but it is also certain, as Saint Teresa says, that "when a soul resolves to suffer, the work is done." By embracing sufferings, those same pains simply become joys. One day the Lord told Saint Brigid: "You should know, my daughter, that My wealth and treasures are fenced in by thorns; it is enough to resolve to bear the first pricks for them all to turn into sweetness." And who can understand the ineffable delights God gives to His elect to enjoy in prayer, at Communion, in solitude, but one who has tasted them? Who can glimpse the interior lights, the great blaze of love, the tender embraces, the peace of conscience and the anticipated joys of Heaven which the Lord gives to His loving souls?

"A single drop of heavenly consolation is worth more than an ocean of worldly joys and pleasures", says Saint Teresa. Our God, who by nature is grateful, even in this vale of tears can give those who suffer in order to please Him to taste in anticipation something of the sweetness of glory. On giving ourselves up to the interior life, the Lord demands that we be ready to bear all kinds of anguish, labours and even death itself, and seemingly invites us with fatigues and conflicts, but in reality it is not so, because it is enough to commit oneself wholly to God for the spiritual life to fill the soul with that peace which, as Saint Paul says, surpasses all understanding, and which exceeds all that the world can offer to the worldly. Experience shows that religious live happier in their poor cells than monarchs in their royal palaces. 'Taste and see, – says the Psalmist, – how sweet is the Lord.' Whoever has not experienced this will hardly understand.

All said, we must be convinced that anyone who enters religion will never enjoy true peace if he is not willing to suffer and overcome himself in everything contrary to nature, so as to purify his heart of all its evil inclinations and to desire what God wills and in the way God wills.

“Whoever enters God’s service in a religious house, let him be convinced – says Saint Teresa – that he is not there for God to treat him well, but to suffer for His love.” Whoever lacks this disposition should not choose to become a religious, since it would be a clear sign that his soul is not yet ready for a state of such great perfection.

Besides this, it is basic not to seek to be esteemed. There are many who abandon country, despise comforts and leave family behind, and then take with them to the monastery attachment to their own honour and glory, which is far more harmful to the religious than all the rest. The greatest sacrifice we can make to God is not renouncing wealth, pleasures and family, rather renouncing our own selves. That is the denial of oneself which Jesus Christ so greatly recommends to those who would follow Him, when He says: “If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross each day and follow Me.” And to deny himself, the religious should begin by trampling upon his own honour and esteem. He should desire every kind of contempt he can receive in the cloister, as for example: to see himself placed after other religious who perhaps have less merit than himself, or be considered unsuitable for religious ministries, or be employed in low, humble and laborious tasks. He should be convinced that in God’s House the posts which obedience imposes are the highest and most honourable. May the Lord free us from ambition or showing desires to command or seek honorific posts; which in religious would be a great scandal. Whoever were to seek any such thing would be held as proud and ambitious, would be given a most rigorous penance and be mortified precisely in that point in a special way. A religious Order would become useless were it to allow through its doors that corrupt atmosphere of ambition which ruins the most flourishing communities and destroys the Lord’s most glorious works.



On the contrary, the novice who wishes to persevere, seeing that others scorn and mock him, should feel great interior satisfaction. We say *interior satisfaction*, because the flesh will rebel, but there is no reason to be alarmed at this rebellion, so long as the spirit embraces the humiliation and rejoices in the higher part.

When someone is continually reprimanded and mortified, not only by superiors, but also by equals and including inferiors, he should give very sincere thanks with calm spirit to whoever reprimands and charitably admonishes him, and tell him that in the future he will take more care not to fall into the same fault.

One of the greatest desires which the Saints have nurtured in their lives on earth has been to be despised for love of Jesus Christ. This was just what Saint John of the Cross asked of the Lord on a certain occasion in which, appearing to him with the Cross on His shoulders, He told him: “John, ask of me what you will”. And the Saint replied: “To suffer and be despised for You.” The doctors, together with Saint Francis de Sales, teach that the most perfect degree of humility is to take pleasure in contempt and scorn, and that is precisely one of the chief founts of merit the Lord sends to our souls. Contempt borne patiently for His love is worth more before God than a thousand fasts

and a thousand disciplines.

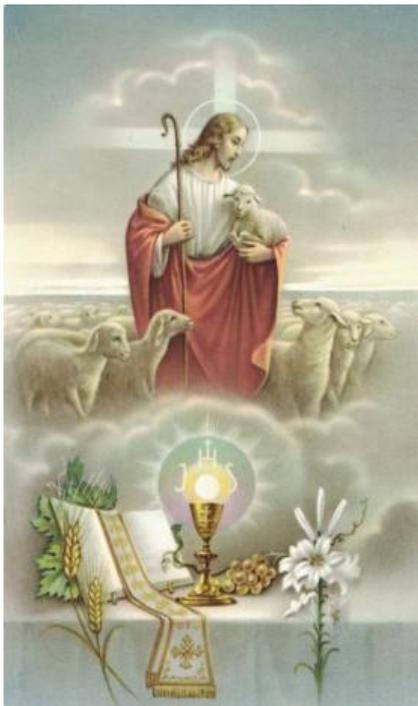
We must be convinced, moreover, that having to bear contempt and humiliations is something inevitable, even in the most perfect communities, at times from superiors, at others from equals. It is enough to read the lives of the Saints to see the insults received by Saint Francis de Regis, Saint Francis de Jerome, Father Torres and many others. The Lord sometimes permits that even among the Saints certain antipathies arise, or perhaps differences of views and of character between persons of much virtue, that later give rise to no little friction and trouble; there will be occasions when things appear as true which are not, and the Lord will permit this, so that the different parties practise patience and humility.

In a word, whoever does not patiently bear contempt and opposition, far from profiting, will lose much in religion. Hence whoever becomes a religious for the purpose of giving himself up wholly to God, yet cannot put up with a humiliation, should feel ashamed. Jesus Christ should always be borne in mind, who for love of

us was loaded with opprobrium. Much attention should be given to this, and on entering religion the novice should be determined to take pleasure in humiliations and be ready to put up with every hardship which may come his way. Otherwise, contrarieties and contempt badly borne will finally perturb him in such a way that he will end up losing his vocation and abandoning the cloister. How many there are who have lost their vocation for lack of patience in humiliations! With what profit can the religious serve God and the Order who cannot bear a little contempt for love of God? How can he say that he has died to himself, as he promised to Jesus Christ on entering religion, if he still feels humiliations in such a lively way that he loses his peace and composure? May they go far, very far, from the cloister those who are so attached to their self esteem, and the sooner they leave the better, so that they do not corrupt and poison the rest with the virus of their pride. In religion all should be dead, especially to self esteem; otherwise it is better not to enter, and having entered it is better that they leave as soon as possible.

All who enter religion should completely renounce their own will, and place it in the hands of obedience. Among all sacrifices, this is the most necessary. Of what use is it to abandon comforts, relatives, honours, if they bring their own will to the cloister? Denying one's own self consists precisely in this, in dying spiritually, in giving oneself up wholly to Jesus Christ. The surrender of the heart, that is, of the will, is what most pleases the Lord and what He demands of all His religious. All other mortifications and prayers and privations will be of very little use if one does not renounce and strip oneself of one's own will.

It can now be seen that this is the means of accumulating many merits before God; it is the one sure way of pleasing Him in everything, so we can say with Jesus Christ: "I ever do what pleases Him." The religious who no longer retains anything of his own will can certainly believe and hope that he pleases God in everything: in prayer, in study, in hearing confessions, in eating, in resting, given that in religion one cannot take a step without having to obey the rule or the Superiors.



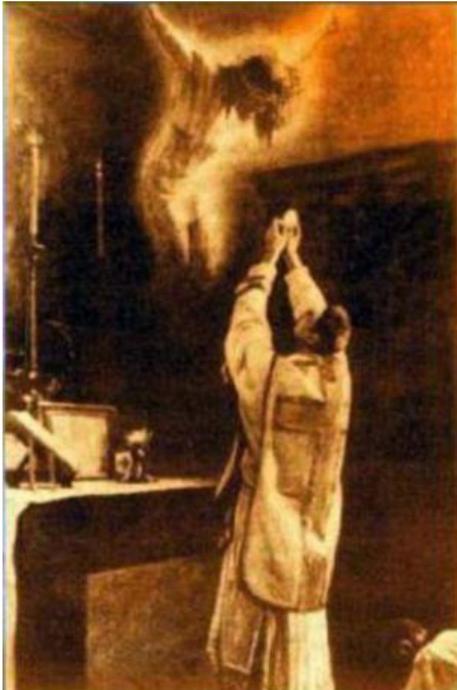
Neither people in the world, nor even souls given to piety, know how meritorious is the life of obedience which is led in religion. It is true that many who live in the world work hard, perhaps harder than those subject to obedience: they do penance and pray; but in all, or in part, they act of their own will. Saint Bernard says: "our own will causes great havoc, given that it is the cause that actions, good in themselves, may not be so for us." This is true when we do not seek God in our actions, but seek our own selves. On the contrary, whoever acts out of obedience is sure of pleasing God in everything.

Saint Mary of Jesus said that she valued the religious vocation on two accounts: one because she continually enjoyed the presence and company of Sacramented Jesus in the cloister, and the other because she was living entirely consecrated to God, sacrificing her own will by way of obedience.

Father Rodríguez relates that Dositeo, a disciple of Saint Doroteo, on dying, revealed to his Abbot that for those five years in which he had lived under obedience, despite not having practised the austerities of the other monks owing to his weak constitution, nonetheless he had won the reward of Saint Paul the Hermit and of Saint Anthony Abbot, for his obedience.

Consequently, whoever wishes to enter religion should be resolved to strip himself entirely of his own will, and only wish whatever obedience requires of him. May God free the religious of pronouncing these words: "I want, I don't want", because in all his actions, even when the superior asks him for his opinion, he should invariably reply: "I only want what obedience requires of me." And as long as there is no open sin in what he is told to do, he should always obey blindly and without delaying to examine what he is ordered to do, since it is not his task to examine it and settle any doubts, but the superior's. If this is not done, and if in obeying he does not submit his own judgement to the superior's opinion, his obedience will be imperfect. Saint Ignatius of Loyola used to say: "When obedience is in question, it is not the subject's task to consider its prudence, but the superiors'; and if some prudence is to be sought for in obedience, it is to obey without prudence." "Obedience, says Saint Bernard, is indiscreet." And elsewhere adds: "It is impossible for a prudent novice to persevere in the Congregation, since it is the Superior's task to judge, and the subject's to obey."

However, to make progress in the virtue of obedience, foundation of all virtue, he always needs to be ready to do what is harder and more repugnant, and peacefully and cheerfully to accept to be deprived of what is more desirable and sought-after. It can happen that when longing for solitude to give himself up to



prayer and study, he then finds himself busier than ever in ministering to others. For though it is certain that in religion he lives a retired and solitary life, and for this purpose hours of silence are established, yet when in the cloister, if the monastery takes charge of missions as well, and there are religious consecrated to the salvation of souls, when obedience keeps them occupied in those ministries they should be happy with the exercises and prayers which are obligatory, without complaining or lamenting, because obedience so requires. And understand well, as Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say: “Everything done out of obedience is prayer.”

So then, if you have reasons for thinking that God favours you with a religious vocation, do not cease to thank the beloved Lord for this inestimable grace, the greatest after that of Baptism. Resolve to give yourself up entirely to the Spouse of virginal souls. He has given Himself up to you without reserve. Why not give yourself up to Him, for to serve is to reign? Say with the Apostle: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ if we are faithful to His Grace?... I am certain that neither death nor life, nor present things, nor future, nor violence, nor all there is on high or in the depths of the Universe, or any creature at all, will ever be able to separate us from the love of God the Father

which is founded on Jesus Christ Our Lord, if we co-operate with the Graces of salvation.”

No one wants you to be a Priest if it is not your vocation; but if the Priesthood is the crown which God has prepared for you, what a loss if you reject it, and one day what remorse!

Given in El Palmar de Troya, Apostolic See, on the 29th of June, Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, in the Year of Our Lord Jesus Christ MMXVIII and third of Our Pontificate.

Con With Our Apostolic Blessing,
 Petrus III, P.P.
 Póntifex Máximus



Petrus III P.P.