



HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

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*Like a Shepherd, He
Shall Gather His Sheep*

Turn Confidently to Mary

While commenting on the text: “Feed my goats”, an ancient interpreter of the Song of Songs has no difficulty in applying it to Mary with regard to sinners.

They, indeed, are the he-goats, he says; and very correctly they are called the goats of Mary. No, certainly not because She would like them as they are in their present condition, to be placed on the left side of the Judge. They are goats of Mary because She adopts them in order to ensure for them a place on His right by transforming them into faithful sheep. [...]

Of course, a lamb is preferable to a goat. So also, nothing is worth the straightforwardness of an innocent soul. Happy are they who like spotless lambs are worthy of being fondled by the Virgin of the virgins, aptly called the Divine Shepherdess. This truth remains a great consolation for sinners. They admit that their crimes have merited for them a place like the accursed goats, to the left of the Judge. And yet it depends on them alone to approach Mary with confidence, and become “her goats”, soon to be changed into lambs. [...]

However weak we are, however desperate the state of our soul, Mary will adopt us as



The Divine Shepherdess, by Miguel Cabrera -
National Art Museum, Mexico City

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her patients if we wish it. And inasmuch as no spiritual infirmity here on earth is incurable, because none can resist the treatment of the all-powerful Mother of God, She will heal us. Her glory, like that of an expert doctor, will shine in proportion to the seriousness of the evil She has to cure.

Then, after being healed and snatched from death, this loving Mother will love us and watch over us, all through the weakness and dangers of a life-long convalescence, like a doctor who checks on his patients after their cure. We will now have a special right to her motherly protection.

TISSOT, Fr. Joseph. “How to Profit from Your Faults”. 6.ed. Strongsville, OH: Scepter, 2014, p.130-131

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OUR READERS WRITE



CATHOLIC FORMATION FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

I would first like to thank *Heralds of the Gospel* magazine for the Catholic formation dedicated to the entire family, including its youngest members. I am a mother of four children, and I am so pleased to see how it manages to elevate the children's universe with each story it presents, cultivating in the little ones the most sublime desires for a life of virtue and holiness.

The story of last November's issue, *God Surpasses All Our Hopes*, impressed me a lot, not only for showing the children that they should not be content with a mediocre life, but also for reminding parents, too, of how important it is to trust in God in the midst of the trials that purify us for the true life that He wants to give us. What delights me with each story, and especially the one from this month, is the ability of the authors to deal with serious topics with such ease, innocence and sense of the marvellous! Our children really enjoy the stories. Congratulations for having a section of the magazine dedicated to them!

Juliana Ferreira
Via.revistacatolica.com.br

QUEEN AND MOTHER OF JESUS

I loved this article regarding Mary as the Queen and Mother of Jesus, from issue 163, entitled *The God of Vengeance Is Drawing Near and He Will Prevail*. She is our link to Jesus. Everything that is given to us in prayer and graces have come via Mary. Jesus cannot refuse her intercessions.

So it behooves us to have a really close relationship with Queen Mary. She was conceived within God's plan for mankind. Without Her, we would not have the salvation that was given to the world with the blood and water poured out for us, to give us entrance into the heavenly Kingdom.

I would definitely like to receive this magazine so that I can ponder on these things, as Mary did while Jesus was on earth.

Susan Pouliot
Via.catholicmagazine.news

THE MAGAZINE I MOST IDENTIFY WITH

I am a fan of this magazine. Among other similar Catholic magazines, it is the one with which I most identify, because of its articles, such as the one entitled *Fragrance Rising to My Throne*, from last October.

I didn't know that I can view and read it on the internet.

Valter Barros Fonseca
Via.revistacatolica.com.br

COMMENTARY OF DR. PLINIO ON THE HOLY ROSARY

I had always considered the prayer of the Holy Rosary as a means to intercede for another person, but I do not remember being told that the person who prays it also receives graces to penetrate its different mysteries, as Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira comments in an article in last October's issue.

I see that the Holy Rosary is an indispensable instrument for us to emerge victorious in the struggle that our journey of faith, so full of obstacles, requires. Now I better understand why Our Lady insists so much that we pray it. It is truly an instrument of salvation. Let us always keep a Rosary close at hand and in our

heart, and let it be our most cherished and precious adornment on the day of our death.

Mayte Heredero
Via.revistacatolica.org

CONFIDENCE IN THE LOVE OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

As we begin to read the valuable article *Meditations of a Boy on the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, issue number 164, with its wealth of details, our hearts are inundated by the sentiments described in the text.

Each comment exposed by the soul of an innocent little boy brings us even more admiration and love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and makes us yearn for new resolutions, overflowing with confidence and gratitude for His immense fatherly love. Such feelings are so strong that we can almost touch them, because of their infinite proportion.

Janaína Bueno
Mairiporã – Brazil

GOD WISHED TO FOUND OUR BRAZIL WITH A MASS

Once again, the Heralds of the Gospel offer us an extraordinary magazine. It is difficult to choose which article is better. However, the article on the Apostle of Brazil, St. Joseph Anchieta, from issue number 164, especially touched me.

God wanted to found our Brazil with a Mass; if we began as Catholics, we will necessarily end up as Catholics. Let us pray, therefore, that the present and future generations may be supremely faithful to this divine design, that is, that we never forget our vocation as a Roman Catholic and Apostolic nation.

Juliano Bongiovanni
Via.revistacatolica.com.br

LET US GO WITH THE SHEPHERDS TO MEET THE SHEPHERD

After the original fall, humanity was immersed in the darkness of iniquity. But, in sincere and upright hearts, one flame remained: the hope of liberation from the clutches of the devil. This faithful expectation is symbolized well by the shepherds of Bethlehem, who, as sentinels of God, kept watch during the sacred vigil of Christmas.

Indeed, after a hard day's work, they had to keep watch with confidence until dawn, to prevent any assault by thieves or wolves. Very attentive observers of the stars, they noticed, however, that the sky sparkled in a new way that night. Soon, a luminous Angel appeared to them to announce the arrival of the Light of mankind (cf. Jn 1:4): "Behold, I bring you good news; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (cf. Lk 2:10-11). And he was joined by a multitude of the heavenly host.

After the Angels – shepherds from Heaven – had sung the most resounding Gloria ever heard, the shepherds of earth set out in haste, crying: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us" (Lk 2:15).

Would the shepherds then have abandoned their flock? No, for they were not only keepers of animals but also, in their hearts, they kept those famous words of the Psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (23:1). They trusted, therefore, that God would care for their sheep.

When they arrived at the manger, they marvelled at the grandeur of the Divine Infant and became, as it were, His "sheep", for they saw lying in the manger the Shepherd by definition – the Good Shepherd – who had known them from all eternity and, having become incarnate, was ready to lay down His life for them (cf. Jn 10:14-15).

Christ, for His part, when He calls the sheep to Himself, sends them into warfare, that is, into the midst of wolves (cf. Mt 10:16), for when they are completely united to Him, they will have nothing to fear. Thus, intuiting that the promised Messiah was also a Lamb, and filled with the strength that came from their contact with the Infant-Shepherd, the shepherds immediately went forth everywhere glorifying and praising God (cf. Lk 2:20), like shepherds of souls! They became authentic heralds of the Gospel, and "all who heard it wondered" (Lk 2:18).

Therefore, in a time as dark as ours, as wolves attack the sheepfold from every side and mercenaries masquerade as shepherds, we too are invited to trustfully hasten to the Good Shepherd, certain that He will lovingly welcome us into His divine embrace and protect us from the onslaughts of the enemy.

Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, we are also invited to persevere in confidence until the day when the Lord will separate the goats from His sheep, and there will be just one flock under one Shepherd. Then there will be no more night, for the light of Christ will shine for all eternity (cf. Rv 22:5). ✧



The Child Jesus, the Good Shepherd - Church of the Holy Angel, Cordoba (Spain)

Photo: Francisco Lecaros



In Bethlehem, Heaven and Earth Meet

This was the moment that all mankind was somehow awaiting: when God would take care of us, when the world would be saved and God would renew all things.

The time came for Mary to be delivered. And She gave birth to her first-born Son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:6f.). These words touch our hearts every time we hear them. This was the moment that the Angel had foretold at Nazareth: “You will bear a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Lk 1:31). This was the moment that Israel had been awaiting for centuries, through many dark hours – the moment that all mankind was somehow awaiting, in terms as yet ill-defined: when God would take care of us, when he would step outside his concealment, when the world would be saved and God would renew all things.

We can imagine the kind of interior preparation, the kind of love with which Mary approached that hour. The brief phrase: “She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes” allows us to glimpse something of the holy joy and the silent zeal of that preparation. The swaddling clothes were ready, so that the Child could be given a fitting welcome. Yet there is no room at the inn. In some way, mankind is awaiting God, waiting for Him to draw near. But when the moment comes, there is no room for Him. [...]

“To all who received Him...”

Saint John, in his Gospel, went to the heart of the matter, giving added depth to Saint Luke’s brief account of the situation in Bethlehem: “He came to his own home, and his own people received Him not” (Jn 1:11). This refers first and foremost to Bethlehem: the Son of David comes to his own city, but has to be born in a stable, because there is no room for Him at the inn. Then it refers to Israel: the One who is sent comes among his own, but they do not want Him. And truly, it refers to all mankind: He through whom the world was made, the primordial Creator-Word, enters into the world, but He is not listened to, He is not received. [...]

Thank God, this negative detail is not the only one, nor the last one that we find in the Gospel. Just as in Luke we encounter the maternal love of Mary and the fidelity of Saint Joseph, the vigilance of the shepherds and their great joy, just as in Matthew we encounter the visit of the wise men, come from afar, so too John says to us: “To all who received him, he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12). There are those who receive Him, and thus, beginning with the stable, with the outside, there grows silently the new house, the new city, the new world. [...]

His new throne is the Cross

In some Christmas scenes from the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, the stable is depicted as a crumbling palace. It is still possible to recognize its former splendour, but now it has become a ruin, the walls are falling down – in fact, it has become a stable. Although it lacks any historical basis, this metaphorical interpretation nevertheless expresses something of the truth that is hidden in the mystery of Christmas.

David’s throne, which had been promised to last for ever, stands empty. Others rule over the Holy Land. [...] In the stable of Bethlehem, the very town where it had all begun, the Davidic kingship started again in a new way – in that Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. The new throne from which this David will draw the world to Himself is the Cross. [...] Yet this is exactly how the true Davidic palace, the true kingship is being built. [...] The power that comes from the Cross, the power of self-giving goodness – this is the true kingship.

Feast of restored creation

The stable becomes a palace – and setting out from this starting-point, Jesus builds the great new community, whose key-word the Angels sing at the hour of His birth: “Glory to God



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Adoration of the Magi, by Gentile da Fabriano - Uffizi Gallery, Florence (Italy)

in the highest, and peace on earth to those whom He loves” – those who place their will in his, in this way becoming men of God, new men, a new world. [...]

What Christ rebuilds is no ordinary palace. He came to restore beauty and dignity to creation, to the universe: this is what began at Christmas and makes the Angels rejoice. The Earth is restored to good order by virtue of the fact that it is opened up to God, it obtains its true light anew, and in the harmony between human will and divine will, in the unification of height and depth, it regains its beauty and dignity. Thus Christmas is a feast of restored creation. [...]

Heaven comes down to Earth

In the stable at Bethlehem, Heaven and Earth meet. Heaven has come down to Earth. For this reason, a light shines from the stable for all times; for this reason joy is enkindled there; for this reason song is born there.

At the end of our Christmas meditation I should like to quote a re-

*Christmas is
a feast of restored
creation; in the
unification of height
and depth, the
universe regains its
beauty and dignity*

markable passage from Saint Augustine. Interpreting the invocation in the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father who art in Heaven", he asks: what is this – Heaven? And where is Heaven? Then comes a surprising response: "... who art in Heaven – that means: in the Saints and in the just. Yes, the heavens are the highest bodies in the universe, but they are still bodies, which cannot exist except in a given location. Yet if we believe that God is located in the heavens, meaning in the highest parts of the world, then the birds would be more fortunate than we,

since they would live closer to God. Yet it is not written: "The Lord is close to those who dwell on the heights or on the mountains", but rather: "the Lord is close to the broken-hearted" (Ps 34:18[33:19]), an expression which refers to humility. Just as the sinner is called 'Earth', so by contrast the just man can be called 'Heaven'" (*Sermo in monte* II 5, 17).

Heaven does not belong to the geography of space, but to the geography of the heart. And the heart of God, during the Holy Night, stooped down to the stable: the humility of God is Heaven. And if we approach this humility, then we touch Heaven. Then the earth too is made new. With the humility of the shepherds, let us set out, during this Holy Night, towards the Child in the stable! Let us touch God's humility, God's heart! Then his joy will touch us and will make the world more radiant. Amen. ✧

Excerpts from: BENEDICT XVI.
*Homily of the Solemnity of the
Nativity of the Lord, 25/12/2007*



Angelis David Ferreira

GOSPEL

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. ² This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, ⁵ to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with Child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for Her to have her Child, ⁷ and She gave birth to her firstborn Son. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. ⁹ The Angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. ¹⁰ The Angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For today in the city of David a Saviour has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find an Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the Angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests" (Lk 2:1-14).

Adoration of the shepherds -
Carmelite Monastery in Brooklyn, New York

On a Mystical Night... the Saviour of Humanity Is Born!

What must have been the supernatural ambience that enveloped the most important event in history? Let us raise our hearts beyond the human circumstances and consider the sublimity of the Nativity of the Infant God!



Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

I – MYSTICISM IS GIVEN TO EVERYONE

The acquisition of holiness involves treading both the ascetical and the mystical paths. In the first, graces are granted profusely in order to urge the soul to progress in virtue, but these demand an effort. For example, occasions arise in which we are tempted and must take practical measures to avoid sin. At times, people burdened with a particular weakness for a long time are touched by a cooperative grace that prompts them to reflect upon eternity. They then take stock of their relationship with God, and admit they have been acting wrongly. Realizing, however, that they lack the strength to correct themselves, they assume an attitude of vigilance, sacrifice, and prayer, storming Heaven for the energy needed to overcome their bad habit. And God always answers them! Countless individuals over the ages have amended their lives with cooperative grace – that is, through the ascetic way – mastering themselves with divine assistance.

But incomparably higher is the mystical state, in which the actuation of the gifts of the Holy

Spirit predominates. In the depths of the soul, the person has an experience of who God is, and of His very strength, through operative and efficacious graces. Since it is God who moves the soul, it is impossible for it to reject these graces, which can so bend human creatures that they are compelled to change their life. The soul favoured in this way must simply let itself be carried “by the touch and the breath of the sanctifying Spirit, who conducts it at will like a finely tuned musical instrument, extracting divine melodies from it.”¹

Countless Saints embraced their vocation as a result of graces of this sort. The conversion of St. Augustine is a case in point.² After a youth marred by grave doctrinal and moral errors – but watered with the tears of his mother, St. Monica – he received, through his contact with St. Ambrose, a grace that completely changed the course of his life.

There is also St. John Bosco, who, a few months before his death, while celebrating Mass in the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Rome, broke down in uncontrollable weeping,

The soul favoured with mystical graces must simply let itself be carried by the touch and the breath of the sanctifying Spirit

Had the Child Jesus been born in a sumptuous palace, many people would have admired the edifice and relegated the Saviour to a secondary plane

which obliged him to interrupt the Holy Sacrifice several times. What had happened? During childhood, he had experienced a prophetic dream whose meaning had eluded him, in which Our Lady said: “You will understand all in due time.” It was during this Mass, many decades later, reflecting on his past, that the images of that dream came back to him, and he recognized in them the story of his vocation. Providence used this means not only to indicate the path he should follow, but, at the close of life, to transmit a mystical grace which filled him with the joy of seeing the fulfilment of God’s plans in his regard.

While hagiography is replete with similar episodes, mysticism is not an exclusive privilege of Saints of the altar, nor of the great contemplatives. The rest of the faithful also experience such interior stirrings. Who has not felt, at some time or other, the consolations of grace? We sometimes come across individuals who, prompted by a ray of divine light, have renounced sinful habits and adopted new criteria, in line with the Faith. There would be few conversions if such changes depended solely on the human will... And if mysticism did not accompany those who set out on the path of perfection, who would persevere until the end?



Vespers of the birth of Christ, by Michael Rieser - The Dorotheum, Vienna

God usually pours out such graces when He wishes to prepare souls for great events. What mystical favours must He have shed on those involved in the central event of history, that is, the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ?

On Christmas Eve, at the start of the Midnight Mass, the Child Jesus is born mystically and liturgically – just as He was more than two thousand years ago in Bethlehem – and He will come to us sacramentally, in the Eucharistic Mystery. This is an ideal occasion to meditate on the atmosphere of graces enveloping the manger when Mary “gave birth to her firstborn Son.”

II – CHRISTMAS CONTEMPLATED FROM THE MYSTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Are reading of St. Luke’s simple narrative, chosen for the Liturgy of this celebration,⁴ can naturally provoke a question within us: Could God possibly have become incarnate and have been born in such a miraculous manner – leaving the womb of Mary without actually touching this sublime tabernacle – and yet not have surrounded this event with extraordinary mystical phenomena? Must it necessarily have taken place in a setting of utter poverty, in the company only of animals?

Let us consider Our Lady. “What language, even angelic, is capable of worthily exalting the Virgin Mother, She who is not the mother of just anyone, but the Mother of God? [...] She was, in fact, worthy of God’s gaze; the King of kings desired her beauty, and She attracted Him with the delicacy of her aromas from the eternal repose in the paternal bosom.”⁵ Nine months before the Nativity of the Child Jesus, the episode of the Annunciation reveals the elevated mystical plane on which her entire life unfolded. Her infancy and youth were assuredly imbued with consolations, ecstasies and efficacious graces that converged when St. Gabriel visited Her

to reveal to Her the Incarnation of the Word.

Accordingly, it would be inappropriate to suppose that, as She awaited the birth of the Divine Redeemer, She was caught up in human preoccupations and the practical concerns related to her state, especially given the fact that She was exempt from original sin and this birth would not follow the norm. Not only was it painless and free of all the inherent complications, but it was accompanied by the maximum degree of grace that this circumstance would admit – as was, indeed, each moment of her earthly existence.

*A scene envisioned
by God with the greatest
possible beauty*

Therefore, the inverse of the law that St. Ignatius⁶ proposes for the meditation on hell, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, can be applied to this event. He says we ought to imagine that place of torments in the most horrific way, contrary to all our desire and pleasure, and even then, we will lack an exact notion of the terrible reality. Concerning the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the contrary can be said: the most beautiful scene imaginable will never equal that which in fact occurred, for the human mind cannot fathom the infinite plenitude of the divine intelligence which designed everything with utmost perfection. It would be blasphemous to think that God the Father was negligent in planning the coming of His Son into the world from all eternity!

Another question arises: why, then, did He choose a stable? For the benefit of humanity and the glory of His Only-begotten Son, God wanted to accentuate the contrast between the human and divine aspects of Christmas to prevent excessive attention from being placed on the former. Original sin has so debased human nature that, had the Child Jesus been born in a sumptuous palace, many people would have admired the edifice and relegated the Saviour to a secondary plane. The cave, the ox, the ass, and even the absence of witnesses besides Mary and Joseph, were providential components in making the divinity of Christ shine in a special way.



Emeltet (CC BY-SA 4.0)

St. Joseph kneels before the newborn Child Jesus -
Church of Saint-Sauveur, Plancoët (France)

*Mary and Joseph awaiting the
arrival of the Infant God*

In the absence of a more detailed description of the scene, our sketching it with the imagination is warranted. Let us contemplate St. Joseph, a man endowed with singular graces inherent to his sublime mission, and perhaps, additionally, with discernment of spirits. At a certain moment, he notes that Our Lady is entering a contemplative state, that her earthly sensibility is ebbing away. In this extraordinary state of recollection, She detaches herself from the actual setting: it could just as well be a grotto or a palace, a golden crib or a manger. All that matters is the divinity of the Child in her most pure womb who communicates with Her, telling Her, almost plaintively, that He will soon leave this beloved tabernacle to repose in her virginal arms. Clearly, He will never cease to favour Her, and will always have a most sublime relationship with Her.

Thus, drawn more and more deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation and the birth of the Eternal Word – one of the principal mysteries of our Faith – the Blessed Virgin yearns to look upon the countenance of God made Man. She is the only creature on the face of the earth who can call Him Son and, at the same time, adore Him with all the strength of her soul. She is the

*St. Joseph,
filled with
awe and taken
by efficacious
graces, paid
no more
attention to
the meagre
conditions
surrounding
the Saviour's
birth*

*The arrival
of the Saviour
rent asunder
satan's
dominion over
Antiquity
and checked
the sway
that, until
then, evil
had held over
the earth*

only Mother who can have such a relationship with her own Son without falling into idolatry. Indeed, for Her, such an act is one of perfection. St. Lawrence of Brindisi says that “God exalted Mary not only above all earthly and heavenly creatures, above Angels and men, but, even supposing that He had created an indefinite number of other sublime spirits, superior to even the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Virgin Mary, as the Spouse of God and Mother of Christ, would continue to be far superior to all of them.”⁷ In view of this, Our Lady’s adoration of the Child Jesus, when her eyes first alighted upon Him, was greater than the sum of the acts of adoration paid by the entire assembly of Angels and Saints, and of mortals over the course of history, until the end of time.

It can well be imagined that there was such a celestial atmosphere within the grotto that the material lamps illuminating the area were rendered superfluous... for an indescribable light must surely have emanated from the Blessed Virgin.

St. Joseph joyfully contemplated that light which, faint at first, grew in brightness. His peerless faith allowed him to understand perfectly that the Creator of the sun and the stars could not be born in darkness. Christ is the Light come into the world, and, while yet in Mary’s womb, He illuminated the cave as brightly as the noonday sun. In fact, perhaps this was one of the factors making the grotto necessary... the need to contain some of this brilliance, otherwise it would have awakened wonder over the whole earth! St. Joseph, gripped with awe and enthusiasm, and taken up by efficacious graces, lost his awareness of those meagre surroundings, as had his blessed spouse.

Moreover, would not the Angels who greeted the shepherds with song have done the same for St. Joseph when the Child Jesus was born? Of course they would have! And if Our Lord promised Nathanael: “you will see Heaven opened,

and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (Jn 1:51), could not St. Joseph have seen the angelic choirs making a path from the grotto to Heaven?

We could continue musing for pages on end about that first Christmas Eve, as Our Lady and St. Joseph prepared to receive the Infant God. To conclude our meditation, let us reflect on the effects produced by this matchless event.

III – HE BRINGS US SALVATION!

The second reading (Ti 2:11-14), from the Letter of St. Paul to Titus, contains a very important concept: “The grace of God has appeared, saving all” (2:11). Although, on one hand, it is difficult to form an accurate notion of the state of humanity before the Incarnation of the Word, on the other, it is enough to have experienced the working of grace to conclude that, just by being born, Our Lord Jesus Christ granted an incalculable blessing to the world. A glance at history reveals the efficacious influence that one saint has over society. How can we gauge, then, the impact of the birth of the Saint with a capital “S”, the Saint in essence, God, our Creator and Redeemer! Jesus could have accomplished the Redemption by offering the Father a smile, a movement of His arm, a blink of the eyes or an act of His will, in reparation for our sins. Thus, the arrival of the Saviour, in itself, rent asunder satan’s dominion over Antiquity and checked the projection of evil over the earth, as St. Andrew of Crete reflects: “He who is mercy by nature justly determined that His Only-begotten Son would manifest Himself with our own nature, to condemn our adversary.”⁸

Jesus strengthens us that we may change our lives

In the following verses, St. Paul emphasizes the role of the grace brought by Our Lord: “training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires

¹ GONZÁLEZ ARIN-TERO, OP, Juan. *Cuestiones místicas, o sea, las alturas de la contemplación y el ideal cristiano.* (Ed.3). Salamanca: San Esteban, 1927, p.664.

² Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE. *Confessionum*, L.V,

c.13-14, n.23-25. In: *Obras, vol. II.* (Ed.7). Madrid: BAC, 1979, p.216-219.

³ AUFRAY, Augustin. *Un grand éducateur: le Bienheureux Don Bosco.* Paris: Emmanuel Vitte, 1929, p.504.

⁴ This article complements the previously published commentaries on this Gospel. See: CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. O Evangelho do nascimento do Menino Jesus. In: *Arautos do Evan-*

gelho. São Paulo. N.1 (Jan., 2002); p.7-9; “Lux in tenebris lucet”. In: *Heralds of the Gospel.* Nobleton, ON. No. 2 (Nov/Dec 2006); p.10-17; Gospel Commentaries for the Mass of the Night of the Nativity of

and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:12-13). The connotation of the verb *train*, in the original Greek, transcends the concept of the mere transmission of doctrine, encompassing the notion of bestowal of power, of instilling the capacity to practise what one has learned, much like an eagle training its eaglets to fly. The training afforded by grace forcefully penetrates to the depths of our souls, prompting us to love what we have understood, and enabling us to practise it. The change that Our Lord Jesus Christ introduced on the face of the earth, therefore, cannot be grasped by the intelligence. It would be necessary to have divine eyes to contemplate the scope of the historical process after original sin, from Adam and Eve until the birth of the Redeemer, and, from then on, the outpouring of grace training and instilling fortitude in people so that they might change their mentality. The Apostle highlights this in the last verse of the second reading: “Who gave Himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people as His own, eager to do what is good” (Ti 2:14).

The victory won by the Child Jesus in being born in Bethlehem

In this twenty-first century, in which evil is flaunted on the pedestals of the world and is



Sergio Holmann

The Child Jesus of Vienna - Chapel of the Alcazar of Segovia (Spain)

spread with frenetic dynamism, Jesus continues to fulfil His mission. For His work is not subject to the laws of botany, by which a seed is planted, sprouts, gives fruit and, having completed its development, begins to wither. From the divine tree planted by the Saviour, namely, the Church, marvels are continually blossoming and outshining those that preceded them. The decadence we currently face is a sign that we will witness a great – indeed, an unprecedented manifestation of God’s power in our days. The Redemption worked on Calvary will now produce fruits that are more excellent and numerous than at the time when it was consummated.

This should be our state of soul in considering Christmas: one of firm hope – yes, of certainty! – that the Child Jesus wishes to grant each of us the strength to embrace what is good. Weakness should not hold us back, for the feebler we are, the more powerfully He will act upon us. We are a field upon which Our Lord Jesus Christ will manifest His power! When we look upon the Divine Infant represented in the Nativity Scene, we see, on one hand, the frailty of human nature, and on the other hand, His omnipotence. It is the same with us: we are receptacles of God’s power, manifested, above all, through our wretchedness and nothingness. Let us, then, confide joyfully in the voice of the Angel that exclaims: “I proclaim to you good news of great joy”! ✧

May our souls on this Christmas be full of the hope – and why not say the certainty – that the Child Jesus wants to grant each of us the strength to embrace what is good

the Lord – Years A and C, respectively in Volumes I and V of the collection *New Insights on the Gospels*.
⁵ ST. BERNARD. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae, Sermo IV, n.5,7. In: *Obras Completas*,

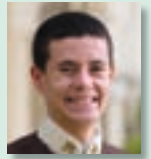
vol. IV: *Sermones Liturgicos* (2^o). (Ed.2). Madrid: BAC, 2006, p.371.
⁶ Cf. ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA. Spiritual Exercises, Second week, n.65-72. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 1952, p.173-174.

⁷ ST. LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI. De Laudibus et Invocatione Virginis Deiparae, III: ‘Ave Maria’, Sermo III, n.4. In: *Mariale*. Madrid: BAC, 2004, p.187-188.
⁸ ST. ANDREW OF CRETE. Homilia V: In

Sanctissimae Deiparae Dominae nostrae Annuntiationem. In: *Homilias Marianas*. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 1995, p.101.

The Importance of a Good Examination of Conscience

Just like a garden, the spiritual life requires continual care, for defects can spring up in the most hidden recesses and in the most unexpected ways, choking the flowers and fruits of virtue that God wants to cultivate within us.



João Paulo Bueno

One of the most famous mottos of ancient philosophy is certainly “know thyself”. This phrase attributed to Socrates, Athenian philosopher, brings to mind a generally overlooked truth: the importance of always considering ourselves according to our true worth.

A fact that occurred in the life of Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira may help us to better understand this principle.

What distinguishes a free man from a criminal?

From a very young age, Dr. Plinio stood out for his talent as an ora-

tor, and was often called to speak in the most varied settings. On one occasion he was invited to give a lecture in preparation for Easter Communion in Carandiru, a former prison in the city of São Paulo – a rather unusual experience for a member of the high society of São Paulo, accustomed to the social life of aristocratic circles.

At the prison’s entrance, one of the directors warned him about the inherent dangers of the premises and recommended vigilance. But the young speaker entered, especially attracted by the opportunity the occasion presented to apply his aptitude

for psychological analysis. And what was his surprise when he observed that the physiognomies he encountered behind bars were more like



Prison of Carandiru, São Paulo; above, inmates from the 1930s

Photos: ACMSP (PF04.003.01)

Behind bars, he found ordinary faces... What differentiated a criminal from the general public on the street?



Sérgio Hollmann

Garden of the Palace of Versailles (France)

those of the people he saw every day circulating in the streets than he had imagined...

He discerned, at the same time, that the general public differed from the prisoners in a specific point, which during the speech came to his mind as an unequivocal conclusion: from time to time over the course of their lives, free individuals examined their conscience, albeit discreetly and imperfectly; those in prison, in contrast, had never analysed themselves in this way, which led them to fall into the crimes for which they were now being justly punished.

According to Dr. Plinio's own comparison, faults are like a load of gunpowder that accumulates in our souls: those who never scrutinize themselves run the risk of accumulating such a quantity of this dangerous substance that a small spark can detonate an unimaginable disaster.

Excellent means of spiritual progress

Some might object that exercises of piety and spiritual development, such as the examination of conscience, or even the Sacraments, sound an-

If we are not vigilant, the garden of our souls may become a field of thorns; to avoid this, we must make a good examination of conscience

achronistic today. However, such a judgement is most likely born of a faulty understanding of these salutary practices.

In the words of a certain Jesuit priest, "to ward off death, we eat every day; to recover from fatigue, we sleep. This double remedy is very old! Are you going to dispense with it on the pretext that it is outdated?"¹ Now, if we have at our disposal excellent means, of undisputed efficacy, for making progress in the supernatural life, why should we not make use of them?

The human soul: with what should it be compared?

Those who think that our soul is like a vehicle that only needs a tune-up once in a while are greatly deceived... On the contrary, the spiritual life is like a garden that requires continuous care, for defects may spring up in the most hidden recesses and in the most unexpected ways.

Those who have ever dedicated themselves to horticulture are very familiar with a certain type of plant that is generally detested: the weed. Especially in a tropical country like Brazil, whose extremely fertile soil seems to always yield more than expected, these "enemy" plants spread with amazing speed!

We can draw a great analogy between this natural reality and the human soul. If we are not careful, vices choke the flowers and fruits of virtue and leave our souls looking like the "field of a sluggard" described in the Book of Proverbs: "I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man without sense; and lo, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and

its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (24:30-34).

In the face of this implacable reality, we have the examination of conscience at our disposal, an aid which, if practised well – not just weekly or monthly, but daily – can achieve great and excellent results. A few minutes a day are enough to profitably examine our conscience.

The general examination of conscience

In his book *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues* – a work which, in the words of St. Anthony Mary Claret, has led more souls to Heaven than the stars that twinkle in the firmament² – Fr. Alphonsus Rodriguez of the Society of Jesus offers us a superb treatise on the examination of conscience, with teachings of an eminently Ignatian character.³ Among them is the distinction between the *general* and the *particular* examen.

The *general examen* deals with all the actions of a given day or period of time. This is the one we make before sacramental Confession. It comprises five points or parts. When we recollect ourselves to make this examen, in the first place we give thanks to God for the benefits we have received, which is a very effective way to contrast Our Lord’s goodness and generosity with our own wickedness and indolence.

Then we ask Him to help us to know our faults and sins. Dr. Plinio used an interesting example to highlight the importance of analysing ourselves accurately: No surgeon in the world would ever dare to perform an operation in the dark. When we examine our conscience, we are the surgeons and the patients at the same

time. That is why we must ask, not only at this moment but continually, for the grace to be enlightened so as to know ourselves well: “Lord, that I may see” (Lk 18:41). For how can we correct faults that we do not perceive or only perceive poorly?

The third step consists in considering the faults committed since the

The purpose of the general examen consists in seeing our faults and identifying the principle from which they stem in us

last Confession, and the fourth in asking God Our Lord to pardon our faults, as we are filled with sorrow for them and repent of them. We can go over the Commandments or the evangelical counsels with the help of a list outlining the faults against them, identifying where we have fallen and offended God. Finally, we make the resolution to sin no more, with the help of divine grace, and we end with a short prayer – an Our Father or a Hail Mary, for example.

Hierarchy of values

It should be emphasized that the full force of this examination lies in the last two points: sincere repentance and the decision to sin no more. From these we derive the most precious fruits of perfection that this habit can bring to our soul and, it should be said in passing, they are two indispensable requirements for the Sacrament of Confession.

The purpose of the general examen, as Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange main-

tains,⁴ does not lie principally in a complete and exhaustive enumeration of venial faults, but in seeing and sincerely accusing the principle from which they stem in us. In this regard, Dr. Plinio states:

“A good examination of conscience must include not only the sinful acts, but the tendencies which lead us to commit those acts. For it is necessary to cut the root of the evil, so that evil does not happen.”⁵

Fr. Alphonsus Rodriguez⁶ explains – and here we refer once again to the figures of the plant kingdom – that if we pull up the bad herb by its roots, then the whole plant withers and dries up. But if we prune only the stalks and leave the roots in the earth, it will soon push up new stems and grow again.

The particular examination

On the other hand, it can also be said that the broader the the vista that meets our eyes, the less accurate will be our view of the details. For this reason, St. Ignatius of Loyola laid more importance on what is called the *particular examen* than on the general, because it enables us to deal with our faults one by one and thus overcome them more easily. Moreover, by tackling one vice, we combat them all.

When the people of Israel were challenged by enemy nations, God encouraged them by saying: “You shall not be in dread of them; for the Lord your God is in the midst of you, a great and terrible God. The Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you may not make an end of them at once” [...] (Dt 7:21-22).

Something similar applies to the imperfections of our soul. God wants us to fight hard against our defects, but He warns us that we will be more successful if we attack specific enemies and persevere in the fight against them until we defeat them completely:

“I pursued my enemies and overtook them; and did not turn back till they were consumed. I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet” (Ps 18:37-38).

The method of action

We proceed in our particular examen with the same method as in the general examination. According to the advice of Fr. Alphonsus Rodriguez,⁷ when choosing the point to be dealt with, we should begin with the exterior faults which trouble and disedify our neighbour, even if there are other greater interior faults, because reason and charity demand that we begin with what can cause harm to others, and live in such a way that they have no grievances against us. But the battle against external faults should not last a lifetime: they are easier to overcome, so we must rid ourselves of them as soon as possible in order to begin the fight against interior imperfections.

With these, the ideal method is to take the virtue we believe we most need to cultivate – which presupposes a contrary vice to combat – and break it down into specific points that will be easy to analyse. It would be a mistake to make a resolution like: “I will be humble in everything, and I will eradicate pride from my soul.” Although this is a very good desire, such a resolution involves a great number of attitudes and dispositions and it would



St. Ignatius of Loyola – Motherhouse of the Heralds of the Gospel, São Paulo

St. Ignatius laid great importance on the particular examen, since it helps us to overcome our faults one by one

be of little spiritual benefit to undertake something so generic. It would be much better to choose points such as: “I will not say anything that will result in self-praise” or “I will cut off

at the outset any vain and haughty thought concerning my personal honour,” which are concrete resolutions, the fulfilment or non-observance of which is easily perceived.

How long should the struggle against one point last?

We know that the passions are inherent in human nature, and it is impossible to eradicate them completely. If we waited until we ceased to feel the impetus of a given passion – like anger or envy, for example – we would never move on to another subject for examination.

Our struggle against a vice should continue until it is weakened and we are able to refrain it with promptness and ease.

We shall then see with how much profit and benefit a few minutes of our day will be employed, and how easy the examination of our own internal and external actions will become.

The examination of conscience is an excellent means of perfecting ourselves as human beings and above all as children of God, for as a famous treatise writer says: “if we do not know ourselves, it is morally impossible to attain perfection.”⁸

A truly courageous person is one who knows how to face his shortcomings, his failings and his inability to practise virtue without the help of grace, and not try to hide them from God or himself. Such a person will succeed in reaching sanctity. ✧

¹ HOORNAERT, Georges. *O combate da pureza*. São Caetano do Sul: Santa Cruz, 2021, p.177.

² Cf. MOLINA, SJ, Rodrigo. Prólogo. In: RODRÍGUEZ, SJ, Alonso. *Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas*. Madrid: Testimonio, 1985, p.6.

³ It is worth noting that Fr. Alphonsus’ reflections, although addressed to persons in the religious life, are applicable to all those who tread the ways of sanctity, which is part of every state of life (cf. CCC 2013).

⁴ Cf. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, Réginald. *As três*

idades da vida interior. São Paulo: Cultor de Livros, 2018, t.I, p.371.

⁵ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plínio. *Conferência*. São Paulo, Mar. 11, 1992.

⁶ Cf. RODRÍGUEZ, SJ, Alonso. *Exercícios de perfeição e vir-*

tudes cristãs. São Paulo: Cultor de Livros, 2017, t.I, p.403.

⁷ Idem, p.403-407.

⁸ TANQUERREY, Adolphe. *Compêndio de Teologia Ascética e Mística*. São Paulo: Cultor de Livros, 2017, p.250.

How to Be Courageous?

We should all face life's struggles with courage; but how can we practise this virtue if we do not understand what it involves?



John Sunny Konikkara

The events currently shaking the world, such as the pandemic, natural disasters, political upheavals, armed conflicts, the crisis in Holy Church and even the questionable solutions presented by authorities to address these problems, elicit the most varied reactions among people. However, one common denominator can be detected in most of them: fear and, quite often, even panic...

In order not to give in to discouragement in the face of such a dismal scenario, we need to face life and its difficulties courageously. But what does it mean to be courageous? Before answering this question, it is necessary to understand what courage is *not*.

A false concept of courage

Most people have, at some point in their lives, come across a counterfeit product. The fact is that there are entire stores full of worthless objects that are very similar – in appearance – to high-quality ones. However, after a short period of use, they typically begin to dysfunction, bringing only trouble and sometimes considerable loss to their owner...

By an unfortunate coincidence, the same phenomenon occurs in the spiritual field: alongside authentic virtues, we find falsifications of them. And, as Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira¹ once pointed out, it is no different with courage. One of the greatest obstacles to its true practice is the diffusion of imitation varieties that are so often passed off as genuine...

Thus, in the soldier who faces death to defend his homeland we should recognize a hero; but a thief who runs the same risk in order to rob a bank is nothing more than a miserable bandit.

There is a big difference between the soldier's valour and the bravery of the thief, for to be courageous means more than just taking risks

Someone who defies danger, ready to sacrifice his life and reputation for the love of God is a martyr; but the impure man who puts his reputation and even his physical integrity at risk in order to clandestinely enter another's house and consummate the destruction of the home, is no more than a wretched adulterer...

In these examples, the soldier and the martyr are truly courageous, while the robber and the adulterer, despite demonstrating apparent bravery, do not possess genuine courage. Indeed, if their homeland or their religion were to summon them to the field of sacrifice, they would not know how to immolate their selfishness for higher values.

Therefore, to be courageous does not consist only in being willing to take risks; there is something more. What is it?

The main ingredient

Dr. Plinio gives us the answer: "Courage is, by definition, the disposition of soul, the virtue² by which a man confronts great trials, suffering, hardship, grief and persecution for an ideal which he places above all else."³

This, then, is what distinguishes the hero from the criminal. It is not enough to merely face great difficulties; one must overcome them for love of an ideal! Both the thief and the adulterer in our example were not moved by idealism, but only by selfishness...

Other falsifications

Moreover, Dr. Plinio alerts us to still other deformations of the virtue of courage. The first is the explosive temperament, by which the person becomes incapable of mastering his will. How many such situations do we witness in our daily life... How many pseudo-courageous people there are who confuse the outbursts of their own unbridled will with strength of soul. The difference between the latter and the truly courageous person is similar to that between a river that overflows its banks, flooding and destroying everything in its path, and the tranquil river waters that fertilize a region.

Another defect that seeks to disguise itself as courage is a clouded intellect, by which man does not perceive the danger that exists. Obviously, someone who is unaware of a risk easily faces it. However, it would be illusionary to imagine that such a person will achieve any lasting objective other than his own ruin. We have doubtless all seen an impetuous person set out to do great things, without measuring the risks or the consequences, and fail in all his undertakings.



Dr. Plinio in 1994, during a conversation with young followers

This is what distinguishes the hero from the criminal: to face and overcome great trials and sufferings for love of an ideal

How to practise this virtue?

So how do we practise true courage? First it is necessary to face dangers head-on and comprehend their magnitude; subsequently, to confront them by a deliberate act of the will.

We find characteristic examples of this virtue in the figure of the medieval knight. The Middle Ages, perhaps the most bellicose period in history, was filled with valiant warriors. However, it was also a time when men demonstrated a greater awareness of the arduousness and tragedy of war. It was for this reason that the military condition was

so glorified; everyone understood the dangers to which combatants were subjected and, consequently, admired those who enthusiastically engaged in the arduous adventure.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that our sensibility will not always accompany the acts of our will. If on some occasions we feel true enthusiasm in practising the virtue of courage, on others we will experience fatigue and despondency of soul. At such times

courage will be more meritorious!

Moreover, there will be times when we need to be courageous, not only deprived of a sensible impetus, but also having to fight against the grip of fear. Yes, the virtue of courage does not exclude fear; on the contrary, it must often be practised in defiance of it!

The Book of Judges tells the story of Gideon, a rather hesitant person (cf. Jgs 6). God appointed him general of His army and ordered him to advance against the enemy host of thirty-five thousand warriors, with only three hundred men, who were not to bear arms. He nevertheless obeyed, and the result was one of the most beautiful victories recorded in Holy Scripture.

Undoubtedly he practised the virtue of courage in all its splendour, but we would be mistaken to think that his sentiments always accompanied his will. Rather, he had to practise it despite his fear.

And what about my life?

At this juncture, it is possible that the reader is asking himself the following question: "All of this is true, but

how do I apply such principles to my life? I am not a soldier, nor do I live in the Middle Ages or in the time of the Old Testament...” Nevertheless, while for the majority of people the difficulties of our days are of a very different nature than the examples narrated so far, the solution is the same.

When I must face the death of a relative, or the risk of losing my job, financial setbacks and illnesses, what should my attitude be? First, calmly look at the matter head on, considering all its dangers and the tragic consequences it may bring. Then, take the firm decision to face the problem in the right way, without the illusion that it will always be possible to avoid suffering. Often, on the contrary, the way to diminish suffering is

to embrace the painful solution, if it is the most upright path.

But where can we find the strength of soul to take such a demanding attitude?

Catholic doctrine teaches us that no man will find within himself the means to practise the virtues perfectly and steadfastly. Courage being one of them, it is not surprising, then, that we should experience difficulty in cultivating it. The solution is to ask God to grant it to us, for He is the creator and source of all good.

The greatest act of courage in history

It would be a crime to end this article without mentioning the strongest and bravest Man of all time: Our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Garden of Olives, at the beginning of the Passion, what

sentiments inundated His most perfect human Soul? Anguish, dread, sadness and the feeling of abandonment by those He loved most.

In this situation, our Redeemer did not take an unbalanced attitude that would be incompatible with His infinite holiness. He calmly contemplated all the suffering that He had yet to undergo, and this caused Him such fear that He even sweated blood! Then He practised the most supreme act of courage in history when He prayed to the Eternal Father, saying: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Mt 26:39).

Dr. Plinio explains this prayer of Our Lord in this way: “The height of courage lay in this: God has designs which, according to His infinite perfection, He sometimes withdraws, and at other times He does not. And in spite everything that caused utmost tension in Our Lord’s perfect instinct of conservation, He made up His mind: ‘I will go; I accept this! Thy will be done and not mine.’ That is the perfection of courage!”⁴

How different this attitude is from anything the world calls courage! The Courageous One felt weak, experienced fear, but looked at His cross directly, made the deliberate act of carrying out His mission and prayed for help. May this divine example, by which the Redeemer obtained graces for our correspondence in analogous situations, lead us to imitate Him to the full extent that may be required of us! ✧

Our Lord saw the suffering that awaited Him and decided: “I accept it! Thy will be done and not mine.” That is the perfection of courage!

The Agony in the Garden of Olives, by Jerónimo Cósida – Church of San Juan del Hospital, Valencia (Spain)



Francisco Lecaros

¹ Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Opera Omnia. Reedição de escritos, pronunciamento e obras*. São Paulo: Retornarei, 2008, v.I, p.266. The present article is based on this publication of Dr. Plinio, in addition to two other expositions given by him, transcribed in: Uma era de fé,

heroísmo e sabedoria [An Era of Faith, Heroism and Wisdom]. In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year IV. No.35 (Feb., 2001); p.18-23; O que é a coragem? [What is Courage?] In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year XVII. No.193 (Apr., 2014); p.8-9.

² In the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, the virtue that corresponds to Dr. Plinio’s concept regarding courage is *fortitudo*. This Latin word is commonly translated as *fortitude*; however, some prefer to use the word *courage* to better express its meaning (cf. PINSENT, Andrew. *The Gifts*

and Fruits of the Holy Spirit. In: DAVIES, Brian; STUMP, Eleonore (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p.477.

³ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, O que é a coragem? [What is Courage?], op. cit., p.8.

⁴ Idem, *ibidem*.

The Most Musical of Saints!

Virtue transformed into art has an incomparable power of attraction. However, Divine Providence reserved this mission for only a few...



Sr. Giovanna Wolf, EP

Music pleases me, and in the world it was one of my concerns. I would have done better if I had applied myself to loving God during that time.¹ This is how the great St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori lamented having dedicated himself so much to the study of music in his youth.

But God, who had filled him with so many gifts, allowed him this “fault” so that his apostolate could later shine with greater excellence. The time he regretted not having dedicated to loving his Creator was, in fact, what eventually made him the holiest of musicians and, perhaps, the most musical of Saints!

Exceptional talent from his youth

“Of noble origin, [...] ready for combat”:² this is the beautiful meaning of his name, Alphonsus. If, as they say, it was not motivated by etymology that his father so named him, it was nevertheless the dream he really cherished for his firstborn son.

Don Giuseppe de Liguori, hopeful that his son would surpass the prestige that many of his ancestors had achieved in the Kingdom of Naples, spared no effort in providing him with a comprehensive education: he hired renowned masters of the classics, liter-

ature, geography, cosmography, architecture and fine arts, even coming from abroad to instruct him privately. And since music was his father’s favourite art, he demanded that the boy dedicate three hours of study a day to it, a period that he spent locked in his room with his instructor. “These long hours of seclusion seemed at first to be a penance for the young pianist, but he soon became so enamoured with harmony that the prison became a place of delight for him.”³

Remarkably gifted, it seemed that, little by little, the boy was fulfilling his father’s aspirations: at twelve he was considered a master at the harpsichord, at sixteen he was al-

ready practising the honourable profession of lawyer... However, some time later, contrary to his father’s wishes, he decided to abandon everything to become a priest.

Music in the apostolate of St. Alphonsus

In renouncing titles of nobility, marriage proposals, careers and rich-

From his youth, St. Alphonsus fell in love with music, a passion that would aid him greatly in his priestly apostolate

Preaching of St. Alphonsus - Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and of St. Alphonsus, Salta (Argentina)



Dario Ialorenzi

es, Alphonsus came to be regarded as irresponsible, even by some of his relatives and closest friends. However, to those who viewed him from the divine perspective, he was like the man in the parable who put all his talents to use wisely: what he had learned from his teachers did not prove useless, for in his long life he had always used these abilities for the glory of Our Lord and the service of his noble vocation. His apostolic work was very wide-ranging and we can still benefit from it today, through his writings, his paintings and his music.

When he embraced the ecclesiastical way, Alphonsus, like so many other Saints, wished to evangelize faraway lands and even China had a place in his dreams. For him, however, the apostolate was reserved for regions not far from his birthplace: Naples itself, and then other small towns and countryside in the surrounding area.

For the success of his missions, he not only employed preaching but he also composed various spiritual hymns. And he was soon able to see how great an ally his music was, for his songs served to replace blasphemy and licentious words, while instructing those who learned them in the truths of the Faith.

A cleric from Naples, who lived after the Redemptorist founder, did not hesitate to affirm that “only Alphonsus de Liguori gave Italy popular singing in all its perfection. Even today, after one hundred and fifty years, his songs resound through valleys and mountains and, like all true poetry, they have retained the freshness of their youth.”²⁴

Some fifty poems make up the Alphonsian *Canzoniere*. While the melodies convey vitality, enthusiasm and joy, the poems are a mixture of high-quality theological teaching and candour full of innocence, under the inspiration of the moment and with the same purpose: “To inflame

souls in divine love, communicating to them the sacred fire that burned in his own heart.”²⁵

Among them, without doubt, *Tu Scendi dalle Stelle* and *Quanno Nascette Ninno* are the best known throughout the world.

The “Tu Scendi” stolen

Written almost always during his missions, the exact history of each song has been lost in the mists of time. *Tu Scendi dalle Stelle*, however, is one of the few whose origin is known.⁶

Alphonsus was on mission in the city of Nola. When he had finished

In his poems, the Saint transmitted doctrine with vitality, enthusiasm and joy, for one purpose: to inflame souls in divine love

his composition, he showed it to the parish priest, Fr. Michele Zambadelli. The latter, delighted with the work, expressed a desire to copy it, but the Saint told him that he could not accede to his request until it had been printed and distributed. Leaving the score on the table, he went to the church where he was to preach his last sermon.

Fr. Michele, not content with his refusal, decided to copy the music while Alphonse was away... Once his “work” was finished, he also went to attend the end of the sermon, where the preacher intoned the new song. Everyone listened to him, enthralled. But there was a slight *sbaglio* and Alphonsus forgot some lines, so he called an altar boy and told him:

“Look, there is Fr. Michele. Ask him for the copy of the *canzoncina*. He has it in his briefcase.”

On receiving the little emissary, the priest was astonished! And he was about to hand over his copy when the Saint took up the song again, which he had not forgotten at all...

Various hymns, but just one poem

Another beautiful Christmas work of St. Alphonsus is the *Per la Nascita*. Its passages were later enriched by being set to various melodies, one more beautiful than the other. Since its composition is also unknown, we are allowed to hypothesize that it was completed over a period of time – hence its length and its diverse metrics.

The story is told, for example, that at Christmas time, Alphonsus had planned to enter the church singing a song that he had composed for the occasion, while carrying the little statue of the Baby Jesus. But, on account of his intense missionary activities, he forgot this plan. As the procession began, someone reminded him that he was to sing. Then, in an impulse of devotion and genius, the Saint improvised the magnificent *Quanno Nascette Ninno*, whose lyrics were part of the poem mentioned above.

Let us praise the Divine Infant!

Throughout the centuries, Christmas melodies represent an effort to reproduce the heavenly harmonies echoing in the cave of Bethlehem. If all the Saints had composed Christmas carols, we would see how virtue transformed into art has an incomparable power to bring us back to the supernatural!

This Christmas, then, under the maternal protection of the Virgin Mother of God and of her most chaste spouse, St. Joseph, let us unite ourselves to St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori; let us be enchanted with his melodies, and with him praise the august birth of the Divine Infant! ✧

Quanno Nascette Ninno
S. Afonso de Ligório

Coro

I. Quo no nas-cet-te Nin-no, a Bet-ta-le me.

Quanno Nascette Ninno

When the Child was born in Bethlehem, / it was night yet it seemed midday, / for that star that shone so brightly / and so lovely up above, / casting its brilliant rays below / to beckon the Magi in the East.

As the shepherds watched their sheep, / an Angel brighter than the sun / appeared and said: / Do not fear; / but rejoice and be glad, / for earth has been transformed into Paradise!

For to you this day is born in Bethlehem / the awaited Saviour of the world / you will find Him / – nor will you be mistaken – / wrapped / in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

The shepherds' hearts beat strongly, / and they said to one another: / Why do we tarry? / Let us go quickly, for we are pining / to see God born as a Child.

Tu Scendi dalle Stelle

From starry skies descending, / Thou comest, glorious King, / A manger low Thy bed, In winter's icy sting; / O my dearest Child most holy, Shuddering, trembling in the cold! / Great God, Thou lovest me! / What suffering Thou didst bear, / That I near Thee might be!

Thou art the world's Creator / God's own and true Word, / Yet here no robe, no fire / For Thee, Divine Lord. / Dearest, fairest, sweetest Infant, / Dire this state of poverty. The more I care for Thee, / Since Thou, O Love Divine, / Will'st now so poor to be.

Leaving the Father's bosom, / on hay Thou dost repose. / My heart's sweetest love / Where hast Thy love carried Thee? / O my Jesus, / how is it that Thou hast suffered so / for the love of me?

Translation of two christmas carols of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori; above, a score of one of them

¹ ST. ALPHONSUS MARIA DE LIGUORI. *A verdadeira esposa de Jesus Cristo*. Aparecida do Norte: Oficinas do Santuário de Aparecida, 1922, v.II, p.408.

² REY-MERMET, Theodule. *El Santo del Siglo de las Luces. Alfonso de Liguori*. Madrid: BAC-Editorial El Perpetuo Socorro, 1985, p.11.

³ BERTHE, CSSR, Augustine. *Santo Afonso de Ligório*. Rio de Janeiro: CDB, 2018, p.33.

⁴ Idem, p.357.

⁵ Idem, ibidem.

⁶ Cf. GREGORIO, CSSR, Oreste. *Canzoniere Alfonsiano. Studio critico estetico col testo*. Angri: Contieri, 1933, p.136.

The Inebriating Joy of Christmas

In the hope of reviving confidence in a new flourishing on earth of the sacral atmosphere of Christmases of yesteryear, Dr. Plinio recounts some facts from his later childhood.



Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

After a year of struggles, sufferings and difficulties, we are approaching the feast of Holy Christmas, which, in my opinion, has the characteristic of making time stand still. Even in the most distressing situation, Christmas builds a wall, leaving on one side the misfortunes and tears, and on the other the bells that announce the joy of Christmas.

It is no ordinary joy, but a much deeper and more buoyant joy, which seems to be made of light. This light is the *lumen Christi*, which shone on earth on Christmas Eve and somehow shines again each year, bringing true joy and true peace of soul to even the most tormented.

The Christmas Eves of yesteryear

In order to transmit some sense of this grace, I believe it will not be out of place to recount some memories, in an attempt to revive the joys and impressions once felt on Christmas Eves.

What was Christmas like in 1920, therefore, in the last years of my childhood?

Someone might say that it was a matter of imagination, but I have the internal conviction that there was a grace given to me, just as to all the children of my

time, at least those that I saw and knew. It was a generalized grace.

A few days before Christmas, the children were filled with expectation and joy, in the hope of the feasts that were about to take place. The earthly perspective of the feast played a role in the children's joy. They knew that St. Nicholas, the affable holy Bishop, would come at night while everyone was asleep and leave presents for them: in the wealthy homes, large boxes; in the poorest homes, small boxes, but full of affection. Wherever there was a mother worthy to be called such, and a devoted father worthy of the title, some present would be placed by the child's bedside, which represented something wonderful for the child.

Inundated by the joys of Christmas, children became better

Walking, running in the garden, playing, everything was done with a well-being proper to the innocence of childhood. To a large extent this joy was motivated by a higher factor, a foretaste of the strictly and definitely religious joy of the approaching Christmas. Something special was beginning to fill our souls.

Over the course of those days, children began to improve: those who lied, began to lie less; those who did

Nativity scene in the Heralds' House
in Guimarães (Portugal)



not lie would censure one who lied; those who were not very observant of the schedule at home became more punctual. Everyone felt a greater sense of cleanliness of soul. And this joy of having a clean soul cannot be compared to any other throughout life.

A principle of purity, of limpidity, of honesty, of goodness and candour seemed to make itself felt on earth, acting in the souls of men. People began to be more kind to each other. Selfish children gladly lent their toys, crabby ones did small favours. And the elderly, even if they did not feel the same joy as the children, remembered the Christmases of their childhood and tried to give the impression that they were participating in the general happiness, becoming especially helpful and affectionate.

From joy to joy, until the apex of Christmas

In a certain room of the house, one could not enter because the Christmas tree was being prepared, as it was every year, with something new: a huge star, a new angel or other decoration.

When a child managed to see something of the surprise, he ran to tell the others, who received the news with an air of great importance. Amidst these joys, time went by until Christmas Eve, the day we went to midnight Mass. There the atmosphere was completely different.

As we lived near the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we went there on foot. All the houses were open and their lights were on. Walking through the streets you could see, in the modest as well as in the finest houses that were almost palaces, an illuminated Christmas tree. and you could hear an old gramophone playing Christmas music inside. One could feel the Christmas joy in each family. Everyone was finishing their preparations to depart for Mass, leaving only a servant to take care of the house. Soon the bells began to ring, announcing that Mass was about to begin.



A principle of purity, of honesty, and of candour made itself felt, filling souls and bringing out the best in them

Plinio, around the year 1920

shoulders, and pressing the child to His chest. Underneath was an aspiration which read more or less as follows: "O Good Jesus, have mercy on me!" I prayed it, thinking: right now, Our Lord is doing this to me...

After Mass, one had the impression that the graces of Christmas were spreading through all the houses. When we arrived at ours, it seemed that it was no longer the same one we had left. There was something religious, something sacred, something recollected about it that caused real wonder. Alongside this supernatural atmosphere, one could feel a joy dwelling in the house the like of which one had never noticed during the year. The greetings and felicitations began, and I was very sensitive to them, especially to the affection and greetings coming from Mama, which I counted on as a complement to Christmas Eve. It is impossible to describe the meaning of the kiss of a Catholic mother on a child whom she wants to be a Catholic too! After the greetings, the Christmas feast began.

Christmas Eve was, therefore, a luminous hiatus, full of an imponderable that cannot be described but that everyone felt, each one in his own era.

The day will come when true Christmases will re-emerge on earth

To what extent have those who are younger felt this? I fear that, at best, they only saw the end of it.

Televisions on all day, radios blaring commercialized Christmas carols, fluorescent and secular lights hanging on trees, in gardens of buildings and in apartments; empty churches. This is the modern Christmas!

The question arises: what remains of all that I have described? Is it only the memory that remains? Much more than that, there is hope! And it is with the aim of reviving this hope that I have narrated these facts. But is there only hope? No. We have a certainty, thanks to the divine promise: the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church (cf. Mt 16:18).

This certainty tells us that one day, after struggles, trials and battles, true Christmases will reappear on earth. And then, perhaps, someone will remember the description I have just given and will have the living conviction that the joy they will experience will not be born just then, but will be part of a long historical chain which will emerge from the depths of the waters of trial and will return to the light. It will be the authentic joy of the Blessed Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christmases more beautiful than those of yesteryear

Despite the decadence that is noticeable in Christmas celebrations nowadays, when compared with those of my time, I do not hesitate to affirm that the Christmases of those who, nowadays, struggle to remain faithful to the true Catholic spirit are even more beautiful than those of yesteryear. And if I, as a boy, could see what the Christmases I should spend in these days would be like, I would doubtless exclaim, "This is what I was born for!"

We must remember, then, that these joys of Christmas, under the smile of Mary Most Holy, will descend upon us, though we be in the most terrible affliction. We should also be encouraged by the confidence of seeing the promise of Our Lady at Fatima fulfilled: "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph!" When this takes place, how sweet, harmonious and peaceful will be the feasts of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ! ✧

Taken, with slight adaptations, from: *Dr. Plinio*.
São Paulo. Year XIV.
No.165 (Dec., 2011); p.6-11



Light,

At was the middle of the night. Darkness had reached the peak of its density. Everything around the flocks was doubt and danger. Perhaps some shepherds, lax or overcome by fatigue, had fallen asleep. But there were others for whom zeal and a sense of duty did not allow them to sleep. They kept watch. And presumably they also prayed, that God might drive away the dangers surrounding them.

Suddenly a light appeared and enveloped them: "the glory of the Lord shone around them" (Lk 2:9). All sense of danger was dispelled. And the solution to all problems and all risks was announced to them. Much more than the problems and the risks of a few poor flocks or a small handful of shepherds. Much more than the problems and risks that continually threaten all earthly interests. Yes, the solution was announced to them for the problems and risks that affect the noblest and most precious thing men have, that is, the soul. The problems and risks that threaten, not the goods of this life, which sooner or later will perish, but eternal life, in which both success and defeat have no end. [...]

Thus, all around men, everything was darkness. And in that darkness, what did they do? What men do whenever night falls. Some run off to orgies, others sink into sleep. Finally, others – and how few – do as the shepherds do. They keep watch, on the lookout for the enemies who jump out in the dark to attack them. They get ready to put up a hard fight against them. They pray with their eyes fixed on the dark sky, their souls comforted by the certainty that the sun will rise at last, will vanquish all darkness, will eliminate or make return to their dens all the enemies that darkness conceals and invites to crime.



the Great Gift

In the ancient world, among the millions of men crushed by the weight of futile culture and opulence, there were exceptional men who perceived all the density of the darkness, all the corruption of customs, all the inauthenticity of the order, all the risks that surrounded man, and above all the senselessness to which civilizations based on idolatry were leading.

These chosen souls were not necessarily people with a privileged education or intelligence. Indeed, the lucidity to perceive the great horizons, the great crises and the great solutions, comes less from the penetration of the intelligence than from rectitude of soul. Those who recognize the state of things are upright men for whom truth is truth and error is error. Good is good and evil is evil. The souls that are not complicit with the abuses of the times, cowed by laughter or by the isolation with which the world surrounds those who do not conform. They were souls of that calibre, rare and scattered a little everywhere, among lords and servants, old men and children, wise men and illiterate, who kept watch in the night, prayed, fought and hoped for salvation. [...]

Are there still today authentic men of goodwill who keep watch in the darkness, who struggle in anonymity, who gaze up to Heaven awaiting with unshakeable certainty the light that will return?

Yes, precisely as in the time of the shepherds. [...]

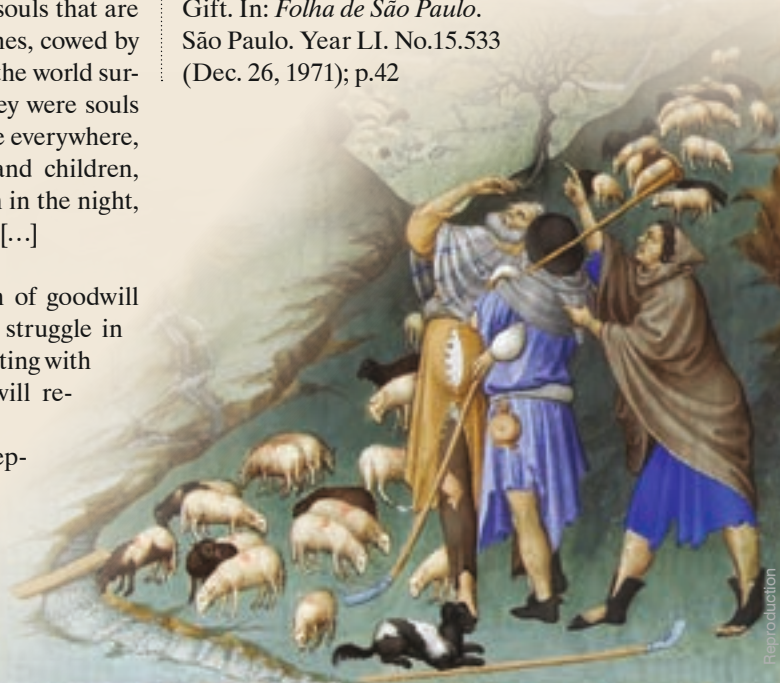
To these authentic men of good will, these genuine successors of the

shepherds of Bethlehem, I propose that they take the words of the Angel as if addressed to them: “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people” (Lk 2:10)!

These are prophetic words which find their echo in the Marian promise of Fatima. Communism may spread its errors everywhere. It may make the just suffer. But in the end – Our Lady prophesied in the Cova da Iria – her “Immaculate Heart will triumph.”

This is the great light that, as a precious Christmas gift, I wish for all readers and, more especially, for genuine men of good will. ✧

Excerpts from: *Light, the Great Gift*. In: *Folha de São Paulo*. São Paulo. Year LI. No.15.533 (Dec. 26, 1971); p.42



The Annunciation to the shepherds - Musée Condé, Chantilly (France)

Reproduction

Empress by Grace... and Audacity!

Daughter and wife of monarchs, acclaimed as queen and empress... Her life, however, was no fairy tale, but rather a compendium of the heroism of the warriors, the resignation of the martyrs and the astuteness of good statesmen.



Sr. Cecilia Maria Almeida, EP



Ralph Hammann (CC by-sa 4.0)

Certain teachings of the Gospel are often the object of greater attention and devotion than others, to the point that some have almost fallen into oblivion in today's world.

The life of St. Adelaide reminds us of one of these truths proclaimed by the Divine Saviour, the meek Lamb who allowed Himself to be immolated on the Cross, but also the perfect model of those who must be as wise and as cunning as serpents.

Born in a "golden cradle"

We might say that Adelaide was born in a golden cradle, on June 27, 931, for she was the daughter of the King of Burgundy, Rudolf II, and Queen Bertha of Swabia. Providence had reserved a great mission for her, and showered her with gifts that she would use generously, marking his-

tory with a brilliance hitherto uncommon for a lady.

Although little is known of her childhood, it is not difficult to conjecture that it served well to prepare her for the hard fight that was to be her life: besides receiving a sacred education according to the customs of the Faith, she learned to speak French, German and Latin fluently, skills that equipped her as an extremely cultured woman for her time.

The end of those quiet and happy years came with the death of her father in July 937. Her little brother Conrad was sent to Germania; she and her widowed mother had a very different fate: King Hugh of Italy, anticipating certain political benefits, sent emissaries to Burgundy to force them to abandon their possessions and to settle at the Italian court in Pavia. Thus

Queen Bertha was forced to marry him, while Adelaide was promised in marriage to Prince Lothair, Hugh's son.

Young queen of Italy

The girl then had her first encounters with evil. At the new court, vice, shamelessness and illegitimate unions reigned supreme; violence, intrigues and power struggles were the order of the day. Queen Bertha was soon scorned for her Christian habits and, to protect herself from the king's displeasure, she abandoned her daughter in Italy to take refuge with her son Conrad.

Adelaide was left alone in Pavia, like a sheep among wolves... However, God would bring great good out of this unfortunate situation which so sorely tested her virtue: when she married Lothair II, she became part

of the line of succession to the Italian crown.

The young prince, of a temperament opposite to his father's, proved faithful and devoted, showering his wife with riches and further enhancing her education.

At the death of King Hugh, Adelaide became Queen of Italy at the age of only eighteen. King Lothair gave her the title of "*consors regni*", that is, consort in the sovereignty, and gave her land and fortune to ratify this pre-ogative.

Would fame and wealth divert her from the path of virtue she had followed since childhood? Not at all, for she had laid up her treasure in Heaven, where the thief does not enter, and the moth does not destroy (cf. Lk 12:33). Thus she would soon come to be admired by her subjects, both for the sweetness of her conduct and the wisdom of her decisions, always reconciling benevolence with the grandeur and dignity of her position.

As an official regent, respected on all sides, she confirmed the power of nobles and prelates, making various gifts of her property to monasteries and churches. Aware of her role in the unification of the kingdom, she aimed with these donations to consolidate

alliances with the political elite and with high-ranking ecclesiastical figures, a move that would later save her life.

Widow... and abducted once again

Medieval history is littered with episodes that have remained largely unexplained. The death of King Lothair is one of them. The young monarch expired in Adelaide's arms at the end of 950, presumably poisoned by the Duke of Ivrea, Berengar II, who coveted the royal crown.

Once again Adelaide found herself alone, "with no other relief than that of tears, no other consolation than her own innocence, no other support than God Himself."²¹ Out of concern for the future of her little daughter Emma, she left Turin, the burial place of Lothair, and went to the city of Pavia.

However, Berengar sent his emissaries to abduct her, and the queen was imprisoned in the region of Lake Garda. While the duke proclaimed himself king of Italy, Adelaide suffered insults and ill-treatment, as St. Odilo, her first biographer, recounts: "This innocent captive was afflicted by various tortures, having her hair pulled out and frequently receiving blows and kicks."²²

Hoping to legitimize his position on the throne, the usurper offered his son Adalbert to Adelaide in marriage as the price for her freedom. In prison, however, she demonstrated all her courageous virtues, the firmness of her principles and her strength of soul, refusing the infamous proposals of the enemy and trusting in Him who makes "the branch of the mighty to wither away" (Is 25:5).

Fleeing at the right time, to the right place

Adelaide accepted suffering and affronts with the resignation of a martyr, but not with her arms folded... Using those defensive and offensive spiritual weapons of which the Apos-

tle speaks (cf. 2 Cor 6:7), she devised a way to escape from prison. The escape was so secretive that Berengar did not become aware of it until she had reached the fortress of Canossa and was safely under the protection of the local count, the Bishop of Reggio and the Roman Pontiff.

This was perhaps one of the most admirable episodes in the life of St. Adelaide, for it was an occasion when her audacity and prudence shone in a special way, virtues by which, defying obstacles and dangers, she was able to escape at the right time to the right place!

In the fortress of Canossa, the queen devised bold plans, calling to her aid the Germanic King Otto I. While awaiting him, she witnessed the crumbling of the meagre siege set up by the wicked Berengar, whose hopes of recovering her captive were completely dashed with Otto's arrival. He restored order and forced the enemy troops to withdraw immediately.

Shortly afterwards, Otto married Adelaide and was crowned King of the Lombards. From then on, she would begin to fulfil one of her most important missions, for which she would forever be remembered in history as the woman whose virtuous



After King Lothair's death, Adelaide was abducted and imprisoned by the impious Berengar



Berengar II; at left, Lothair II. Previous page: St. Adelaide – Church of St. Maurice, in Soultz-Haut-Rhin, (France)

and sagacious actions made Otto an emperor, for the benefit of the Catholic Faith throughout Christendom at that time.

The consolidation of power

The following years were marked by intense activity. St. Adelaide's endeavours extended to all social levels, beginning with her own family, defusing various animosities. She magnanimously granted Berengar pardon, which he had requested, and even allowed the offender the administration of the kingdom of Italy, since the couple were settled in Germany.

With true political acumen, she consolidated the power of the Ottonian dynasty, using her wealth to establish friendly relations and extend the domains of the Church. Exerting a strong influence on the king's decisions, she particularly favoured the monasteries and churches founded by the monks of Cluny, in order to encourage the reform of customs and the religious formation of her subjects.

No one set a greater example of detachment and modesty at court than the queen herself, who dressed soberly and repressed any form of flattery and ostentation in her courtiers.

In 955, she had the joy of giving birth to the successor to the crown, Otto II. In August of the same year, her husband defeated the Hungarians, still pagans, at the historic Battle of Lechfeld, fighting in the front rank and wielding one of the most valuable relics of Christianity, which had accompanied Adelaide since childhood: the Holy Lance, symbol of royal and divine power.

A few years later, an unexpected situation would favour the glorious ascension of Otto and Adelaide to the status of emperors.

The first empress of the West

As regent of Italy, Berengar had become a cruel tyrant, despoiling the local nobility and using violence in his deliberations and commands. The Roman Pontiff's request to Otto for help was added to the general outcry of the people, indignant at his excesses.

On her way to Rome, Adelaide had her six-year-old son crowned co-king in Aachen Cathedral, in memory of the Emperor Charlemagne, in order to strengthen the dynastic line of succession.

Finally, on the symbolic feast of the Purification of Mary, February 2, 962, Otto and Adelaide were crowned emperors by Pope John XII. It should be noted that it was she herself who established the ceremonial of their coronation, for until then no woman had achieved such a dignity in the West.

In fact, it was with St. Adelaide that the role of the empress was born in the government and in the exercise of power. Her name would appear on almost all the official documents of the empire and she herself would issue decisions, always demonstrating generosity and being a tireless mediator between the people and the crown.

She showed herself to be an expert in the exercise of justice, even when God put the infamous Berengar in her hands. The captor and tyrant of old became the prisoner of the one he had oppressed before, ending his days in captivity.

An enemy in her own family

The Holy Empress was concerned with ensuring the stability of the empire in the person of her son, making the necessary arrangements for the marriage of Otto II to the Byzantine princess Theophanu. During the ceremony, held in St. Peter's Basilica and officiated by the Pope, the bride and groom were crowned and associated with the empire as successors to the reigning couple.

Alas, the death of Otto I spelled the end of the days of happy government. A few years later, Adelaide was forced to flee her own son's court, for her daughter-in-law, likely moved by envy, had maliciously worked to in-



Joined to Adelaide by matrimony, Otto strove in an outstanding way to favour the holy initiatives of his spouse

Battle of Lechfeld, by Balthasar Riepp – Parish church of Seeg (Germany)

(CC by-sa 3.0)



Reinhardhaute (CC by-sa 3.0)

St. Adelaide obtained courage from Him who casts down the mighty and lifts up the humble, and consequently she never faltered in the face of difficulties

Scenes from the life of St. Adelaide – Church of St. Martin, L'Isle-Adam (France)

stil in Otto II a deep aversion for his mother.

Maternal love compelled St. Adelaide to pray for her son until, some time later, she obtained his repentance and conversion. As a sign of gratitude and perhaps in fulfilment of a promise, she had one of the robes of Otto II sent to the tomb of St. Martin, richly embroidered, with the following message: “Receive, priest of the Lord, this small gift, sent to you by Adelaide, slave of the servants of God, sinner by her nature; by the grace of God, empress.”

Theophanu, however, was unable to admire the holiness of her mother-in-law...³ When Otto II died after an unsuccessful military campaign, she was eager to exercise command and, contrary to the policy used by Adelaide, instigated division at court, promoted unsuccessful wars and put the union of the empire at serious risk. She had her son Otto III crowned, then a child of just three years of age, but a few months later he was kidnapped by a relative – Henry II of Bavaria, nicknamed the Wrangler – in a failed at-

tempt to usurp the throne. Peace was only restored when St. Adelaide herself retrieved the boy, making use of the vast network of friendships she had built up over the years.

Since little Otto was still unable to govern, Theophanu assumed the regency, exercising power until her death on June 15, 991. She died at only thirty-one years of age, obstinately at enmity with her mother-in-law.

Fond of the fight and of audacity

It fell to St. Adelaide to serve as regent of the empire until her grandson reached the age necessary to rule. After successfully leading him to the throne, she was finally able to joyfully enjoy the fruit of years of struggle and suffering, seeing the empire united and stable, cemented by her effective audacity and tireless charity. She then retired to a monastery, eager to prepare herself in recollection and prayer for her encounter with the Lord. It was at this time that she decided to narrate her life to a certain monk of Cluny, the future abbot St. Odilo.

Fond of the fight and of audacity, but mindful of her own weakness, St. Adelaide knew how to find courage in Him who casts down the mighty from their seats and lifts up the humble, and for this reason she was never discouraged in the face of difficulties. During our present time of struggle, more than a millennium after her death, her example continues to encourage us along that sublime path of heroism – confidence! – reserved for the children of the light, “sinners by nature, but Our Lady’s intrepid soldiers by grace.”⁴ ✦

¹ SEMERIA, Giovanni B. *Vita politico-religiosa di Santa Adelaide*. Turim: Chirio e Mina, 1842, p.13.

² ST. ODILO. *Epitaphium Adalheidæ Imperatricis*, n.3: PL 142, 971.

³ Idem, n.18, 979.

⁴ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Santa Adelaide: pecadora por natureza, imperatriz pela graça [St. Adelaide: Sinner by Nature, Empress by Grace]. In: *Dr. Plinio*. Year XVI. No.189 (Dec., 2013); p.31.

An Invitation to Confidence!

In the face of the perplexities that today's decadent world arouses in the hearts of faithful Catholics, an invitation to heroic confidence points the way to the blessed days of Our Lady's triumph.

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

Imagine the situation of a medieval youth who hears stories about helpless pilgrims who are the targets of assaults and every kind of abuse on the roads to Jerusalem. Moreover, he hears that the Holy Places themselves, where the Divine Redeemer suffered and died to redeem men from sin and eternal death, are being brutally desecrated and destroyed by enemies of the Faith. Filled with holy zeal for the Lord God of hosts, the boy takes a vow and enlists in the Crusades.

However, he had suffered a terrible accident in his childhood which considerably reduced his agility. Confronted by the enemy, the young man moves with all the vigour of his spirit to strike the right blow, but his limbs do not respond to the impetus of his soul. He soon realizes that he is heading for failure and defeat.

But then, against all expectation, an indomitable and valiant crusader fighting at his side notices his difficulty, takes up position behind his weaker brother in arms and, becoming one with him in the fight, takes control of his arms; he wields the shield and the sword with the same agility and precision as when he acts with his own limbs. Unexpectedly, the

lame knight begins to perform unimaginable feats and becomes one of the greatest heroes on the battlefield! The condition for achieving the glory of success consisted only in letting himself be guided with total flexibility and unpretentiousness by his "guardian angel", without creating obstacles.

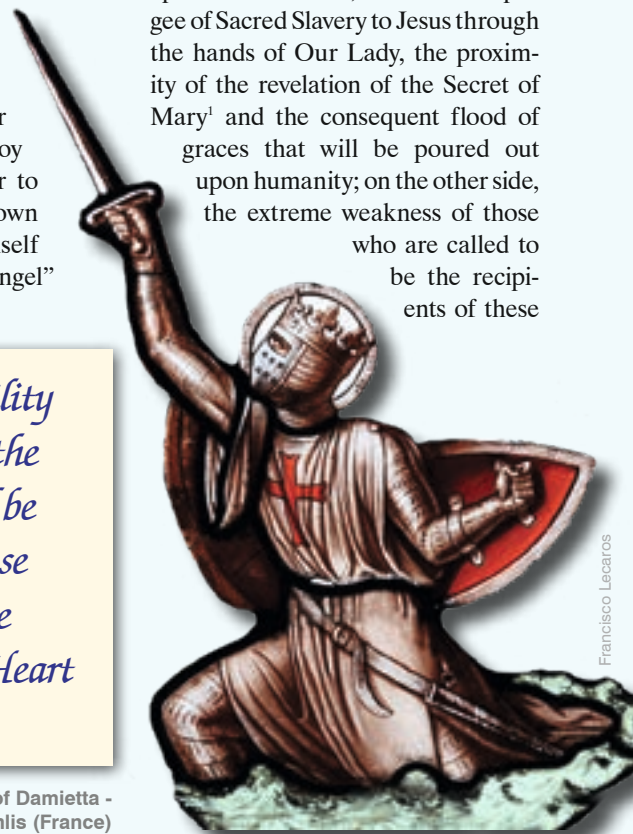
What would be better for that young man: to enjoy physical integrity in order to defeat the enemy with his own strength, or to allow himself to be taken over by the "angel"

and thus acquire his incomparable proportions in the art of the fight?

Something similar can be applied to the spiritual battles fought for the triumph of the Heart of Mary. We are living through a historical juncture of apexes: on one side, we have the apogee of Sacred Slavery to Jesus through the hands of Our Lady, the proximity of the revelation of the Secret of Mary¹ and the consequent flood of graces that will be poured out upon humanity; on the other side, the extreme weakness of those who are called to be the recipients of these

Complete flexibility to the action of the Holy Spirit will be demanded of those who fight for the triumph of the Heart of Mary will

St. Louis IX in the siege of Damietta - Notre-Dame Cathedral, Senlis (France)



Francisco Lecaros

graces and to contemplate the splendid dawn of the pinnacle-era of history.

Faced with this panorama, the children and slaves of Our Lady who wish to be faithful have but one path before them: that of unpretentiousness. It is not enough to recognize that they are nothing, that they do not have the will-power to take even one step along the path to holiness, that they depend in everything on Mary's grace and help. If they are to become valiant and fearless warriors of the Virgin, they will be asked to abandon themselves completely and to be entirely flexible to the action of the Holy Spirit in their souls. In this way they will attract the benevolent gaze of the Almighty, who will assume them and perform great works through them.

Crippled by nature, divine by grace

This mystery caused Our Lady's soul to rejoice and proclaim that God had looked upon the nothingness of His handmaid and worked wonders in Her (cf. Lk 1:49). Yes, in the canticle of the *Magnificat*, Mary wanted to proclaim a future still far off, but in which She already rejoiced. She contemplated her chosen ones, so weak, inconstant and lacking the necessary qualities for carrying out the mission of establishing her reign on earth; nevertheless She also discerned that in this chosen generation the Most High would manifest all His power. Through union with the Blessed Trinity, they would become true tabernacles of divine life, just as She had been when She gave birth to the Child Jesus.

With the august event of the union of the divine and human natures with-



The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Our Lady and the Apostles - Church of the Servites, Innsbruck (Austria)

The Holy Spirit will unite Himself to the children and slaves of His spouse, making them the apostles long envisaged and desired by so many souls

in the virginal womb of Our Lady, a new era in God's relationship with creation began, maintained in the course of history by providential men who prepared the way for the full realization of the divine plans. Now, the advent of this culmination, that is, of the Reign of the Virgin, will open for her children and slaves an even superior regime in their relationship with the Blessed Trinity. The Paraclete Spirit will unite Himself to each one in a manner never before seen, making them the apostles envisaged and

longed for by so many ardent souls in times past, particularly by Mary's great prophet, St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, in his *Fiery Prayer*: "men who are free but still in bondage to your love and your will; men after your own heart who, without taint or impediment of self-love, will carry out your will to the full and, like David of old, lay low all your enemies."²

How much we must desire the prompt establishment of this new economy of grace in the hearts of Mary's beloved children! For this, we need to persevere in this longing as we wait, and to keep our faith alive in the fulfilment of the promise,

even if we are experiencing the most terrible abandonment or we are confronted with the clearest denial.

This attitude of soul will win from Heaven an abbreviation of the days of affliction, and the hastening of the entire fulfilment of the divine plans. Like new Jacobs (cf. Gn 32:24-28), we will fight with God so that His glory may be the most complete and splendid, and the defeat of His enemies the most annihilating and humiliating.

The story of the Maccabees and our days

As we ponder the superabundance and excellence of this new Marian regime of graces, a question inevitably arises: what is the devil plotting to prevent it from flourishing? Will he infiltrate it with the aim of attacking the souls called to participate in it? But if not even the heavenly spirits have been given to know about the supernatural treasures which Our Lady carries in her Heart, and of which She wants men to be partakers, what will the demons know

about them? Nothing, absolutely nothing! Nevertheless, the evil angels act like dogs that sniff out the presence of grace.

“Watch and pray” (Mt 26:41), taught the Divine Master! The infernal enemy will try to distort and obstruct the flow of these graces to humanity, causing the children of the Virgin to give up advancing. In what way? In the same way that someone could ruin a book that has not yet been written. That is to say, simply by causing so much trouble, torment and hindrance to the writer that he gives up the enterprise. If he surrenders before the obstacles, the book will not exist; that is to say, grace will be rejected *a priori*.

A historical fact illustrates this stratagem of the prince of darkness in a paradigmatic way. “Smelling” in the air that the Incarnation of the Word was approaching, Satan understood that the only way to prevent it would be to destroy the Chosen People, and above all, the True Religion, for then the prophecies would lose their meaning and the Saviour would be deprived of the necessary bases to work the Redemption and to found the Holy Church. The Messiah’s mission would have been utterly thwarted and the new regime of graces that He would have inaugurated for humanity would have been frustrated from the very outset.

To achieve this, the devil made use of Antiochus Epiphanes. By the action of this wicked king, who was joined by the “wicked men” (1 Mc 1:12) of Israel, many apostatized from the covenant with the Lord, adopting pagan customs. The worship of God was replaced by idolatrous rituals in Jerusalem, and a terrible religious persecution was unleashed against the Maccabees and the few Israelites who remained faithful! But the Lord never abandons those who are au-

thentic in their love. Assisting them with graces and extraordinary interventions, He granted them victory after victory, until the complete annihilation of their enemies and the restoration of divine worship (cf. 1 Mc 1-4).

History seems to repeat itself in our own day, with all those who sincerely love Our Lady. The forces of evil have “smelt” the change of key in the salvific plan and want to prevent, or at least distort, the copious graces

Just as, at the time of the Maccabees, the wicked tried to thwart the Redeemer’s coming, they now want to impede the emergence of a new regime of graces



Before Antiochus Epiphanes, a mother encourages her seven sons to embrace martyrdom - engraving by Gustave Doré

that the Immaculate Heart of Mary is beginning to pour out on her children. Perhaps sensing that he will soon be crushed by the heel of the Virgin, the devil, out of desperation, provokes all kinds of insults, blasphemies and sacrileges against the Mother of God, denying Her the glories and the honour that the Church has always paid Her from the beginning. But when we see these things happening, let us remember the exploits of the Maccabees and repeat the words of the Divine Master: “look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Lk 21:28).

Sublime battle cry:
“Confidence! I have overcome the world!”

During the Last Supper, soon after the son of perdition had left the Upper Room to consummate his infamous betrayal, Our Lord addressed words of extreme affection and encouragement to His disciples, announcing to them the coming of the Paraclete Spirit and warning them of the terrible persecutions that would soon befall them. Never had a victorious general dared to speak to his troops in such a way, and the Redeemer concluded His fiery discourse of love with a sublime battle cry, “confidence, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

Confidence thus emerges as the most powerful and destructive weapon of Christ’s disciples in the struggle against the powers of evil, which are united in preventing the consolidation and expansion of God’s Kingdom in hearts and in society. For this reason, the perfidious Serpent spares no effort to create snares in order to extirpate this virtue, as far as possible, from the very foundations of man’s psychological structure. To remove from human nature the ability to trust was, without doubt, one

of the most fateful evils that the Revolution has been able to cause!

It becomes fundamental for Our Lady's children to recognize their own weakness and to know how to trust in the strength that comes from divine grace. Providence has allowed, and will still allow, many trials in the phase leading up to Mary's reign, precisely so that they may be convinced of this reality. For how can anyone confide in grace if he does not experience weaknesses in himself? What can the Mother of Mercy do for those who think they are self-sufficient, strong and secure? Only the sick take benefit from both the doctor and medicine...

However, more than restoring to her beloved ones the ability to confide, the Blessed Virgin wants them to become paragons of confidence! In her unspeakable goodness, She will ask one son to practise this virtue in the face of misfortune; another, amidst adversity; a third, in the struggle against his own weaknesses; yet another, in recognizing that he is greatly loved by Her. Finally, Our Lady wants to make of each child a precious stone inlaid in the magnificent jewel of confidence!

***The dawn of the
Reign of Mary already
shines on earth!***

The graces that will be bestowed on the souls most called and most united to the heavenly Queen already participate in the specific graces of her reign, which will gradually extend to the whole of society. These graces are still unknown, even to the Angels, because until now they have been hidden in the divine Paradise of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The words of the Apostle can be well applied to them when he refers to the heavenly realities: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (1 Cor 2:9).

In this grandiose picture, the author of these lines cannot fail to high-

light the role of a hero of confidence: St. Joseph. At the Incarnation of the Word, the Eternal Father made him guardian of the graces of the hypostatic union. It is also to the Glorious Patriarch that Our Lady entrusts the Marian graces. At every moment, like a kind and vigilant father, he embraces, protects and sustains the elect of his virginal Spouse.

What, then, should be the attitude of true devotees, Mary's children and slaves of love? A profound awareness of the importance of these graces. In what way? By having complete confidence in Her! To confide means to believe in the superabundant and gratuitous love of Our Lady, which comes down from on high and is capable, in an instant, of converting them into the apostles of the latter times prophesied by St. Louis Grignion de Montfort.

Paraphrasing the Divine Saviour, they can proudly proclaim: "Confidence, confidence, confidence! Mary Most Holy, the Queen of history, She who alone has crushed all heresies, triumphed over Satan and the accursed Gnostic and egalitarian Revolution! The dawn of the Reign of her Wise and Immaculate Heart already shines on earth!" ✧

Taken, with slight adaptations,
from: *Mary Most Holy!*
God's Paradise Revealed to Men.
São Paulo: Arautos do Evangelho,
2020, v.III, p.173-183

*To confide is to believe
in the magnanimous
love of Our Lady,
who is capable of
transforming her
devotees into apostles
of the latter times*



Francisco Lecaros

The Virgin with the Christ Child,
crushing the devil - St. Peter's Cathedral,
Vannes (France)

¹ In his writings, St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort refers to the slavery of love to Mary that he preaches as a secret revealed by the Most High of a sure path to holiness. More than in pious practices, this secret consists in doing all things with Mary, in Mary, through Mary and for Mary (cf. ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT. *Le secret de Marie*, n.1; 28).

² ST. LOUIS-MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT. *Prière Embrasée*, n.8.

Posture and Nobility in Face of Hardships!

Since man is composed of body and soul, whatever happens in his physical life has repercussions in his spiritual life, and vice-versa. It is important for us to know how to elevate both realities concomitantly.



Sr. Leticia de Sousa, EP

Catholic piety has dedicated its most sublime artistic manifestations to Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Magnificent buildings, stained glass windows, music, liturgical splendours of every kind have sprung up over the centuries to render as much glorify and praise as possible in this land of exile to the august and real presence of the King of kings among men in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Now, as a Mother and Teacher of good sense and wisdom, the Church has always been equally concerned with adorning the living shrines of the souls of her children for God.

We are temples of the Blessed Trinity!

Every baptized person becomes a temple of God, according to the promise of the Redeemer: “If a man loves Me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23). Therefore, the human soul, which harbours the Trinity itself in a living relationship, is worth much more than all the in-

animate ornamentation surrounding altars, or even the tabernacle containing the Sacred Host.



**Harbouring the Blessed Trinity
in a living relationship,
the human soul is worth
much more than a tabernacle**

Tabernacle of Our Lady of Fatima
Oratory, Nova Friburgo (Rio de Janeiro)

In view of this reality, Catholic doctrine teaches that man’s moral perfection should correspond to, or even surpass, the beauty of the sacred arts; and, consequently, his practical and material life should always be clothed in dignity, out of respect for the Divine Guest of his soul.

The relationship between corporeal and spiritual life

This duty, however, is also based on a more subtle consideration of an ontological nature: since man is composed of body and soul – unified realities, whose separation signifies a violence to our nature – everything that happens in our bodily life has repercussions in our spiritual life, and vice-versa.

A great and prolonged moral suffering, for example, is frequently the cause of ailments of the organism, such as sleep and eating disorders. On the other hand, a routine that is too hectic physically can lead a person to spiritual acedia.

From this it follows that, in the opposite sense, this body-soul relationship, when properly channelled, can

have a beneficial impact on the spiritual progress of souls.

Posture and moral behaviour

A very illustrative example for today's generation concerns the physical posture.

It is increasingly rare to find people who know how to maintain an upright bearing when walking, talking or even sitting. Nowadays, under the pretext of comfort, positions closer to the irrational are adopted... Now, a simple analysis of behaviour shows that, when faced with the hardships of life, people usually react with an irrationality that matches their posture: they shrink back, yield to laziness and even give up completely. Just as they sink into a chair at the slightest sign of fatigue, they collapse in the face of the struggles that come their way.

Is there not, then, a relationship between these two attitudes?

How to attain grandeur of soul

The same also applies in a positive sense. Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira,¹ in a conference given in the 1990s, gives an interesting explanation in this regard, using as a model the historical period of the *Ancien Régime*.²

He recounts that, at that time, it was required of people of some refinement to walk with their heads high and erect, as a sign of the affirmation of their own dignity. Families would pass on this custom to their adolescent children by tying a small pile of books atop their heads with string. They would then walk about the house and converse with one another bearing with this burden, which obliged them to maintain an upright posture. As a result, they learned to maintain this position when the weight was removed. Hence the noble, dignified and splendid bearing of the figures of that time. They were true monuments of distinction!

Analogously, says Dr. Plinio, for a man to attain grandeur of soul it is necessary that he carries the "pile of books" that Providence "ties" upon his head: the annoyances, the concerns, the sufferings and the setbacks so common to the state of trial.

Obliging oneself to always maintain a good posture is, then, an excellent stimulus to face the hardships of life with nobility. The soul takes on a different attitude! When an obstacle appears, one is more disposed to face it standing on both feet and with the head held high.

Therefore, just as the worldly man shows the laxity of his character in the slackness of his outward demeanour, the Catholic affirms his courage of soul in the nobility of his bearing!

Courage, strength and resolution!

Therefore, dear reader, these lines invite you to be enthusiastic about your sublime status as a temple of God and about your demanding duties as a militant Catholic! Keep always alive within you the certainty that in everything "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom 8:37). If you strive to constantly elevate your way of living, your soul, thus sustained, will become a friend of the Angels and consort with the Blessed in Heaven!

If, however, adversities of the moment weigh heavily upon you and weakness overcomes you, have recourse without hesitation to the transforming affection of Our Lady, Virgin most clement, and trust that She will soon give you strength, as if telling you: "My child, let us forge ahead! As a Mother, I understand the difficulty you have in bearing these setbacks, which are your personal burden. But consider well the



Reproduction

Obliging oneself to always maintain a good posture is an excellent stimulus to firmness in the face life's hardships

Charles I, by Anthony van Dyck –
The Louvre, Paris

dignity of suffering all these things for love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Church. Lift up your head and give thanks to God! I myself will be your support!" ✧

¹ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, June 6, 1990.

² From the French: Old Regime. The expression was originally used by Girondin and Jacobin agitators to pejoratively designate the system of monarchical government of the Valois and Bourbon families, preceding the French Revolution of 1789. This epoch was characterized by the splendour of the ceremonial in court life and by the harmonious and hierarchical order reigning in society.



Resigned to God's Will

Virtue grows in souls in proportion to the magnitude of the obstacles that they face. So it was with Dona Lucilia, for whom an unexpected and painful event occasioned great spiritual growth.

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

Once, when bedridden with pains and a high fever – perhaps an omen of his impending death – Dr. Antônio said he had seen the ghost of a friend, whose life had been far from praiseworthy, enter his room through the window. The phantom sat at the foot of the bed and stared malignantly at Dr. Antônio, as if inviting him to join him in the place from whence he had come.

At that moment Dona Lucilia opened the door and entered. Thinking her father was delirious, she placed a satin-like hand on his forehead. Awakening as if from a nightmare, Dr. Antônio said that he saw his former acquaintance disappear through the window. Much relieved, he felt himself perfectly restored and realized that the fever had entirely left him.

Unusual prediction

Every year Dr. Antônio would purchase a “St. Anthony’s Almanac,” which featured meteorological

forecasts and included a thought for each day. Handing it to his wife Dona Gabriela, he said:

“*Sinhara*,” as he affectionately called her, “have a look through the new almanac then put it on the shelf.”

Then he added pensively:

“1909...” and pencilling a calculation on a piece of paper, he commented “I will die this year.”

“Totó, don’t say foolish things,” Dona Gabriela responded, a little upset.

But Dr. Antônio smiled and persisted:

“I will die this year. Wait and see.”

At mealtimes he would occasionally pick up his table knife and rest it against his wrist. The knife would quiver, and he would say:

“You see? It’s a sign that I’m going to die.”

“Don’t say that! Who ever heard of such a thing?” Dona Gabriela would retort.

But death made its call on November 12, 1909. This is how it happened...

“Partir c’est mourir un peu. Mourir...”

On that day, Dr. Antônio was in Santos, where he had a partnership in a coffee-trading company. He lost consciousness as he was alighting from a streetcar in front of the enterprise headquarters. He was immediately recognized by someone who was passing by:

“This is Dr. Ribeiro dos Santos! We must advise his family; they are staying at the Parque Balneário Hotel!”

They carried Dr. Antônio into the company’s office and laid him on a counter, and from there he was transferred to a partner’s home.

The doctors soon arrived and examined him, but found that there was nothing to be done but to let him rest. Meanwhile, family and friends began to appear, and to gather into little groups in the next room. Suddenly, Dr. Antônio called one of his sons and, as soon as he saw him, raised himself on an elbow and said:

“Now look, Antônio, I’m feeling very poorly...”

And without another word, he fell dead.

News of the passing of a person as well-known as Dr. Antônio spread quickly, causing general mourning.

Dona Lucilia had not gone to Santos, but was waiting to receive word from her father that he had concluded his business, at which point she would join him. Instead, she received this painful communication, at around two in the afternoon. She suffered such a terrible shock that she fell ill and had to take to her bed.

The wake was held at the family residence on Barão de Limeira Avenue. The body arrived in São Paulo at ten at night. It was transported, according to the custom of the time, on a special train – with just an engine, a tender, and a funeral car covered with flowers and draped with black cloth – which went slowly, blowing its whistle.

The news had struck such a blow to Dona Lucilia that she had not been able to leave her bed since receiving it. When it was almost time to close the coffin, some of the mourners went to urge her:

“Lucilia, if you don’t come now, you won’t be able to see your father before the burial.”

Leaning on her husband and an uncle, she struggled to walk the half block from her home to her father’s house.

In those days, funerals were stately affairs. The cortège to the cemetery was formed by traditional carriages of black and gold, adorned with plumes. The coachmen and footmen – the funeral service staff – wore plumed bicorne and a costume reminiscent of the *Ancien Régime*.

As she made her way along the long line of coaches in the funeral procession, the impatient stomping of the horses’ hooves on the cobblestones hammered harshly in Dona Lucilia’s ears and seemed to echo in her heart. Her strength gave way and she had to return home. Thus, in that grief-stricken moment, she was unable to pay her last respects to her beloved father.

*Partir c’est mourir un peu,*¹ the French say, which suggests an even more mournful thought: *mourir c’est partir pour toujours,*²

leaving only memories behind in the land of the living.

An occasion for greater spiritual progress

This sad event was a landmark in Dona Lucilia’s life. No one had imagined that Dr. Antônio would die so suddenly, and the abruptness of the loss was all the more painful to Dona Lucilia who loved him so tenderly. Robbed of the protective presence of her father, her life would change drastically, and she would have to face new responsibilities.

Great souls grow in virtue as they overcome obstacles, for God never fails to supply His grace, especially when it is sought with confidence.

So it was with Dona Lucilia; these new circumstances would result in spiritual progress. Nothing had indicated that Dr. Antônio’s forecasts of his own death within the year would prove true. Dona Lucilia’s esteem for her father, and his healthy appearance when he left for Santos, had prevented her discernment from perceiving the nearness of his death.

From that moment forward, she resolved that life’s unexpected sorrows would not catch her off guard. Her steadfastness in practicing this virtue called for great strength of soul, for nothing is more averse to the human spirit than to face possible tragedies head-on. ✧

Taken, with slight adaptations, from: *Dona Lucilia*. Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV; Heralds of the Gospel, 2013, p.111-113



As the solemn procession of carriages advanced, Dona Lucilia found herself bereft of strength to pay her last respects to her beloved father

Funeral cortège in São Paulo, from the same epoch as Dr. Antônio Ribeiro dos Santos’ death; inset, portrait of Dr. Antônio and, on previous page, Dona Lucilia in 1906

¹ From the French: To depart is to die a little.

² From the French: To die is to part forever.

More than 40 Thousand Families Make Their Consecration to Mary



Caieiras (SP)

Leandro Souza

On the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, celebrated on September 8, more than 40 thousand Brazilian families began an online course of Consecration to Jesus through Mary, available free of charge on the Catholic Formation Reconquest Platform, of the Heralds of the Gospel. The course is administered by Rev. Fr. Ricardo Basso, EP (above, detail). Then, on October 12, Solemnity of Our Lady of Aparecida, Patroness of Brazil, these families made their consecration, and all participants were able to feel the supernatural presence of the Most Holy Virgin during the ceremony. Most of those who had signed up made their consecration in their homes, during the Mass celebrated by Fr. Ricardo in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, in Caieiras (São Paulo State) and transmitted live through the Heralds of the Gospel YouTube channel. However, more than two thousand families had the opportunity to take part in on-site ceremonies held in the chapels, oratories and churches of the Heralds of the Gospel in the

cities of Belo Horizonte, Brasília, Caieiras, Cuiabá, Campo Grande, Campos dos Goytacazes, Cariacica, Cotia, Fortaleza, Joinville, Juiz de Fora, Lauro de Freitas, Maringá, Montes Claros, Moreno, Nova Friburgo, Piraquara, Ponta Grossa, São Carlos and Ubatuba. In Rio de Janeiro, the act was held in the Church of St. Joseph of Lagoa.

The enthusiastic comments of participants gave eloquent testimony to the many graces received throughout the course and during the ceremonies. Many emphatically affirm that, since that day, they have felt that they are true children and slaves of love of Our Lady, and that their lives, attitudes and thoughts have no other purpose than that of being in accordance with Her, and that they desire nothing other than union with God, through the hands of His Holy Mother.

This was the first round of the consecration course, in a series that will unfold over the next few months on the Reconquest Platform.



Rodrigo de Aguiar



Diego Maciel

Edson Fernandes



Ponta Grossa (PR)



Cotia (SP)

Renan Afonso

Daniel Gomes



Ubatuba (SP)



Rio de Janeiro

Craziella Toyares



Brasília

Hélcia Chala

Breno Fonseca



Juiz de Fora (MG)



Montes Claros (MG)

Luzia Antunesa



Cariacica (ES)

Devanildo Barbosa

Luiz André



Piraquara (PR)



Joinville (SC)

Edmundo de Azevedo



Cuiabá

Paula Santos



Photos: Alejandro López



Greece – To mark the 450th anniversary of the Battle of Lepanto, which was fought on October 7, 1571, a priest of the Heralds of the Gospel celebrated Holy Mass aboard a small vessel, in the waters of the Gulf of Lepanto, the site where this decisive combat in favour of Christendom played out.

Photos: Lúcio Alves



Portugal – To mark the month of the Holy Rosary, the Heralds of Portugal visited the St. Joseph Old Age Home with the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (at right), and the St. Raphael Continuing Care Unit where a Holy Mass was celebrated (at left). Both entities belong to the Holy House of Mercy of Montijo.

Photos: Esther Pinales



São Paulo – On October 9, missionaries from the Heralds of the Gospel visited St. Francis Xavier Parish, in the city's north zone, to host a lecture on the Rosary, interspersed with theatrical sketches for the children who participate in catechesis. There was also a recitation of the Rosary and celebration of Holy Mass.



Photos: Alvaro Tavera

Colombia – On October 14, the Military Engineers of the Army consecrated themselves to the Blessed Virgin, in Bogotá. Seven Generals, in addition to many officials and soldiers, and their families, participated in the Holy Mass. Afterwards, everyone took part in a procession carrying a statue of Our Lady to the command headquarters, where She was enthroned.



Photos: María Clara Cheesman

Guatemala – In the month of October, missionaries of the Heralds of the Gospel took the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on a visit to the Margarita Cruz Ruiz Home (at left) and the Valle de los Angeles Orphanage (at right), which provides a home to approximately 175 children and youth.



Photos: José Luis de Zayas

Itaquaquecetuba (São Paulo) – The pastor of the Church of Our Lady of Carmel invited the choir and orchestra of the Major Seminary of the Heralds of the Gospel to enrich the Solemnity of Brazil's Patroness on October 12. At the end of the Holy Mass a procession was carried out through neighbouring streets, with the recitation of the Rosary and the singing of hymns.

CHURCH AND WORLD EVENTS



Sword from the time of the Crusades found intact

On the Mediterranean coast of Haifa, near Mount Carmel, a sword more than a metre long was found encrusted with shells and marine organisms. Shlomi Katzin was practising recreational diving one hundred and fifty metres from the beach when he saw the artefact along with other objects, including metal anchors and fragments of pottery.

Because of its natural coves, this area served as a refuge for ancient ships, and the weapon is presumed to have belonged to a crusader who arrived in the Holy Land nine hundred years ago, as Nir Distelfeld, inspector of the Israel Antiquities Authority's Robbery Prevention Unit, states: "The sword, which has been preserved in perfect condition, is a beautiful and rare find and evidently belonged to a Crusader knight." The object will be cleaned and examined

in a specialized laboratory before being put on display.

Statue of St. Teresa of the Andes tours Santiago

During the month of October, a life-size image of St. Teresa of the Andes went on pilgrimage to parishes, chapels and schools in Santiago de Chile, and was joyfully received, especially by young people. Patricia Mora, director of archdiocesan activities, explained that the purpose of the pilgrimage is to highlight the profound love of God lived by this Carmelite.

Fr. Sebastián Martínez, rector of the Lycée Leonardo Murialdo, explained that the visit was an occasion to pray and to make a concrete resolution for holiness. "Young people have the desire to participate, to let themselves be questioned and challenged. The visit of the missionary Teresita inspired them with a proposal of Gospel values, values that make life worth living," he affirmed.

Religious vandalism attacks in the United States reach one hundred

According to the Committee for Religious Liberty of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), since May 2020 – when the Committee began tracking incidents

such as arson or other destruction – a hundred vandalism attacks against Catholic buildings and monuments have been recorded in the country. Last October, for example, unidentified persons wrote satanic slogans and messages of religious hatred on the walls of the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Denver, Colorado, just before Sunday Mass.

"These incidents of vandalism have ranged from the tragic to the obscene, from the transparent to the inexplicable. There remains much we do not know about this phenomenon, but at a minimum, they underscore that our society is in sore need of God's grace," reads a communiqué issued by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York and Chair of the Committee for Religious Liberty, and Most Rev. Paul Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City and Chair of the USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

New Blessed for the Church: 127 martyrs of Cordoba

In October, Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, beatified 127 martyrs of the anti-Catholic persecution of 1936 in the Cathedral of Cordoba, Spain. The group of martyrs is

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Christ the Redeemer Celebrates 90 Years



Thiago Tamura

Brazil's greatest religious icon, Christ the Redeemer, turned ninety years old on October 12. Erected atop Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro, the statue stands over seven hundred metres above sea level and weighs 1,145 tonnes. It was chosen in 2007 as one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World and in 2019 alone, 2.4 million people visited it.

On the symbolism of this magnificent monument for Brazil, Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, who attended its inauguration on October 12, 1931, once commented:

"I cannot forget one night when I was in Rio de Janeiro, when the mist rising from the sea surrounded the statue of Christ the Redeemer on Corcovado. Being only

one fixed light on a silhouette, or on a hand that blesses, or a heart that palpitates with love, or a face that contemplates full of solicitude, at no moment did the mist succeed in extinguishing the figure of the Redeemer. This is the faith with which we walk towards the future, whatever the circumstances. It may be that very difficult trials may obscure from our eyes the prospects of victory; it may be that unforeseen circumstances bring problems that are not yet ours today. Beyond the mist, beyond all that can cloud the truth, on the Brazilian's visual horizon there is something that nothing can erase: it is the image of Christ the Redeemer, faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ. And this faith will save us!"

made up of seventy-nine priests, five seminarians, three religious men, one nun and thirty-nine lay people, all of whom were killed out of hatred for the Faith by the populist front.

The postulator of the cause, Fr. Miguel Varona, explained the circumstances and the theological significance of their martyrdom. "We have 127 brothers in Heaven – thus the Church recognizes them, Blessed by martyrdom. They become our intercessors, companions on the journey and models for this time in the life of the Church," the priest declared.

A million children pray the Rosary for a better world

In October, the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need, ACN, reintroduced the One Million Chil-

dren Praying the Rosary campaign, which seeks to unite children from five continents to petition God for the world. The initiative was supported by the Shrine and the World Apostolate of Fatima, and children from forty-four countries participated.

This year, the campaign focused on the figure of St. Joseph, since it has been 150 years since Pope Pius IX declared him Patron of the Universal Church. Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, President of ACN International, said that St. Joseph "is a great example for us of how God can turn all things to good through our prayer, our faithfulness and our obedience to his Word."

Africa and Asia: a hope for the Church

On the occasion of World Mission Day, the Holy See published the Sta-

tistical Yearbook of the Church, with data for 2019. According to the figures presented, while Africa is the main continent benefiting from the Church's growth, with eight million new Catholics, Europe has 292,000 fewer faithful.

Furthermore, a decrease in the number of bishops has been recorded, while the number of priests has increased. The increase came from Africa and Asia, which gave the Church 3,638 new priests.

The Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples explained that in recent years there has been an increase in the percentage of Baptisms and entries into the seminary or religious life in Asia, although the number of Catholics on the continent is still relatively small.

In Search of the Lost Sheep



Bethel had disappeared! As Hannah went to get help, she heard pipes and drums playing, and voices that rang out in jubilation. What might it be all about?



Maria Auxiliadora Boldori

It was December. The sun's rays warmed the green pastures of Star Meadow, where a large flock grazed, tended by a cheerful girl named Hannah. She was the daughter of Simon, a seasoned shepherd of the region. Now a tall, slender twelve year old, she had learned the art of tending sheep from her father since she was seven. She often wore a pale green tunic with a lilac waist sash and a pinafore of the same tone as the traditional veil that encircled her contented face.

For Hannah, the work was no burden. She knew each sheep like the palm of her hand: she knew what type of grass each one preferred, knew how to enliven the lazy ones and calm the overly frisky, and even called each sheep by name. Hers was no small flock; the sheep numbered a hundred and twelve, including the youngest, whom she had named Bethel.

For their part, the sheep knew their dedicated shepherdess very well. They seemed to understand everything that she said, and they kept her entertained during the long afternoons she spent in the fields with them.

When she led the sheep home, she always checked to make sure that

none were missing as she gathered them into the fold.

On evening, as the sun sank slowly behind the slopes to make way for emerging stars, Hannah started to review her "troops".

"Agnes!"

"Baaah."

"Sarah!"

"Bah-baaah!"

"Bethel!"

Silence...

"Bethel! Bethel?" Not a sound was heard.

This adventurous lamb had the habit of slipping away unseen to explore hidden pathways and practise leaping over boulders and fallen tree trunks... And this time she had wandered all too far.

"Bethel is lost! I lost my lambkin!... Oh Father Abraham! What will Papa say? He will be so displeased. Poor little Bethy all alone in the dark, at the mercy of ravenous wolves..." thought Hannah, distraught, as she ran to find her father.

Arriving at the house, Hannah heard pipes and drums playing, and voices that rang out in jubilation. "What might be happening? Could it be that they found my lost sheep?"

Upon entering, she found the house full of shepherd folk from near and far. All were excitedly preparing for a journey, when the normal activity of that hour was to settle down for a well-deserved rest... "What is the big occasion?" she wondered.

"Hannah! Alleluia! Are you ready for the great encounter? We have been waiting for you."

It was her good friend Elizabeth coming toward her.

"Encounter? But I'm still searching..." replied the young shepherdess.

"Are you the only one in Bethlehem who hasn't heard the good tidings?"

"What good tidings?"

"Hannah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob has taken pity on His People! The Lord's Angel appeared saying: 'I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.' The promises are being fulfilled!"

"Really? The Hope of the nations has finally come down to earth?"

"Yes! And we can go see Him and pay Him homage! Come! It's high time we left!"

The shepherds hastily set out on their way, with neither map nor guide – led only by their faith in the Angel’s words and their ardent longing to meet the Messiah. The caravan walked and walked, amid “glorias” and “alleluias,” until they finally spotted a very luminous cave on a hilltop nearby. “That must be where He lies!” they all concluded.

At that moment, Hannah’s lost sheep came to her mind. She recalled a passage from the Book of Isaiah: “All we like sheep have gone astray.” And she pondered in her heart: “We really are like stray sheep, even more than poor Bethy. But God did not abandon us, for the Saviour has come to...”

“Baaah!”

“That cry sounds awfully familiar... I think is Bethel!”

Hannah scanned the knolls and gul-lies and soon sighted a figure prancing uphill toward the grotto. Full of new hope, she bolted after it, but a man suddenly came into view, picked the animal up, and slipped again into the shadows of night.

“Oh, no! I am positive that sheep was Bethel. She is of my flock!” cried the shepherdess.

Seeing what was happening, her father, Simon, called after her:

“Hannah! Don’t let this distract you from the great Messiah! We must be ready to give up good things to gain great ones! God will reward you for sacrificing your beloved sheep. The Messiah is waiting for us!”

When they reached the doorway of that place – steeped in such a blessing as to seem more like a cathedral than a cave – the pious shepherd folk clustered into a closer group, filled with awe and respect.

“Do you suppose we’ll be allowed to see Him?” whispered one of the shepherds.



Illustrations: Elizabeth Bonyun

Hannah saw her dear little lamb right next to the Child

“Wait and see,” responded another.

Just then a man emerged from the grotto and approached them. He was noble and distinguished – a true son of his forefather David. He addressed them in a tone of paternal affection, saying:

“Good people, we have been looking forward to your arrival! My Wife, Mary, is asking you to come in. Would you like to enter now?”

Wonderstruck and dazzled, the shepherds filed into the grotto.

Hannah glanced about one last time before entering, still hoping to find Bethel.

“My child, do you want to see little Jesus?” asked the Holy Patriarch.

That majestic voice, brimming with fatherly tenderness was music to Hannah’s ears and seemed to invite her to calmly confide.

No palace, nor even the Temple of Jerusalem could compare with the splendour of that grotto’s cold stones. Whoever entered there be-

came immersed in an atmosphere of rapt joy and sublime quietude flowing from one of the greatest mysteries of our Faith, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In the centre of the grotto sat a Lady all enveloped in serenity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, overjoyed to bear in her arms the One who was both her God and her Baby Boy. The shepherds all knelt around the Child’s Mother – all except Hannah, who had entered last.

Our Lady looked at the shepherdess, and then beckoned to her. Taking Hannah’s hand She had her touch the sleeping Baby, and He opened His little eyes. Seeing the girl before him, He smiled. Then extended his tiny hand, to point to some-

thing at His side.

It was Bethel! Hannah’s strayed sheep had ended up right beside the loving Mother and Child, set there by the kind Patriarch, St. Joseph.

In this story, our little shepherdess finds her lost sheep. In reality, however, Hannah and all of humanity have gone astray by sin. We are the true lost sheep, found and rescued by the divine Good Shepherd, who took on our weak human nature to save us. ✧



Each one of us is like a lost sheep, rescued by the Good Shepherd

THE SAINTS OF EACH DAY

1. **St. Eligius**, bishop (†660). Goldsmith from Limoges, France, and councillor to King Dagobert I. He entered religious life and founded several monasteries before being elected Bishop of Noyon.

2. **Blessed Mary Angela Astorch**, abbess (†1665). Founded convents of Clarist Capuchins in the Spanish cities of Zaragoza and Murcia.

3. **St. Francis Xavier**, priest (†1552 Shangchuan - China).
St. Zephaniah, prophet. In the days of Josiah, King of Judah, he announced the downfall of the wicked and strengthened the weak in the hope of salvation.

4. **St. John Damascene**, priest and Doctor of the Church (†c. 749 Mar Saba - Israel)
St. John the Wonderworker, bishop (†ninth century). He staunchly defended the cult of sacred images, confronting the iconoclast Emperor Leo the Armenian.

5. **2nd Sunday of Advent.**
St. Crispina de Tagora, martyr (†304). Mother of a family beheaded in Tebessa, Algeria, for refusing to sacrifice to idols in the time of Diocletian and Maximian.

6. **St. Nicholas**, bishop (†fourth century Myra - Turkey).
St. Dativa and companions, martyrs (†fifth century). In North Africa, they endured terrible torments during the persecution waged by the Arian Hunneric, king of the Vandals.

7. **St. Ambrose**, bishop and Doctor of the Church (†397 Milan - Italy).
St. Athenodorus, martyr (†c. 304). He was tortured with

fire and other torments in the time of Diocletian in Syria.

8. **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.**
St. Narcisca de Jesus Martillo Morán, virgin (†1869). A young Ecuadorian seamstress who, after a life of intense prayer and penance, was admitted to the Dominican Convent of the Patronage in Lima, Peru.

9. **St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin** (†1548 Mexico City).
St. Gorgonia, mother of a family (†c. 370). Daughter of St. Nona and sister of St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Caesarius. She exemplified a modest and pious life and generosity towards the poor.



Martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket - Notre-Dame Cathedral, Bayeux (France)

10. **Blessed Virgin Mary of Loreto.**
St. John Roberts, priest and martyr (†1610). In his youth he converted to Catholicism, and joined the Benedictine Order in Valladolid, Spain, from where he left as a missionary for England. During the reign of James I he was discovered and hanged.

11. **St. Damasus I**, Pope (†384 Rome).
St. Maria Maravillas de Jesus, virgin (†1974). Carmelite nun, daughter of the Marquis of Pidal, ambassador of Spain to the Holy See. She founded several monasteries in Spain and India.

12. **3rd Sunday of Advent. Gaudete Sunday.**
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas.
St. Israel de Dorat, priest (†1014). A man of great culture, he was appointed Vicar General by the Bishop of Limoges, France, whom he assisted greatly in preaching the Gospel.

13. **St. Lucy**, virgin and martyr (†c. 304/305 Syracuse - Italy).
St. Odile, virgin (†seventh century). First abbess of the monastery of Hohenbourg, France, founded by Duke Aldaric, her father.

14. **St. John of the Cross**, priest and Doctor of the Church (†1591 Úbeda - Spain).
St. Nicasius of Reims, bishop (†407). He was killed by pagans at the door of the basilica he had built in Reims, France.

15. **St. Virginia Centurione Bracelli**, widow (†1651). She founded and directed the Work of the Sisters of Our Lady of Refuge in Mount Calvary in Genoa, Italy.

16. St. Adelaide, empress (†999).

Wife of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Otto I, she demonstrated great charity towards the indigent and built several churches and monasteries.

17. St. Judicael (†c. 650). King of the Bretons; he re-established peace between Bretons and Franks and, after abdicating the throne, spent the rest of his life in the Abbey of Saint-Méen, France.

18. Blessed Nemesia Valle, virgin (†1916). Member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joan Antida Thouret, she generously dedicated herself to the formation of youth. She died near Turin, Italy.

19. 4th Sunday of Advent.

St. Anastasius I, Pope (†401).

A man of outstanding poverty and apostolic solicitude, he firmly opposed heretical doctrines.

20. St. Dominic de Silos, abbot (†1073). After living as a hermit, he restored the Benedictine Monastery of Silos, Spain, which was virtually in ruins, re-establishing the observance and practice of divine praise.

21. St. Peter Canisius, priest and Doctor of the Church (†1597 Fribourg - Switzerland).

St. Micah, prophet. During the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, he defended the oppressed with his preaching, condemned idolatry and wickedness, and announced to the Chosen People the arrival of the One who would be born in Bethlehem and would shepherd Israel.

22. Blessed Thomas Holland, priest and martyr (†1642).

Jesuit, executed by hanging in the time of Charles I, for exercising his priestly ministry in England.

23. St. John Cantius, priest (†1473 Krakow - Poland).

St. Marie Marguerite d'Youville, religious (†1771). She devoutly educated her two sons, leading them to the priesthood. She founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal.

24. Holy ancestors of Jesus Christ.

Patriarchs and just chosen by God to make part of the lineage from which the promised Messiah would be born.

25. Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.



Ralph Hammann (CC BY-SA 4.0)

St. Odile - Chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Bon-Secours, Sainte-Croix-aux-Mines (France)

St. Eugenia, martyr (†third/fourth century). Martyred in Rome.

26. Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

St. Stephen, deacon and protomartyr.

St. Dionysius, Pope (†268). After the terrible persecution of Valerian, he tried to console the Christians, to rescue the captives and to bring back the wayward.

27. St. John, Apostle and Evangelist.

St. Fabiola, widow (†400).

From a noble Roman family, she used her wealth to help the poor, founded a hospital, and dedicated herself to a life of prayer and penance.

28. Holy Innocents, martyrs.

St. Anthony of Lérins, monk (†c. 520). After many years of hermetic life, he ended his days in the Monastery of Lérins, France.

29. St. Thomas Becket, bishop and martyr (†1170 Canterbury - England).

St. Benedicta Hyōn Kyōngnyōn, widow and martyr (†1839). Korean catechist who was beheaded after suffering many tortures for Christ.

30. Blessed John Mary Boccardo, priest (†1913). He founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Poor Daughters of St. Cajetan, in Pancalieri, Italy.

31. St. Sylvester I, Pope (†335 Rome).

St. Catherine Labouré, virgin (†1876). Religious from the Daughters of Charity in Paris, she received the revelations of Our Lady of Graces. She was a model of charity and patience.

On the Right or Left of Jesus?

Facing the grave reality of the Judgement, into which category of souls do you, dear reader, fall? Are you one of the good sheep, or do you belong to the flock of the rebellious goats?



Bruna Piva



Tmmense and verdant pastures teeming with flocks, some of sheep and lambs, others of goats and kids: such is the picturesque scene that often meets our eyes when we venture far from the big cities.

There is something special about these little animals, leading the Redeemer to mention them in His parables, intended for the instruction of humanity throughout history.

Sheep, known for their docility and obedience to the voice of their

shepherd, were created by God as figures of just souls. In fact, just as these charming creatures are happiest when they are close to their guide and hear his commands – which guarantee their safety and nourishment – so the true children of light seek the salutary presence of the Lord, are nourished by His grace and joyfully submit to the teachings of Holy Church. They are never seized by the “wolves” of temptations, nor do they wander into the “dense forest” of mortal sins.

The goats, on the other hand, are of a different nature... Not very obedient, they amuse themselves by fleeing from their shepherds and straying into unknown places. Some of the mountain-dwelling species live in peril, climbing steep crags and leaping over vertiginous chasms! They are the symbol of sinful souls who constantly put their eternal salvation at risk by living in a lax and reckless manner amid the snares of the world, the flesh and the



Willtron (CC by-sa 3.0)

If you are a “sheep-soul”, rejoice! Your life will always be blessed, under the constant care and protection of the Good Shepherd

Sheep on the Barranco del Boj, the Aragonese Pyrenees (Spain)



Reproduction

devil. They boast of absenting themselves from preaching, the Sacraments and the life of the Church – therefore, from the sweet care of Jesus, the Divine Shepherd.

The distinction made in the Gospel between the one type of animal and the other is not without reason:

“When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the Angels with Him, [...] Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will place the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at the left” (Mt 25:31-33).

Faced with this grave reality, into which category of souls do you, dear reader, fall? Are you one of the good sheep, or do you belong to the flock of the rebellious goats?

If you are a “sheep-soul”, rejoice! Under the constant care and protection of the Saviour, your life will always be blessed: you will lack no good thing, and in the days of trial He Himself will be your guide. You are the true heir of the Lord’s promise: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand” (Jn 10:28). In view of this, give thanks for such a gift and pray to be preserved in this good disposition.

However, if to your sadness and regret you find that you have placed yourself in the group of goats, today I have a message of confidence to convey to you.

Among the favours granted by Providence at the moment of our Baptism, none can compare to that of being children of Our Lady. She is Mother of Mercy for the children of the Church, whether they are righteous or wicked; and just as She sustains the former, She prays for the latter, drawing them to the paths of holiness.

Whoever wishes to abandon the path of evil should have recourse to the unfailing intercession of Mary, the most powerful Shepherdess of the elect. Her maternal care corrects any “mischief” and endows the sinner with the qualities of a sheep. With her help, anyone can easily pass from the left to the right of Jesus and, consequently, be saved on Judgement Day.

Whether we are among the “sheep” or the “goats”, let us lose no time: just as these two creatures, each in its own way, glorify the Creator by their existence, let us also praise Him who has redeemed us. May the perseverance of the faithful proclaim the power of divine grace, and may the miseries of the weak extol the omnipotent mercy of God and Mary! ✧



Jirí Bubeniček (CC by-sa 4.0)

**But if, to your sadness and regret, you find yourself among the flock of goats...
I have today a message of encouragement for you**

Mountain goats; above Christ the Judge, by Fra Angelico - Orvieto Cathedral (Italy)



He Surrounded the Church with Splendour

Having lived during the reign of Constantine, St. Sylvester was the Pope who presided over the transformation resulting from the fact that the Church was emerging from persecution to assume her role as queen, leaving the catacombs and beginning to occupy palaces.

He was the Pontiff who accompanied the Church's passage from the catacombs like a rising sun. Under his directives and inspiration, the work began which surrounded the Church with a luxury and a splendor that repaired the years of undeserved misery spent in the catacombs.

Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

St. Sylvester - Notre-Dame Cathedral,
Paris; in background, Basilica of
St. John Lateran, Rome