

The Mirror of Prayer

By Bernardino Da Balvano

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Bernardino da Balvano (+ c. 1568/70) was an outstanding missionary and preacher who worked predominantly in the region of Southern Italy. Many small booklets which inspired popular piety over a long period of time were the result of his pastoral activities. The content and diversity of topics in these writings are to be found in a condensed fashion in his most important and most prolifically published booklet entitled The Mirror of Prayer which appeared in Messina in 1553 and was reprinted fourteen times within the space of about seventy years. It is a charming little pocket edition the product of both the concrete spiritual and apostolic experience of its author. In thirty-three very compact short chapters, as well as a final appendage (which in our opinion was a separate little work, entitled The Seven Rules for Good Living, which is mentioned by his biographers), the subject of interior prayer that leads to the gift of mystical experience through meditation on the mysteries of Christ is set out with great clarity, simplicity and emotion. However, it is not so much an authoritative and abstract lecture as it is a very practical manual in which the essential theoretical directives are passed on plainly and applied by means of concrete and realistic exercises that can be easily assimilated by the reader. It is this “practical quality” which makes the work popular in character and worthy of a spiritual guide and a true master of prayer.

As a zealous and clear thinking preacher, Bernardino Balvano makes the pages of his booklet ooze with useful suggestions that are embedded in a rhetorical style, but still remain an expression of sharing a spiritual experience as well as a method of prayer. In fact, he used to proclaim this teaching and method of prayer from the pulpit. He did this in 1553 in Messina where the faithful who were enthusiastic and won over became so fervent that they repeatedly demanded that these devout teachings be printed for their use so that they would not forget them. After a week spent in studying Sacred Scripture in order to consider all that concerned prayer, in a letter dated 6 May 1553 from the friary (“ex nostro paenitentiae loco) to the Inquisitor in Messina, the author wrote a summary of the content of his preaching which he had put together in a small booklet. He said that the content included: “What is prayer, how many kinds of prayer there are, how should we prepare ourselves, what conditions are required, what is necessary and useful for prayer. Then there are thoughts on the method of praying, how to pray to God and to the Saints.”

In more detail, there are three types of prayer: vocal, mental and mixed. Obviously he dwelt more on mental or interior prayer dividing it, according to the tradition of the Church, into four steps or acts: 1) “The inner reading of the soul” with its “chapters” or settings; 2) meditation as a attempt to “stimulate our inner feelings towards God” by means of various pious sentiments of the heart (love, hatred of evil, fear, hope, sorrow, joy); 3) perfect prayer,

¹ *I frati cappuccino: documenti e testimonianze del primo secolo*, a cura di COSTANZO CARGNONI, Edizioni Frate Indovino, Perugia. III/1 pp. 555-636.

which develops in three acts: oblation (about what is offered to God), postulation (asking from God), and thanksgiving (giving thanks to God). This interior dialogue passes in review through all the mysteries of the life of Jesus, paying special attention to the sorrowful mysteries of the Passion, and particularly the scourging, which is the author's favourite example, the "model" chosen from all the other mysteries of Christ. This kind of spiritual experience, by means of a free gift of God, may lead to the fourth step in interior prayer which is: 4) 'the indescribable delight of absolute contemplation', or "a sweet experience and most beautiful sensation of divine riches". This "enlightens the intellect, inflames the will with sweetness", so that the soul "understands at depth with tranquillity, loves strongly with delight, understands profoundly and desires ardently".

The originality of this method consists in the manner in which the mysteries of Christ, which are the necessary medium for contemplation, are enumerated and proposed "in memory of the thirty-three years in which the loving Jesus lived with us on earth", and then "are experienced" with their "delightful fruits and very rich treasures". This affective and interior prayer does not remain self-contained, but opens out in a meaningful fashion to all our brothers and to the whole of humanity. It is divided into nine states, which are associated with the merits of the nine sheddings of blood suffered by Christ, concerning which Bernardino wrote another spiritual booklet.

The style of this portable booklet, which is set out with clarity and emotion and written as a conversation between Christ and the soul, conveys concise statements and spiritual unction which makes it one of the best examples of early Capuchin spiritual literature, which some have compared, perhaps with some degree of exaggeration, to the golden book of The Imitation of Christ, but compared to which it is positively more optimistic in spiritual outlook. In the chapters and passages that have been reproduced here the modern reader can undoubtedly experience this particular kind of spirituality, which is rich in ascetical nuances and resonant with the love of the living Christ and the paschal mystery.

CONCERNING THE KINDS OF PRAYER. CHAPTER 1

First of all we should identify and separate the equivocal and uncertain words that contain a mixture of elements and then define each one. Firstly you should understand that there are or can be three kinds or ways of praying: firstly vocal, secondly mental and thirdly mixed. The first is performed exteriorly by the lips alone. The second is performed internally by the mind alone. The third is performed within mind and vocally. We shall speak of all three in more detail below.¹

CONCERNING EXTERIOR PRAYER WHICH IS PERFORMED WITH THE VOICE ALONE. CHAPTER 2

Prayer is external and exclusively vocal when a person recites the office or prayers, psalms or Our Fathers without paying any attention with his mind, or worse, when someone deliberately distract himself by occupying his mind with vane thoughts or with the goings-on or business of the world, as, for example, what happens with people who are not devout who pick up the Rosary and say Our Fathers while they go shopping in the square. Others, while they are at prayer, interrupt themselves by speaking about unrelated matters or about one thing or another, sometimes while they are walking up stairs, going through courtyards² or gardens carrying on business. The foolish woman recites the Rosary while carrying out domestic duties. Another one stands at the window to see who is passing by while reciting Our Fathers. Another one sings Psalms to display her sweet sounding voice or allows other distractions such as these. They do it deliberately and do not want to pay attention.

St Isidore spoke about this kind of prayer when he wrote in the seventh chapter of his third book³ *Del sommo bene*: “Prayer is pure when a person is not preoccupied with thoughts pertaining to the world while praying. Whoever is occupied with worldly business distances his soul from God”; and a little further down he says: “People will not be heard by God when they speak a lot, as if wishing to force Him or influence Him by much talk. He is certainly not appeased by lengthy arguments, but rather by a pure intention.”⁴ The seraphic Saint⁵ Bonaventure calls such persons people who bark rather than pray since they bark and shout out with their voices but remain silent within, not paying attention with their hearts.⁶

How do you expect the High God to pay attention to your prayers when you persist in not paying attention? It is futile and unproductive for the tongue to labour on the outside if the heart does not pay attention within. Such voices do not address the Great God in order to listen to Him. As they lack desire and attentiveness the Church says of them in chapter *Sedulo* dist. 38: “They know that their voices will not reach God’s ears if the affection and attention of the soul is lacking.”⁷

¹ This is a very practical division. Even though it is not perfect it is well adapted to popular teaching. It is already contained in St Bonaventure, *In IV Sententiarum*, dist. 15 art. 2, q. 3 concl. (*Op. omnia IV, 374ab*).

² Corte = cortile.

³ This is how it was written more correctly in the first edition in 1553: while in the 1564 edition the verb *scresse* was omitted.

⁴ Cf, St Isid., *Sententiarum* lib. III, c. 7, n. 8 (*PL 83, 677*).

⁵ An adjective not found in other editions.

⁶ There is a similar thought in the *Regula novitiorum*, c 2 (S. Bonav. *Op. omnia VIII, 477a*).

⁷ Cf, Dist. 38, C. XII: *Sedulo monendi* (*CIC I, 143*).

Such persons are completely unworthy of being heard, instead they ought to be severely punished,¹ because, their way of undertaking prayer, shows little respect for such a great God. In reference to them the living voice of the Lord Jesus says in chapter fifteen of St Matthew: “You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: ‘This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”² This attitude is to be avoided and we should pray devoutly like faithful people, as the Church says in chapter *Quando de cons.* Dist 1: “O most beloved brothers, when we are at prayer we should be careful and attend to the prayers and try with all our hearts to put aside every human carnal and worldly thought, nor should the soul think about anything, except what it is praying about”.³ We shall not discuss this anymore.

CONCERNING THE FOUR STEPS IN MENTAL PRAYER. CHAPTER 3

The second way or kind of prayer is performed with the mind alone when the devout soul who is free of any other thought is recollected in herself and has raised the mind to God produces acts of love by means of pious affections towards God and these are generally of three types: acts of oblation or giving, lovingly offering oneself to God; acts of beseeching or imploring, asking something of Him either for oneself or others; acts of gratitude or thanksgiving, expressing thanks for the many gifts which He has bestowed each day and acknowledging that He is ready to give more.⁴

This prayer is of more noble character, more excellence and worth, the more the one that performs it is pleasing to God. In some way such persons are united to the citizens above in such a way that those who are performing it share while on earth in the angelic office and taste here to some degree what they will taste fully in the heavenly home.

At present I do not wish to commend or praise such as these any further since only the tongues of angels would suffice to give them proper commendation and praise. However it is fitting that with the prophet I exhort them to taste this by means of acts and performance in order to see how the Lord may be experienced while doing this⁵

When complete this mental prayer is achieved in four stages: the first is called reading; the second meditation; the third prayer, the fourth contemplation.⁶ To throw greater light on these these stages and to make them clearer we will explain them briefly below by setting out the rules for each one of them and by giving an example so that it is easier to perform them.

CONCERNING READING, THE FIRST ACT OF MENTAL PRAYER. CHAPTER 4.

Just as when reading books a person commits things to memory and makes them almost become present to him, this also happens in concentrated thought on things that a person wishes to meditate on, including their cause, reasons and circumstances, in an inner reading in the soul that makes the things on which the soul wishes to meditate present to it. Just as in books the chapters are set out in sequence to create greater order and to assist the memory,

¹ *Assai*: only appears in the 1553 edition.

² This quote also appears in the *1536 Constitutions*, n. 36, 2; cf. Mt 15, 8; Mk 7, 6; Is 29, 13.

³ Cf. *Decreti tertia pars de cons.*, dist. I, c 70: *Quando autem* (CIC I, 1313).

⁴ That is the act of offering, asking and thanking.

⁵ Ps 34, 9.

⁶ These are the four classical stages: *reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation*.

inner reading does the same thing during holy prayer, as if there was a book in the soul, and some topics are like chapters in a book to afford greater assistance to the soul.

For the present we wish to make six points concerning these matters:

First, think of whatever you wish to meditate on, either a mystery or passage of Scripture, with all its circumstances of place, time, the way it happened and anything like that.

Second, think of who is involved in the mystery, uttered the saying or composed that piece of Scripture with its circumstances of strength, of wisdom, of justice, of goodness, of perfection or the like.

Third, think of why it happened, to honour God, for the salvation of souls, the bewilderment of the devil, the destruction of vice, the strengthening of virtue, as an example of goodness, clarification of doubts and so on.

Fourth, consider was it performed for the love or benefit of someone, his situation, whether he was friend or foe, whether it gave him pleasure or pain, was useful or not useful, what it required of him, and what he hoped to gain.

Fifth, consider how the activity was carried out and what actions did it involve, in public or in secret, whether it was performed with humility, patience, in silence, with compassion or the like.

Sixth, consider what was the frame of mind and inner emotion, whether the person was pleased with this, or whether he wished he could have done more? Were the circumstances well planned and carried out? This will afford you not only vast scope for meditation and thinking about many aspects of a mystery or passage of Scripture, but will also prepare you well for sacred meditation and make it very easy.¹

To make this clearer we shall give an example below concerning such inner reading with its circumstances by applying it to the painful scourging of the Lord, which will serve as a model for all the other mysteries.²

AN EXAMPLE OF INTERIOR READING. CHAPTER 5

When the spiritual person places himself devoutly in a fitting posture, as will be described below in chapter 23, to meditate for example on the painful scourging of the Lord, he will carryout the exercise like this.

Imagine³ with attentive thought of the mind seeing Jesus Christ bound to the pillar with His head bowed to the ground, naked and trembling all over, and around him Pilate's violent servants with scourges in their hands ready and waiting to scourge Him in the middle of the courtyard of the iniquitous judge and many people who were standing around.

Imagine⁴ seeing such a horrendous spectacle with your eyes and hearing the harsh lashes and bitter strokes with your ears, and pause here for a moment to consider this mystery, as if you

¹ These "chapters" or circumstances connected with a mystery about Christ are used widely in spiritual literature and come from the monastic tradition and the *devotio moderna*.

² This is probably the first outline of another very popular spiritual book by Bernardino da Balvano: *Il mistero della flagellazione di N. Signore Gesù Cristo ridotto in forma di meditazione per tutti i giorni della settimana*, Venezia 1559, which was frequently translated into Latin, French, German and Dutch in the first decades of the Seventeenth Century.

³ This is an example of "meditation using the imagination".

⁴ In the text *Parasi*.

were present and it was taking place in front of you. This will be the first stage, that is, think about the mystery and what you wish to meditate on.

Then, O pious soul, enter further into the second stage that is the one that experiences suffering. After you have thought about the mystery in the above manner¹ in which you appeared to have seen the meek Lord bound to the pillar and harshly scourged and in which on account of the bitter flogging His sacred blood issued from every part of His body and in which the Lord, who, because of the cruelty of the torments, had been cut everywhere, groaned within Himself and cried sorrowfully, you ought to be beyond yourself with dismay, and recognising who it is who is suffering,² you will discover at the same time that He is truly the All-powerful God, who became human for love of us, who if he wished could terrify all the heavens with one glance, move the earth to tears, make hell tremble and with a simple word destroy every creature. Nevertheless, with all this, He meekly stands there bound, allowing Himself to be hit and scourged by most vile villains, as if He could do nothing.

At this point begin to think of His power, how stupendous and marvellous it is that He made the heavens and the earth and all that they contain out of nothing, in addition to the wonders that He worked in the Old Testament. He cleansed lepers, made hunchbacks upright, cured the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, walked on the waves of the ocean, multiplied bread, cast out devils, and performed other stupendous and marvellous works in front of those whom you see treating Him violently.

More than that, consider that who is the supreme wisdom and glory of the angels could be so viciously embarrassed and despised by filthy sinners and by those upon whom He had conferred gifts and marvellous graces even though He was totally perfect, never committed sin, and was completely innocent and holy!

At this point begin to think of how marvellous His perfection is, how bitter the scourges, how cruel are the sufferings and the bitter pain of Christ, how exalted, stupendous and awe-inspiring is His love who underwent meekly so much for us! How cruel and merciless are the angry Jews and Pilate's servants who struck Him so callously! How iniquitous the judge who gave the order!

Then, thirdly, think about for whose love He, the meek Lord, underwent all of this. Then you will know that it was for your sins not His because He was completely innocent. You committed the fault willingly for which He who is bound tightly suffers the punishment. Then think of who you are and what you have done for Him who is bearing such great pain for you. What have you to give Him in payment for such great suffering? You are a bag of bones, a vase of muck, a vessel of filth, full of so many errors, overflowing with vices and sins, of how you have so wickedly offended Him, and how you thanklessly offend Him each day.³ The fact that He, while naked, felt the scourges for you, while He was just, and you were a scoundrel and wicked, gives you something to think about! Not only has he never received anything good from you but He cannot receive it (because he does not need anything), while you, after receiving such good things, do not endure even a word for Him.

Fourthly, consider then for what purpose and for what reason the loving Saviour endured so much that His precious blood flowed out of His sacred veins because of the power and violence of the scourges. You will find that it was only to show His great love for you, to free

¹ In the text *del modo*.

² In the text *quel lo pate*.

³ This is Capuchin plain speech, which was found already in Giovanni da Fano, in the booklets on the Rule, concerning which see C. Cargnoni, *Fonti, tendenze e sviluppi della letteratura spirituale cappuccino primitiva*, in *CF* 48 (1978) 355 nota 195.

you from eternal scourging and bring you back to lost joys, to destroy the power of death, to give salvation to the whole world, to carry out His promises in action and to strengthen the faithful for suffering, to remove the consolations of the world, to destroy the vices of the flesh, to honour His divine Father and obey Him perfectly. Consider all these things in deep and attentive thought. How wonderful His love is! How ungrateful you would be not to love Him in return!

Fifthly, consider the way in which he suffered, how meekly with His eyes fixed on the ground, without complaint or threat, not uttering a word like a meek angel.¹ They rained down the harsh strokes mercilessly and he offered Himself lovingly to the scourging. They shouted with noisy voices that were filled with insult and the merciful Saviour remained as if he were deaf not moving His lips against them. The wicked servants laughed in derision while kind Jesus, having compassion on them, shed tears for their sins. On all sides he was threatened and embarrassed by the pagan people, but the most sweet Lord did not raise His eyes, or show any sign of being disturbed or impatient.

Now think about how to imitate these virtues and how to endure adversities meekly following the example of Christ, not by just having inner good will, but displaying such sentiments externally by actions which are meek and compassionate.

Sixthly, think of the amount of courage and longing with which He underwent everything. You will find that He was more distressed over the sins of those who flogged Him than over his sufferings. Although He suffered such great pain for us, He wished and ardently desired to suffer much more for our salvation. How much He also wished that His sufferings would be fruitful for all and bring about their salvation! With what anticipation did He look forward to the day when he would place His delicate flesh into the hands of his enemies and many scourges for the Father's glory and the salvation of the world! Here think of how much love you give to Him, how much you are willing to suffer for Him, what effect have Christ's sufferings had on you.

If we would concentrate on the mysteries in this manner having these thoughts or others which the Holy Spirit will inspire in those who frequently exercise their minds on these mysteries we shall be² easily prepared for the second activity of mental prayer that is called meditation. David spoke of this when he said concerning himself in Psalm 76: "I thought for a while without speaking about the days of old and I remembered the eternal years and in the night I thought carefully within my heart and I pondered and my heart was purified."³ That is, in this way I was prepared by interior thinking for fervour of spirit and holy prayer.

CONCERNING MEDITATION: THE SECOND STAGE OF MENTAL PRAYER. CHAPTER 6.

So that something will begin to happen in the well-prepared subject even before a fire can be kindled it is necessary that the timber be dried. To achieve this, even though the Holy Spirit assists our weakness,⁴ it is required that we do not neglect to prepare ourselves and bring on His help. We do this by performing the second act of mental prayer, which is called meditation. This is only brought about by thinking carefully about what you wish to meditate on, carefully investigating the reasons and causes of this matter, attempting to stimulate a

¹ Cf. Is 63, 9.

² In later editions we read *sarano* (*they would be*) which involves a different interpretation, an exchange of subject where what has gone before becomes the subject.

³ Cf. Ps 77, 6-7. In the primitive text it says *David was speaking about himself in Psalm 76*.

⁴ Cf. Rom 8, 26.

sensitivity towards God from within ourselves and thus devoutly preparing oneself for acts of prayer, so that such acts may be more lovingly produced as David says in Psalm 38: “My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out.”¹ In chapter 50 of his book concerning mind and soul Saint Augustine says: “Meditation surely gives birth to knowledge, knowledge brings compunction, compunction brings devotion, and devotion produces perfect prayer.”²

Because of the different circumstances in which a person might find himself and the various stages and desires within him there is a need for many kinds of meditation which prepare a person for prayer since one method is not suitable for everyone. A person who is joyful needs one method, a person who is sad needs another, a person who is timid and fearful needs another, a person who is excessively confident and presumptuous needs another.

Suitable remedies are applied according to various characters and defects since what helps one person injures another. Just as a physician performs his function with the same purpose for everyone, namely, to restore health and life, yet prescribes different medicine for each one according to their constitution and complaint, so too all devout persons have the same aim, namely to promote spiritual fervour within themselves by means of meditation in order to arrive at perfect prayer.

Although there are many ways to stimulate feelings according to the various circumstances of a person, there are six particular ways which cater for the six kinds of feelings in the soul through which this can be achieved, namely, emotions of love, hatred, fear, hope, suffering and joy.³ Love is directed towards God, one’s salvation, one’s neighbour, virtues, grace and other good things. Hate is directed towards sin, concupiscence of the flesh, voluptuousness of the world, towards all things which are contrary to salvation, injurious to the soul, dangerous to our neighbour and dishonour God. Fear is directed towards God’s judgement, the torments of scoundrels, doubts of one’s own salvation, of the cunning of enemies, of one’s own frailty, of the uncertainty of death, of the severity of the Lord’s justice, of the torments of hell and other such things which should be feared. Hope is directed towards God’s grace, the remission of sins, freedom from anxiety, the hope of Jesus Christ’s favour with the Father, of being provided with what we need, of being assisted in the service of God, of being freed from battles with the Devil, of being comforted by good works and crowned with glory and other things that we should hope for. Sorrow is directed towards offences committed against the Divine Majesty and against our neighbour, concern about our own damnation, the fact that we have lost heaven, merited hell, displeased Christ, given pleasure to the devils, deprived the angels of pleasure and of being the cause of the sufferings and death of Christ, and other things which should make us sorry. Joy is directed towards having been redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, of being made heirs of heaven, of having our faults forgiven, of having been assisted in doing good, being guarded by angels, defended by Christ, comforted by the Holy Spirit and so greatly loved by the Eternal Father, and other similar things which could and should make us happy.

Since this has been written to console simple souls, we recognise that those who are not so advanced should perform these things more gently according to the requirements of various circumstances and degrees of proficiency; we will set out an example of all the emotions mentioned above, keeping in mind the mystery of the scourging of the Lord. [...]

¹ Cf. Ps 39, 4. (Vulg. 38, 4).

² Cf. St Augustine [attributed], *De spiritu et anima*, chapter 50 (PL 40, 816).

³ The various kinds of emotions which are here gathered under six headings receive strong emphasis in spiritual writers such as Mattia da Salò, Silvestro da Rossano and others.

In the chapters which follow up to chapter 12 examples are provided for the various emotions that the soul lives through and experiences during meditation (love, hate, fear, hope, sorrow, joy). They resemble an inner conversation between the soul and Jesus that displays the contrast between the sanctity and dignity of the Lord and the shame of the sufferings which have been caused by various sinful attitudes. At the end a hymn of praise and blessing similar to what follows bursts forth.

Arise, my soul, why are you so sluggish? Embrace the feet of your suffering Lord and kiss His sacred blood. Lord, may you be blessed now and forever. Rise up angels, men and women and all of you bless, thank and together with me love the finest Lord. O sweet Jesus, drive away from me all filthy objects of love and pleasure and put hilarity and vane consolation to flight, cast honours, preferment, pomp and glorious deeds of the world far from me! May I name no one as giving me contentment or pleasure in the present life, but may I wish the Lord Jesus, who endured such a harsh scourging at the pillar for love of me, to be engraved on my heart. I shall no longer love pleasures because I see You, O glory of the angels, being flogged! I shall no longer love pomp because I see You stripped, O beauty of Paradise!

I shall not love smiles but Your tears since I see You crying with deep sighs for my salvation, O happiness of the Saints! I shall no longer engage in longing for love or attending dances, because I see You tightly bound, O freedom of the Blessed! Let there be no pleasure in my body because I see You enduring such suffering, O sweetness of life eternal! I shall be negligent in Your service no longer because You endured such exhaustion for me, O gentle rest and sweet repose of all Your servants! My ears shall no longer listen to vane and vulgar songs but only to Your sacred words, because You were so unjustly cursed by the vilest of people, O harmony of heaven and venerable majesty! Let nothing be able to distance me from You, O my sweet love, whether prosperity or adversity, but let me give myself in everything to Your service because You have done so much for me, O highest contentment and true peace! O Lord, Your blood alone will be my wellbeing and my riches, my satisfaction and consolation, and I give You my heart, so that in love and thought it will always be where my salvation and wellbeing lies. [...]¹

O my soul, was there ever anyone who hoped in the Lord and was embarrassed? Was there ever anyone who turned to Him with a contrite heart who was cast away? He did not scorn the publican or the tearful sinner or contrite Zacchaeus, or the disciple who denied Him or even the thief on the cross. Why did he do this? He did this so that you, O my soul, if you wanted to return to Him with all your heart, would place great trust in Him. My Lord's scourges free you from eternal punishment; His nudity covers your shame; the foul spittle on my Lord's face confers eternal splendour on your face; His patience cleanses your anger; His being bound tightly means your perpetual freedom. What more can I say? His precious blood will wash all your horrid sins, and what He suffered for you will be your greatest promoter and powerful champion before the Father. Therefore place your hope in Him and you will never be embarrassed.

Blessed be You, my Lord, and all Your weariness, sorrow, torment, sweat, poverty, anxiety, insults, persecution, scourges and every other kind of suffering, at present and forever [...].²

¹ This passage is taken from Chapter 7; *An Example of Meditation That Produces Love*. This also explains how emotions are developed, how to arouse inner feelings in these words: "In order to arouse yourself sometimes talk to yourself, sometimes to those taking part in the mysteries, sometimes address the mystery and its causes, sometimes listen to what they are saying to you in words that will arouse emotion." Note the fervour of the prayer which is simple, in love with the suffering Christ and very practical.

² Chapter 10 *An Example of the Practice of Hope During Meditation*.

My Lord, blessed be Your scourges and cursed be my sins which caused them. Blessed be the ropes which bound You to the pillar; and cursed be my frivolity and my waywardness, which were the reason for these scourges. Blessed be Your bitter blows and harsh knocks, and cursed by my shameful life which has offended You. Blessed be Your crown of thorns and cursed be my ambition and vane adornments which caused it to be placed on Your head. Blessed be Your purple garment and Your being displayed shamefully to the people and cursed be my vanity and pride because of which You were so embarrassed in this way. Blessed be Your meek silence and cursed be my violent anger which caused You so much sadness of heart. Blessed be the heavy cross which You carried on Your wounded shoulders and cursed be my disobedience that imposed such a burden. Blessed be the wounds in Your hands and feet and cursed be my wicked deeds which forced the blunt nails through them. Blessed be the lance and Your open side¹ and cursed be my bad thoughts and old hatred that is not willing to forgive. It was these, O my Lord, that pierced Your heart. Blessed be the blood that You shed from everywhere and cursed be my extravagance and cruelty towards my neighbour which slashed You so violently.

May You be blessed all over, O sweet Jesus, my Lord and my God. Blessed be Your head, which was crowned with thorns for me, Your face which was defiled with spittle, Your tearful eyes, Your ears which were filled with abuse, Your sweet lips which were made sour with gall and vinegar, Your broken shoulders, Your wounded flesh, Your hands and feet pierced with nails, Your wounded side, and all your other limbs which were tormented for love of me. May they be blessed forever! Blessed be the suffering, the pain, the privations, the weariness, the sweat, the tears, the sighs, the sobs that You and Your sorrowful Mother uttered for me. I thank You eternally [...].²

May You together with Your Father and the Holy Spirit be forever blessed. Blessed be Your works, nativity, life and death with all Your deeds which were filled with such sweet fruit. May heaven, earth, sea, angels and all other creatures bless³ You now and forever. *Amen.*⁴

CONCERNING PRAYER AND ACTS OF PRAYER. CHAPTER 13

Sow a garden and care for it so that it yields fruit. Such a procedure purifies and strives vigorously to win victory. This is how a spiritual person begins the work on inner comprehension and starts meditating so that he can go on to the other acts of mental prayer more easily and with greater peace. When a tree does not bear fruit the gardener has worked in vane. When the soul does not produce acts of mental prayer, reading and meditation it produces little fruit. Consequently we shall offer this chapter which deals briefly with prayer and its acts.

Prayer is nothing else than when the soul puts aside all other considerations elevates the mind to God by means of attentive interior reading, and rouses itself by means of contemplating pious emotions of love, hatred, fear, hope, sorrow or joy (as described above with respect to meditation), and being completely on fire, produces prayerful acts directed towards God.⁵ These acts are or could be of three kinds: oblation, that is, offerings to God; requests, or demands on Him; thanksgiving, expressing gratitude to Him.

¹ *Lato* in the text *costato*.

² From Chapter 11. *An Example of the Practice of Sorrow During Meditation*.

³ In the text *benedicanoti*.

⁴ This is the end of Chapter 12: *An Example of how to Practice Joy during Meditation*.

⁵ This definition includes classical expressions taken from saintly fathers, theologians and medieval writers.

St Paul wrote about the first, which is offering, in chapter 12 to the Romans: “I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern God’s will”.¹

The same apostle speaks about the second act of prayer which makes requests or places petitions: Colossians 1: “Therefore, we also, from the day that we heard it, cease not to pray for you and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: that you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing; being fruitful in every good work.”²

The apostle Paul spoke about the third act which is thanksgiving in Thessalonians chapter 5: “Pray without ceasing. In all things give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”³

Therefore when you go to pray to God, there is no need to appear empty handed before Him; rather let your heart be full of good will in order to offer Him assurances of holy and upright desires. When you have done this, ardently ask with trust to obtain what you need from Him, and when you have received it, give Him abundant thanks, so that your prayer may be complete.

The lawyer who cannot put his case and arguments to a judge is a fool. The person⁴ who approaches God to obtain grace and does not know how to pray in the appropriate manner is even more forlorn. There are norms, rules, standards and practices for everything, would prayer alone be the only thing that does not need a teacher, order and a system? Thus while many pray, few succeed because they do not know how to pray properly or wish to learn what they should.⁵

Therefore so that all may practice effective prayer, after explaining mental prayer, which involves offering God things that are worthy with an ardent will, asking Him for what is necessary and thanking Him with a pure heart we shall dedicate a specific chapter to each one of these acts.

CHAPTERS 14 – 16 DESCRIBE THE THREE ACTS OF MENTAL PRAYER ANALYTICALLY. HERE WE MENTION ONLY CERTAIN SIGNIFICANT PASSAGES FROM CHAPTER 14.

THE FIRST ACT OF MENTAL PRAYER WHICH IS CALLED GIVING OR OBLATION. CHAPTER 14

The rich gifts and splendid presents that good vassals bring to their prince with love make it easy to approach him and make him smile and inclined to readily give them what they ask for. By offering pious affections to the High God devout persons pave the way for their prayers to reach heaven and dispose the divine Majesty to answer them easily. Such pious affections are of three kinds: the first are dispositions to avoid something, the second are dispositions to implement something, and the third are dispositions to endure something. In the first case we willingly offer to avoid completely what we know is displeasing to the all-powerful Lord.

¹ Cf. Rom 12, 1-2.

² Col 1, 9-10.

³ 1 Thes5, 17-18.

⁴ Quello = colui che.

⁵ Bisogno = quello che è necessario.

Next we are prepared to truthfully practice completely what He demands of us with a sincere heart and to fully implement what He wills.

Following this we totally commit ourselves into His fatherly hands with a peaceful mind and a pure heart being disposed and ready to take on everything contentedly. This comprises the first act of interior prayer which is called giving. One offers to avoid evil with a ready soul, to do what is right and to endure adversities in order to freely offer something to God for one's own salvation and to set an example for our neighbour.

In Psalm 96 David instructs us about the first kind: "For thou art the highest Lord over all the earth: thou art exalted exceedingly above all gods. You that love the Lord, hate evil: the Lord preserves the souls of his saints, he will deliver them out of the hand of the sinner."¹

He points out the same thing in Psalm 36 about the second kind, which involves presenting oneself as prepared to carry out the divine will: "Trust in the Lord, and do good, and dwell in the land, and thou shalt be fed with its riches. Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the requests of thy heart."² This is the same as saying: "Offer yourself willingly to do his will and then ask Him and he will give."³ When he prayed in this manner in Psalm 118 David offered to both avoid evil and do good: "I have hated and abhorred iniquity, but I have loved thy law. Seven times a day I have given praise to thee."⁴

David spoke about the third kind, which is being prepared to endure adversities, in Psalm 56: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready: I will sing, and rehearse a psalm,"⁵ and in Psalm 37: "You heard me, O Lord my God, for I am ready for scourges: and my sorrow is continually before me."⁶

This manner of acting, according to which gifts are first presented to the great masters before favours are asked of them, goes on also in the world. In this way when the mind has been raised to pray to God with pious sentiments first offer devout actions and then you may ask for what you need and for divine assistance. The great God is the source, the means and the end of all good. Therefore since God is the author of all good, let us begin our prayer by praising Him and lovingly offering Him acts as to the One who accomplishes everything.⁷

In the second act of prayer let him ask with trust and beg with emotion. This is what the saintly Ambrose did himself and taught others to do as he says in chapter two of his book on the institution of virgins: "The prayer that observes order, beginning with divine praise, is good. Just as when we start to trade with men we try to appear honest, should we not do so all the more when we pray to the Lord? So at the start let us offer God a song of praise, as the Apostle says.⁸ Christ, the teacher of truth, laid down the same rule and pattern for his Apostles when it says in St Matthew chapter 6 and St Luke chapter 11: "Master, teach us how to pray," and He replied: "When you pray, say: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come."⁹ This is how I demonstrated the first act of prayer, in which by

¹ Ps 96, 9-10 (*Vulg.*).

² Ps 36, 3-4 (*Vulg.*)

³ *Saratti* in the text = *sarà*.

⁴ Ps 118, 163-164 (*Vulg.*).

⁵ Ps 56, 8 (*Vulg.*).

⁶ Ps 37, 18 (*Vulg.*).

⁷ This is a very important observation about the practice of prayer and the fruit of great spiritual experience which is also taken up by Mattia da Salò.

⁸ Cf. St Ambrose, *On The Institution of Virgins and Mary's Virginity*, chapter 2, n. 8 (*PL* 16, 321).

⁹ Cf. Lk 11, 1-4; Mt 6, 9-10.

praising God the soul presents itself as ready to do His holy will, abhorring all that it prohibits, carrying out what it commands and patiently enduring what comes to us.

I maintain that this is the first act of interior and mental prayer, since the first fruits, the tithes, the gifts and other offerings are, in the long run, pleasing to God and are acceptable to Him to the degree that they are presented to Him from a generous heart which possesses these inner dispositions. Anyone who does not willingly avoid evil, who does not do good works and does not endure things that are adverse, will experience little or no enjoyment in external things. There are many who make long prayers, and because they do not focus their mind on God, or willingly and inwardly promise to avoid what displeases God, embrace His will through actions and exercise patience in adversity,¹ go out from prayer not having changed themselves for the better, remaining what they were before or even worse, loving their own will, dissolute, proud, sowing discord, cruel, pompous, rash, unjust, liars, envious, without shame, irreverent, not at peace and filled with all kinds of vice.² How does this come about? This happens because, with good intentions, they have not offered themselves to the Lord in prayer, nor do they pray for what they need. He who is in a fire and does not feel the heat, or is penniless in the midst of plenty, or cannot see light at midday is indeed in a miserable condition. How much worse is it to be with God each day in prayer and repeatedly ask Him for things and never receive anything, to talk to the teacher of virtue for a year and, through not praying as one should, not acquire at least something beneficial for your salvation?³

So that your prayer may always be efficacious and fruitful always keep the act, which consists in offering, in the first place. Then you will be wrapped in God for interior reading and enkindling through holy meditation, readily offering yourself to leave aside all that is displeasing to the divine Master and whatever separates you from what is good and leads you towards evil. Then you will be ready to do what you see is pleasing to Him and to receive as His rich gifts and fatherly caresses whatever the Lord allows to come upon you that goes against you or is unpleasant. By doing this with a willing heart you will have accomplished the first act of prayer which consists in offering up and you will be ready for the second and its consequences, which is to ask for and obtain what you seek.

Another two chapters about the remaining two acts of meditation or mental prayer, namely the act of petitioning and thanksgiving, follow this (Chapters 15-16). All of these three acts are put into practice in the following chapter.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE ACTS OF PRAYER AND THE MANNER OF AROUSING THEM. CHAPTER 17.

Actions speak louder than words and we give an example to make it easy for those who are undertaking this practice. A doctor does not perfect his art by study alone. If he does not have experience he will be ignorant of medicine. It will be of little benefit to a Christian to know about prayer and its acts if he does not know how to become involved in the exercise. Let the teacher write down the example for his disciples, who by following this become as perfect as what is written, equal to the master or sometimes even better by means of developed ingenuity or repeated study.

¹ In the Venice edition of 1564 instead because of a change to the original text we read: *né abbraccian con opera il suo volere e nella contrarietà non si mostrano pazienti.*

² This list of vices is taken from Rom 1, 29-31.

³ This is another example of changes in syntax in the 1564 edition where we read: *vien dal non orar come si conviene?*

So that the faithful who are new to prayer may have the road opened for them, we will provide a short example as a model of how to practice the mysteries of the sacred art of prayer which for those who regularly dedicate themselves to praying with fervour will yield wonderful fruits of holy prayer. Everything is a bother for a person who is negligent or lazy, but a person who is anxious and keen about doing good never gets tired and always takes on greater things with relish. When learning any art a person experiences difficulty and pain at the beginning, but continued perseverance makes it easy to grasp the art and to practice it with pleasure. I maintain that it is the same with prayer in which at the beginning the soul feels exhausted and experiences pain, nevertheless if a person practices it continuously and customarily with love, he will be able to pray with ease and will taste the greatest happiness through the experience.¹

If a person does not want to fail he should proceed in an orderly manner with everything and, if he wants it to work well, have a model. Therefore, having set out the rules and manner of undertaking interior reading above with respect to meditation we shall now also give an example of how to practice the acts of prayer.

When the soul is focused within itself through concentrated inner reading, and properly aroused through fervent meditation along the lines of the above sentiments, namely, hatred of evil, love of what is good, fear of God, hope of divine mercy, sorrow for sins committed, joy over good things, as if the Lord were drawing you away from your sins, exhorting you to perform virtue, offering you grace, and rousing you to thank Him, He will lead you to acts of prayer, to which you should readily offer yourself.

For example, He says: “O beloved soul, for whom I have done so much good, why are you so ungrateful in recognising this? I became man for you, so that I could give you a share in my own goodness; why do you despise me? I was enclosed in the Virgin’s womb for nine months, to provide room in heaven; why to you abandon right living and the situation of holy religion? I chose the shame of the manger and the coarseness of the straw for you to provide you with the comfortable relaxation of the honourable palace of heaven. Why do you seek so many pleasures and not wish to suffer any inconvenience for me? I shed my blood at the circumcision and when persecuted fled² into Egypt to make you holy and to take away all your fear; why then don’t you change and be patient in persecution? I was subject to my Mother, went into the desert and was tempted to set you an example and to teach you; why do you turn away from obedience, not wish to suffer and be so fragile in temptation? I lived with weariness and taught the truth in order to draw you towards my law; why do you not observe my precepts?

I performed unheard of signs, stupendous miracles and other well-known acts to make you really certain and confer salvation on you; what is your excuse for doubting the faith, embracing error and not accepting my teaching? I was transfigured on the mountain to prove my glory; why are you so half-hearted in doing good things? I entered Jerusalem with humility to give you honour in heaven; why do you seek so much happiness on earth? After seeking my Mother’s permission I went to death for you so as to confer eternal life on you; why then when you have been called into my service do you allow yourself to be held back³

¹ This theme is strongly emphasised by the Capuchin theorists on prayer.

² In the text *fugii = fugetti*.

³ *Intertire = trattenere*. – The mention of Jesus getting His Mother’s permission before going to His death on the cross is related by pious authors, as in the *Meditationes* attributed to St Bonaventure. In the Capuchin noviciate in Lombardy, and probably in other Provinces, before going to sleep at night the novices among other things used to recite: “And you, O most holy Virgin, give me too this most holy blessing in memory of the blessing which you gave to your divine Son when he left you to go to His death on the cross...”

by your family? At supper I washed the feet of my Apostles and also instituted the sacrament to provide you with food and make you humble; why are you proud and so negligent and lazy when receiving Holy Communion?

When I prayed in the garden, I sweated blood to give you comfort and perseverance in prayer; how can you be frightened and have such little regard for prayer? I was betrayed by a disciple's kiss, taken by a soldier, abandoned by the Apostles, presented to the High Priest, struck in the face, denied by Pilate, and tormented throughout the night, to free you from all evil and confer complete redemption on you: why do you commit so many errors and not love me with your whole heart as you should? I was falsely accused by the Jews, ridiculed by Herod and unjustly condemned by Pilate to free you from a just sentence by dying and confer high honours on you: how can you utter so many calumnies, despise the poor and minors and value them so little and treat them badly? I was stripped naked to provide you with the robes of glory: why do you seek the good life with such vanity? Behold me bound to a pillar with such disrespect to free you from your sins.

What is it, then, that leads you to waste the whole day in amusements and exert yourself at dances? I am here struck most harshly to turn you away from eternal scourging: what excuse can you bring for not doing proper penance for your sins? Furthermore, dear soul, not content and satisfied with this, my head was crowned with thorns to give you the crown of the eternal kingdom: why do you seek honours, positions and titles out of ambition and in disrespect for me? I carried the heavy cross on my weak shoulders to make the journey to heaven pleasant for you: why don't you take my yoke upon you? Both my hands and feet were pierced with nails to draw you into my kingdom: then why do you run away from me and follow the world? I was raised on high between thieves with shame on the cross: so that you could find a place in the choirs of angels triumphantly and gloriously: why do you not reveal all your sins to a confessor in trust because you are frightened of suffering a little scorn or disgrace? I was shouted at with mockery by everyone so that you might be sublime and honoured; why do you scurrilously insult everyone and even curse me and all my saints? Everyone shouted against me "Death! Death";¹ I shed many tears while praying to my Father for Him to pardon them and you: then, why, having lost sight of this, do you not forgive offences, but causing much damage seek revenge all day long?

The thief confessed to me and I promised him Paradise so that he could ask me for heaven: why to you deny me and not ask me vigorously for what will provide for your salvation? I gave my Mother to John as his mother, and gave her John as her son as a powerful advocate for you: why, then, are you not devoted to her and so slow to invoke her? My mouth tasted vinegar and bitter gall so that you might taste heavenly beverages: why are you not satisfied with what is necessary but pour into you throat without restraint? Being in such pain that I cried out "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me,"² in order to make you patient and strong in tribulation: then why are you so unstable and become sad and disturbed by every little thing. When I tasted the bitterness of gall I cried out in a loud voice: "*Consummatum est*. It is consummated",³ to make you constant and give you perseverance: why do you let yourself be conquered by temptation and stop the good works that you have begun?

When I came to the end of my life, I commended my spirit to the Father in tears, to make Him be merciful towards you: why do you then become dispirited in your worries and toils, and leaving Him aside invoke the devil in anger? My body became pale and motionless on the

¹ Cf. Jn 19, 6.

² Cf. Mk 15, 34; Mt 27, 46.

³ Cf. Jn 19, 30

hard wood to make you resplendent and immortal in paradise: why then do you give yourself to lust and desire fine clothes and soft beds? My side was pierced with a cruel lance to plant perfect charity in your heart; why don't you love your neighbour as yourself, and love me more than anything? I was taken down from the cross and my afflicted Mother cried with great sorrow to make you compassionate towards those who are afflicted: why are you so cruel with respect to the needs of others? My naked body was wrapped in a sheet to give you abundant spiritual gifts: why do you get rich on the goods of others and seek only passing wealth. My body was placed in the tomb of another to put yours in the heavenly realm: why are you buried with so much show and tales of glorious deeds¹ as if you were not going to rot or could not survive unless you were wrapped in precious cloth, marked by ornate grave stones and marble tombs with many images engraved on them?²

My soul descended into Limbo to visit the ancient fathers and undo the power of the devil and confer full authority over him on you: why then do you not resist him powerfully and bravely? I rose on the third day in victorious glory to confer on you a fresh, commendable, heavenly, uncomplicated and virtuous life: why then are you so dissolute, full of vice and perverse activities in the way you live and conduct yourself? After I rose I spent forty days in the company of my disciples, sometimes hiding from you, to provide you with a blueprint for honest living: why are you so fond of hypocrisy so that it becomes necessary for me to prove my glory?

I ascended above the heavens to my Father in triumph and majesty to be your continual advocate and effectual protector before Him: why don't you come to Me with assurance and trust in all your needs? I sent the Holy Spirit into the world with rich gifts so that he could arouse you, instruct and rule you: why don't you accept Him and obey all his saving inspirations? On the final judgement day I will appear in glory and majesty and the living and the dead will come together in my sight, to confer proper glory on you in body and soul if you have been faithful and eternal punishment if you have rebelled: why then do you not fear, serve and obey Me? Am I not the God of Sabaoth, supreme sovereign and monarch of the universe? Perhaps you think so little of Me and abandon Me in disgust because you see Me bound to the pillar? I am, I am He who has supreme dominion over life and death.

Therefore, beloved soul, do not think poorly of me, repent of having offended me, persevere in my service and ask for all that you need with trust, since I am aware of everything that you ask and ready to hear you. Pay attention now to all the good things I, together with my Father and the Holy Spirit, have done for you, and of what I have prepared for you in the heavenly kingdom. Make yourself aware of the benefits, and do not be ungrateful to the benefactor but always thank him in all humility, so that these things will be preserved for you and then more will be given to you,”³

Now faithful soul wake up to what you are doing! Rouse yourself from the sleep of tepidity and with heartfelt affection towards God produce acts of prayer and before offering this say:

“O my omnipotent Lord, who is just, holy and merciful, full of beauty and clemency, I have appreciated what you have done for me, and how ungrateful I have been towards you. I am sorry with all my heart for having offended you and from the bottom of my heart I loathe not having recognised this and also of having been the cause of so much of your suffering, in your birth, life and death, in your poverty, sweat, wounds, scourging, insults, torments, tears and in

¹ In the text *fausti* = *fasti*.

² We read in the 1564 edition: *if they were not wrapped in precious cloth, and placed in marble tombs engraved with many images.*

³ This is an example of a swift and devout summary of Christ's life and the history of salvation.

such a painful death. From now on, O my God, by means of your grace and great favour I promise to not wish to offend you any more in any way. I am ready to avoid all sin and all that might lead me into sin. I shall abandon evil practices, amusements, ostentatious displays, vanities, strange ways of life, evil longings and desires, excessive eating, thinking of or watching whatever is not proper and all other evil and its occasions. I wish in all humility to confess everything to a priest, following your command, with sorrow for what has happened and a firm proposal to not do it any more.¹

In addition I offer, O my Lord, to always obey you promptly, from the present instant to the end of my life and I wish to be always continuously fervent and careful in your service observing what you command me without transgressing in anything. Beyond this, O benevolent Father, I offer myself into your most holy hands being prepared to patiently endure what you allow to happen to me whether it be adversity or tribulation, sickness, persecution, calumny, anxieties, slander, toil, aggravation,² injustice, suffering and death. If any of these should happen to me, to those whom I love or who are dear to me, I shall not leave your service, (if your mercy helps me), knowing for certain that whenever you allow some adversity to come to me all will work towards my salvation and greater reward.

To achieve all this I place everything in your hands as my loving Father. Do to me what you will so that I may never offend you”.

Now you come to the second act of petition and say:

“O most clement Redeemer and sweet Father, because we are here impoverished without you, nor can we do any good deed without your contribution, by your mercy give us grace and extend your help to us. O merciful Lord, forgive all the sins committed against your divine Majesty, and give me the strength to resist the temptations of the enemy and the grace to never offend you. Do not look upon my ineptitude³ and ingratitude. Cancel this and dispense me from all the heavy punishments that my horrible sins justly deserve and free me from hidden deception and all evil through the merits of your precious blood.

Give me the grace, O my Lord, to please you always and to observe your holy law. Defend and maintain me and the whole Christian population in your service and consent to convert others to the true faith and good conduct, so that everyone may do your will both in heaven and on earth. In the end, lead everyone to the consummate joys of the heavenly home where you live and reign forever with your Father and the Holy Spirit.”

Thirdly with respect to the act of thanksgiving, say:

“I thank you, most excellent benefactor, for the infinite number of times when you gave me, who am so ungrateful, so many favours so generously. You conferred them and set them out. As far as I can I offer you abundant thanks because you created me in your divine image, capable of reasoning and destined for eternal happiness. I glorify you for the many creatures that you placed at my service and for having given me the company and security of the angelic spirits. When I had been called to the true faith and saved by your own blood you made me an heir of paradise where you have placed and kept so many good things for me.

I thank you, Lord, because you restrain and govern my soul and body like a good Father. Fulfilment awaits me. You have not overlooked calling me in many ways towards what is good and have taken such attentive care of me. I thank you especially, most dear Father, for

¹ This is reminiscent of expressions in the Catechism and in the Act of Contrition.

² In the Venice edition of 1564 we read erroneously *travagli gravemente* (f. 69v).

³ *pocagine* in the text = *dappocagine*.

all the pain and toil you have undergone for me: being born poor, circumcised on the eighth day, fleeing into Egypt, and other things especially the scourging (and do the same for the other steps in the Passion). I thank you for being stripped for me, bound to the column and flogged cruelly. May the blood which you shed on the ground for me be blessed, Lord! Blessed be the whips, the column, and the cords that bound you! Blessed be your wounds, your sighs, sorrows, crying and the injuries which you endured for me a miserable and unfaithful creature!

O my Lord, may you be ever blessed and thanked! May the angels and saints, heaven and earth, the sea, men and women, bless you!¹ O my Lord, because I am so poor and you so rich and not because you need it, but recognising you as my Lord and my sole patron, as a tribute and as a sign of thanksgiving, in memory of this painful mystery of the most harsh scourging, I offer you an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* on behalf of myself and the Christian people, and by means of this, open my heart and myself to you. Accept me, O God, out of your mercy. Even though I am poor I too approach heaven's bench with your guarantee of mercy², in search of all that it covers. Lord, may it please you, through the merits of this mystery, to accept my down-payment and myself together with it. Grant what I ask in my prayer so that I may remain here with you in the state of grace and then reign in glory above".

CONCERNING CONTEMPLATION: CHAPTER 18

The elephant becomes excited at the sight of blood and the faithful soul is set alight for fervent prayer by Christ's mysteries. A soldier is strengthened by the example set by a stout-hearted general, and a Christian becomes strong by the vivid recollection of the life and deeds of the Saviour.

This is the most effective remedy for the deceit of the vilest enemy: holding onto the image of sweet Jesus, and finding happiness in Him through intimate love. Through tasting soothing milk a child conducts itself compliantly and rests in the arms of its dear mother: and by means of inner sweetness and heavenly consolation a spiritual person engages in holy prayer frequently and, with very little effort, discovers abundant repose and lasting strength.

Such a person, who has had the experience of heavenly gifts, readily despises everything. Divine consolation is not given to those who seek pleasure and delight in what is corruptible; but to those who, for the sake of God, deprive themselves of the comforts of this world the kind Saviour often gives a taste of indescribable sweetness in deep contemplation, as an down-payment³ on perpetual happiness, in order to arouse this person and make him better prepared to serve you.

Contemplation is a high-quality disposition and very sweet savouring of the divine riches, when the soul, having been cleansed and warmed by inner reading and holy meditation, being raised up on a high, beyond the thought of passing things through frequent and devout prayer, soothed and at peace, tastes supreme goodness⁴ through a marvellous consciousness of the divine mysteries. Just as the sun illumines, warms and makes grass grow and plants take root, so divine contemplation enlightens the intellect with marvellous sentiments, inflames the heart with wonderful sweetness and confers perfect motion on both, to the extent that, according to the character of your infallible wisdom and human capacity, it mulls this over

¹ In the text: *benedicanoti* = *benedicano*.

² In the text: *polisa* = *polizza*

³ In the text: *un caparro* = *caparra*.

⁴ Splendid definition that captures the sentiments of Bonaventure.

profoundly in peace and loves strongly with sweetness, understands at length and desires ardently. This is how it is with the mystery of the scourging when we think of who it is that is being scourged, for love of whom, by whom and for what reason,¹ and so on with the other mysteries.

As set out above contemplation opens up an understanding of how wonderful was the power of the one who suffered, with what marvellous wisdom it was planned and arranged in every detail, how exceptional was the integrity and ardent the love that endured such bitter suffering for the vilest of creatures and wicked sinners and what an obligation such goodness impose on us. This is how the pure soul who prays well acquires through the gift of contemplation a most profound understanding and exceptionally marvellous disposition, which goes beyond all human thought, in so far as it understands the divine mysteries so deeply with a certain relish, which there is no way to express, neither in word nor in writing, but which is well understood within by a heavenly gift. The will is drawn so gently to the love of God and to these mysteries that many times it forgets itself and is transformed into God so that it is living in Him more than in itself and tastes here below in part what the saints possess completely in paradise. Although this experience is possible for the well purified soul, it cannot be explained in full, since the exalted experience and sweet taste of contemplation so fills the soul with exalted things that no words can be found to express it adequately and how it comes about.²

Because this is a gift from the Lord, who gives it when He wishes, to those who have very pure souls and who are very dedicated to prayer, in order to arouse them, you do not need to investigate it very much, but strive to be careful concerning prayer, thoughtful concerning interior reading, and fervent in holy meditation, and carry the acts of each of these with great love, leaving the gift of spiritual taste in contemplation to Him who distributes all in an orderly manner for the good of His servants. When the Lord gives you this taste, I am sure that you will cry out with Queen of Sheba what is in chapter 10 of the Book of Kings: “Experience proved to me that not half of what I have actually tasted was told to me”.³

To conclude I quote what the Prophet David said in Psalm 33: *Taste and see*, I learnt how sweet the Lord is.⁴

CONCERNING THE THIRD KIND OF PRAYER NAMELY MIXED. CHAPTER 19

Because the pre-eminent Creator of the universe made rational creatures that are composed of spiritual and corporal natures, the rational soul and the body, therefore there also exists mixed prayer which combines part mental and part vocal prayer. Because a person is more perfect as he lives more according to the spirit than to the flesh prayer is more perfect when it involves what is mental rather than vocal.⁵

Certain methods of mixed prayer, such a how to recite the Psalms, ejaculations, or “prayers of rejoicing” or others are described attractively:

The third occurs on impulse or out of an excess of love, when the soul which has been filled with spiritual sweetness, by means of the vigour of ardour, emits sounds as if moved by an

¹ In the text: *pensando quello è flagellato, per amor di cui, da chi e per che cagione.*

² These observations are interesting in so far as they indicate a vivid experience of the author concerning contemplation and how it is beyond description.

³ Cf. 1 Kings 10, 7.

⁴ Ps 33, 9 (*Vulg.*).

⁵ This concept was already contained in *Alb. n. 3* and *Const. 1536*, n. 42,5.

abundance of fervour. This is not the same for everyone, but differs according to the various emotions of the soul and movements of the spirit. Sometimes the soul addresses God as Lord, at other times as Father, often as Spouse or in similar amorous terms, moved by inner fervour. The Canticle is full of this and the Saints call it joy, that is inner joy which is displayed with merriment.¹ The Prophet David speaks about this in Psalm 88: “Mercy and justice shall go before thy face, O Lord. Blessed is the people that knows jubilation”; and in Psalm 46: “God is ascended with jubilee.”²

The fourth usually occurs by recognising what is owed to God by both the natures, namely the spiritual and corporeal, that He has given. This is carried out in the body with the voice and in the soul by paying attention. In each of these ways the devout person may pray fruitfully in mixed prayer, taking care to focus more on the mind than on many words,³ as Saint Isidore says in chapter seven of his book on *The Highest Good*: “It is good to always pray with the heart and also with the voice, to glorify God with spiritual hymns, but, to pray with the voice alone without the inner heart amounts to nothing.”⁴ The Apostle says: “Sing to the Lord with your hearts”⁵ that is make melody not only with your voice but also with your heart.

In Chapters 20 and 21 Bernardino da Balvano pauses to deal with the “necessity” and “utility” of prayer concluding with this shared guarantee.

“I assure you together with Saint Augustine that the divine mercy will never leave us, while we are careful about prayer.”⁶

CONCERNING PREPARATION FOR PRAYER, AND FIRSTLY CONCERNING THE SIX THINGS THAT GO BEFORE IT. CHAPTER 22.

As the author summarises at the end of the Chapter, this preparation consists in six things: “Having Catholic faith, being reconciled with one’s neighbour, freedom from mortal sin, moderation in life style, use of a private place, praying at the right and proper time. Concerning the last three he has this to say:

The fourth preparatory requisite is moderation. It is necessary for a person to be sparing in food, drink and sleep, since what undermines the will is not conducive to prayer. One cannot fill the stomach with fine and delicate food and entertain wholesome and holy thoughts in the mind. Neither can one rejoice with the world here below and then reign above with Christ. Whoever prudently deprives himself of exterior things for the love of Christ, will receive the inner consolation of holy prayer with greater abundance. When is accompanied by moderation, the soul can easily fly towards God and ask Him for whatever it wants.

Thus the Angel said in Chapter 12 of the Book of Tobias; “Prayer is good with fasting”, and the Lord said in Chapter 17 of the Gospel according to Matthew: “This kind of devil is not cast out but by prayer and fasting”. In the Fourth Lenten Sermon holy Bernard says: “Fasting enables prayer to be carried out with trust and devotion”. This is how prayer and fasting are combined. In a similar vein he wrote: “One brother will encourage the other and both will

¹ Cf. Augustine, *Exposit, in Psal. 32: CCL 38, 253s* (and the second reading of the Memorial of St Cecelia, Virgin and Martyr on 22 November); S Bonaventure, *Leg. maior* 10, 4, FAED, II, p. 607.

² Cf. Ps 88, 15-16; 46, 6 (*Vulg.*).

³ This expression is taken from the *Cost. 1536*, n. 42,3.

⁴ Cf. St. Isid. *Senteneiarum* lib. III, c. 7, n. 30 (*PL 83, 678*).

⁵ Cf. Eph 5, 19; Col 3, 16.

⁶ St Augustine develops this concept in many passages of his works; for example, Cf. *Ep 137*, n. 20 (*PL 33, 525*).

obtain consolation.”¹ Prayer provides the strength for fasting, and fasting acquires the grace of prayer. Fasting strengthens prayer and prayer sanctifies fasting and presents it to the Lord.

Whoever lives with moderation will be ready for prayer and to obtain grace successfully, as it says in Chapter 4 of the Book of Judith: “Know that the Lord will hear your prayers if you continue with perseverance in fasting and prayers.”²

The fifth preparatory requisite is to select a comfortable place. Although in many respects the Church is a suitable place to pray, nevertheless at times one is constrained to choose a private, suitable, and quite place away from noise, in your room, an oratory, garden, or other place, concerning which the same rule does not apply to everyone, rather each one should pick the spot where he feels the greatest peace. The Saviour says in Chapter 6 of the Gospel according to Matthew: “But when you pray, enter into your room, and having shut the door, pray to your Father in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you there.”³

Although a person can pray anywhere, nevertheless those who are not so perfect will benefit greatly from and need to have peace of mind and a quiet place so that they may also avoid human applause, as Isidore says in the passage cited above.⁴ Prayer is more fittingly undertaken in secluded places. One can express what they want more easily where God is their only witness, because hypocrites pray to be seen. Their efforts do not please God, but gain glory from mortal men. In the first place have a clear inner conscience and then select a place to pray where you may do so with the greatest ease and peace.

The sixth and last preparatory requisite is to choose a suitable and proper time. Although a spiritual person can always pray,⁵ producing pious feelings towards God, professing an ardent desire to be ever ready to serve Him, desiring to receive from Him what he needs, offering Him much thanks, an hour should never pass when this does not happen, still the saints set certain aside to pray more efficiently, as is proper.

The Prophet David prayed to God six times a day and he rose at midnight to sing the divine praises, even though He was King and very busy. He knew well from experience that, having experienced divine favour, all would go well. However, human lethargy is so strong today that even those in religious orders who have plenty of peace hardly say any prayers. This is certainly something to lament, that being besieged⁶ from all sides by the enemy, stripped of virtue; they throw down the weapon of holy prayer.

Although prayer for the main things that are needed should be continuous, yet because of the great confusion in the way we spend our time we should, for many reasons, designate two special and appropriate times for prayer⁷ in the morning and in the evening. Set aside one hour or two in the morning at the beginning of the day when your stomach is settled and you have dressed and do not need to change again to begin the day. As you have to work during the day, once you have prayed and offered and committed yourself to God, you will find that

¹ With regard to the quotes: Tob. 12, 8; Mt 17, 21; Mk 9, 29; Pr 18, 19; Bernard, *Sermo IV in Quadragesima*, 2 (PL 183, 176).

² Judith 4, 11 (*Vulg.*).

³ Cf. Matt 6,6. The principle of choosing a quiet place to pray is a golden rule which once more shows the author’s great experience of prayer and reflects the freedom of the early Capuchins who freely prayed in the woods, in caves, in a garden, in a church etc

⁴ Cf. Isid. *Sententiarum* lib. III, c. 7, nn. 20-21 (PL 83, 676).

⁵ A thought contained in *Const. 1536*, n. 41, 3.

⁶ In the text: *assaggiati*. In other editions this is corrected to *assediati*. What can we say today, if even then they lamented a lack of silence and quiet? Regarding the seven times for prayer Cf. Ps 118, 62, 164 (*Vulg.*).

⁷ Note also in this passage a similarity to the text of the *Const. 1536*, n. 41, 4.

everything will go well. This is what the Holy Spirit said in the Book of Ecclesiasticus: “The just man, that is the Christian, will give his heart to resort to the Lord early in the morning, and he will pray in the sight of the most High.”¹ In chapter 8 of Proverbs we read: “They that in the morning early watch for me, shall find me.”² David said in Psalm 5: “Harken to the voice of my prayer, O my King and my God. For to you I will pray: O Lord in the morning you will hear my voice.”³

Praying at night is most suitable because the person can examine what he has done during the day, and being sorry for his mistakes, can ask pardon with a heart prepared to confess everything to a priest, according to the divine command, and to thank the Lord for the graces received, so that should death occur suddenly, that person would be found in the state of grace through inner contrition and well prepared by praying to God. David refers to this in Psalm 140: “I have cried to you, O Lord, hear me: hearken to my voice, when I cry to you. Let my prayer be directed as incense in your sight; the lifting up of my hands, an evening sacrifice.”⁴ Holy Cyprian taught the same thing concerning praying in the morning and in the evening in Sermon 6 concerning Sunday prayer. He said: “He should pray in the morning and evening at the setting of the sun.”⁵

CONCERNING SIX METHODS OF PREPARATION OR RATHER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SHOULD
ACCOMPANY PRAYER. CHAPTER 24.

The more important something is the more parts it has. Once the priest who wishes to celebrate Mass has prepared the altar, he puts on the sacred vestments. A queen who is about to enter the King’s palace takes a few maids with her. So too a devout person who wishes to appear before the Lord to engage in prayer, (in addition to the preparations mentioned above) should take something else with him by way of ornamentation and complement, so that by means of fitting reverence he can have more confidence in prayer and entertain secure hope. Therefore the Holy Spirit said in chapter 32 of Ecclesiasticus: “For your reverence good grace shall come to you.”⁶ Psalm 9 says: “The Lord listens to the desire of the poor and accepts the preparation of their heart.”⁷

The first preparatory circumstance involves the place and actual position of the body when at prayer. Still it is left to the free choice of those who are praying how they position their body to generate the greatest devotion. Some have prayed to the Lord with the mind while their faces looked up to heaven, as David did in Psalm 122: “To you have I lifted up my eyes, you who live in heaven. Behold as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters. As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress: so are our eyes unto the Lord our God, until he have mercy on us.”⁸ Others, like the publican,⁹ have prayed with their face bent to the

¹ Sir. 39, 6 (*Vulg.*)

² Prov. 8, 17 (*Vulg.*)

³ Ps. 5, 3-4.

⁴ Ps 141, 1-2.

⁵ Cf, St Cyprian, *Serm. 6: De orat. Dominica*, n. 13 (*PL* 4, 560).

⁶ Sir 32, 14 (*Vulg.*: “Pro reverentia accedet tibi bona gratia.”)

⁷ Psalms 9-10, 38 (*Vugl.* Ps 9, 38 “Desiderium pauperum esaudivit Dominus, praeparationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua”).

⁸ Ps 122, 1-2 (*Vulg.*)

⁹ Cf. Lk 18, 13

the ground. Others, like Moses,¹ have prayed with their arms extended. Others have prayed with joined hands or in a similar manner as devotion dictated.

Some prayed standing, others spread themselves out on the ground and many knelt devoutly, which is the most common way according to what Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 3: “For this cause I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, after whom all paternity in heaven and on earth is named: that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man.”² To make clear to you in a word what should be your posture when praying, think of how mortals stand before the Pope or the Emperor when asking a favour or discussing something with them. You ought to assume a posture of greater reverence when you pray to the immortal God, whom the supreme powers adore while trembling, and I assure you that you will obtain greater graces more easily when you come to prayer disposed and devoted.

The second preparatory circumstance³ for those who need to pray is having the right intention so that what is asked for is just and proper and involves all that is pleasing to God and is not asking for what is vain, for profit or something else that is evil. Thus our requests should be exclusively for what is good for the soul, such as the remission of sins, the gift of grace, right living and the glory of paradise, or else things that pertain to the body such as health, sufficient clothing, matters of learning, having children and the like. We may always ask for the first kind of things, which pertain to the soul, and are nothing but good,⁴ unconditionally. We may ask for the second kind of things, which pertain to the body, and although when they are used well are of benefit to the soul, but because they may still be offensive and are not specific, that is neither good nor bad⁵ depending on how they are put to use, should be requested conditionally so that the Lord would grant them if they work towards salvation. However, things which are evil cannot be requested under pain of sin, nor are they deserve to be granted. Indeed any one who asks for them should be punished in the same way as God’s wrath punishes those who offend Him by committing sin or the like.

Thus David says in Psalm 65: “If I have looked at iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”.⁶ If one asks a virtuous man to do something that is unjust or which would bring him harm⁷ then the greater the evil the more the great God will be offended by a request for him to do something improper. Thus we have to be very circumspect in prayer and only request what is good and holy.

Since we do not know the best way to go about things, let us place ourselves in the hands of Divine Providence (when we pray), because in the Gospel according to Luke he says: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him?”⁸ With regard to this Basil the Great says in chapter one of his Book of Rules: “When you pray, be careful not to ask for one thing instead of another and provoke the Lord to oppose you. Do not ask for money, human glory, power or for anything that is weak and corruptible, rather seek the Kingdom of God

¹ Cf. Es 17, 11-12

² Eph 3, 14.

³ A second way of preparing for prayer

⁴ *Eccetto* = se, altro che.

⁵ Mali = cattive

⁶ Ps 65, 18 (*Vulg.*)

⁷ gli si fa ingiuria.

⁸ Lk 11, 13.

and all those things that are necessary for the body will be given to you; as he says: “Seek the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things will be given to you as well.”¹

There are two ways of praying: one is to give praise with humility, the other, which is inferior to the first, is to demand. Therefore when you pray do not begin immediately to demand because if you do it will appear that you adore God because of what you need. To achieve this when you start to pray withdraw from yourself, your wife, your children and the earth and pass over to heaven, leaving aside every visible or invisible creature and begin to praise the Creator of all and while you are uttering such praise do not let your mind stray here and there. In Sermon 19 on *Blessed are the immaculate* Saint Ambrose states the same when he says: “When you pray ask for grand things, that is those that are eternal and for nothing less. Ask for things that are divine and pertain to heaven, so that you become like the angels in heaven. Do not pray for money because it is rust.² Do not ask for gold because it is metal nor for possessions because they belong to the earth.”³ Such prayer will not reach God. He will not even hear it even though⁴ you wish it deserved his gifts and that he would listen to a pious voice that was full of grace and devotion.

The third preparatory circumstance⁵ is that it is necessary to pay attention so that your mind is not wandering around. This was dealt with in part in chapter 19 on mixed prayer and will be dealt with in part in the beginning of the treatment on mysteries in chapter twenty five.⁶

Because our mind is set in frail flesh, as a ship is on the sea, mysteries are conferred on it to make it steady, as an anchor steadies a ship. For if the mind is not focused prayer will not be very successful. Therefore the Church says in chapter 10 of *Quando de cons.* Dist. 1: “Therefore, when we are at prayer, most beloved brothers, we ought to pay attention with all our heart and engage in praying while putting aside all thought of the carnal and secular man. During that time let the soul think of nothing but prayer. To achieve this before coming to prayer the priest ought to prepare the minds of the brothers by saying: *Lift up your hearts*, so that the people answer: *We have lifted them up to the Lord*. We have lifted them up to the Lord with a warning not to think of anything but the Lord. Shut the heart against the enemy and open it only to God and do not allow God’s enemy to approach during the time of prayer.”⁷

In the Sixth Book on the Sacraments in chapter 3 Blessed Ambrose exhorts us saying: “Let your prayer not be uttered only on your lips, but be attentive with all the strength of your soul. Enter the seclusion of your hear and gather everything there. Do not treat the one you wish to please as nothing or someone of no consequence. Be sure to pray from the heart so that you will deserve to be heard when praying with your mind.”⁸ Paul said the same in his First Letter to the Corinthians in chapter 14: “I shall pray with the Spirit and with the mind.”⁹

To stir things up in memory we need to carefully mull over basic things. To beg for grace from God the mind should be fixed on prayer and the soul attentive as Blessed Ambrose says

¹ Cf. St Basil, *Rules* ch. 1, n. 2 (PG 31, 1327).

² *Ruggia* in the text = *ruggine*.

³ Cf. St Ambrose, *Commentary of the Psalms* 118: *Serm* 19, n. 11 (PL 15, 1549).

⁴ *Eccetto* in the text = *se*.

⁵ In the text *gl'è = è*

⁶ See above and below p. 20.

⁷ Cf. *Decreti tertia pars de cons.*, dist. I, as in note 10 above.

⁸ St Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* Book II, ch. 3, n. 13 (PL 16, 476).

⁹ 1 Cor 14, 15

when commenting on chapter 14 of the First Letter to the Corinthians “I shall pray not only with the lips, but with feelings of the heart, so that I may deserve to be heard.”¹

The fourth preparatory circumstance is when praying to search for deep confidence in obtaining what is asked if this is for the honour of God and our salvation. Such confidence can come from three sources: firstly from God’s omnipotence and riches since nothing is lacking in these attributes and he can bestow them copiously and lavishly. The Apostle speaks about this in chapter 9 of the Second Letter to the Corinthians: “God is able to make all grace abound in you”.² Secondly, from his infallible truthfulness, because once he had promised this this it could not fail. In chapter 11 of Mark the Lord says in this regard: “Therefore I say to you, all things you ask when you pray, believe that you will receive, and they shall come to you.”³ Thirdly, such trust comes from the great love that he has towards us and his goodness which is prepared to give us greater things than we are disposed to receive. The Saviour speaks of this in chapter 16 of St John: “In that day you shall ask in my name and you shall receive, because the Father loves you. Up to now you have not asked anything in my name: ask and you shall receive.”⁴

You should not doubt when asking him for necessary things which He will give copiously to everyone by means of his power. Therefore James the Apostle says in chapter one: “But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men abundantly and does not reproach. It will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For whoever wavers is like a wave on the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore, let that man not think that he will receive anything from the Lord.”⁵

Thus you ought to pray with confidence expecting to receive from the Lord in due time all that is not contrary to salvation. St Isidore says in chapter 7 of the Third Book of the Sentences: “The feelings towards God of the one who is praying should be such that he does not doubt the effectiveness of his prayers. We pray in vain when we do not have trust and hope. So, as the Apostle says, ask with faith, not doubting anything.”⁶

The fifth preparatory circumstance seeks deep interior and exterior humility. By recognising one’s needs and bringing them before the Lord from within we admit that we are unworthy to receive grace from such exalted Majesty and that what we ask will be granted by divine generosity and not on account of our merits. This is like what Abraham did in chapter 18 of Genesis: “I will speak to the Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes”.⁷ Outwardly, going down on both knees, getting rid of great ostentation and the flamboyance of having ornate cushions⁸, comfortable footstools, one should remain with head bowed and completely devout as is in keeping with such great Majesty. Nor should one approach the altar or sacred places too closely out of reverence for the Lord being convinced that the further you stay back out of humility the closer you come to God for him to hear you, as the Spirit states in chapter 35 of Ecclesiasticus: “The prayer of he who humbles himself shall pierce the clouds and he will not be comforted until it comes near; nor will he depart until the most High accepts it.”⁹ In Psalm

¹ The quote was not identified. Insistence on attention of the heart is strongly stressed in *Const 1536*, n. 42, 1.

² Cf. 2 Cor. 9, 8.

³ Cf. Mk 11, 24.

⁴ Cf. Jn 16, 23, 26.

⁵ James 1, 5-8.

⁶ Cf. St Isidore, *Sententiarum* lib. III, c. 7, n. 15 (*PL* 83, 674s).

⁷ Gen 18, 27.

⁸ *Cussini* in the text = *cuseini*.

⁹ Sir 35, 21

101 the prophet David says: “He has regard for the prayer of the humble; and he has not despised their petition.”¹

An unfortunately proud person is disliked by everyone and when a pompous person begs they are given nothing. The person who is ostentatious when praying can cry as much as he likes but he cannot make a request until he becomes humble. This is contained in the ninth chapter of the Book of Judith: “O Lord, you have not liked the proud from the beginning, but the prayer of the humble and the meek is fine.”² Therefore, the one who wishes to be heard when he prays should pray with deep humility and then his prayers will always be accepted.

The sixth preparatory circumstance is perseverance because we are always in need of the Lord once more and the obligation of thanking him increases. Thus it is fitting that our prayer be unrelenting and if it does not obtain a favour immediately that it keeps knocking and wait till the door is opened.³ A drop of water penetrates a rock not because it is harder but because it falls⁴ often and the person who persists will win what is unwinnable through humble perseverance and will bend the Omnipotent to listen to his request.

A person will go repeatedly to a Prince’s palace to obtain a favour without obtaining it immediately. We think that we will be heard by the immortal God by reciting a couple of *Our Fathers*. Even though he is always ready to give we are not already ready to receive. A person desires to receive much but only provides small vessels. The Lord delays to grant what is asked of him because we are not capable of receiving it or in order to give us something bigger at the right time.⁵

By means of lengthy prayers Elizabeth and Zachary begged to have John the Baptist in their old age. Thus in Book Two of *The Sermon on the Mount* St Augustine says: “Knock, as one having great faith in him whose promise does not deceive”. He then says: “Whoever asks receives and he who seeks finds and the door shall be opened to him who knocks. For this reason perseverance is required in order to receive what we ask for and to find what we are seeking and that the door may be opened to the one who is knocking”.⁶ Near the end of chapter 7 of the Second Book on the Highest Good Isidore wrote: “This is why the prayers of some people are heard much later so that while they are waiting they can become more eager and their rewards increase like when frost delays the harvest so that the longer it takes for the grain to appear the richer the harvest⁷ will be. How many times⁸ when we pray we are not heard quickly and we think about our conduct we attribute this to our faults and divine justice. Sometimes when we persevere in prayer and are not heard it is to our advantage and not disadvantage. Often⁹ God does not answer the prayers of many as they would like because he answers them for their salvation.”¹⁰

¹ Ps 101, 18 (*Vulg.*)

² Cf. Judith 9, 16 (*Vulg.*) “nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to you, but the prayer of the humble and the meek have always pleased you”, the text in Judith 9, 11 is slightly different.

³ Cf. Mt 7, 7; Lk 11, 9.

⁴ *Vi caschi* in the text = *casca*.

⁵ This is an example of Bernardino of Balvano’s concise style which some have compared to the *Imitation of Christ* by A’Kenpis.

⁶ St Augustine, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Book II, nn. 72-73 (*PL* 34, 1302).

⁷ *Ricolta* in the text = *raccolta*.

⁸ Or every time

⁹ *Molta volte, spesse volte* = *many times, frequently*.

¹⁰ St Isidore, *Sententiarum. Lib. III, c. 7*, nn. 21-26 (*PL* 83, 677).

Let the heart of the one who is praying be consoled. Let him carry on valiantly and wait for the Lord and he will receive all that he asks for appropriately.¹ Because we should ask for nothing else in prayer than God's honour and salvation it is not proper that we should cease from prayer until we have obtained what we have asked for. Nor should we make much of the sweetness we taste when praying since this is not as acceptable to God as greater humility. Milk is fed to children but solid food is served to adults. Sometimes God gives consolation and savour to those who are imperfect to entice them and not to those who are perfect so as to give them a greater crown in heaven.

The one who looks beyond his own comfort must be regarded with greater love by his patron. When we persevere in prayer without feeling gratification the Lord God is more pleased and he confers glory and a greater reward on such a one. Because of this let all of us persevere in prayer. The Holy Spirit² says in chapter 7 of Ecclesiastes: "Better is the end of a prayer than a beginning." The Acts of the Apostles says of Mary and the disciples: "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus."³

These therefore are the conditions that should accompany prayer: posture of body, right intention, being attentive, confidence, humility and perseverance.

REGARDING THE RESULTS WHICH SHOULD BE PRESENT FOLLOWING PRAYER CHAPTER 24

The first result is listening to the word of God reverently and attentively, and being prepared to put it into practice. Because just as you wish to be heard by the Lord when you pray to him, so he also wishes to be heard and comprehended by you in sermons and holy books when he speaks to you, for we speak to God in prayer and he speaks to us in sermons and in readings from Sacred Scripture. When ever we do not want to listen to him, he will not hear our prayers. The Holy Spirit gives witness to this in chapter 28 of the Book of Proverbs: "Whoever turns his ears away from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination."⁴

The second result which should be present after prayer is obedience to the divine precepts. With what kind of confidence can a person who does not want to be continually subject to God but to despise him ask for grace from the Lord? On what grounds can he ask him for pardon if he does not seek to stop offending him? Therefore, after he has prayed, a Christian should carry out the will of God so that he might be both well prepared for prayer and better disposed to receive grace by observing his commandments. Thus the Holy Spirit says in chapter 35 of Ecclesiasticus: "Whoever keeps the law multiplies prayers. It is a wholesome sacrifice to take heed of the commandments, and to depart from all iniquity."⁵ David says in Psalm 36: "Be subject to God and pray to him".⁶ In chapter 17 of his work *On the Work of Monks* Augustine wrote: "The prayers of those who are obedient are answered more readily than ten thousand of those who despise God's precepts".⁷ In his commentary on chapter 7 of St Matthew St John Chrysostom wrote: "Prayer is nothing without good works, since the

¹ Cf Ps 26, 14 (*Vulg*).

² Qo 7, 8; but in the Vulgate we read: "Better is the end of a prayer than the beginning." (Ecclesiastes 7, 9).

³ Acts 1, 14.

⁴ Prov 28, 9.

⁵ Sir 35, 1-2.

⁶ Ps 36, 7 (*Vulg*) In the present translation the meaning is quite different Cf Ps 37, 7.

⁷ St Augustine, *The Work of Monks* chapter 17 n. 20 (*PL* 40, 565).

strength of prayer is upright works. Whoever wishes to obtain what he asks for in prayer should be always prepared to be obedient to the Lord”.¹

The third result that one looks for following prayer is compassion for the poor because cruelty towards one’s neighbour does not deserve mercy from God and the person who does not come to the assistance of those in need through the things which the Lord has given him will not be helped by the Lord in what he needs [...]².

The fourth and final result is moderation and propriety in lifestyle because prayer would be infantile³ and a useless thing if after having repeatedly offered yourself to the Lord as prepared to run away from sin, as being willing to serve him without delay and to conform to his way of living, and to endure adversity you did not truly show this by action. Because of this it is appropriate that after praying we be seen to be restrained in speech, well-adjusted in conduct, exemplary in lifestyle, having custody of the eyes, self-controlled in eating, modest in dress and circumspect in conduct, kind to our neighbour, reverent towards superiors, affable towards our equals, generous towards our subjects and amiable towards all, guarded and well-behaved towards ourselves and everyone in our family, living in a religious manner according to God [...].⁴

THE CAUSES OF THE MYSTERIES AND THEIR ORDER CHAPTER 25

Wonder is born when we do not know the cause of something. Performance is perfected when we know the cause. Since we wish to discuss the mysteries of Christ’s life we shall firstly state their cause in order to create greater resolve in the mind.

We have said⁵ that prayer is the raising of the mind to God through pious sensations which generate the acts that are needed which are three kinds: oblation, petition and thanksgiving.⁶ Among all these things nothing is as useful and necessary as the mysteries of the Lord.

In order to raise our mind to God we need to know first of all where He is, otherwise we shall not know where to direct our mind. For this reason, during the time of the natural law,⁷ the Lord ordered the construction of altars so that the faithful would know how to raise their minds to Him. Subsequently, during the period under the law,⁸ he had them make tabernacles or pavilions in the desert in which He spoke and they listened. Later He commanded the construction of the holy Temple in Jerusalem, and He did all this so that His

¹ St John Chrysostom *In Math hom.* 23, n. 5 (PG 57-58, 314, the thought expressed there only partly corresponds to what is expressed here).

² In the text we read *quelle cose l’ha dato il Signore (the things which the Lord has given)*. Compassion for those who are in need is a characteristic of Capuchin spirituality.

³ That is: child’s play. In later edition we read: *giuoco da putti (a game of little boys)*.

⁴ Here the author has written useful pages against the lust and vanity of men and women as exemplified in these remarks: “It would be a very profane thing and against the Christian religion for you to possess many ostentatious things and comfortable ornaments while leaving Christ’s poor naked and trembling with the cold... It is necessary that a person not only despise the present world, but chastise the flesh itself and bring it under subjection...” At the end the chapter is summarised in the usual way: “So that a person may be prepared for prayer, four things are required as a consequence of prayer, namely. Listening to the word of God with humility, observing faithfully what is read and understood, being compassionate to a person in need and living a disciplined life in one’s conduct.”

⁵ *Dissemo* in the text = *dicemmo*.

⁶ See above.

⁷ *Tempo della natura* in the text = the period of natural law before Moses.

⁸ That is during the period of the Mosaic Law.

people might more easily raise their mind to God. Although they could not see Him with their bodily eyes, because He is spirit, still they understood with their minds that in that place the God of majesty was ready to listen to them and really hear them and they came there with respect like people who go into the hall of a king, where He lived in a pavilion even though they did not see Him with their eyes in the pavilion, then comprehended with their soul and they paid reverence.

However, Christ, who possesses the fullness of the divine nature because He is true God and perfect man, is given to us who live during the period of grace,¹ to whom we have raised our minds to God. As a person sees with the eyes of his body and understands within his soul through the senses, so when he has gathered thoughts on the mysteries of the Lord Jesus Christ he is moved by what is divine and is heard by Christ Himself.

Thus there is no better way to focus one's thoughts on God than by means of these mysteries because through these mysteries we have in mind Christ, who possesses the divine nature. Because of this whoever takes these mysteries to heart possesses Christ who brings this about. Whoever possesses Christ possesses God because Christ is God. This is easy because not only is He God but He is also perfect man, like us, except for sin.² The Lord says this in chapter 14 of St John: "Have I been so long a time with you and have you not known me? Philip he who sees me sees the Father also".³

Secondly, also with regard to the acts of prayer nothing is as profitable as these mysteries. With respect to oblation, they provide most excellent example for you. If you undertake the first step in the prayer of oblation which is readiness to avoid evil you will recognise what displeases God by means of these mysteries, because evil really consists in choosing what Christ shunned and turning away from what He chose. You can understand all this clearly by means of the acts of His holy life as demonstrated in these mysteries.

With respect to the second step in the prayer that is oblation, which is offering ourselves for His service and doing His divine will, Christ himself was the rule and example of this in His mysteries which if one follows he will do God's will and be certain of salvation.⁴ With regard to the third step in the prayer of oblation which is giving oneself willingly to endure adversity, the mysteries of Christ and his wonderful patience will not only be a useful teaching but also afford inner comfort in enduring such things with joy. All torment and suffering will be joyful to him who contemplates Christ's great affliction with living faith.⁵ Thus for the first kind of prayer, which is oblation, the mysteries of Christ are most appropriate.⁶

With regard to the second kind of prayer which consists in being freed from evil and supported⁷ both in the needs of soul and body, and which will be given after being blessed in glory, the most effective remedy are Christ's mysteries and begging to be heard through these

¹ In the New Testament.

² Cf. Heb 4, 15.

³ Cf. Jn 14, 9.

⁴ He could not have stated the principle of conformity to Christ which is the fundamental programme of a Christian more forcefully or practically.

⁵ This thought was already present in Ochino and was further developed by Mattia da Salò in his sermons *Dei dolori di Cristo*.

⁶ The meaning is: For the initial act of prayer, which is oblation, Christ's mysteries are the most useful method of oblation.

⁷ *Suvenito* in the text = *sovvenuto*.

mysteries. Thus everything comes through Christ and His mysteries with regard to what the eternal Father has given to us, is giving or will give.

The third kind of prayer which is thanksgiving is the most worthy way to satisfy completely what we owe to God because it includes all the graces and gifts that He has given to us or will give as we shall see later.

In addition to this, just as a ship at sea drops anchor in order to be safe and steady similarly our mind needs to have something to keep it attentive and secure from wandering and there is nothing better to achieve this than the mysteries of the Lord Jesus, because they can be perceived by the senses and considered profoundly as they provide to keep the mind occupied.¹

So that a person can pass from one thing to another in order to avoid becoming bored, he may consider the thirty three mysteries which commemorate the thirty three years which the loving Jesus, our Lord and God, spent here with us on earth in such a way that a devout person can review this or that mystery in intense reflection.² In this way by means of long practice and with divine assistance he will pray with such ease and grace that his mind will be fixed on these mysteries not only during prayer, but, because they are so deeply rooted in his heart with so much love, wherever he is they will occupy his mind even when he is doing other things and they will always be in his heart like a bunch of myrrh,³ and what will take place in the soul will be what the Lord proclaimed through the Prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations chapter three: “Remember my poverty, and transgression, the wormwood and the gall” and the response will come as follows: “I will be mindful and remember, and my soul shall languish within me”.⁴

CONSIDERING THE NUMBER AND ORDER OF THE MYSTERIES. CHAPTER 26

Knowledge of the road makes the traveller feel more secure, counting the miles makes the journey easier and the trip more enjoyable: so too giving details of the mysteries will make the steps in holy prayer more sweet and consoling to the devout soul. Therefore, let us collect them all here briefly and in an orderly manner. They are the following:

[1] The profound mystery of eternal election, when, having loved us with perpetual charity⁵ the omnipotent Father decided *from eternity* to free us from sin, to justify us and in the end to glorify all those who sought to believe, love and follow His only Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ, and to obey Him. He did this by no other means than through Jesus Christ himself and his merits.

[2] The miraculous mystery of the Incarnation, when in the fullness of time,⁶ through the work of the Holy Spirit, the eternal Word took human flesh in the immaculate womb of the most blessed Virgin, remaining there for a period of nine months.

[3] The joyful mystery of the happy birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, when by order of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus¹ the census² to count all the people in the world, calculated

¹ This concept is also developed by Bellintani in his sermon *Dei dolori di Cristo* which we have quoted.

² This thought is quite common in spiritual literature and can be found in Girolomo da Molfetta, Bernardino Occhino, Paolo Manassei and many more.

³ This is a well known thought that goes back to St Bernard and St Bonaventure.

⁴ Treni in the text = Lamentations. Cf. Lam 3, 19-20.

⁵ Cf. Gen 31, 3.

⁶ Cf. Gal 4, 4.

calculated the day on which Maria gave birth and bore the Lord Jesus in Bethlehem while remaining immaculate and always a virgin. As there was no room in the crib she placed him on straw wrapped in poor little pieces of cloth.³ It happened this way for love of us and to set us an example of the King of glory lying in such great poverty. During that night he was visited by shepherds. In marvellous splendour, when all were frightened, the angel proclaimed with great festivity: “Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all people: for this day is born to you a Saviour”. And there was with the angel the loud voice of the heavenly army, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will.”⁴ The baby Jesus was visited by shepherds and fed by most sweet Mary.

[4] The compassionate mystery of Christ’s circumcision, on the eighth day, was meant to set us an example of perfect obedience, and to strip us of what is superfluous. He was circumcised according to the law and at the divine command as revealed by an angel he was given the sweet, name Jesus, which is wonderful and to be adored⁵

[5] The venerable mystery of the adoration of the divine one by the Wise Men, when by means of a marvellous prodigy in the heavens, and guided by a miraculous star to the place where the child Jesus was laying, the Magi entered and found Him with his mother Mary, and kneeling on the ground adored Him and offered Him gold as for a great king, incense as for the high priest and myrrh as a sign of His burial because He would subsequently die. On the advice of an angel in a dream the Magi returned to their country by another way.⁶

[6] The sacred mystery of the devout presentation in the temple which took place according to the law of purification forty days later, occurred when his most holy mother, with a gift characteristic of poor people, to observe the law and out of love of us, offered the Lord Jesus in the temple, and there where the just man Simeon was waiting, He was placed in his arms while he proclaimed to Mary that the sword of her Son’s passion would pierce her heart. The prophetess Anna was also in the temple and she professed publicly that He was the saviour⁷ of Israel.

[7] The frightening mystery of the shuddering flight into Egypt when wicked Herod realised that he had been tricked by the Magi being covetous of the kingdom and fearful of losing it had innocent children of two years and above put to death. Most holy Joseph took the baby Jesus and His Mother into Egypt after being warned by an angel.⁸

[8] The perplexing mystery of the painful finding in the temple, when, after Herod had died, they were advised by an angel to return from Egypt to Nazareth and following the custom of the law after the Lord Jesus had come to Jerusalem with Joseph and Mary on the occasion of the feast, they lost Him and looked for Him in sorrow. On the third day they found Him sitting in the temple with the doctors, questioning them and replying with great prudence, even though He was still a child of twelve years of age.⁹

¹ In the text *Agosto*.

² *Discretione* in the text = *descrizione*.

³ Cf. Lk 2, 1-7.

⁴ Lk 2, 8-14.

⁵ Lk 2, 21.

⁶ Mt 2, 1-12.

⁷ *Ricatto* in the text = *riscatto*. Cf. Lk 2, 22-38.

⁸ Cf. Mt 2, 13-18.

⁹ Cf. Lk 2, 41-46.

[9] The humble mystery of exemplary subjection to Joseph and Mary when the Lord Jesus, after returning with them to Nazareth, was subject to them until He was thirty years of age, and the glorious exchanges which Jesus had with Joseph and Mary and His prompt obedience to them.¹

[10] The salutary mystery of the baptism in the Jordan when the Lord Jesus was baptised² by John the Baptist at thirty years of age and the Holy Spirit was seen above the Lord in the Jordan in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice was heard: "this is my beloved Son", and John pointed to him saying, "This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world".³

[11] The exemplary mystery of the miraculous fast in the desert, when He left the Jordan filled with the Holy Spirit and went into the desert and lived alone there for forty days and forty nights, during which time He neither ate nor drank and had nothing else by bare earth often continuing in prayer to set us an example.⁴

[12] The generous mystery of the cruel temptation and the Lord's strong victory, when, after the fast of forty days had come to an end, He was assaulted⁵ by mischievous Satan, who tried to make Him turn stones into bread if He was the Son of God to make Him fall into the vice of gluttony and of treating God as suspect; throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, so that He would be overcome by vain glory, and that he would give Him the whole world if He bowed down and adored him thinking to turn Him towards idolatry by means of avarice. However the kind Lord overcomes this in a noble manner by saying that human life does not consist of bread alone, but in the word of God as well, and since a person can descend by means of a ladder there is no need to put God to the test. With all his pride Satan should withdraw to the rear as it is written: "You must adore the Lord your God and serve him alone",⁶ thereby setting a noble example of how to overcome temptations in a virtuous manner.

[13] The wonderful mystery of the choosing of the Apostles when the best mediator, having begged the Father by fasting and prayer, and having won the battle with the fierce enemy, wishing to call the world to penance and to communicate divine grace to people chose twelve Apostles to be with Him as witnesses⁷, to whom (except for the traitor) He would subsequently give the fullness of the Holy Spirit and whom He would send as His most faithful ambassadors to proclaim forgiveness and penance to all people.⁸

[14] The most reliable mystery of wholesome teaching, when the heavenly teacher and supreme master, having become our guide, taught us clearly all that He had received from His Father⁹ that was necessary for our salvation, the gravity of sin and the value of grace. He also declared the bitterness of hell, the happiness of heaven, the effectiveness of divine love, the way to serve God, how to overcome temptation, the charity we owe to our neighbour, disciplining ourselves, enduring adversity, moderation in prosperity, the effectiveness of faith,

¹ Cf. Lk 2, 51-52.

² *Battigiato* in the text = *battezzato*. Cf. Jn 1, 29; Mt 3, 13-17; Mk 1, 9-11; Lk 3, 21-22.

³ Cf. Jn 1, 29; Mt 3, 13-17; Mk 1, 9-11; Lk 3, 21-22.

⁴ Mt 4, 1-2; Mk 1, 12; Lk 4, 1-2; see also *Const 1536*. n. 26. *Vacando* in the text = *attendendo*.

⁵ *Assagiato* in the text = *assaltato*.

⁶ Cf. Mt 4, 3-11; Lk 4, 3-13.

⁷ Cf. Lk 6, 12-13; Mt 3, 13-15; Mk 3, 13-15.

⁸ Cf. Mt 28, 19-20; Mk 16, 15-16.

⁹ Jn 8, 26; 14, 24; 15, 15.

the excellence of charity, the benefit of hope, the glory of humility and, in brief, all those things that are helpful, necessary, useful and beneficial to our salvation.

[15] The awesome mystery of wonderful miracles, when for our salvation and as a testimonial to what is true, as true God and perfect man, He worked miracles so that the entire world would be saved. He accredited Himself and his teachings¹ by stunning miracles and wonderful signs, casting out devils, giving sight to the blind, restoring the speech of the dumb, hearing to the deaf, the power of walking to the lame, health to those who were sick and life to those who were dead, cleansing lepers,² changing water into wine, multiplying loaves, walking on the waves of the sea, stilling the wind, calming the storm,³ causing the earth to quake when He died, darkening the sun, splitting rocks, opening graves from which the dead came out to confess that He was God.⁴ He did all of this so that the world might receive eternal salvation by believing in Him and obeying Him.

[16] The glorious mystery of the splendid transfiguration, when our loving Lord was transfigured on the mountain to take away our fear of death and to give us the courage to suffer, by displaying the glory which the elect will possess, in the presence of Peter, James and John. While praying His face appeared brighter than the sun and His clothing as white as snow. Moses and Elijah appeared with Him discussing heavenly things. Peter was so moved that he requested that three tents be raised not knowing what he was saying because he was lost in wonder. The Holy Spirit appeared in a shining cloud and the voice of the Father was heard from the midst of the cloud: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, listen to him." When the Apostles were gripped by great fear they were comforted by the Lord and coming down from the mountain He them not to speak about this mystery until He had risen from the dead.⁵

[17] The regal mystery of the royal entry into Jerusalem with palms, when the humble Lord, who despised the world's ambitious pomp and show, entered Jerusalem on a poor donkey. He was greeted with palms in great solemnity and triumph by people who cried out with loud voices: "Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel."⁶ This entry took place where the merciful Lord wept over their sins, over the great destruction which the city would suffer at the hands of the Romans, over His death and their abstinence, where during the siege⁷ a mother would eat her own child out of excessive hunger,⁸ when a stone would not left upon a stone. On the occasion of this glorious entry into Jerusalem He cast the sellers out of the temple with a cord and then preached until nightfall.⁹

[18] The tearful mystery of asking a distressing permission of his mother, when the time for His bitter Passion had come, when He had to leave His mother, He humbly knelt down (according to pious belief)¹⁰ and asked permission and pardon with many tears, thanking His

¹ Cf. Jn 10, 25; Acts 2, 22.

² Cf. Mt 11, 4-6; Lk 4, 16-21.

³ Cf. Respectively Jn 2, 1-11; 6, 1-13, 16-21; Mk 4, 37-41; etc.

⁴ Cf. Mt 27, 51-54.

⁵ Cf. Lk 9, 28-36; Mt 17, 1-9; Mk 9, 2-10.

⁶ Cf. Mt 21, 4-9; Mk 11, 1-11; Lk 19, 35-38.

⁷ *Assegio* in the text = *assedio*.

⁸ A macabre detail related by Josephus Flavius. Cf. *De bello judaico*, lib. VI, c. 3, n. 4 (*Flavii Josephi operum t. II*, Lugduni 1726,382). For Jesus crying over Jerusalem cf. Lk 19, 41-44.

⁹ Mt 21, 12-13; Mk 11, 11, 15-19; Lk 19, 45-46.

¹⁰ In fact this fact was made up by the imagination of devout Christian popular tradition. It is not related in the Gospel. Cf. above note 54. Verucchino also dedicated a meditation to this, specifically meditation 4; *Sei punti*

dear mother for the many hardships, privations and anxieties which she had endured for Him in the flight into Egypt, when worriedly looking for Him in the temple and enduring such stark poverty, comforting her so that she could bear what the Lord had to suffer, such as being scourged at the pillar, crowned with thorns, unjustly condemned, nailed to the cross and taken down from it with five wounds and holding Him in her arms and placing Him in the tomb. For her part His tearful mother asked pardon for not having served Him as she should have and thanked Him for having deigned to accept her service and for His love and she offered herself as ready to undergo any sadness. Following many sighs and tears they embraced one another and she gave Him permission to go to His death for us ungrateful people.

[19] The mystery of the long-anticipated holy supper, when filled with longing, the night before His bitter Passion, the Lord Jesus gave Himself as food, as He celebrated His last supper with His disciples, where He ordained the Apostles as priests and shared His most holy body and precious blood with them, humbly washed their feet with His own hands and kissed them with His sacred mouth while kneeling in front of them. Here He also declared that one of them would betray Him and delivered a dynamic address and having given thanks to the Father withdrew to the garden to pray.¹

[20] The devout blood-stained and fervent prayer in the garden, when the Lord, being in a state of anguish, having given thanks after supper, while the traitor Judas was negotiating with the High Priest and the Pharisees how to betray Him, while he was coming with the soldiers and the servants of the Jews, with lanterns, clubs and swords to apprehend Him, the humble Lord waited for three hours in great fervour for the moment to come. Having comforted His apostles, He called Peter, James and John aside and showed them his great distress, saying that his soul was sorrowful to the point of death and asking them to keep watch with Him and pray so that they would not be overcome by temptation and going about a stone's throw away from them on His own He prayed three times for the space of three hours: whether it was possible for the chalice of His Passion to pass Him by. However, He placed everything at the disposal of His Father's will and setting us an example He said: "Not my will but your will be done, O my Father." This prayer was so intense and His anguish so great that He perspired blood which flowed down over His knees and soaked into the ground He reproved Peter for not being able to spend a hour with Him, and while enduring such bitterness He was comforted by an angel.²

[12] The horrendous mystery of Christ's most cruel arrest and binding when the traitor Judas came up to Him in the garden to take Him and as the Apostles woke up the fearless Lord met him and when He received a kiss from the traitor asked who they were looking for and they replied: "Jesus of Nazareth" He immediately answered "I am he" and they fell to the ground three times till He finally said to them: "If you are looking for me, let my disciples go" and they bound Him tightly and took Him to Annas and Caiaphas, the high priest where He was questioned about his disciples and His teaching to which He replied: "I have spoken publicly to the world, as those who heard me". He was struck in the face solidly by the hand of a contemptible servant, and before the cock crowed He was denied three times by Peter. When asked He confessed that He was the Son of God and they spat in His face. He was judged worthy of death by the high priest and all who were standing around and He endured serious torture during the whole night until morning.³

per meditare l'ultima licenza che Cristo Salvatore tolse dalla sua benedetta Madre per andar alla morte. Cf. Compendio di cento meditazioni sacre, Venezia 1602, 313-321.

¹ Cf. Jn 13, 1-38; Mt 26, 17-29; Mk 14, 12-25; Lk 22, 7-22.

² Cf. Lk 22, 39-46; Mt 26, 36-46; Mk 14, 32-42.

³ Cf. Mt 26, 47-67; Mk 14, 43-52; Lk 22, 47-53; Jn 18, 2-11.

[22] The long-suffering mystery of false abuse and contempt, when in the morning meek Jesus was presented by the priests to Pilate, who knew He was innocent, but when he was seriously harassed by the Jews sent Him to Herod, who was anxious to see Him and curious to ask Him many questions. When the gentle Lord remained silent Herod ridiculed Him as a madman. To add more contempt and scorn Herod had Him dressed in a white garment and sent back to Pilate in disgrace, after which Herod and Pilate became friends whereas they had been enemies. This happened to show the benefits that could come from Christ's patient tolerance.¹

[23] The painful mystery of the most harsh scourging when the totally innocent Lord by command of Pilate to please the perfidious and enraged Jews, stripped Him of His clothing, tied Him to a column and had Him bitterly scourged to the extent that His precious blood flowed from all His limbs and soaked into the ground setting us the best example of endurance.²

[24] The punishing mystery of the crown of thorns when because of the severe uproar of the people wicked Pilate thinking that he could placate the furious anger of the Jews had a harsh crown of spiked thorns placed on the head of the Lord Jesus and had Him draped with a purple garment the colour of saffron.³ And a reed placed in His hand. After the soldiers had blindfolded Him they spat in his face and struck His face with their hands and out of disrespect greeted Him: "Let God save you, King of the Jews." When striking Him they said: "If you are a prophet guess who hit you." Set like this they paraded Him before the people saying: "*Behold the man*" and in a loud voice they all proclaimed: "Take Him and crucify Him for He certainly deserves to die."⁴

[25] The tiring mystery of the evil sentence and the carrying of the cross when most wicked Pilate for fear of Caesar, being unable to satisfy the cruel people, fearful of losing his office, after freeing the murderer and seditious Barabbas at the request of the people according to the Jewish custom of setting a prisoner free on the solemnity of the Pasch, the most evil judge sat on the tribunal pronounced an unjust sentence on most holy Jesus, who after carrying His cross on His shoulders was placed on the cross on Mount Calvary with two thieves on each side of Christ. While He was carrying the cross on His shoulders He said to the women who were crying out of compassion for Him: "Do not cry over me but over yourselves and your children, because if they do this in the green what greater punishment will be yours?" He met his sorrowful mother at the gate of the city and both fell to the ground out of intense sorrow, and as the Lord was exhausted by such severe suffering, tears and scourging He could not carry the cross so to hasten progress Simon of Cyrene was forced to help and thus in great pain they led Him to Mount Calvary, the place of judgement.⁵

[26] The dreadful mystery of the cruel crucifixion, when, on the mountain, in the presence of wretched people, the tormented Lord was stripped naked and placed on the cross with his most holy feet and sacred hands being pierced by big nails and hard hammers. With His whole body being racked with the utmost pain, the cross was raised with a written note by Pilate affixed to it in Hebrew, Greek and Latin: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". As He hung on the cross His mother and all the surrounding people heard Him say seven words for our instruction: against anger, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do;" to the

¹ Cf. Lk 23, 1-12; Mt 22, 1-2; Mk 15, 1.

² Cf. Mt 27, 26; Mk 15, 15; Jn 19, 1.

³ This detail was omitted from subsequent editions perhaps because the colour of saffron was not purple.

⁴ Cf. My 27, 27-31; Mk 15, 16-20; Jn 19, 1-16.

⁵ Cf. Mt 27, 20-26; 31-32. 38; Mk 15, 6-15. 21-22. 27; Lk 23, 13-19, 26-32; Jn 19, 17.

thief, against avarice, “Today you will be with me in paradise;” to His mother, “Woman, behold your Son”; to the disciple, “Behold your mother;” against lust because of great sorrow, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” against gluttony, “I thirst;” against sloth, “It is consummated;” that is, everything is done; against pride, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,” after He said these words, following many torments, pains and sorrows, He gave His spirit back to His Father and His body remained hanging on the cross in death.¹

[27] The emotional mystery of the bitter weeping, when, following the death of the Lord, when the crowd had dispersed, and while Mary remained with John, Mary Salome and Mary Magdalene and other devout persons at the foot of the cross, they compassionately contemplated quite tearfully the pale and torn limbs, which were still on the wood of the cross. When the noble Joseph had gained access to Jesus’ body from Pilate, he and Nicodemus took it down from the cross and placed it on the ground on a white sheet with Mary standing at the head and Mary Magdalene at the feet surrounded by the others uttering bitter and sorrowful sobs over the body while everyone shed abundant, copious tears.² This adds to what was written: “In that day there shall be great lamentation in Jerusalem;” and “and they shall say to him: What are these wounds in the midst of your hands?”³

[28] The dark mystery of the gloomy tomb when, after many tears and sorrowful sobs and after taking care of the body with myrrh (following the Jewish custom), they carried it to the grave and closed the tomb after many tears leaving the sorrowful Mother’s soul buried with the body out of love of her child. As they returned home they passed the place where the blood-stained cross stood and they became sorrowful again and shed many tears while kissing the ground that was soaked with that precious blood. They returned home together.⁴

[29] The glorious mystery of the joyful resurrection, when, on the third day, at dawn on Sunday, the Lord Jesus’ glorious soul shattered hell’s gates, bound Lucifer the proud prince of the realm of darkness, emptied Limbo and accompanied by the hosts of heaven and bringing the souls of the ancient Fathers with Him, entered the happy tomb and at the command of God collected the sacred blood into His precious veins and immediately raised his body in victory. By means of the glorious gift of movement, without the least concern about the tomb, He went out observed by the saintly Fathers and appeared bright and beautiful, with the glorious banner of triumphant victory conveying peace. Many dead bodies of saints rose with Him. Immediately the high citizens of heaven descended, that is the holy angels, and a big earthquake frightened the guards while the angels stood in the tomb with white garments as a sign of joy, and said in a loud voice to the women who had come to anoint the body: “You seek Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is risen, come and see the place.”⁵ The Lord consoled His mother and His disciples with many happy and sweet appearances and conversed with them for up to forty days, often teaching them, eating and drinking with them, thus demonstrating to them clearly and effectively the truth of His resurrection.⁶

¹ Cf. Mt 27, 33-50; Mk 15, 23-37; Lk 23, 33-46; Jn 19, 23-30. The Christ’s “seven words” on the cross have been treated by a vast amount of devotional literature.

² Cf. Mt 27, 55-59; Mk 15, 40-45; Lk 23, 47-52; Jn 19, 38-40. Note what pious imagination has added to the scene which may have inspired works of art at the time.

³ Zacharias 12, 11; 13, 6.

⁴ Here too we observe how compassion has added to pious devotion which was doubtlessly inspired by the familiar *Meditationes vitae Christi*, chapter 83.

⁵ Cf. Mt 28, 1-6; Mk 16, 1-6.

⁶ Cf. Acts 1, 3; 10, 40-41. Certain apocryphal details attest to the content of meditation that was spread by popular devotion, as can also be seen in the meditations of Verucchino. Cf. *Compendio di cento meditazioni sacre*, medit. 72-74.

[30] The triumphant mystery of the jubilant ascension, when forty days after His resurrection, when His disciples and His mother had come together at the Mount of Olives, after He had eaten with them and talked about many marvellous things, looking at them all with joy, He ascended triumphantly into heaven. When He had ascended in this way, all stood there amazed and then two angels appeared amongst them in human form and exclaimed in a joyful voice: “Men of Galilee, why are you looking up to heaven? The Lord Jesus will come in the same way that you have seen Him ascend in glory.”¹ With this exalted triumph and supreme majesty the Lord pierced the heavens accepting glorious command of everything, becoming our advocate, adored by the angels, seated at the right hand of the Father forever.

[31] The very rick mystery of the anticipated sending of the Holy Spirit, when, fifty days after the resurrection, when Mary was with the Apostles and disciples devoutly praying in the house, suddenly there was a loud noise from heaven and the Holy Spirit was sent and He hovered over them in the form of tongues of fire and they and the whole house were filled. The Holy Spirit revealed great mysteries to them, and (even though they were simple people) He gave them knowledge of all languages. Because the event was so extraordinary a large crowd came to them and they preached to the crowd in a wonderful way about exalted things and all became overcome with wonder. This took place in such a manner that, having been made ambassadors of the eternal King and filled with the Holy Spirit, they went everywhere with the Lord working with them so that (as we have seen) they whole world came to the cross.²

[32] The fearful mystery of the universal judgement, when at the end of the world the fearsome judge will come down in glory and majesty, accompanied by hosts of angels, carrying the symbol of His victory in front of Him, we shall all be summoned to a terrifying judgement by the voice of an archangel and a dreadful trumpet. The graves have been opened and those who have risen with their own bodies will appear before Him to give a strict account of their thoughts, words and actions. When those who were good have been separated from those who were evil, like sheep from goats, He will call the elect to Himself pronouncing as an excellent reason for their happiness and glory that they fled from evil and in obedience to Him performed works of mercy. When the reprobates together with the devil and his angels have been condemned to perpetual flames for having been³ rebels to the divine majesty and cruel instead of merciful, the judgement will be complete and the just judge will have rendered a worthy reward to each one according to his own actions.⁴

[33] The most happy mystery of the immediate and wished-for restitution of the conquered kingdom to the Father and our joyful possession of that kingdom, when, once the judgement has been completed, the Lord Jesus, taking all the elect with Him, ascends in the presence of the eternal Father in great triumph and most excellent glory, returning the conquered kingdom of the elect to the Father, as with deep joy and solemn celebration he says: “Behold, O Father, I have completed the work which you assigned to me *from eternity*. I have restored everything by means of my blood shed on the cross. O my Father, accept the noble treasure I have won, so that your saints may be happy with me forever: You in me, and I in them; with all being united together in perpetual joy and eternal happiness.”⁵ When the Father has accepted all this, the Father will be content with us and us with Him eternally. O eternal joy. Blessed are those who possess you forever! May all give thanks, O supreme Father, that through our Lord

¹ Cf. Lk 24, 50-51; Acts 1, 6-12.

² Acts 2 1-41.

³ *Per haver stati* in the original text = *per essere stati* here.

⁴ Cf. Mt 25, 31-46; Rev 8, 6; 20, 12-13. Note the influence of the *Dies irae*.

⁵ This is a summary of Christ's priestly prayer. Cf. Jn 17, 1-26.

Jesus Christ, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we have arrived here as your faithful servants and surrounded with such good things have been brought together in celebration and joy world without end forever. Amen.

In chapters 27-28 it is explained how all of these mysteries should be committed to memory. A “short model” is put forward for meditating on them according to the rules which have already been proposed. Bernardino da Balvano lists the spiritual fruits of these mysteries.

CONCERNING THE TWELVE FRUITS WHICH THOSE WHO DWELL ON THE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST IN PRAYER WILL BEAR. CHAPTER 29.

We show an apple to a child and a green field to a sheep to entice them more easily. We speak about profit to a greedy man to make him anxious to take action. The sweet fruits and very rich hidden treasures that are sealed in Christ’s mysteries and the abundant benefits which are received by those who practice prayer in the manner described above¹ are set before devout persons and beginners in prayer so that novices may be enticed² more easily and those who have a deeper tendency towards prayer may advance towards greater things so that they may gain more grace. Although such fruits may be many and the treasures infinite even during the present life still we shall mention, in addition to those which were mentioned in the chapter on the value of prayer,³ a few of them for the benefit of devout people. These are:

[1] The first fruit that comes to those who diligently consider the mysteries and who, through them, become Christ’s brothers, sisters and mothers, as the Lord Jesus says in chapter 12 of Matthew: “Whoever shall do the will of my Father, who is in heaven, is my brother, sister and mother.”⁴ Because the supreme Father’s will is that we become conformed to the image of His Son, as the Apostle wrote to the Romans: “he predestined us to be made conformable to the image of his Son,”⁵ it is necessary that whoever wants to be conformed to the Son must know Him, and the way to know Him is the same as the way to be conformed to Him and this is by means of the above-mentioned mysteries, through which we come to know and understand His immaculate life which, for the person who observe them, is fulfilling the Father’s will and he becomes a brother, mother and sister to the Lord Jesus.

[2] The second fruit is that by doing this, more than by any other method, the devout person becomes enlightened concerning everything that is beneficial for salvation. For the Lord Jesus is the wisdom of the Father, the mirror without blemish and the image of God.⁶ Thus by contemplating His mysteries you will be enlightened by the same wisdom. You will gaze into the mirror and you will understand by what is reflected how wonderful is the divine goodness that gave His own Son up for you.⁷ How horrible sin is to cancel which He shed his own blood! How bitter are the pains of hell, to free you from which he suffered such anxiety! How important is the happiness of heaven for which He paid so high a price so that you might possess it! How you ought to value your neighbour and your salvation for which He shed His own blood with so much suffering! In short, nothing should be learnt more quickly as being

¹ Cf. above chapters 13, 22-25.

² That is, be attracted.

³ That is chapter 21: *On the value of prayer* where the reasons of why prayer is valuable “and of benefit to the soul, the body and everything else.” are listed

⁴ Mt 12. 50

⁵ Rom 8, 29.

⁶ Cf. Wis 7, 26; see also

⁷ Such thoughts have a long history and are present already in St Clare and also in the 1536 Constitutions n. 113. They enjoy wide usage in Bernardino Ochino.

important for salvation¹ than how to often devoutly practice, as described above, of contemplating these mysteries and the life of the Lord.

Thus the Holy Spirit says in Psalm 35: “For with you is the fountain of light, and in your light we see light. Extend your mercy to them that know you and your justice to them that are right in heart.”² The Apostle says in chapter one of the First Letter to the Corinthians: “I give thanks to my God always for you, for the grace of God that is given to you in Christ Jesus. That in all things you are made rich in him, in all utterance and in all knowledge.”³ He wrote in the second chapter of the Letter to the Colossians: “That their hearts may be comforted, being instructed in charity and unto all riches of fullness of understanding, unto the knowledge of the mystery of God and of Christ Jesus in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”⁴

Therefore, anyone who wishes to learn quickly about everything that is required for his salvation should practice the exercise of considering Christ’s mysteries frequently.

[3] The third fruit is that they can overcome temptations easily and put evil spirits to flight. Just as wax melts in the presence of a flame all battles are won in the presence of God and the enemy is robbed of his strength, as the Holy Spirit states in Psalm 36: “The enemies of the Lord shall vanish like smoke.”⁵ Psalm 67 says: “Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered: and let them that hate him flee before his face.. As smoke vanishes, so let them vanish away as wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish in the presence of the Lord.”⁶ Since the Lord becomes present to us by means of careful thinking about His mysteries, then whoever wants to flee from any danger and gain glorious triumph over his enemies should meditate continuously on these mysteries.

[4] The fourth fruit is that through meditation on the mysteries and the vane and corruptible things of the present life which usually impede the salvation of souls are easily despised. We willingly give up wretched metal to receive precious gold. Once the faithful soul has tasted the pleasant sweetness of the divine mysteries, the whole world appears to be a nuisance to him compared to possessing these rich treasures as the Apostle, speaking from experience, declares to the Philippians: “The things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ. Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as dung that I may gain Christ.”⁷ Anyone who wishes to derive fruit from readily despising mortal things which must tragically be left behind at the time of death should keep Christ’s mysteries fresh in his mind.

[5] The fifth fruit which can be acquired in the thorough consideration of the mysteries is great peace of mind, peace with God and serenity of conscience, so that, by considering the mysteries one comes to appreciate how sweet the Lord is since so that we might have life Christ took death upon Himself. A person will easily arrive at sorrow for his sins and weep over his ingratitude by thinking about the countless benefits which the soul has gained through these mysteries, and will be gently persuaded to take the Lord’s yoke upon himself,

¹ This advice was repeated in Ochino’s sermons. *Sermon Preached in Perugia by Reverend Brother Bernardino da Siena of the Friars Minor Capuchins on the Feast of Sr Nicholas to the University Students.*

² Ps 35, 10-11. (*Vulg*).

³ I Cor 1, 4-5.

⁴ Cf Col 2, 2-3.

⁵ Ps 36, 20 (*Vulg*)

⁶ Ps 67, 2-3 (*Vulg*)

⁷ Ch Phil 3, 7-8.

through which as a consequence deep peace will come over him, as the Lord says in chapter 12 of St Matthew: “Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I shall refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you will find rest for your souls.”¹

[6] The sixth fruit of the mysteries is that in order to make our life consist of all the virtues, the perfect rule and best model, which will not only show you the will of God, but also the way to carry it out in doing what is acceptable and pleasing to the Lord God, is to follow what the Holy Spirit said in the twenty fifth chapter of Exodus: “Look, and make it according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mount.”² that is in Christ, the height of virtue and the peak of perfection, you will also have a safe and trustworthy guide for you in walking the heavenly path and coming to the kingdom above. By contemplating the mysteries you will come to know the life that He lived to take Him to heaven. Thus St John says in chapter 8: “I am the light of the world. He who follows me does not walk in darkness.”³ One cannot follow follow the way unless he knows it and it shines out in the mysteries, so that, whoever wishes to come out of the darkness and become perfect in a short space of time, should take these mysteries as his mirror, being ready to regulate his life by them.

[7] The seventh fruit is an abundance and accumulation of merits, because all the mysteries of the Lord are full of the richest treasures which the more we share in them with increased charity the more genuinely they impart love which stimulates us for the fervent and affectionate exercise of meditating on these mysteries. The Lord cries out in chapter eight of the Book of Proverbs: “I love them that love me and they that early in the morning watch for me shall find me. With me are riches and glory, glorious riches and justice. My fruit is better than and precious stone.”⁴ We read in chapter 15 of St John: “He that abides in me, and I in him will bear much fruit.”⁵ If you want to become rich with eternal benefits without much effort, stimulate yourself strongly with divine love the continually recalling these mysteries.

[8] The eighth fruit is tolerating all adversity with great patience and wonderful gratitude to God. This is so necessary that it is through this that a person possess his soul and obtains salvation, as the Lord says in chapter 21 of St Luke: “In your patience you shall possess your soul.”⁶ The Apostle Paul says in chapter 10 of the Letter to the Hebrews: “Patience is necessary for you that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promises.” There is no nobler or more excellent way in which you can endure everything with joy than the vivid thought and fresh memory of the mysteries and life of the Saviour.

When the deer is being chased by the hounds it looks for a stream to refresh itself. In adversity, a devout person flees to the mysteries of the Lord in fervent meditation and devout prayer and finds peace and rest in them. Thus, to comfort the faithful, the Apostle says in chapter 12 of the Letter to the Hebrews: “Let us run with patience to the fight proposed to us; looking on Jesus the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and not sits on the right hand of the throne of God. Think diligently about him that endured such opposition from sinners against himself that you not be wearied, fainting in your minds. For you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

¹ This is really Mt 11, 28-29

² Ex 23, 40.

³ Jn 8, 12.

⁴ Prov. 8, 17-19.

⁵ Jn. 15, 5.

⁶ Lk. 24. 12.

You have forgotten the consolation which speaks to you as to children.”¹ It is written in chapter 24 of St Luke: “Why are you troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? See my hands and feet, that it is I myself,”² that is with the power to accomplish what I promised and through the mysteries of my life to give the faithful steady patience and tranquil peace.

[9] The ninth fruit is an ardent flame and great warm feeling towards divine love. Christ Jesus came down from heaven to inflame human breasts with heavenly charity and He prepared plenty kindling which were the countless benefits that He conferred on us in all the acts and gestures of His most holy life which, for those who often turn to them with warm affection, sparkle on all sides with spiritual love.³ The Apostle speaks of this warmth in chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans: “I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, not any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴ The disciples said in chapter 24 of St Luke: “Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke on the way and opened to us the scriptures.”⁵ Did not your heart boil with perfect delight when you heard Christ Jesus speaking to your soul during meditation? You will see everything if you consider these mysteries fervently and with feeling.

[10] The tenth fruit is an unshakable confidence in asking the supreme God for whatever you need. With respect to the eternal Father we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord without any doubt that He will grant what we ask. Thus the holy Church concludes all her prayers through Christ and His mysteries; through His birth, baptism, fast, cross, passion, death, resurrection and the other mysteries. Therefore, whoever wishes to obtain grace from God let him ask through Christ’s mysteries, through which we are permitted to ask with all confidence. This is what the Apostle says in the fifth chapter of the letter to the Romans: “Through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have access to this grace.” In Psalm 90 David says, when speaking in the name of Christ: “Because he hoped in me I will deliver him: I will protect him because he has known my name. He shall cry to me and I will hear him.”⁶

[11] The eleventh fruit is great assurance at the time of death. Since the person has often brought Christ to mind he will not feel much anxiety when he leaves this life, but rather much consolation. He who continually thinks about the Saviour’s mysteries and aligns himself with them cannot live at times without suffering especially when he considers His pain and bitter scourging. It is then that unshakable consolation develops in the soul according to what we read in Psalm 125: “They that sow in tears shall reap with joy.”⁷ In chapter one of his Second Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle says: “As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ does our comfort abound.”⁸ Therefore, if you want to leave this life without anxiety, anxiety, have Jesus Christ’s mysteries deeply engraved on your heart.

[12] The twelfth and final fruit is the happiness of glory and the excellence of the award. The more we are similar to Christ in suffering the closer we shall be with Him up there in the highest glory as the Apostle says in chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans: “If sons, heirs also;

¹ Heb 12, 1-5

² Lk 24, 38

³ This concept recalls various expressions of Bernardino Ochino.

⁴ Rom. 8, 38-39

⁵ Lk 24, 32.

⁶ The last two quotes are from: Rom 5, 1-2; Ps 40, 14 (*Vulg*)

⁷ Ps 125, 5.

⁸ 2 Cor 1, 5.

heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him.”¹ We read in chapter 12 of St John: “If any man minister to me, let him follow me: and where I am, there also shall my minister be. If anyone minister to me, him will my Father honour.”² For anyone to serve Christ he must suffer with Him and follow His example. The only way to do this is to always keep His mysteries in sight so that the soul may contemplate a real mirror of everything that is appropriate to do for one’s own salvation, to set an example for one’s neighbour in a way that is acceptable and pleasing to God.

Thus Paul professed openly that he did not want anything else except to know and think about Christ and His mysteries, as he wrote in chapter 2 of his First Letter to the Corinthians: “Brothers, I judged myself not to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ and him crucified.”³ He wrote in chapter 6 of his Letter to the Galatians: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” He concluded: “Henceforth let no man be troublesome to me: for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body,” that is the signs of Christ’s wounds.⁴ This came about through constant and fervent meditation.

Paul already knew well that our salvation and everything that is good depended on always carrying Christ and His mysteries engraved on our heart by means of ardent charity and imitating Him in our actions right to the end.⁵ So that no one would neglect this I placed these twelve fruits which come to those who take up this practice with fervour. These fruits are symbolised in the twelve fruits which John the Evangelist saw produced every month by the tree of life, which was planted in the middle of paradise. This is Christ, from whom devout souls, who think with the intellect, love with the will and imitate His actions in their deeds, receive these beautiful and sweet fruits, which Jesus Christ, our Lord, together with His Father and the Holy Spirit gives to those who deserve them.⁶

CONCERNING THE METHOD OF PRAYING TO THE SAINTS. CHAPTER 30

[...] We offer prayers to the saints in order to share their friendship and their duties and to offer something to the Lord God in gratitude and service by honouring on earth, as far as we can, the things they hold so dear in heaven so that the prayers which we offer may be heard through their merits and intercession.

Although this is true and possible for all the saints, it applies in a special manner to those to whom you are devoted. This is particularly true with respect to our most holy Mother, who is the Queen of heaven, Queen of the angels, the hope of sinners, the strength of the just, the joy of paradise, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, the spouse of the eternal Father, the most beloved mother of the Lord Jesus and the most effective advocate of the whole human race.⁷ Thus each day all the faithful should specifically offer her a present, recalling what we have done during the day, so that what we beg of the most Holy Trinity may be granted, that is that our prayers may be heard by the Lord.

¹ Rom 8, 17.

² Jn 12, 26.

³ 1 Cor. 2, 2.

⁴ Gal. 6, 14. 17.

⁵ Note the reference to the Apostle Paul as the model of meditation and the imitation of Christ’s mysteries.

⁶ The image is taken from Revelations 22, 2.

⁷ The Marian titles echo the Litany, and prayers and liturgical antiphons such as the *Ave Regina Coelorum*, *Salve Regina* etc.

Since devout persons usually recite the rosary,¹ we shall say a few words concerning how it is to be recited. The rosary consists in ten *Hail Marys* and then an *Our Father*.

The *Hail Mary* is put forward as a present or gift in praise of the Madonna, to perform something which is pleasing to her. The *Our Father* is offered in remembrance of what was composed by the Lord Jesus Christ, which contains all our needs and petitions, and thus by offering it to our most glorious Mother we are requesting that she deign to present it to the Divine Majesty and obtain divine kindness through her merits and that we obtain what it contains.

So that you may lift up your mind and keep it fixed take some of the mysteries that involve the Madonna and go over them in the same way as described above concerning the mysteries of the Lord. This is how you should offer the rosary or other prayers to the Madonna. For example you might do this on her seven feasts, which are, her most holy conception, birth, presentation in the temple, annunciation, visit to Elizabeth, her purification forty days after giving birth to Christ, her assumption into heaven.²

As you meditate on each one of these, offer your prayers in the manner described above and thus, while you are considering the mystery in this way at prayer, you will be led to contemplate how the conception took place, how she was preserved from all stain of sin, miraculously conceived by Anna who was sterile, how the soul of the most blessed Mary was adorned with grace, how she received the gift of free choice, how she was so pleasing and acceptable to God from her mother's womb, *predestined eternally* to be the mother of the Son of God, Queen of the kingdom on high and advocate of sinners. When you think like this you will rejoice over her many gifts and graces with her.³

Feeling respect, honour and reverence, as is noble and right, say the ten *Hail Marys* with devotion and as you offer them to her say like this: "O most glorious Mother, who is most happy and excellent beyond all other creatures, I rejoice over your gifts and graces. Although I am unworthy to offer a present to such a great Lady, still, because you are the Mother of mercy and worthy to be honoured, praised and given presents by everyone, I beg you to graciously accept this poor gift, which I offer with all my heart." When you say the *Our Father* say it like this: "O most clement advocate of the world, who are so acceptable to the eternal Father, who was conceived by the working of the Holy Spirit and born His Son, condescend to offer this prayer to the most Holy Trinity and grant through your clemency and merits that I obtain whatever it contains, according to the intentions of your Son and my Lord Jesus Christ as it was composed and given to His Apostles, so that as often as I say it, I may receive grace. Do this through your kindness and through the love that you have for your only beloved Son" Do the same for the mysteries of her birth, presentation and the others until you have finished the rosary.⁴

¹ This is a page from the history of Marian piety and specifically of the rosary and its mysteries. At this stage, however, the rosary was not divided into the traditional joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries.

² The seven feasts of Mary, as well as other mysteries for meditation, cover the rosary as suggested by Bernardino da Balvano.

³ In the Franciscan tradition the Immaculate Conception was defended also by the Capuchins and she subsequently became the principal patroness of the Order.

⁴ Note the emotional tone of these prayers which is put forward here in simple and popular language. The beginning of the first recalls Dante's famous line: "Virgine madre, figlia del tuo figlio, l'umile ed alta più che creatura" etc. *Virgin mother, daughter of your Son, humble and exalted more than any creature.*

If sometimes you want to have some variety and to avoid boredom you may meditate on the eight sorrows of the Madonna, for instance on Wednesday or Friday.¹ You should do so in the same way as you meditated on the feasts. The sorrows are the following:

First, at Christ's circumcision when she saw baby Jesus shed His precious blood and cry in pain as He was still so small.

Second, at the presentation of the Lord Jesus in the temple, when Simeon prophesied that she would be pierced by the sword of Christ's Passion when her heart would be opened out of compassion.

Third, when she would flee to Egypt in fear because of Herod's persecution.

Fourth, when he would be lost in the temple.

Fifth, when she would meet Him with the cross on his shoulder outside Jerusalem.

Sixth, when she would see Him so cruelly crucified on the cross between two thieves.

Seventh, when she held Him in her arms when He had been taken down from the cross covered in lacerations and together with the other women she uttered bitter cries over His body.

Eighth, when she carried Him to the grave and left Him inside coming away from Him.²

Sometimes you might consider the seven joys and they are as follows: First, when the angel made the announcement to her; second, when she gave birth and saw Christ born; third, the adoration of the Magi; fourth, when she found Jesus in the temple; fifth, Christ's resurrection; sixth, when she saw Him ascend into heaven in glory; seventh, when she was assumed body and soul into paradise.³

If you consider these mysteries when you say the rosary in the manner mentioned above you will find it rewarding and you will be doing something that pleases and serves the Lord.

Chapter 31 treats of another characteristic exercise of prayer which the author suggests should be performed daily; to pray by means of the "nine situations" of people which define everyone. These conditions are; sinners, the just, the tormented, the dead, those who do good, those to whom we are obligated, prelates and rectors in the Church, relatives and friends, and finally enemies. These "nine conditions" run parallel to the "nine times" that Jesus shed blood as explained in the following chapter.

[...] We should pray by means of the nine conditions mentioned above as this is not only proper but also necessary for us to apply the price which the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ paid for the world. This would make it more than sure that we will always be heard. So that this might be easier for you we shall give some parallels between these conditions and the shedding of the precious blood.⁴

[1] The first time on which the Lord shed blood was at His circumcision, which to the Jews signified remission of sin as baptism does to us today. The Lord underwent circumcision

¹ The text has *mercori e il venere* which = *il mercoledì e il venerdì*.

² Another devotion which was spread widely among the early Capuchins was the rosary of the Sorrowful Mother which consisted of eight sorrowful mysteries.

³ This is the Franciscan Crown expressed as *antonomasia*.

⁴ Ancient Capuchin bibliographies state that Bernardino da Balvano wrote a work entitled *De novem effusionibus sanguinis Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*, Venetiis 1559, Paris 1601 (Cf. **AC** I, 154; Bernardus a Bologna, *Biblioteca Scriptorum*, Venetiis 1742, 43; *Lexicon cap.*, 201). The book has not been found, but in all probability these pages of the *Mirror of Prayer* contain the substance and arrangements of topics in that book.

according to the law not for His sins but for our errors and this is the first condition which we ought to pray about as also for sinners. Thus we pray through the shedding of that most innocent blood that He condescend to free the whole world from sin and bring it back to the state of grace. For each condition say an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* in honour of that blood.

[2] The second time was in the garden, where because of His intense sorrow and the thought of the passion and death that he had to undergo, He sweated great drops of blood on the ground and with much strength of mind He reconciled Himself to suffer to conform to His Father's will. Therefore, we ought to pray for good people that, like the Lord who sweated blood with great determination of mind, that all fear would be taken away from them and that they would be given great strength to suffer and lovingly follow God's will.

[3] The third time was when He was scourged at the pillar where all His sacred limbs were wounded and tormented. Thus let us pray to Him that through the merits of His scourging He might condescend to grant assistance and grace to those who are afflicted by various tribulations, anxieties and trials in this life may undergo everything with patience for the honour and praise of the Lord and for their salvation.

[4] The fourth time was when the crown of thorns was placed on His head. Thus just as the head was the highest part of the Lord's body and thus vulnerable, so we pray for the souls of the dead in Purgatory, who are a vulnerable part of Christ's mystical body even though they are in a higher place than we who are alive. While we suffer like they do, they are safer from falling than we are, and once their debt is paid that will enter glory. We ought to pray like this through the merits of the hurtful crown and the blood shed from His divine head so that He would condescend to relieve their pain and give rest to the souls in Purgatory.

[5] The fifth time was when His right hand was wounded by a nail. Thus we pray that the Lord would condescend, through the merits of that precious blood, to generously recompense both in this life and in the next those who have done good things with their right hand, that is those who acted with good will.

[6] The sixth time was when the left hand was nailed. Since it is on that said the heart rest most peacefully we ask the clement Lord to condescend to hear us and grant grace to those to whom we have promised to pray for from our heart and to do this through the merits of the blood shed from His left hand.

[7] The seventh time was when the right foot was nailed. Since the feet, especially the right foot, support the body, we ask the Lord, through the merits of that precious blood, to condescend to favour and send help to all prelates and spiritual and temporal rectors so that they may govern well and sustain the whole body of the Church militant in peace and sanctity.

[8] The eighth time was when the left foot was nailed. This helps the right foot in supporting the body to such a degree that the body cannot walk properly without both feet. Therefore, we humbly ask the greatest Father by the strength and effectiveness of that precious blood to condescend to grant help to ourselves and our families through whom we have received life and the Christian Sacraments, and for ourselves so that we may correctly obey the just precepts of the prelates in order not to fall to the ground through schism or disobedience to the body of the Church.

[9] The ninth and last time was when His side was pierced by the lance. This was when blood and water poured out of the wound in that side. Therefore we ask the most loving Lord to condescend to pardon all who have offended us from the heart.¹ We ask this through the

¹ *Quelli n'hanno = che ci hanno.*

merits of the holy blood that flowed from His side. For love of that blood we also ask that we may forgive from the bottom of our hearts those who offended us.

Pray in this manner every day either in the morning or in the evening, keeping in mind these nine ways in which the Lord shed His blood for you and with each one of these recall a kind of person as mentioned above according to the way in which they belong to the category of sinners, the just and so on. For each one say an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* in thanksgiving for the blood that was shed, and to obtain grace for these groups of people.

So that this comes to mind easily, let us briefly recall the times that blood was shed and the condition of the people for whom we are to pray in the following order.

At the circumcision, sinners

At the prayer in the garden, the righteous

At the scourging, those who have trials

At the crowning, the souls of the deceased

When the right hand was nailed, those who do good

When the left hand was nailed, those we have promised to pray for

When the right foot was nailed, prelates and rectors

When the left foot was nailed, ourselves and our families

When the side was pierced, our enemies

This is of great benefit to priests who are about to celebrate as a preparation for Mass.¹

CONCERNING THE PREPARATION A CHRISTIAN SHOULD MAKE EVERY DAY, AND HOW TO
CONSIDER THE MYSTERIES DURING THE DAY. CHAPTER 33.

A child goes to lessons every day and although he did not know much at first if he continues he will become learned. No matter how soft it is dripping water wears a hard stone. In a similar way a spiritual person who practices prayer continually and who uses these mysteries even if at the beginning he is in a terrible state of being clumsy with little expertise, by God's grace (if he perseveres faithfully), he will become a skilled master of prayer. If his heart was harder than stone, it will still easily become soft in a short period of time and be as soft as wax before a flame.² Therefore, we shall set out an easy method here.

If you wish to begin this devout practice and this Christian way of life, firstly, make a good and complete confession, even better if it is a general confession.³ You should do it like this. Turn over in your mind that the Lord has summoned you and that in ten or fourteen days you will have to leave this life and appear before His judgement seat and render a strict account to Him of your whole life, and according to what you deserve you will receive an appropriate recompense for everything. Since in this life He has given priests the power to hear and remit sins on His behalf, make a good examination of conscience as if you were going to die (as I

¹ The pious practice which the author recommends as a preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist is similar to that suggested by Silvestro da Rossano.

² The image is taken from the famous Latin proverb: *Gutta cavat lapidem*. The practice of prayer makes simple people wise.

³ This condition is repeatedly emphasised by Capuchin spiritual writers which became also institutionalised, so to speak, in the Capuchin programme for novices. Cf. *Const 1536*, n. 20, 3, and the Book of Ceremonies by Bartolomeo Vecchi.

have said in ten or fourteen days) and include your entire life according to the position you are in, the things you have done, the office you hold, the places you have been, the persons with whom you have dealt and the like.

Find yourself a good confessor who is a good learned man,¹ who fears God, and confess to him as to the Lord completely all your sins with sorrow and a firm resolve of never committing them again. If you have to make restitution to your neighbour for anything make it because otherwise everything would be null, as the Church states in the chapter entitled *Si res aliena, causa XIII, q. VI.*² “If what belongs to another is the matter of sin it must be returned, and if it is not, penance is not effective, the sin is not remitted, if what had been acquired in a evil manner is not returned.”

Be careful not to leave a sin out of confession out of embarrassment but think and act in such a way as to simply confess everything, since by leaving anything out through malice or shame would be another sin and you would feel more shame and incur punishment at the time of death. All sins which are not confessed to a priest out of malice or shame according to the law of Christ will be revealed to everyone at the time of judgement to the confusion of the sinner. In the same way as confession must be integral with respect to sins it must not also be split up but made to one priest. Therefore the Church says in the chapter entitled *Consideret de Poenit. Dist, V.*: “Let the penitent be aware that prompted by shame he may not split his confession wishing to confess different sins to different confessors, that is part to one and part to another so as to hide something from one and reveal it to another. This is self glorification and walking in hypocrisy and not obtaining forgiveness, while thinking to be forgiven of everything in parts by splitting confession over different priests and thinking of being absolved of part by one priest and part by another. This cannot be done.”³

Thus to find forgiveness before God confess all your sins to the best confessor that you can find and having received his absolution and made restitution to your neighbour as you owed, arrange and fix your life, your house and family and all your affairs in such a way that you cannot find any reason why you should not receive God’s grace. It would also be good for you to make a will and settle your affairs while you are healthy so that if you take sick you will not be smothered by thoughts about business and the cares of this world which are often the reason why a person dies ahead of time and sometimes out of God’s grace. It is only when you are sick that you can pull yourself together and think about salvation when you have fixed your affairs when you were healthy. Even if death comes suddenly you will be at peace with God and with the world.⁴

When you have done this (which will bring you deep composure of soul, quiet of conscience and peace of mind and be a great preparation for prayer) you ought to go ahead in this way:

Always set aside one or two hours each day before you go to work. Go to where you pray either in the chapel or your private room, go on your knees and devotedly invoke the name of the Holy Trinity and bless yourself with the sign of the cross three times, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and after saying the Creed as a profession of your faith think for a little space of time what you have to do during the day whether it is something that is good or bad. If it is something bad immediately tell the Lord that you are prepared to leave it aside and say: “O my Lord, in no way do I wish to do this or anything else which is against Your honour, my salvation and to the detriment of life, reputation, the

¹ This is what St Theresa of Avila wanted and preferred.

² Cf. *Decreti secunda pars*, Causa 14, q. 6, c. 1 ; *Si res aliena* (CIC I, 742).

³ *Ibid.*, Causa 32, q. 3 *De poenitentia*, dist. 5: *Consideret*, § 7 (CIC I 1239s).

⁴ This suggestion is the product of wide experience.

property or good name of my neighbour because You have forbidden this and I know that it would not please You. O most sweet Father give me the grace of never doing anything that is against Your will, through the merits of the precious blood of Jesus Christ my Saviour and the intercession of the Virgin Mary and all the saints.”

If it is something good, say with all your heart: “O my most clement and powerful Lord, I intend to carry out this action or work in Your service, for my salvation and the edification of my neighbour because You have commanded me to live by the sweat of my brow, to practice mercy towards my neighbour, to guide my family, direct my servants, obey my superiors and respect other good people. However since I cannot do this without You, O my most loving Lord, I beg the grace to be able to do everything to Your praise and glory through the merits of my Lord Jesus Christ, for love of whom You have promised to give salvation and eternal life to those who want to believe, love and obey.” Now ask the saints to whom you are devoted to pray for to God for you, and say a few prayers recalling the mysteries according to the order and manner given above. When you have finished this go to work.¹

When you do this it will seem like the Lord is present to you in one mystery and then in another. Sometimes He will speak to you and at others you will speak beautiful words to Him and engage in acts of mental prayer offering yourself to Him, asking Him for what you need and thanking Him for his gifts. When eating, walking around or going about your business use this method of raising your mind to the mysteries and you will experience the reward.² *For example:* Bring to mind the mystery of His birth and say from your heart: “O, my Lord, I thank you for being born so poor for me. O my God, by the merits of such charity give me the grace of always pleasing You and in this action grant me the favour of being at Your service. O my baby Jesus, so gracious and beautiful how can I love You with all my heart? O most happy Mother of the Lord, who kissed the Son of God so lovingly and nourished Him, intercede with Him for me that He would forgive my sins,” using words like this as the spirit moves you.³ Do these things often with your mind fixed on the mysteries and you will very easily acquire the spirit of prayer.

When a suitable situation for prayer arises immediately lift your mind up to a mystery especially those involving the Passion. This will arouse you more if it is one which took place at that hour.⁴ At the hour of Prime He was presented to Pilate and suffered insults and scourging. At the hour of Terce He was crowned, dressed in purple for ridicule and shame and paraded before the people with a cane in His hand as a mark of disrespect to receive the wicked sentence and leave Jerusalem with His cross on his shoulder destined for Calvary in sorrow. At the hour of Sext He was placed on the cross, given vinegar and gall to drink, mocked by the priests and uttered the seven words. At the hour of None when He breathed His last and hung on the cross with His limbs ashen and torn. At the hour of Vespers when He was taken down from the cross and His mother and the other women sobbed sorrowfully. At the hour of Compline when He was buried and the night He spent in prayer and sweated blood and was captured and bound.

When a time comes when it would be easy to sin and there is an occasion for doing evil say to yourself: “Lord Jesus you suffered so much for me at this time and should I offend you? You

¹ Note once again the simplicity and practicality of this teaching which is really suited to people.

² Here we see his ability to apply his method of contemplating on the mysteries to practical life, which basically is nothing else but the practice of the presence of God as contained in one of Christ’s mysteries.

³ This is refrain which is often used to emphasise the primacy of the freedom of the spirit in the workings of the Holy Spirit in the soul beyond all rules or method.

⁴ This is the principle of the devotional practice proposed in *Orologio della Passione* even though here it is only specifically applied to the seven liturgical hours.

shed blood and should I give myself to pleasure? It would have been better had I not been born that that I commit such a mistake. I shall not do it, Lord. Because of Your love give me grace and strength.” Then occupy yourself with a mystery and the temptation will pass easily. However if the temptation still persists, stay strong, because the Lord wants to see your fidelity and after you have conquered He will give you a greater reward. If you pass the day in this way everything will work for your salvation.

After you have come home at night, go to the place where you usually pray and when the business of the day has quietened down; before you go to bed diligently examine all that you have done during the day including thoughts, words and other things.¹ If you find that you have acted for the honour of God, for your salvation and set a good example for your neighbour as you planned in the morning thank the Lord God for giving you such a gift. Pray that He will keep you safely in His grace until morning and that he will accept what you have done in His service and say: “O my most kind Lord and greatest Father I thank you infinite times that You have mercifully preserved me in the service of Your divine Majesty, Condescend to accept all that I have done and may it please You. Help me to be always able to please You and protect me from all visible and invisible enemies for the love that You have for me my Saviour and Your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns in perfect unity with Your and the Holy Spirit.”

However, if you find that you have committed some error or sin of thought, word or deed to defame or rob your neighbour of salvation acknowledge your fault in bitterness and say from the bottom of your heart: “O my Lord, I am sorry for having offended You and for not having kept the promise that I made to You this morning. O most sweet Saviour, forgive me because I am determined never to offend You again and I want to make up for all that I have done and confess it humbly to a priest, according to Your command, and to readily accept penance from him. May it please You to keep me safe during the night out of Your infinite clemency and highest mercy.” Then, after making the sign of the cross, after engaging your mind in the mysteries say your prayers and give yourself to the Lord and His saints and then you may go to bed. When you wake during the night go over some mystery in your mind to chase away temptation because the devil is afraid of Christ’s mysteries and runs away. So that sin does not gain control of you, if (God preserve you!) you happen to commit a sin, repent that night and ask pardon making a promise not to do it again and to go to confession to a priest. When Sunday comes, find a good confessor and after making a general and good confession to him, confess that sin to him and so go on with a good life.² Receive communion on some of the main feasts and so obtain greater graces.

During illness conduct yourself like this when you see that the illness is getting worse. Before anything else go to Confession and Communion and devoutly kneel on the ground and placing yourself completely in the hands of the Lord, say: “O most holy and powerful Father, Lord of heaven and earth, who have total power over life and death and who is to be struck and who is to be healed, who is to die and who is to rise, I commit my soul and body to You. Out of your mercy, condescend to give me what is better for Your service and my salvation as I place myself completely into Your kind hands. My plan is to remain strong in faith, steady in hope and always united to You in perfect charity. By overcoming any temptation, may it please You, most clement Lord, to protect me and not let me fall into sin because my aim is never to offend You in any way. I give You my soul, my life, my body and everything else.

¹ This is the examination of conscience.

² It is evident that he addressing mainly secular laity for clearly religious would not have to wait until Sunday to go to confession.

Give me life or death according to what pleases You more, and I shall accept everything as a special grace making me enjoy Your favour, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

When you have done this go back to bed, often finding consolation by having some spiritual persons, talk about the things of God and of salvation, or having some devout books read to you and accepting with joy the sickness and anything else that happens to you from the hands of God, and continually committing yourself to the Lord. If some sin comes to mind that you have not confessed, humbly confess it. If you do this with all your heart, whether death or life comes you will be in God’s grace here below and will reign happily with Him and His saints above in eternal glory. *Amen.*¹

What I have said, and whatever else I might say, I submit to the correction of the Holy Roman Church. Accept the response to your requests² for the praise, honour and glory of Him who lived and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

THANKS BE TO GOD

¹ Certainly anyone who was sick would have to have a great spirit to put these suggestions into practice. However, it is really beautiful.

² Bernardino da Balvano had been asked by the people of Massina to write this little booklet collecting his sermons and teachings on prayer.