

**DEATH, JUDGMENT, HEAVEN, AND HELL:
MEDITATIONS ON THE FOUR LAST THINGS**

BY

SAINT ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI

(1696-1787)

DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

TAKEN FROM

THE WAY OF SALVATION AND OF PERFECTION

Including A Rule of Life

and Prayers

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No eye has seen, no ear has heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Cor 2. 9)

"Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. ...But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake and would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour. ...But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating,

shall receive a light beating. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more." (Luke 12. 35, 38-48)

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MEDITATION 1

Eternal Salvation

1. Our most important affair is that of our eternal salvation; upon it depends our happiness or misery forever. This affair will come to an end in eternity, and will decide whether we shall be saved or lost forever; whether we shall have acquired an eternity of delights, or an eternity of torments; whether we shall live forever happy, or forever miserable.

O God! what will my lot be? Shall I be saved, or shall I be lost? I may be either. And if I may be lost, why do I not embrace such a life, as may secure for me life eternal? O Jesus! You died to save me; yet I have been lost, as often as I have lost You, my sovereign good: permit me not to lose You any more.

* These meditations were published by Saint Alphonsus in 1767.

For a method of making meditation, see Compendium of Rules for a Christian Life, at the end of the volume. ED.

[16] Men esteem it a great affair to gain a lawsuit, to obtain a post of honor, or to acquire an estate. Nothing, however, that will end with time deserves to be esteemed great. Since, therefore, all the goods of this world will one day end for us, as we shall either leave them or they will leave us, that affair alone should be esteemed great upon which depends eternal happiness or eternal misery.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, cast me not away from Your face, as I have deserved! I am indeed a sinner; but I am grieved from the bottom of my heart for having offended Your infinite goodness. Until now I have despised You, but now I love You above all things. Henceforth You alone shall be my only good, my only love. Have pity on a sinner who penitently casts himself at Your feet, and desires to love You. If I have grievously offended You, I now ardently desire to love You. What would have become of me, If you had called me out of life when I had lost Your grace and favor? Since You, O Lord! have shown so much mercy to me, grant me grace to become a saint.

3. Let us awaken our faith in a heaven and a hell of eternal duration: one or other will be our lot.

O God! how could I, knowing that by committing sin I was condemning myself to eternal torments - how could I sin so often against You and forfeit Your grace? Knowing that You are my God and my Redeemer, how could I, for the sake of a miserable gratification, so often turn my back upon You? O God, I am sorry more than every evil for having thus despised You. I love You above every good, and henceforth I will suffer the loss of all things rather than lose Your friendship. Give me strength to continue faithful. And do You, O Blessed Virgin Mary! pray for me and assist me.

MEDITATION 2

The Patience of God in waiting for Sinners

1. Who in this world has so much patience with his equals as God with us his creatures, in bearing with us, and waiting for our repentance, after the many offences we have committed against him?

Ah! my God, had I thus offended my brother or my father, long ago would he have driven me from his face! O Father of mercies, cast me not away from Your face, but have pity on me.

2. You have mercy, says the wise man, upon all, because You can do all things, and overlook the sins of men for the

1 "Domine, quis similis tibi?" Ps. 34. 10.

2 "Ne projicias me a facie tua." Ps. 1. 13.

[19] sake of repentance.¹ Men conceal their sense of the injuries which they receive, either because they are good, and know that it belongs not to themselves to punish those who offend them; or because they are unable, and have not the power to revenge themselves. But to You, my God, it does belong to take revenge for the offences which are committed against Your infinite majesty; and You indeed are able to avenge Yourself, whenever You pleaseth; and do You dissemble? Men despise You; they make promises to You and afterwards betray You; and You seem not to behold them, or as if You have little concern for Your honor?

Thus, O Jesus, have You done towards me. Ah! my God, my infinite good, I will no longer despise You, I will no longer provoke You to chastise me. And why should I delay until You abandon me in reality and condemn me to hell? I am truly sorry for all my offences against You. I would rather have died

than offend You! You are my Lord, You have created me, and You have redeemed me by Your death; You alone have loved, You alone deserve to be loved, and You alone shall be the sole object of my love.

3. My soul, how could you be so ungrateful and so daring against your God? When you offended him, could he not have suddenly called you out of life and punished you with hell? And yet he waited for you; instead of chastising you, he preserved your life and gave you good things. But you, instead of being grateful to him and loving him for such excessive goodness, you continued to offend him!

O my Lord, since You have waited for me with so great mercy, I give You thanks. I am sorry for having offended You. I love You. I might at this hour have dwelt in hell, where I could not have repented, nor have

1 "Misereris omnium, quia omnia potes; et dissimulas peccata hominum propter poenitentiam." Wis. 11. 24.

[20] loved You. But now that I can repent, I grieve with my whole heart for having offended Your infinite goodness; and I love You above all things, more than I love myself. Forgive me, and grant that from this day I may love no other but You, who have so loved me. May I live for You alone, my Redeemer, who for me did die upon the cross! All my hopes are in Your bitter Passion. O Mary, Mother of God! assist me by Your holy intercession.

MEDITATION 3

The Certainty of Death

1. We must die! how awful is the decree! we must die. The sentence is passed: It is appointed for all men once to die. 1 You are a man and You must die. St. Cyprian says that we are born with a rope around our necks, and as long as we live on earth we hourly approach the gallows, that

is, the sickness that puts an end to our life. It would be madness for any one to delude himself with the idea that he shall not die. A poor man may flatter himself that he may become rich, or a vassal that he may be a king; but who can ever hope to escape death? One dies old, another young, but all at last must come to the grave.

I therefore must one day die and enter eternity. But what will be my lot for eternity? happy or miserable? My Savior Jesus, be You a Savior to me!

2. Of all those who were living upon the earth at the beginning of the last century, not one is now alive. The greatest and most renowned princes of this world have exchanged their country; scarcely does there remain any remembrance of them, and their bare bones are hardly preserved in stone monuments.

Make me, O God! more and more sensible of the folly

1 "Statutum est hominibus semel mori." Heb. 9. 27.

[21] of loving the goods of this world, and for the sake of them renouncing You, my sovereign and infinite good. What folly have I not been guilty of; and how much it grieves me! I give You thanks for having made me sensible of it.

3. A hundred years from here, at most, and neither you nor I will be any longer in this world; both will have gone into the house of eternity. A day, an hour, a moment, is approaching which will be the last both for you and me; and this hour, this moment, is already fixed by Almighty God; how then can we think of anything else but of loving God, who will then be our judge?

Alas! what will my death be? O my Jesus and my judge! what will become of me when I shall have to appear before You to give an account of my whole life?

Pardon me, I beseech You, before that moment arrives which will decide my happiness or misery for eternity. I am sorry for having offended You, my sovereign good. Until now I have not loved You; but now I will love You with my whole soul. Grant me the grace of perseverance. O Mary, refuge of sinners, have pity on me!

MEDITATION 4

The Loss of all Things in Death

1. *The day of destruction is at hand.*¹ The day of death is called the day of destruction, because then is destroyed all that man has acquired; honors, friends, riches, possessions, kingdoms - all are then no more. What then does it profit us to gain the whole world if in death we must leave all? All is at an end at the bedside of the dying man. Is there any king, do you think, said St. Ignatius to Xavier when he sought to bring him to God, who has taken with him into the other world even a thread of purple to mark his sovereignty? Has any rich

¹ "Juxta est dies perditionis." Deut. 32. 35.

[22] man taken with him a single coin, or even one servant to attend him? In death all is left behind. The soul enters eternity alone and unattended, except by its works.

Woe to me! where are my works to accompany me to a blessed eternity? I can discover none but such as render me deserving of eternal torments.

2. Men come into the world in unequal conditions: one is born rich, another poor, one a noble, another a plebeian; but all go out of it equal and alike. Consider the graves of the dead: see if you can discover among the bodies which are there interred, who was a master and who a servant, who was a king and who a beggar.

O God! while others amass the fortunes of this world,

may my only fortune be Your holy grace. You alone are my only good both in this life and in the next.

3. In one word, everything on earth will come to an end. All greatness will end, all misery will end, honors will end, misery will end; pleasures will end, sufferings will end. Blessed in death, therefore, not he who has abounded in riches, honors, and pleasures, but he who has patiently endured poverty, contempt, and sufferings! The possession of temporal goods affords no consolation at the moment of death: that alone consoles us which has been done or suffered for God.

O Jesus! separate my heart from this world, before death entirely takes me from it. Help me with Your grace; You indeed know how great is my weakness. Permit me not to be any more unfaithful to You, as I have until now been. I am sorry, O Lord! for having so often despised You. Now will I love You above every good, and will die a thousand times rather than forfeit Your grace. But the infernal one ceases not to tempt me; in mercy abandon me not, leave me not to myself, permit me not to be any more separated from Your love. O Mary, my hope! obtain for me the grace of perseverance.

MEDITATION 5

The Great thought of Eternity

[23] 1. Thus did St. Augustine designate the thought of eternity: "The great thought" -- "magna cogitatio." It was this thought that induced so many solitaries to retire into deserts; so many religious, even kings and queens, to shut themselves up in cloisters; and so many martyrs to sacrifice their lives in the midst of torments, in order to acquire a happy eternity in heaven, and to avoid a miserable eternity in hell. The Ven. John of Avila converted a certain lady with these two words: "Reflect," said he to her, "on these two words: Forever

and Never." A certain monk went down into a grave that he might meditate continually on eternity, and constantly repeated, "O eternity! eternity!"

How frequently, my God, have I deserved the eternity of hell! Oh, that I had never offended You! Grant me sorrow for my sins; have compassion on me.

2. The same Ven. John of Avila says that he who believes in eternity and becomes not a saint should be confined as one deranged. He who builds a house for himself takes great pains to make it comfortable, spacious, and handsome, and says: "I labor and give myself a great deal of trouble about this house, because I shall have to live in it all my life." And yet how little is the house of eternity thought of! When we shall have arrived at eternity there will be no question of our residing in a house more or less comfortable, or more or less spacious: the question will be of our dwelling in a palace overflowing with delights, or in a gulf of endless torments. And for how long a time? not for forty or fifty years, but forever, as long as God shall be God. The saints, to obtain salvation, thought it little to give their [24] whole lives to prayer, penance, and the practice of good works. And what do we do for the same end?

O my God! many years of my life are already past, already death is near at hand, and what good have I until now done for You? Give me light, and strength, to devote the remainder of my days to Your service. Too much, alas! have I offended You; I desire from henceforth to love You.

3. With fear and trembling work out your salvation. 1 To obtain salvation we must tremble at the thought of being lost, and tremble not so much at the Thought of hell, as of sin, which alone can send us there. He who dreads sin avoids dangerous occasions, frequently recommends himself to God, and has recourse to the means of keeping himself in the state of grace. He who acts

thus will be saved; but for him who lives not in this manner it is morally impossible to be saved. Let us attend to that saying of St. Bernard: "We cannot be too secure where eternity is at stake."²

Your blood, O Jesus, my Redeemer! is my security. I should have been already lost on account of my sins, had You not offered me Your pardon, on condition of my repentance for having offended You. I am sorry therefore with my whole heart for having offended You, who are infinite goodness. I love You, O sovereign good! above every other good, I know that You will my salvation, and I will endeavor to secure it by loving You forever. O Mary, Mother of God! pray to Jesus for me.

MEDITATION 6

The Abuse of God's Mercy

1. There are two ways by which the devil endeavors to deceive men to their eternal ruin: after they have committed sin he tempts them to despair on account of the severity of divine justice; but before they have sinned he encourages them to do so by the hope of obtaining the divine mercy. And he effects the ruin of numberless souls as well by the second as by the first artifice. "God is merciful," says the obstinate sinner to him who would convert him from the iniquity of his ways. "God is merciful." But as the Mother of God expresses it in her canticle, *His mercy is to them that fear Him*.¹ Yes, the Lord deals mercifully with him that fears to offend him, but not so with the man who presumes upon his mercy to offend him still more.

O God! I give You thanks for having made me sensible of Your patience in bearing with me. Behold, I am

¹ "Misericordia ejus timentibus eum." Luke 1. 50.

[27] of the number of those who, presuming on Your good

ness, have offended You again and again.

2. God is merciful; but he is also just. Sinners are desirous that he should be merciful only, without being just; but that is impossible, because if he were only to forgive and never to chastise, he would be lacking in justice. Hence Father Avila observes that patience on the part of God towards those who avail themselves of his mercy just to offend him the more, would not be mercy, but a lack of justice. He is bound to chastise the ungrateful. He bears with them for a certain time, but after that abandons them.

Such a punishment, O God! has not as yet overtaken me, or else I would have now dwelt in hell, or been obstinate in my sins. But no: I desire to amend my life; I desire to offend You no more. Though I have until now displeased You, I am sorry for it with my whole soul; I desire henceforth to love You, and I desire to love You more than others do, because You have not shown the same patience towards others as towards me.

3. *God is not mocked.*¹ Yet he would be mocked, if the sinner could go on continually offending him, and yet afterwards enjoy him in heaven. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.*² He who sows good works shall reap rewards; but he who sows iniquities shall reap chastisements. The hope of those who commit sin because God is forgiving is an abomination in his sight: *their hope*, says holy Job, *is an abomination.*³ Hence the sinner, by such hope, provokes God to chastise him the sooner, as that servant would provoke his master, who, because his master was good, took advantage of his goodness to behave badly.

O Jesus! such, I fear, has been my conduct towards

1 "Deus non irridetur." Gal. 6. 7.

2 "Quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet." Ibid. 8.

3 "Spes illorum abominatio." Job 11. 20.

[28] You; because You were good I have made no account of Your precepts. I confess that I have done wickedly; and I detest all the offences I have committed against You. Now do I love You more than myself, and I desire never more to displease You. Ah, if I should again offend You by mortal sin! Permit it not, O Lord; rather let me die. O Mary, Mother of perseverance, do assist me!

MEDITATION 7

The Emptiness and Shortness of Human Life

1. Holy David said that the happiness of this life is as the dream of one awaking from sleep: *as the dream of them that awake*.¹ All the greatness and glory of this world will appear no more to poor wordlings at the hour of death, than as a dream to one awaking from sleep, who finds that the fortune which he has acquired in his dream ends with his sleep. Hence, did one who was undeceived wisely write on the skull of a dead man, "Cogitanti omnia vilesunt." He who thinks will undervalue all things. Yes, to him who thinks on death, all the goods of this life appear as they really are, vile and transitory. Nor can that man fix his affections on the earth who reflects that in a short time he must leave it forever.

Ah, my God, how often have I despised Your grace for the miserable goods of this world! Henceforth I desire to think of nothing but of loving and serving You. Assist me with Your holy grace.

2. "And is it thus, then, that worldly grandeur and sovereign power must end?" Such was the exclamation of St. Francis Borgia, when he beheld the corpse of the Empress Isabella, who died in the flower of her youth. Reflecting upon what he saw, he resolved to bid adieu to the world, and to give himself entirely to God, say-

1 "Velut somnium surgentium." Ps. 72. 20.

[29] ing, "I will henceforth serve a master who will never forsake me." Let us detach ourselves from present goods before death tears us away from them. What folly it is to expose ourselves to the danger of losing our souls, for the sake of some attachment to this miserable world, from which we shall soon have to depart; for soon it will be said to us by the minister of God, "*Go forth, Christian soul, out of this world!*"¹

O my Jesus, if only I had always loved You! How many offences have I been guilty of against You! Teach me how to correct my disorderly life, for I am willing to do whatever You please. Accept my love, accept my repentance, in which I love You more than myself, and crave Your mercy and compassion.

3. Reflect that you cannot remain forever in this world. You must one day leave the country in which you now reside; you must one day go out from the house in which you now dwell to return to it no more.

Make me sensible, O God, of the injustice I have been guilty of in turning my back upon You, my sovereign good; and grant me the sorrow to bewail my ingratitude as I ought. O that I had died rather than ever offended You! Do not allow me to live any longer ungrateful for the love which You have shown me. My dear Redeemer, I love You above all things, and I desire to love You to the best of my power during the remainder of life. Strengthen my weakness by Your grace; and do You, Mary, Mother of God, intercede for me.

1 Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo.

MEDITATION 8

The Pain of Loss

1. The greatest pain of hell is not the fire nor the darkness, not the stench, nor any other of all the material torments of that dreadful prison of despair; it is the pain of loss - that is, the pain of having lost God which of itself may be said to constitute hell. The soul was created to be forever united with God, and to enjoy the sight of his enrapturing countenance. God is its last [32] end, its only good, so that all the goods of earth and heaven, without God, could not make it happy. Hence it is that if a condemned soul in hell could possess and love God, hell, with all its torments, would be to it a paradise. But this will be its greatest punishment, which will render it forever inconceivably miserable, to be deprived of God for all eternity, without the least hope of ever again beholding him or loving him.

Jesus, my Redeemer! nailed to the cross for my sake,
You are my hope; oh that I had died rather than offended
You!

2. The soul, being created for God, has an instinctive tendency to become united with its sovereign good, its God; but being united with the body, when it wallows in iniquity, it becomes so darkened by the created objects which allure the senses that it loses its sight, and has so little knowledge of God as no longer to desire to be united with him. But when separated from the body, and from sensible objects, then it will know that God is the only good that can render it happy. Therefore, as soon as it shall have departed from here, it will feel itself drawn with most powerful attraction towards a union with God; but having left this life an enemy of God, it will be not only kept back from him by its sins, as by a chain, but dragged by them into hell, there to be forever separated and at a distance from God. The wretched soul in that eternal dungeon will know how beautiful God is, but will not be able to behold him. It will know how amiable God is, but will not be able to love him; it will even feel itself forced by its sins to hate him; and this will be its hell of hells, to know that it hates a God who

is infinitely lovely. It will desire that it were possible to destroy God, to whom it is hateful; and to destroy itself, hating God; and this will be the eternal occupation of this unhappy soul.

O Lord! have pity on me.

[33] 3. This torment will be immensely increased by the remembrance of the graces that God bestowed upon it, and the love which he evinced towards it during its lifetime. It will especially call to mind the love of Jesus Christ in shedding his blood, and laying down his life for its salvation; but, ungrateful soul, not to forego its own miserable gratifications, it consented to lose God, its sovereign good; and it will find that no hope will be left of ever regaining him.

Ah, my God! If I were in hell, I would not be able to love You, nor to repent of my sins; but as I have it now in my power to repent and to love You, I am sorry with my whole soul for having offended You, and love You above all things. Grant me to remember continually that hell which I have deserved, that I may love You with still greater and greater fervor. O Mary, refuge of sinners! do not abandon me.

MEDITATION 9

The Particular Judgment

1. *It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.*¹ It is of faith, that immediately after death we shall be judged according to our works in this life. And it is also of faith, that upon this judgment will depend our eternal salvation or perdition. Imagine yourself to be in your agony, and to have only a short time to live. Think that in a short time you would then have to appear before Jesus Christ to give an account of your whole life. Alas! how alarming would the sight of your sins then be to you!

Jesus, my Redeemer! pardon me, I beseech You, before You judge me. I know that I have many times

1 "Statutum est hominibus semel mori; post hoc autem, judicium."
Heb. 9. 27.

[34] already deserved to be sentenced to eternal death. No, I desire not to present myself guilty before You, but penitent and pardoned. O my sovereign good! I am grievously sorry for having offended You,

2. O God! what will be the anguish of the soul when it shall first behold Jesus Christ as its judge, and behold him terrible in his wrath? It will then see how much he has suffered for its sake; it will see what great mercies he has exercised towards it, and what powerful means he has bestowed upon it for the attainment of salvation; then will it also see the greatness of eternal goods, and the vileness of earthly pleasures, which have wrought its ruin; it will then see all these things, but to no purpose, because then there will be no more time to correct its past errors; what shall have then been done will be irrevocable. Before the judgment seat of God, no nobility, nor dignity, nor riches will be considered; our works alone will be weighed there.

Grant, O Jesus! that when I first behold You I may see You appeased; and, for this end, grant me the grace to weep, during the remainder of my life, over the evil which I have done in turning my back upon You, to follow my own sinful caprices. No, I desire never more to offend You. I love You and desire to love You forever.

3. What contentment will that Christian enjoy at the hour of death who has left the world to give himself to God; who has denied his senses all unlawful gratifications: and who, if he has on some occasions been negligent, has at last been wise enough afterwards to do worthy

penance for it! On the other hand, what anguish will that Christian experience who has continually relapsed into the same vices, and at last finds himself at the point of death! Then will he exclaim: "Alas! in a few moments I must appear before Jesus as my judge, and I have not as yet even begun to change my life! I have many times [35] promised to do so, but I have not done it; and now, in a short time, what will become of me?"

Ah, my Jesus and my judge! I give You thanks for the patience with which You have until now waited for me. How many times have I myself written my own eternal condemnation . Since You have thus waited to pardon me, reject me not, now prostrate at Your feet. Receive me into Your favor through the merits of Your bitter Passion. I am sorry, my sovereign good! for having despised You. I love You above all things. I desire never more to forsake You. O Mary! recommend me to Your Son Jesus, and do not abandon me.

MEDITATION 10

Preparation for the Particular Judgments

1. *Be ready : for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.*¹ The time of death will not be the time to prepare ourselves to die well; to die well and happily, we must prepare ourselves beforehand. There will not be time then to eradicate bad habits from the soul, to expel from the heart its predominant passions, and to extinguish all affection to earthly goods. *The night comes when no man can work.*² All in death will be night, when nothing will be seen; and, from here, nothing done. The heart hardened, the mind obscured, confusion, fear, the desire of health, will all render it almost impossible at the hour of death to set in order a conscience confused and entangled in sin.

Sacred wounds of my Redeemer! I adore you, I humbly kiss you, and I confide in you.

2. The saints Thought they did but little, though they spent their whole lives in preparing for death, by acts of

1 "Estote parati, quia, qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet." Lk. 12. 40.

2 "Venit nox, quando nemo potest operari." John 9. 4.

[36] penance, prayer, and the practice of good works; and they trembled when they came to die. The venerable John Avila, although he had led a very holy life from his youth, when it was announced to him that he was about to die, made answer and said, "Oh that I may have a little more time to prepare myself for death!" And what shall we say when the summons of death shall be brought to us?

No, my God, I do not wish to die troubled and ungrateful, as at present I should die, if death were to overtake me; I desire to change my life, I desire to bewail my offences against You, I desire to love You with my whole heart. O Lord! help me, enable me to do some thing for You before I die, for You who have died for the love of me.

3. *The time is short*¹ says the Apostle. Yes, we have but a short time in which to set our accounts in order. Hence the Holy Spirit admonishes us, *Whatever your hand is able to do, do it quickly.*² Whatever you are able to do today, do not put off till tomorrow; for today is passing away, and tomorrow may bring death, which will deprive you of all means of doing good, or of amending what you have done badly. Woe to me if death should find me still attached to this world!

Ah, my God, how many years have I lived at a distance from You! And how have You had so much patience with me, in waiting for me and in calling me so often to repentance! I thank You, O my Redeemer! for Your long forbearance, and I hope to thank You for it forever in heaven. *The mercies o the Lord I will sing for-*

*ever.*³ Until now I have not loved You, and have made little account of being or not being loved by You, but now

1 "Tempus breve est." 1 Cor. 7. 29.

2 "Quodcumque facere potest manus tua, instanter operare."
Eccles. 9. 10.

3 "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo." Ps. 88. 2.

[37] I do love You with my whole heart; I love You above all things, more than I love myself, and I desire nothing so much as to be loved by You; and, recollecting how I have despised Your love, I would willingly die of grief for having done so. Jesus, grant me perseverance in virtue. Mary, my holy mother, obtain for me the happiness of being faithful to God.

MEDITATION 11

The Suffering of Souls in Hell in their Mental Faculties

1. The souls in hell will be tormented in their memory. Never, in the abode of infinite misery will they lose for a moment the remembrance of the time that was allowed them in this life to practice virtue, and to make amends for the evil which they have done; and never will it be concealed from them that there is no longer the least hope of remedy. They will call to mind the lights which they received from God, his many loving calls, his offers of pardon, all despised; and they will see that all is now at an end, and that nothing remains for them but to suffer and to despair for all eternity.

O Jesus! Your blood, Your sufferings, and Your death are my trust and hope. Alas! permit me not to fall into hell, there to curse forever even the blessings which You have bestowed upon me.

2. The souls in hell will be tormented in their understanding, by thinking continually of heaven, which they have willfully lost through their own fault. The immense felicity enjoyed by the blessed in the abode of

delights will be forever before their eyes; and this will render their life of dreadful sufferings, which they must endure forever in the prison of despair and woe, still more tormenting.

If I had died, my Redeemer, when I was in sin, I would now have no hope of ever enjoying You in [38] heaven! You gave me life that I might gain heaven, and now have I lost heaven for something worse than nothing, by losing Your grace! I love You, O God, and I am sorry for having offended You; and I hope, through the merits of Your Passion, to come to love You forever in heaven.

3. The souls in hell will be tormented in their will, by being denied everything which they desire, and by having every punishment inflicted upon them which they do not desire. They will never have anything which they wish for, but everything which they abhor. They will long to rid themselves of their torments and to find peace; but there will be no peace for them; they will be forced to dwell in the midst of their torments forever. Their perverse will, by hating God when they know him to be the supreme good, and worthy of infinite love, will become their greatest torment.

So it is, my God; You are an infinite good and worthy of infinite love, and I have exchanged You for nothing! Oh that I had died and had not offered You so grievous an injury! I love You, my sovereign good. Have pity on me and permit me not to be again ungrateful to You! I renounce all the delights of this world, and embrace You as my only good. I will be forever Yours; be forever mine. This is my hope, my God, my love, and my all. Deus meus et omnia. O Mary! You are all-powerful with God; obtain for me the grace of leading a holy life.

MEDITATION 12

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary

1. Jesus is the mediator of justice; Mary obtains for us grace; for, as St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernadine of Sienna, St. Germanus, St. Antoninus, and others say, it is the will of God to dispense through the hands [39] of Mary whatever graces he is pleased to bestow upon us. With God, the prayers of the saints are the prayers of his friends, but the prayers of Mary are the prayers of his mother. Happy they who confidently and at all times have recourse to this heavenly mother! This, above all others, is the most pleasing devotion to the Blessed Virgin, often to have recourse to her and to say : O Mary! intercede for me with Your Son Jesus.

2. Jesus is omnipotent by nature; Mary is very powerful by grace; she obtains whatever she asks for. It is impossible, says St. Antoninus, that this mother should ask any favor of her Son for those who are devout to her, and the Son not grant her request. Jesus delights to honor his mother by granting whatever she asks of him. Hence St. Bernard exhorts us to seek for grace, and to seek for it through Mary; because she is a mother to whom nothing can be denied. 1 If, then, we desire to be saved, let us recommend ourselves to Mary, that she may intercede for us, because her prayers are always heard. O mother of mercy! have pity on me. You are called the advocate of sinners; assist me, therefore, a sinner placing my confidence in You.

3. Let us not doubt whether Mary will hear us when we address our prayers to her. It is her delight to exercise her powerful influence with God in obtaining for us whatever graces we stand in need of. It is sufficient to ask favors of Mary to obtain them. If we are unworthy of them, she renders us worthy by her powerful intercession; and she is very desirous that we should have recourse to her, that she may save us. What sinner ever perished, who, with confidence and perseverance, had recourse to Mary, the refuge of sinners? He is lost who does not have recourse to Mary.

Mary, my mother and my hope! I take refuge

1 "Quaeramus gratiam, et per Mariam quaeramus; quia Mater est, et frustrari non potest." *S. de Aquad.*

[40] under Your protection; reject me not, as I have deserved. Protect me and have pity on me, a miserable sinner. Obtain for me the forgiveness of my sins; obtain for me holy perseverance, the love of God, a good death, and a happy eternity. I hope all things of You, because You are most powerful with God. Make me holy, since You have it in Your power to do so, by Your holy intercession.

Mary! in You do I confide, in You do I place all my hopes, next to Your divine Son Jesus.

MEDITATION 13

The One Thing Necessary

1. *One thing is necessary*¹: the salvation of our souls. It is not necessary to be great, noble, or rich in this world, or to enjoy uninterrupted health; but it is necessary to save our souls. For this has God placed us here: not to acquire honors, riches, or pleasures, but to acquire by our good works that eternal kingdom which is prepared for those who, during this present life, fight against and overcome the enemies of their eternal salvation.

Ah, my Jesus, how often have I renounced heaven by renouncing Your grace! But, O Lord! I am more grieved for having forfeited Your friendship than for having lost heaven. Give me, O Jesus! a great sorrow for my sins, and mercifully pardon me.

2. Of what consequence is it if a man be poor, lowly, infirm, and despised in this life, provided that in the end he dies in the grace of God and secures his salvation? The more he has been afflicted with tribulations, if he

suffered them with patience, the more will he be glorified in the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, what does it profit a man to abound in riches and honors, if, when he dies, he is lost forever? If we are lost, all the goods that we have enjoyed in this world will be remembered only to increase our misery for eternity.

O my God, enlighten me; grant me to understand that my only evil is to offend You, and my only good to love You. Enable me to spend the remainder of my days in serving You.

3. Salvation is necessary, because there is no middle

1 "Unum est necessarium." Luke 10. 42.

[43] way - we must either be saved or lost. It will not do to say: I shall be satisfied with not going to hell; I shall not be concerned at being deprived of heaven. No; either heaven or hell; either forever happy with God in heaven in an ocean of delights, or forever trampled upon by devils in hell in an ocean of fire and torments: either saved, or lost; there is no alternative.

Jesus! I have until now chosen hell, and for years past I should have been suffering there, if in pity You had not put up with me. I thank You, O my Savior! and I am sorry above every evil for having offended You. I hope, for the future, with the assistance of Your grace, to walk no more in the way that conducts to hell. I love You, O my sovereign good! and I desire to love You forever. Grant me perseverance in good, and save me through that blood which You have shed for me. O Mary, my hope! intercede for me.

MEDITATION 14

The Patience of God with Sinners

1. The more we have experienced the patient mercies

of God, the more we ought to be afraid of continuing to abuse them, lest the time of God's vengeance overtake us. *Revenge is Mine, and I will repay in due time.*¹ God will put an end to his forbearance towards those who will not cease to abuse it.

I give You thanks, O Lord! for having patiently borne with me, though I have so often betrayed You. Make me sensible of the evil that I have done by abusing Your patience for so long a time; make me sorry for all the offences I have committed against You. No, I will never more abuse Your tender mercy.

2. "Commit this sin; you can afterwards confess it." Such is the deceit with which the devil has drawn many souls into hell. Many Christians, now in hell, have been lost by this delusion. *The Lord waits, that He may have mercy on you.*² God waits for the sinner, that the sinner may be converted, and obtain mercy; but when God sees that the time which he allows the sinner for doing penance is employed only in increasing the number of his offences, then he waits no longer, but punishes him as he deserves.

Pardon me, O God! for I desire never more to offend You. And why should I delay? that You may condemn me to hell? I fear indeed that now You can no longer have patience with me. I have indeed offended You too grievously. I am sorry for it. I repent of it.

¹ "Mea est ultio, et ego retribuam in tempore." Deut. 32. 35.

² "Expectat Dominus, ut misereatur vestri." Isa. 30. 18.

[48] I hope for forgiveness through the merits of that blood which You have shed for me.

3. It is the mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed : *because His mercies have not failed.*¹ Thus should he exclaim who finds, to his confusion, that he has frequently offended God. He should be most grate-

ful to God for not having permitted him to die in his sins, and be most careful not to offend him again; otherwise the Lord will reproach him, saying: *What more could I have done for My vineyard that I have not done?*² God will say to him: Ungrateful soul! If you had committed the same offences against man, who is viler than the earth, truly he would not have borne with you. And how great mercies have I exercised towards you! How many times have I called you, and enlightened you, and pardoned you? The time of punishment is at hand; the time of forgiveness is past. Thus has God spoken to many who are now suffering in hell; where one of their greatest torments is the remembrance of the mercies which they formerly received from God.

Jesus, my Redeemer and my Judge! I also have deserved to hear the same from Your mouth; but I hear You now again calling me to pardon: Be converted to the Lord Your God: ³ O accursed sin, which has made me lose my God, how much do I abhor and detest You! I turn my whole self towards You, my Lord and my God! My sovereign good, I love You; and because I love You I repent with my whole soul for having, during the time that is past, so much despised You. My God! I desire never more to offend You: give me Your love, grant me perseverance. Mary, my refuge, attend to and help me.

1 "Misericordise Domini, quia non sumus consumpti." Lam. 3. 22.

2 "Quid est quod debui ultra facere vineae mese et non feci? Isa. 5. 4.

3 "Convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum." Hosea 14. 2.

MEDITATION 15

Death, the Passage to Eternity

[49] 1. It is an article of faith that my soul is immortal, and that one day, when I least think of it, I must leave this world. I ought therefore to make a provision for myself, which will not fail with this life, but will be eternal even as I

am eternal. Great things were done here, in their life time, by an Alexander or a Caesar; but for how many ages past have their glories ceased! and where are they now?

O my God, that I had always loved You! What now remains for me, after so many years spent in sin, but trouble and remorse of conscience? But since You allow me time to repair the evil which I have done, behold me, Lord, ready to perform whatever You require of me, whatever You please. I will spend the remainder of my days in bewailing my ungrateful conduct towards You, and in loving You with all my power, my God and my all, my only good.

2. What will it avail me to have been happy in this world (if indeed true happiness can be attained without God) if hereafter I should be miserable for all eternity? But what folly it is, to know that I must die, and that an eternity either of happiness or misery awaits me after death, and that upon dying badly or well depends my being miserable or happy forever, and yet, not to adopt every means in my power to secure a good death!

Holy Spirit, enlighten and strengthen me to live always in Your grace, until the hour of my departure. O infinite goodness! I am sensible of the evil which I have done by offending You, and I detest it: I know that You alone are worthy of being loved, and I love You above all things.

3. In a word, all the good things of this life must end [50] at our burial and be left, while we are mouldering in our graves. The shadow of death will cover and obscure all the grandeur and splendor of this world. He only, then, can be called happy who serves God in this world, and by loving and serving him acquires eternal happiness.

O Jesus! I am truly sorry for having until now made so

little account of Your love. Now I love You above all things, and I desire nothing else but to love You. Henceforth You only shall be the sole object of my love, You only shall be my all; and this is the only inheritance I ask of You; to love You always, both in this life and in the next. For the merits of Your bitter Passion, give me perseverance in all virtues. Mary, mother of God, You are my hope.

MEDITATION 16

The Reformation of our Lives before Death

1. Every one desires to die the death of the saints, but it is scarcely possible for the Christian to make a holy end who has led a disorderly life until the time of his death; to die united with God, after having always lived at a distance from him. The saints, in order to secure a happy death, renounced all the riches, the delights, and all the hopes which this world held out to them, and embraced poor and mortified lives. They buried themselves alive in this world, to avoid, when dead, being buried forever in hell.

O God! for how many years past have I deserved to be buried in that place of torments, without hope of pardon, or of being able to love You! But You have waited in order to pardon me. Truly, then, am I sorry from the bottom of my heart for having offended You, my sovereign good; and have pity on me, and do not permit me to offend You any more.

[51] 2. God forewarns sinners that they will seek him in death and will not find him: *You shall seek and shall not find Me.*¹ They shall not find him because they will not then seek him through love, but only through the fear of hell; they will seek God without renouncing their affection for sin, and from here they shall not find him.

No, my God, I will not wait to seek You in death,

but will seek and desire You from this moment. I am sorry for having until now given You so much displeasure by seeking to gratify my own inclinations. I am sorry for it, I confess that I have done evil. But You do not will that the heart that seeks You should despair, but rejoice: *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*² Yes, O Lord! I seek You, and I love You more than myself.

3. How miserable is the Christian who before his death has not spent a good part of his life in bewailing his sins! It is not to be denied that such a man may be converted at his death and obtain salvation; but the mind obscured, the heart hardened, the bad habits formed, the passions predominant, render it morally impossible for him to die happily. An extraordinary grace will be necessary for him; but does God reserve such a grace to bestow it upon one who has continued ungrateful to him even until the moment of death? O God, to what straits are sinners reduced to escape eternal destruction!

No, my God, I will not wait until death to repent of my sins and to love You. I am sorry now for having offended You; now do I love You with my whole heart. Do not allow me any more to turn my back upon You; rather let me die. O holy Mother, Mary, obtain for me perseverance in virtue.

1 "Quaeritis me, et non inuenietis." John 7. 34.

2 "Laetetur cor quaerentium Dominum." Ps. 104. 3.

MEDITATION 17

The Value of Time

1. Time is a treasure of inestimable value, because in every moment of time we may gain an increase of grace and eternal glory. In hell the lost souls are tormented with the thought, and bitterly lament that now there is

no more time for them in which to rescue themselves by repentance from eternal misery. What would they give but for one hour of time to save themselves by an act of true sorrow from destruction! In heaven there is no grief; but if the blessed could grieve, they would do so for having lost so much time during life, in which they might have acquired greater glory, and because time is now no longer theirs.

1 "Diliges Dominum Deum tuum." Matt. 22. 37.

[54] I give You thanks, O God! for giving me time to bewail my sins, and to make amends by my love for the offences I have committed against You.

2. Nothing is so precious as time; and yet how is it that nothing is so little valued? Men will spend hours in jesting, or standing at a window or in the middle of a road, to see what passes; and if you ask them what they are doing, they will tell you they are passing away time. O time, now so much despised! You will be of all things else the most valued by such persons when death shall have surprised them. What will they not then be willing to give for one hour of so much lost time! But time will remain no longer for them when it is said to each one of them: "Go forth, Christian soul, out of this world:" I hasten to be gone, for now there is no time for You. How will they then exclaim, lamenting, Alas! I have squandered away my whole life; during so many years I might have become a saint; but how far am I from being such; and shall I become such, now that there is no more time for me?! But to what purpose will such lamentations be, when the dying man is on the verge of that moment on which will depend eternity?

3. *Walk while you have light.*² The time of death is the time of night, when nothing can any longer be seen, nor anything be accomplished. The night comes, in which no man can work* Hence the Holy Spirit admonishes us to walk in the way of the Lord, while we have the light

and the day before us. Can we reflect that the time is near approaching in which the cause of our eternal salvation is to be decided, and still squander away time? Let us not delay, but immediately put our accounts in order, because when we least think of it, Jesus Christ will come

1 Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo.

2 "Ambulate dum lucem habetis." John 12. 35

3 "Venit nox, quando nemo potest operari." John 9. 4.

[55] to judge us. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.* 1

Hasten, then, my Jesus, hasten to pardon me. And shall I delay? shall I delay until I am cast into that eternal prison, where, with the rest of the condemned souls, I must forever lament, saying, *The summer is past, and we are not saved.*² No, my Lord, I will no longer resist Your loving invitations. Who knows but that this meditation which I am now reading may be the last I shall ever cast my eyes upon! I am sorry for having offended You, O sovereign good! To You do I consecrate the remainder of my days, and beseech You to grant me holy perseverance. I desire never more to offend You, but forever to love You. O Mary, refuge of sinners! in You do I place my confidence.

MEDITATION 18

The Terrors of the Dying Man at the Thought of Approaching Judgment

1. Consider the fear which the thought of judgment will cause in the mind of a dying man, when he reflects that in a very short time he must present himself before Jesus Christ, his Judge, to render an account of all the actions of his past life. When the awful moment of his passage out of this world into another, out of time into eternity, arrives, then will there be nothing so tormenting to him as the sight of his sins. St. Mary Magdalene

de Pazzi, being ill, and thinking of judgment, trembled. Her confessor told her not to fear. "Ah, Father," she replied, "it is an awful thing to appear before Jesus Christ as our Judge." Such were the sensations of this holy virgin, who was a saint from her infancy. What will he say who has frequently deserved hell?

1 "Qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet." Luke 12. 40.

2 "Finita est aestas, et nos salvati non sumus." Jer. 8. 20.

[56] 2. The abbot Agatho after many years of penance trembled, saying, "What will become of me when I shall be judged?" And how should he not tremble who has offended God by many mortal sins, and yet has done no penance for them? At death, the sight of his crimes, the rigor of the divine judgments, the uncertainty of the sentence to be pronounced upon him, what a tempest of horror and confusion will these raise around him! Let us be careful to throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus Christ, and secure our pardon before the arrival of our accounting day.

Ah! my Jesus and my Redeemer, who will one day be my judge, have pity on me before the day of justice. Behold at Your feet a deserter, who has often promised to be faithful to You, and has as often again turned his back upon You. No, my God, You have not deserved the treatment which You have until now received at my hands. Forgive me, O Lord! for I desire truly to change and amend my life. I am sorry, my sovereign good! for having despised You: take pity on me.

3. Then will be decided the great affair of our eternal salvation. Upon this decision will depend our being either saved or lost forever, our being happy or miserable for all eternity. But, O God! each one knows this, and says, "So it is." But if it is so, why do we not leave all to attend only to our sanctification, and to the securing of our eternal salvation?

My God, I give You thanks for the light which You have given me. Remember, O Jesus! that You did die for my salvation; grant that when I first behold You I may see You appeased. If until now I have despised Your grace, I now esteem it above every other good. I love You, O infinite goodness! and because I love You, I am sorry for having offended You. Until now I have forsaken You, but now I desire You and seek You; grant that I may find You, O God of my soul! Mary, my mother, recommend me to Your Son Jesus.

MEDITATION 19

The Fire of Hell

[57] 1. It is certain that hell is a pit of fire, in which the miserable souls of the wicked will be tormented forever. Even in this life the pain of burning is of all pains the most intense and dreadful; but the fire of hell has the power of inflicting much more excruciating torment, because it has been created by God to be the instrument of his wrath upon his rebellious creatures. "Go, you cursed, into everlasting fire," is the sentence of the reprobate. And as in this sentence of condemnation fire is particularly mentioned, we may conclude that, of all the torments with which the senses of the wicked are afflicted, fire is the greatest.

Ah, my God, for how many years past have I deserved to burn in this fire! But You have waited for me, to behold me burning, not with this dreadful fire, but with the blessed flames of Your holy love. This is how I love You, my sovereign good, and desire to love You forever.

2. In this world fire burns only outwardly, and does not penetrate our interior; but in hell the fire enters into the inmost recesses of its victims. *You shall make them as an oven of fire.*¹ Every one will become as a furnace of fire, so that the heart will burn within the

chest, the bowels within the belly, the brains within the skull, and even the marrow within the bones. Sinners, what are your feelings with regard to this fire? You, who cannot now bear a spark accidentally fallen from a candle, nor a house too hot, nor a ray of the sun upon your head, how will you endure to be permanently immersed in an ocean of fire, where you will be forever dying, and yet never, never die?

1 "Pones eos ut clibanum ignis." Ps. 20. 10.

[58] O my Redeemer! let not that blood which You did shed for the love of me, be shed for me in vain. Grant me sorrow for my sins, grant me Your holy love.

3. *Which of you, says the prophet, can dwell with devouring fire?* 1 As a wild beast devours his prey, so shall the fire of hell continually devour the unhappy soul, but without ever depriving him of life. Hence St. Peter Damian exclaims, "Go on, sinner, go on, unchaste one; give Your flesh its desires: a day will come when Your impurities will be to You as pitch within Your bowels, to nourish the fire which will consume You in hell for all eternity."²

My God, whom I have despised and lost! forgive me, and permit me not to lose You any more. I am sorry above every evil for having offended You. Receive me into Your favor, for now do I promise You that I will love You, and love no other but You. Most holy Mary, deliver me by Your holy intercession, from ever suffering the torments of hell.

MEDITATION 20

The Vanity of all Worldly Things

1. What is life but a vapor, which appears for a short time and then is seen no more? *What is your life?* says St. James. *It is a vapor which appears for a little while,*

*and afterwards shall vanish away.*³ The vapors which arise from the earth, when raised into the air and surrounded by the rays of the sun, appear brilliant and beautiful; but the least wind disperses them, and they

1 "Quis poterit habitare de vobis cum igne devorante?" Isa. 33. 14.

2 "Libido tua vertetur in picem, qua se perpetuus ignis in tuis visceribus nutriat." *Opusc. de cael. sac. c. 3.*

3 "Quid est enim vita vestra? vapor est ad modicum parens, et deinceps exterminabitur." James 4. 15.

[59] are seen no more. Such is the grandeur of this world. Behold that prince; today, he is feared, attended upon and honored by thousands; tomorrow, he will be dead, despised and hated by all. In a word, honors, pleasures, and riches must all end in death.

my God! make me sensible of the immensity of Your goodness, that I may love nothing but You.

2. Death deprives man of whatever he may possess in this world. What a sad sight, to behold a rich man, after death, carried out of his palace, to return there no more! How sad to behold others taking possession of the estates which he has left, of his wealth, and whatever else he so lately enjoyed! His servants, after having accompanied him to his grave, abandon him, and leave him there, to be devoured by worms; no one esteeming him, no one flattering him. Formerly every one obeyed his nod, but now no one takes the least notice of his orders.

How wretched have I been, O Lord! in having, for so many years, gone after the vanities of the world, and left You, my sovereign good! But from this day forward I desire to possess You as my only treasure, as the only love of my soul.

3. *Dust and ashes, why are you proud?*¹ Man, says the Almighty, do you not see that in a short time you will become dust and ashes? and on what do you fix your

thoughts and affections? Reflect that death will soon rob You of everything, and separate You from the whole world. And if, when You give in your accounts, you be found wanting, what will become of you for eternity?

I give You thanks, my Lord and my God. You speak thus to me, because You desire to save me. Let Your mercies now prevail. You have promised to pardon such as repent of their offences against You.

1 "Quid superbit terra et cinis?" Sirach 10. 9.

[60] From the bottom of my heart I repent: grant me therefore pardon. You have promised to love those who love You: above all things do I now love You; and so do love me also, and hate me not any more, as I have deserved. O Mary, my advocate, in Your protection is my hope.

MEDITATION 21

The Number of our Sins

1. It is the opinion of St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Amrose, St. Augustine, and others, that as God has determined for each one the number of talents, the goods of fortune, and the number of days to be bestowed upon him, so he has also determined for each one the number of sins to be pardoned him, which being completed, God will pour out his chastisements upon him and pardon him no more. *Each one, says St. Augustine, is patiently borne with by Almighty God for a certain time; but when this is over, there is then no longer any more pardon for him.*¹

I am aware, O God! that I have until now abused Your patience too much; but I know that You have not yet abandoned me, because I am sorry for my sins, and this sorrow is a sign that You still love me. O my God! I desire never more to displease You; for pity's sake do not abandon me.

2. *The Lord patiently expects that when the day of judgment shall come, He may punish them in the fullness of their sins.*² Although God has patience and waits for the sinner, yet, when the day arrives for the measure of his sins

1 "Tamdiu unumquemque a Dei patientia sustentari, quamdiu nondum finem repleverit; quo consummate, nullam illi veniam reservari." *De Vita Christi*, ch. 3.

2 "Dominus patienter exspectat, ut eas (nationes), cum iudicii dies advenerit, in plenitudine peccatorum puniat." 2 Macc. 6. 14.

[61] to be filled up he will wait for him no longer, but chastise him.

O Lord! wait yet for me a little while, do not yet abandon me; I hope with the assistance of Your grace never to offend You more, nor to excite Your anger against me. I am sorry, O my sovereign good! for having offended You, and I protest that I will never more betray You. I now esteem Your friendship more than all the goods of the whole world.

3. We commit sins, and we take no notice of the load of guilt which we are accumulating; but let us tremble lest what happened to King Balthasar befall us also: *You are weighed in the balance, and are found wanting.*¹ The devil may tell you that it matters not whether it be ten or eleven sins. But no, that wicked enemy deceives you; the sin which he is tempting you to commit will increase the load of your guilt; it may decide the balance of divine justice against you, and you may be condemned for it to the torments of hell. If, O Christian, you live not in fear that God will not show you mercy, should you add one more mortal sin to those which you have already committed; if you tremble not at the thought of this, you are in great danger of being lost.

No, my God: You have borne with me too long; I will never more abuse Your bountiful goodness. I thank You for having waited for me until now. I have forfeited

Your love too often; but I hope never more to lose You. Since You have not yet abandoned me, enable me to find You again. I love You, O my God! and I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having ever turned my back upon You. No, I desire never more to lose You. Assist me with Your grace. And You, my queen and my mother, Mary, help me by Your holy intercession.

1 "Appensus es in statera, et inventus es minus habens." Dan. 5. 27.

MEDITATION 22

The Folly of Living as Enemies of God

[62] 1. Sinners call the saints who, in this life, fly from honors, riches, and the pleasures of sense, and embrace poverty, contempt, and mortification, fools. But at the day of final retribution they will confess that they themselves have been fools in judging the lives of the saints to be folly: *We fools esteemed their life madness.*¹ And what greater folly can there be than to live without God? which is to live a miserable life in this world, to be succeeded by a still more miserable one in hell.

No, I will not wait till the last day to confess my folly; I now confess it: how great has it been in offending You, my sovereign good! *Father, I am not worthy to be called your son.*² Father, I am not worthy to receive Your forgiveness, but I hope for it through the blood which You have shed for my sake. My Jesus, I am sorry for having despised You, I love You above all things.

2. Unhappy sinners! blinded by their sins, they lose all judgment. What would be said of a man who should sell a kingdom for the smallest coin? And what should be said of him who, for a momentary pleasure, a vapor, a caprice, sells heaven and the grace of God? They think only of this life, which will shortly end, and in the

meantime deserve hell for that life which will never end. O my God! permit me not to become any more so blind as to prefer, as I have until now done, my own unlawful gratifications before You, and for the sake of them to despise You, my sovereign good! I now detest them, and love You above all things.

1 "Nos insensati vitam illorum aestimabamus insaniam." Wis. 5. 4.

2 "Pater . . . non sum dignus vocari filius tuus." Luke 15. 19.

[63] 3. Miserable worldlings! the time will come when they will bewail their folly; but when? when there will be no longer anything to prevent their eternal ruin. Then will they say, *What has pride profited us? or what advantage has the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow.*¹ Behold, they will exclaim, how all our delights have passed away like a shadow, and nothing remains to us now but suffering and eternal lamentation!

Dear Jesus! have pity on me. I have forgotten You, but You did not forget me. I love You with my whole soul, and I detest above all evil whatever sins I have committed against You. Pardon me, O God! and remember not my offences against You. And since You knowest my weakness, do not abandon me; give me strength to overcome all things to please You. O Mary, Mother of God! in You do I place my hopes.

MEDITATION 23

The Great Affair of Salvation

1. The affair of our eternal salvation is of all affairs the most important. But how does it happen that men use all diligence to succeed in the affairs of this world, leave no means untried to obtain a desirable situation, to gain a lawsuit, or to bring about a marriage, reject no counsels, neglect no measures by which to obtain their object, going without food and sleep, and yet do nothing to gain eternal

salvation, nothing to gain it, but everything to forfeit it, as though hell, heaven, and eternity were not articles of faith, but only fables and lies?

O God! assist me by Your divine light; permit me not to be any longer blinded, as I until now have been.

2. If an accident happen to a house, what is not immediately done to repair it? If a jewel be lost, what is not done to recover it? The soul is lost, the grace of God is lost, and men sleep and smile We attend most carefully to our temporal welfare, and almost entirely neglect our eternal salvation! We call those happy who have renounced all things for God; why then are we so much attached to earthly things?

O Jesus! You have so much desired my salvation as to shed Your blood and lay down Your life to secure it; and I have been so indifferent to the preservation of Your grace as to renounce and forfeit it for a mere nothing! I am sorry, O Lord! for having thus dishonored You. I will renounce all things to attend only to Your love, my God, who are most worthy of all love.

[66] 3. The Son of God gives his life to save our souls; the devil is most diligent in his endeavors to bring them to eternal ruin: and do we take no care of them? St. Philip Neri convicts that man of the height of folly who is inattentive to the salvation of his soul. Let us arouse our faith: it is certain that, after this short life, another life awaits us, which will be either eternally happy or eternally miserable. God has given us to choose which we will. *Before man is life and death . . . that which he shall choose shall be given him.*¹ Ah! let us make such a choice now as we shall not have to repent of for all eternity.

God! make me sensible of the great wrong I have done You in offending You and renouncing You for the love of creatures. I am sorry with my whole heart for having despised You, my sovereign good; do not

reject me now that I return to You. I love You above all things, and for the future I will lose all things rather than forfeit Your grace. Through the love which You have shown me in dying for me, attend to me with Your help, and do not abandon me. O Mary, Mother of God! be my advocate.

MEDITATION 24

The Frequent thought of Death

1. Men who are attached to this world endeavor to banish the thoughts of death from their minds, as though, by avoiding the remembrance of death, they could avoid death itself. But no; by banishing the thoughts of death from their minds, they expose themselves to greater danger of making an evil end. There is no alternative: sooner or later we must die; and what is still more, we can die but once; and if once we lost, we shall be lost forever.

1 "Ante hominem vita et mors, bonum et malum; quod placuerit ei, dabitur illi." Sirach 15. 18.

[67] My God, I give You thanks for having enlightened me. I have already lost too many years in offending You; but I will now spend the remainder of my life entirely in Your service. Command me what You will, for I desire to please You in all things.

2. Holy anchorites, who formerly fled from the world into deserts in order to secure for themselves a happy death, took nothing with them but some spiritual book and a skull, by the sight of which they might continually keep up in their minds the remembrance of their last end. They meditated upon it, saying: "As the bones of him to whom this skull belonged, so will the bones of my body one day be: and my soul - who knows where that shall dwell?" And thus they endeavored to gain not the goods of this life, but of that life which will

never end.

I give You thanks, O Lord! for not having permitted me to die when I was in the state of sin. I am sorry for having offended You, and hope, through Your precious blood, for mercy and pardon. I desire, O Jesus! to renounce all things, and to do my utmost to please You.

3. A certain hermit, being at the point of death, was observed to smile, and being asked why he was so cheerful, answered: "I have always kept death before my eyes, and from here, now that it has come, it does not alarm me." The approach of death, therefore, is terrible to those only who have thought of nothing but of gratifying themselves during their lifetime, and have never thought of their last end; but it is not terrible to those who, by frequently thinking upon it, have learned to despise all earthly goods, and to love nothing but God.

O my Savior! I perceive that death is already drawing near to me, and as yet I have done nothing for You, who did die for me. No, before death, I will, O God! love You, who are worthy of infinite love. I [68] have until now dishonored You by the offences which I have committed against You; but I am sorry for them with my whole heart. For the future I will honor You, by loving You to the utmost of my power. Give me light and strength to do so. You would have me be wholly Yours, and such do I desire to be. Help me by Your grace; in You do I confide. And in You also do I confide, O Mary, my Mother, my hope!

MEDITATION 25

The Turning away from God by Sin

1. St. Augustine and St. Thomas define mortal sin to be a turning away from God : that is, the turning of one's back upon God, leaving the Creator for the sake of the creature. What punishment would that subject deserve

who, while his king was giving him a command, contemptuously turned his back upon him to go and transgress his orders? This is what the sinner does; and this is punished in hell with the pain of loss, that is, the loss of God, a punishment richly deserved by him who in this life turns his back upon his sovereign good.

Alas! my God, I have frequently turned my back upon You; but I see that You have not yet abandoned me; I see that You approach me, and inviting me to repentance, offer me Your pardon. I am sorry above every evil for having offended You, have pity on me.

*2. You have forsaken Me, says the Lord, You have gone backward.*¹ God complains and says, Ungrateful soul, you have forsaken me! I should never have forsaken you had you not first turned your back upon Me: you have gone backward - O God, with what consternation

¹ "Tu reliquisti me, dicit Dominus; retrorsum abiisti." Jer. 15. 6.

[69] will these words fill the soul of the sinner when he stands to be judged before Your divine tribunal!

You make me hear them now, O my Savior! not to condemn me, but to bring me to sorrow for the offences I have committed against You. Yes, O Jesus! I sincerely repent of all the displeasure which I have given You. For my own miserable gratifications I have forsaken You, my God, my sovereign, infinite good! But behold me a penitent returned to You; and reject me not.

*3. Why will you die, O house of Israel? return and live.*¹ I have died, says Jesus Christ, for the salvation of your souls, and why will you condemn them by your sins to eternal death? Return to me, and you will recover the life of my grace.

Jesus! I should not dare to crave Your pardon, did

I not know that You had died to obtain my forgiveness. Alas! how often have I despised Your grace and Your love! O that I had died rather than ever offered You so great an injury! But You, who came near to me even when I offended You, will not now reject me, when I love You and seek no other but You. My God and my all, permit me not any more to be ungrateful to You. Mary, Queen and Mother, obtain for me the grace of holy perseverance.

MEDITATION 26

The Mercy of God in Calling Sinners to Repentance

i . The Lord called to Adam, and said to him, *Where are You?*² These are the words of a father, says a pious author, going in quest of his lost son. Oh the immense compassion of our God! Adam sins, he turns his back

1 "Quare moriemini, domus Israel? . . . Revertimini, et vivite." Ezek. 18. 31.

2 "Adam . . . ubi es? Gen. 3. 9.

[70] upon God; and yet God does not abandon him, but follows him and calls after him, "Adam, where are You?" Thus, my soul, has God frequently done towards you; you have forsaken him by sin; but he did not hesitate to approach you, and to call upon you by many interior lights, by remorse of conscience, and by his holy inspirations; all of which were the effects of his compassion and love.

God of mercy, O God of love! how could I have so grievously offended You, how could I have been so ungrateful to You!

2. As a father when he beholds his son hastening to cast himself down from the brink of a precipice, presses forward towards him, and with tears endeavors to withhold him from destruction; so, my God, have You done towards me. I was already hastening by my sins to pre-

cipitate myself into hell, and You did hold me back. I am now sensible, O Lord! of the love which You have shown me, and I hope to sing forever in heaven the praises of Your mercy: *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.*¹ I know, O Jesus! that You desire my salvation; but I do not know whether You have yet pardoned me. Oh! give me intense sorrow for my sins, give me an ardent love for You, as signs of Your merciful forgiveness.

3. O my Savior! how can I doubt of receiving Your pardon, when You Yourself do offer it to me, and are ready to receive me with open arms on my return to You? And so I do return to You, sorrowing and overpowered at the consideration that after all my offences against You, You indeed still love me. Oh that I had never displeased You, my sovereign good! how much am I grieved for having done so! Pardon me, O Jesus! I will never more offend You. But I shall not

¹ "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo." Ps. 88. 1.

[71] be able to rest satisfied with Your forgiveness only: give me also a great love for You. Having so often deserved to burn in the fire of hell, I now desire to burn in the fire of Your holy love. I love You, who are my only love, my life, my treasure, my all. O Mary, my protectress! pray for me, that I may continue faithful to God until the end of my life.

MEDITATION 27

The Soul's Appearance at the Tribunal of God

1. When criminals are presented before their judges, though they fear and tremble, yet flatter themselves that either their crimes will not be proved against them, or that their judges will remit in part the punishments which they have deserved. O God! how great will be the horror of a guilty soul when presented before Jesus

Christ, from whom nothing will be hidden, and who will judge it with the utmost severity! *I am the Judge and the Witness*¹ will he then say: "I am Your Judge, and I am witness of all the offences You have committed against me."

My Jesus! I deserved to hear this from Your mouth, had the hour of my judgment arrived. But now You are pleased to assure me, that if I will repent of my sins, You will no longer remember them: *I will not remember all his iniquities.*²

2. It is the opinion of theologians that in the same place in which the soul is separated from the body it will be judged, and its lot decided either for eternal life or eternal death. But should the soul unhappily depart from the body in sin, what will it be able to say when Jesus Christ reminds it of his abused mercies, of the years he granted it, of the calls by which he invited it,

¹ "Ego sum iudex et testis." Jer. 29. 23.

² Omnium iniquitatum . . . non recordabor." Ezek. 18. 22.

[72] and of the many other means which he offered it of securing its salvation?

Jesus, my Redeemer! You who condemn obstinate sinners, do not condemn those who love You and who are sorry for having offended You. I am a sinner, but I love You more than myself, and I am sorry above every evil for having displeased You; oh, do pardon me before the time comes when You will judge me!

3. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.*¹

When, therefore, O my Jesus and my Judge! You shall judge me, after my death, Your wounds will be a terror to me, reproaching me with my ingratitude for the love which You have shown me in suffering and dying for me, but now they encourage me and give me

confidence to hope for pardon from You, my Redeemer, who for the love of me, and that You may not have to condemn me, did allow Yourself to be tormented and crucified. *We therefore pray You, help Your servants whom You have redeemed with Your precious blood.*² O my Jesus! have pity on me, who am one of those sheep for whom You did shed Your sacred blood. If until now I have despised You, I now esteem and love You above all things. Make known to me the means by which I may be saved, and strengthen me to fulfil Your holy will. I will no longer abuse Your goodness. You have placed me under too many obligations to You; I will no longer permit myself to live at a distance from You and be deprived of Your love. Mary, Mother of mercy, have compassion on me.

1 "Qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet." Luke 12. 40.

2 Te ergo quaesumus, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti. [Eucharistic prayer 1 in Mass]

MEDITATION 28

The Will of God to Save All

1. The Apostle St. Paul teaches us that God wills the salvation of all: *He will that all men be saved.*¹ and St. Peter says: *the Lord, deals patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance.*² For this end the Son of God came down from heaven, and was made man, and spent thirty-three years in labors and sufferings, and finally shed his blood and laid down his life for our salvation; and shall we forfeit our salvation?

You, my Savior, did spend Your whole life in securing my salvation, and in what have I spent so many years of my life? What fruit have You until now reaped from me? I have deserved to be cut off and cast into hell. But You *desire not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live.*² Yes, O God! I leave all and

turn myself to You. I love You, and because I love You I am sorry for having offended You. Receive me, and permit me not to forsake You any more.

2. How much did the saints do to secure their eternal salvation! How many nobles and kings have forsaken

1 "Omnes homines vult salvos fieri." 1 Tim. 2. 4.

2 "Patienter agit, nolens aliquos perire, sed omnes ad poenitentiam reverti." 2 Peter 3. 9.

3 "Nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur . . . et vivat." Ezek. 33. 11.

[77] their kingdoms and estates, and shut themselves up in cloisters! How many young persons have forsaken their country and friends, and have dwelt in caves and deserts! And how many martyrs have laid down their lives under the most cruel tortures! And why? to save their souls. And what have we done?

Woe to me, who, although I know that death is near at hand, yet think not of it! No, my God, I will no longer live at a distance from You. Why do I delay? Is it that death may overtake me in the miserable state in which I now am? No, my God, do assist me to prepare for death.

3. O God, how many graces has my Savior bestowed on me to enable me to save my soul! He has caused me to be born in the bosom of the true Church; he has many times pardoned me my transgressions; he has favored me with many lights in sermons, in prayers, in meditations, in Communions, and spiritual exercises; and often has he called me to his love. In a word, how many means of salvation has he granted me which he has not granted others!

And yet, O God! when shall I detach myself from the world and give myself entirely to You? Behold me, O Jesus! I will no longer resist. You have obliged me to love You. I desire to be wholly Yours: do receive me, and disdain not the love of a sinner who has

until now so much despised You. I love You, my God, my love, and my all; have pity on me, O Mary! You are my hope.

MEDITATION 29

The Near Approach of Death

1. Every one knows that he must certainly die; yet many delude themselves by imagining that death is at so immense a distance from them that it will scarcely [78] ever reach them. No; our life is indeed short, and death is very near us. The days of our sojourning here are few, and perhaps much fewer than we imagine. What else is our life but a light vapor, which is driven away and disappears with the wind? a blade of grass which is dried up in the heat of the sun?

O God! You would not allow death to overtake me when I was under Your displeasure, because You did love me and did desire my salvation; and so I will also love You.

2. My days, said holy Job, have been swifter than a runner.¹ Death is hastening towards us more rapidly than a runner, and we at every step, and every breath and moment, are drawing nearer and nearer to death. At the time of our death how shall we wish for one day or one hour of the many we now squander away to no purpose!

Ah! Lord, if death were now announced to me, what should I find that I have done for You? Alas! come to my assistance; let me not die ungrateful to You as I until now have been. Grant me true sorrow for my sins, the gift of Your love, and holy perseverance.

3. Death hastens towards us; and so we must also hasten to do that which is good, and to put our accounts in order against the day of its arrival. When death comes it precludes all remedies for what has been done

badly. How many are now in hell who thought of amending their lives at some future period, but were prevented by death and consigned to eternal torments!

My dear Redeemer, I will no longer resist Your calls. You offer me pardon, and I am desirous of obtaining it; I pray for it, and hope for it, through that death which You, my Jesus, have suffered that You may be able to impart it to me. I am sorry, O infinite goodness, for having offended You. You, my Jesus, have died for me, and I have put off Your friendship for my

1 "Dies me! velociores fuerunt cursore." Job 9. 25.

[79] own wretched inclinations. For the future I hope with Your assistance always to love You. I love You, O God! I love You. You are now and shall be forever my only good, my only love. Mary, mother of God, watch over me and take pity on me.

MEDITATION 30

God Abandons the Sinner in his Sins

1. It is a grievous chastisement of God when he cuts the sinner off in his sins; but still worse is that whereby he abandons him and allows him to add sin upon sin. "No punishment is so great," says Bellarmine, "as when sin is made the punishment of sin."¹

I give You thanks, therefore, O Jesus! for not having allowed me to die in my sins; and I give You still greater thanks for not having abandoned me in my sins. And oh! into how much deeper an abyss of sin should I have fallen if you had not supported me. Continue, O Lord! to keep me from sin and do not forsake me.

2. *I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted.*² When the master cuts down the fence of his

vineyard, and leaves it open for any one to enter therein, it is a sign that he considers it not worth cultivating, and abandons it. In like manner does God proceed when he forsakes a sinful soul: he takes away from it the hedge of his holy fear, of his light, and of his voice; and from here the soul being blinded and enslaved by its vices, which overpower it, despises everything, the grace of God, heaven, admonitions, and censures; it thinks lightly even of its own damnation, and thus en-

1 "Nulla poena gravior, quam cum peccatum est poena peccati. *In Ps.* 68.

2 "Auferam sepem ejus, et erit in direptionem." *Isa.* 5. 5.

[80] veloped in darkness is certain to be lost forever. The wicked man, when he has come into the depths of sins, scorns it.¹

This have I deserved, O God! for having so often despised Your light and Your calls. But I see that You have not yet abandoned me. I love You, O my God! and in You do I place all my hopes.

3. *We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed; let us forsake her.*² The physician visits the sick man, prescribes remedies for him, and makes him sensible of his maladies; but when he sees that his patient does not obey him, and on this account grows worse and worse, he takes leave of him and forsakes him. It is thus that God deals with obstinate sinners: after a certain time he speaks but little to them; and only assists them with grace just sufficient to enable them to save their souls; but they will not save them. The darkness of their minds, the hardness of their hearts, and the inveteracy of their wicked habits, render it morally impossible for them to gain salvation.

But, O God! since You still call me to repentance, You have not yet abandoned me; I desire never more to forsake You. I love You, O infinite goodness! and because I love You I am exceedingly sorry for

having offended You. I love You, and I hope through Your blood to love You forever. Do not allow me to be any more separated from You. Holy Mary, Virgin of virgins, become my advocate.

MEDITATION 31

The Examination at the Particular Judgment

1. In the same moment and in the same place in which the soul departs from the body, the divine tribunal

1 "Impius, cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit." Prov. 18. 3.

2 "Curavimus Babylonem, et non est sanata; derelinquamus." Jer. 51. 9.

[81] is erected, the indictment read, and the sentence pronounced by the sovereign judge. *Those whom he foreknew*, says St. Paul, *he also predestined to be made conformable to his Son . . . them he also justified.*¹ In order, therefore, to be made worthy of glory, our lives must be made conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. Hence it is that St. Peter says that, in the day of judgment, the just man shall scarcely be saved.²

Jesus, my Savior and my judge! what will become of me, since my whole life has until now been the reverse of Yours? But Your Passion is my hope. I am a sinner, but You can make me a saint, and this I hope for from Your generosity.

2. The Venerable Father Louis da Ponte, reflecting on the account which he should have to give of his whole life at the time of his death, trembled to such a degree as to make the whole room shake. And how ought we to tremble at the thought of this account! and how diligent ought we to be in seeking the Lord while we may find him! At the time of death it will be difficult to find him, if we are overtaken in our sins; but now we may easily find him by repentance and love.³

Yes, my God, I am sorry above every evil for having despised You; and I now esteem and love You above every good.

3. What shall I do, said holy Job, when God shall rise to judge? and when He shall examine, what shall I answer Him?⁴ And what shall I answer him, if, after so many mercies, so many calls, still I resist him?

1 "Quos praescivit et praedestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui . . . illos et glorificavit." Rom. 8. 29.

2 "Justus vix salvabitur." 1 Peter 4. 18.

3 "Quaerite Dominum, dum inveniri potest." Isa. 55. 6.

4 "Quid faciam, cum surrexerit ad judicandum Deus? Et cum quaesierit, quid respondebo illi?" Job 31. 14.

[82] No, Lord, I will no longer resist You, I will no longer be ungrateful to You. I have committed many offences and disloyalties against You, but You have shed Your blood to save me from my sins. "*Help Your servant whom You have redeemed with Your precious blood.*"¹ I am sorry, my sovereign good, for having offended You, and I love You with my whole heart; have pity on me. And O Mary, my Mother, do not abandon me!

MEDITATION 32

The Journey to Eternity

1. *Man shall go into the house of his eternity.*¹ This earth is not our true country; we are only passing through it on our way to eternity. The land in which I dwell, the house which I inhabit, are not mine. In a short time, and when I least expect it, I must leave them. The house which will contain my body until the day of general judgment will be the grave, and the house of my soul will be eternity, in heaven if I be saved, in hell if I be lost. Foolish indeed, then, should I be were I to place my affections on things which I must soon leave. I will endeavor to procure for myself a happy mansion

in which I may dwell forever.

2. Man shall go into the house of his eternity. It is said "he shall go," to give us to understand that each one shall go, in another life, into that house which he himself has chosen: "he shall go," he shall not be conducted, but shall go there of his own free will. Faith teaches us that in the next life there are two habitations: one is a palace of delights, where all are happy forever, and this is paradise; the other is a prison of excruciating torments, where all are forever miserable, and this is hell. Choose, my soul, to which of the two you will go.

1 Tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.

2 "Ibit homo in domum aeternitatis suae." Eccles. 12. 5.

[83] If You desire heaven, you must walk in the way which leads to heaven; if you should walk in the way which leads to hell, you will one day unhappily find yourself there.

Jesus, enlighten me; Jesus, strengthen me. Permit me not to be separated from You.

3. Man shall go into the house of his eternity. If then I be saved and enter into the house of bliss, I shall there be happy forever; but if I be lost and enter into the house of woe, I shall be miserable forever. If, therefore, I would be saved, I must keep eternity always before my eyes. He who frequently meditates upon eternity does not become attached to the goods of this world, and thus secures his salvation. I will endeavor, therefore, so to regulate all my actions that they may be so many steps towards a happy eternity.

O God! I believe in life eternal. Henceforth I will live only for You; until now I have lived for myself and have lost You, my sovereign good. I will never more lose You; but will forever serve and love You. Assist me, O Jesus! and do not abandon me. Mary, my

Mother, protect me.

MEDITATION 33

The Folly of Neglecting Salvation

1. *What does it profit a man, says our Lord, if he gain the world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?*¹ How many rich men, how many nobles, how many monarchs, are now in hell! What now remains to them of their riches and honors but remorse and rage, which prey upon their souls, and will continue to prey upon them for all eternity?

O my God! enlighten me and assist me. I hope nevermore to be deprived of Your grace. Have pity on a sinner who desires to love You.

2. How is it, writes Salvian, that men believe in death, judgment, hell, and eternity, and yet live without fearing them? Hell is believed, and yet how many go down there! But, O God! while these truths are believed, they are not dwelt upon, and from this are so many souls lost.

Alas! I also have been of the number of those who have been guilty of such folly. Although I knew that by offending You I was forfeiting Your friendship and writing my own condemnation, yet I was not restrained from committing sin! "*Cast me not away from Your face!*"² I am sensible of the evil I have done in despising You, my God, and am grieved for it with my whole soul. Oh, "cast me not away from Your face."

¹ Matt. 16. 26

² Ps 50. 13

[86] 3. And then? and then? Oh, what force have these two words with Fr. P. Francis Zazzera when repeated to him by St. Philip Neri, in order to induce him to renounce the world and give himself wholly to God!* *Oh*

*that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their ultimate end.*¹ Oh! if all persons would but think of death, in which everything must be relinquished; of judgment, in which an account must be given of our whole lives; of a happy or miserable eternity, which must be the lot of each one : if all did but provide for these last things of their lives, no one would be lost. The present only is thought of, and from here is eternal salvation lost.

I give You thanks, O God, for the patience with which You have until now borne with me, and for the light which You now bestow upon me. I see that although I forgot You, You did not forget me. I am sorry, my sovereign good, for having turned my back upon You, and I am now resolved to give myself entirely to You. And why should I delay? That You may abandon me, and that death may find me as miserable and ungrateful as I have been even until now?

* The circumstance to which St. Alphonsus here refers is thus related by him in his sermon for Septuagesima Sunday:

"St. Philip Neri, speaking one day to a young man named Francis Zazzera, who expected to make his fortune in the world by his talents, said : 'Be of good heart, my son; you may make a great fortune, you may become an eminent lawyer, you may then be made a bishop, then perhaps a cardinal, and then, who knows, perhaps even Pope. And then? and then? Go,' continued the Saint, 'and reflect upon these two words.' The young man went his way, and after having meditated on the two words *and then? and then?* abandoned all his worldly prospects, and gave himself entirely to God. Leaving the world, he entered into the same congregation that St. Philip had founded, and then he died in the odor of sanctity."

¹ "Utinam saperent, et intelligerent, ac novissima providerent." Deut. 32. 29.

[87] No, my God, I will no more offend You, but will love You. I love You, O infinite goodness! Give me perseverance and Your holy love; I ask for nothing more. Mary, refuge of sinners, intercede for me.

MEDITATION 34

The Moment of Death

1. "*O moment, on which depends eternity!*"¹ - Oh! how much depends on the last moment of our lives, on our last breath! Either an eternity of delights, or an eternity of torments, a life of happiness, or a life of misery. What folly therefore must it be, for the sake of a wretched momentary pleasure in this life, to run the risk of making an evil end, and beginning a life of misery which will never terminate!

O God! what will become of me in the last moment of my life? O Jesus, who did die for my salvation! permit me not to be lost forever; permit me not to lose You, my only good.

2. O God! how do those miserable criminals who are condemned to cast lots for their lives tremble when they throw the dice, upon the cast of which depends their life or death! Tell me, Christian, if you were in such a situation, how much you would give to be liberated from it? But faith teaches you that you will one day arrive at that last moment, on which will depend your eternal life or death. You will then say, "Alas! I must now be either happy forever with God, or in despair forever without him."

No, my God, I will not lose You; if I have until now forfeited Your friendship, I am sorry for it, and sincerely repent of it; I will never lose You again.

3. Either we believe, or we do not believe. And if we believe that there is an eternity, that we can die only

¹ O momentum, a quo pendet aeternitas!

[88] once, and that if we die badly, the consequences will

be eternal, without the least hope of remedy; why do we not resolve to separate ourselves from all danger of being lost, and to use all the means in our power to secure for ourselves a happy death? No security can be too great when eternity is at stake. The days of our lives are so many favors from God, by which he allows us time to prepare our accounts against the arrival of death. Delay not, for you have no time to lose.

Behold me, O God! tell me what I must do to be saved, for I will do all that You require of me. I have turned my back upon You; and for this I am exceedingly sorry, and for having done so would willingly die of grief. Pardon me, O Lord! and permit me not to forsake You any more. I love You above all things, and will never more cease to love You. Holy Mary, Virgin of virgins, obtain for me the grace of perseverance in virtue.

MEDITATION 35

The Sentence of Particular Judgment.

1. Oh! what joy will he experience who, departing out of this life in the grace of God, will, on being pre-

1 "Ipse Christus vos obsecrat; quid autem obsecrat? reconciliamini Deo." *In 2 Cor.*, hom. 2.

2 "Quid est homo, quia magnificas eum? aut quid apponis erga eum cor tuum? Job 7. 17.

[90] sented before Jesus Christ, behold him with a kindly countenance, be lovingly received by him, and hear from him those delightful words: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant : because you have been faithful over a few things, I will place you over many things : enter into the joy of your Lord.*¹

But, O Jesus! if I were now to be summoned to judgment before You, how could I hope that You would call me a good and faithful servant, when I have until now been so bad and faithless towards You, changing my

promises of fidelity into betrayals? But I will be faithful to You for the future, and will sooner lose my life a thousand times than forfeit Your grace. Do give me strength to fulfil this my resolution.

2. On the other hand, what anguish, O Jesus! will that sinner experience, who, dying in sin, and being presented before You, beholds Your wrathful countenance! The soul that departs this life in God's displeasure will first condemn itself, and will then hear from Jesus Christ that terrible sentence: *Depart from me, You accursed, into everlasting fire.*²

How often, O Jesus, have I deserved to hear from You the same sentence when I have committed mortal sin! When death overtakes me, You will then be my judge; but now You are my Father and Redeemer, ready to pardon me, if I am sorry for having offended You. I am therefore sorry, from the bottom of my heart, for all my offences against You; and I am sorry, not so much on account of hell which I have deserved by them, as because by them I have grievously offended You, who have loved me with an infinite love.

3. The soul goes forth and leaves the body, but it is

1 "Euge, serve bone et fidelis; quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam: intra in gaudium Domini tui." Matt. 25. 23.

2 "Discede a me, maledicte, in ignem aeternum." Matt. 25. 41.

[91] for some time doubtful whether the person be alive or dead. While the bystanders are doubting, the soul has already entered eternity. The priest, satisfied at length that the man is dead, recites the prayer of the Church: "Come to his assistance, all ye saints of God: meet him, all you angels of God: receive his soul and present it now before its Lord."¹ But of what avail will it be to the soul that has departed an enemy of God, and upon which sentence has already been passed, to call the saints and angels to its assistance?

My good angel, you saints, my holy advocates, St. Michael, St. Joseph, and you my holy protectress Mary! help me now while you have it in your power. And You, my Redeemer, pardon me now while You exercise mercy. I am sorry for having offended You, and I love You with my whole heart. Assist me, O Lord! and support me, that I may never offend You again. O Mary! take me forever into Your care.

MEDITATION 36

An Unprepared Death

1. Nothing is more certain than death, but nothing more uncertain than the hour of death. It is certain that the year and day of each one's death are already determined by our Lord, though we know them not; and wisely does God conceal them from us, in order that we may always prepare for our departure.

I give You thanks, O Jesus! for having waited for me, and for not having called me out of life in the state of mortal sin. During the remainder of my life I will weep for my iniquities and love You with all my strength. I know that I must die, and by Your grace I will prepare myself for a good death.

1 Subvenite Sancti Dei. Occurrite, Angeli Domini, suscipiente animam ejus, offerentes eam in conspectu Altissimi.

[92] 2. Jesus Christ admonishes us of the hour of our death, and when will it be? when we least expect it. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.*¹ If then, says St. Bernard, death may at any time take us out of life, we should at all times be prepared for it and keep our accounts in order.

O Jesus! I will not wait until the moment of my death to give myself to You. You have said that those who

seek You shall find You: *Seek and you shall find.*² I seek You, I desire You; grant that I may find You. I am sorry for my sins and will nevermore offend You.

3. When then, dear Christian, you are tempted to commit sin with the hope of confessing it the next day, say to yourself: But who knows but that this moment may be my last? And if in this moment I should be guilty of sin, and death should overtake me, where would I go? O God! how many miserable sinners have been struck by death in the act of feasting themselves on some poisonous gratification! The devil will say to you: This misfortune will not befall you. But do you answer him: If it should befall me, what will become of me for eternity?

God! may it not happen to me which has happened to so many other unhappy sinners? How many are now in hell for lesser sins than I have committed! I give You thanks, O Jesus! for having waited for me with so much patience, and for having now enlightened me. I have erred in forsaking You; and death might have been my punishment; but since You give me time, henceforward I will think of nothing but of loving You. Assist me with Your grace. And do You, Mary, assist me by Your holy intercession.

1 "Qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet." Luke, 12. 40.

2 "Quaerite, et invenietis." Matt. 7. 7.

MEDITATION 37

The Eternity of Hell

[93] 1. If hell were not eternal, it would not be hell. Punishment that does not continue for a long time is not grievous punishment. On the other hand, punishment, however light it may be, when it continues for a long time, becomes intolerable. Were a person obliged during the whole of his life to see the same entertainments, or

to hear the same music, how could he endure it? What then must it be to remain in hell and to suffer all its torments! And for how long a time? For all eternity. It would be folly, for the sake of a day's pleasure, to condemn one's self to be burnt alive. And is it not folly, for the sake of a sensual gratification, which can last but for one moment, to condemn one's self to the fire of hell, whose victims, though dying every moment, yet never, never die?

O God! preserve me by Your grace. Woe to me if I should turn my back upon You after the great mercy with which You have dealt with me! Keep me, O God! and preserve me from so great a misfortune.

2. Let us awaken our slumbering faith. It is certain that he who is lost is lost forever, without the least hope of being redeemed from eternal ruin. *They shall go into eternal punishment.*¹ He who once enters the prison of hell can come out no more. Otherwise the condemned wretches would flatter themselves with hopes, and would say, Who knows, perhaps God may some day have pity on us and deliver us? But no, they well know that hell will never have an end, and that they must continue to suffer the same torments that they at present endure so long as God shall be God. My dear Redeemer, I know too well that by the past I have forfeited Your grace, and

¹ "Ibunt hi in supplicium aeternum." Matt. 25. 46.

[94] condemned myself to hell; but I do not know whether You have pardoned me. Hasten to forgive me, O Jesus! while I bitterly lament my offences against You, and never permit me to offend You any more.

3. In this life death is of all things the most dreaded, but in hell it is of all things the most desired. There they desire and long for death, but cannot die. They shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them. ¹ Are there not at least, in that place of torments, some to com-

passionate them? No, all hate them, and rejoice in their sufferings, which will last forever, without end of mitigation. The trumpet of divine justice continually sounds and thunders forth in their ears those terrible words: "Forever, forever; never, never."

Amongst these miserable beings, O Jesus! I have deserved to be numbered; but You, who have until now preserved me from falling into hell, preserve me for the future from falling into sin, which alone can condemn me to that place of woe. Ah! never permit me again to become Your enemy. I love You, O infinite goodness! and I am sorry for having offended You. Pardon me, and as I have deserved to burn forever in the fire of hell, grant me to burn forever with the fire of Your holy love. O Mary, in Your powerful intercession do I confide.

MEDITATION 38

The Uncertainty of Grace

1 . *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and put it not off from day to day: for His wrath shall come suddenly, and in the time of vengeance will He destroy You.*² The Lord admonishes us to be speedily converted, if we would be

1 "Desiderabunt mori, et fugiet mors ab eis." Rev. 9. 6.

2 "Non tardes converti ad Dominum, et ne differas de die in diem: subito enim veniet ira illius, et in tempore vindictae disperdet te." Sirach 5. 9.

[95] saved; because if we go on putting off our conversion from day to day, the time of vengeance will come, when God will neither call nor wait for us any longer; death will overtake us in sin, and there will be no means of escaping eternal damnation. God admonishes us in this manner, because he loves us and wills not to see us perish. I am convinced, O God! that You desire my salvation; I know that You desire to deal with me in Your mercy; and it is my desire never more to despise You.

2. Alas! to how many have the admonitions given by God during life become now in hell the most cruel swords that pierce their souls! In proportion as the mercies which God showed them were greater, so were their crimes more enormous.

If, O Jesus! You have condemned me to hell, as I have deserved, how great would have been my punishment, since Your graces and favors have been so abundant towards me! No, I will no longer be ungrateful to You. Say to me what You please, and I will obey You in all things. I am sorry for having so often offended You; henceforward I will not seek to please myself, but to please only You, my God and only good.

3. How cautious are men in their temporal affairs, and yet how negligent in the affairs of eternity! If a man has to receive a sum of money from another, he uses every expedient to obtain it as quickly as possible, saying, "Who knows what may happen?" And yet, why do so many live months and years in sin? Because they do not say, when the soul is at stake, "Who knows what may happen?" If money be lost, however valuable it may be, all is not lost; but if the soul be lost, all is lost, and must be lost forever, without hope of recovery.

My beloved Redeemer, You have given me life that I may become worthy of Your grace; and yet I have often renounced Your grace for something worse than nothing. Pardon me, O infinite goodness! for I am sorry, from [96] the bottom of my heart, for having done so. O Jesus! You have done too much to oblige me to love You, and I desire to love You to the utmost of my power. I love You, my sovereign good, I love You more than myself. Permit me not, O God! to cease to love You any more. O Mary, holy queen! protect me.

MEDITATION 39

The Death of Jesus for the Love of Men

1. Was it ever possible that God, the Creator of all things, should have been pleased to die for the love of his creatures? Our faith tells us that he has done so. *He has loved us, and has delivered Himself for us.*¹ The earth, the heavens, and all nature, with astonishment beheld Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, the lord of the universe, die of intense pain and anguish, on a shameful cross; and why? For the love of men. And do men believe this and not love God?

I have believed it, O Jesus! and yet not only have I not loved You, but I have frequently offended You. Pardon me, I beseech You, and remind me continually of the death which You have suffered for me, that I may never more offend You, but may always love You.

2. It was not necessary for man's salvation that God should die; one drop of his blood, a single tear, or a prayer would have been sufficient, because being of infinite value, it would have redeemed this or a thousand other worlds.

But, O Jesus! You would suffer so much, to teach us Your great love for us. Hence, St. Bonaventure exclaims, but with much greater reason may I exclaim, who have so often offended my Redeemer: "Alas! my God, why have You so much loved me? why, O Lord, why? Who am I?" O divine Pastor of my soul, behold

¹ "Dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis." Eph. 5. 2.

[97] I am the lost sheep, in quest of which You came upon the earth. I have ungratefully fled away from You; since, unmindful of the sufferings which I have occasioned You, You call me, miserable as I am, but overcome with Your great goodness, embracing Your sacred feet, nailed to the cross. Jesus, my love, my treasure! I love You, and because I love You I am sorry for having offended You.

3. St. Bernard, imagining himself present when Pilate passed sentence of death on our Blessed Savior, thus addresses him: "What have You done, my most innocent Savior, that You should be thus condemned?¹ You are innocence itself; and how do I now behold You condemned to death, even to the death of the cross? What crime have You committed?" And he proceeds to answer, "Your crime is love." As if he had said, Ah! it is Your too great love for us, and not Pilate, that condemns You to death.

When, my dear Redeemer, I remember the offences I have committed against You, it is not hell, which I have deserved for them, that makes me grieve, but the love which You have shown me. Ah! my crucified God, I desire to be henceforth and forever Yours, and I will love no other but You. Strengthen my weakness, and make me faithful to You. Holy Mary, mother of God, enable me to love Jesus; this is the only favor I ask.

MEDITATION 40

The Certainty of being either Saved or Lost

1. *With fear and trembling*, says the Apostle, *work out your salvation*. 2 In order to be saved we should tremble

1 Quid fecisti, innocentissime Salvator, quod sic condemnareris?

2 "Cum metu et tremore vestram salutem operamini." Phil. 2. 12.

[98] lest we be lost, for there is no middle way; we must be either saved or lost forever. He who trembles not is in great danger of being lost, because he takes but little care to employ the means of obtaining salvation. God desires that all should be saved, and he gives to all his grace; but he requires that all should cooperate for this end. All desire to be saved; many, because they will not employ the means of salvation, are lost. St.

Philip Neri used to say, "Heaven is not made for the slothful."

Enlighten me, O Lord, that I may know what I ought to do, and what to avoid, for I desire to do all that You require of me. I am determined, by Your grace, to save my soul.

2. St. Teresa said to her religious, "One soul! my daughters, one eternity!" She meant that in this world we ought not to attend to anything but to the salvation of our souls; because if the soul be lost, all will be lost; and if once lost, will be lost forever. Benedict XII, being asked by a prince for a favor that he could not grant without committing sin, answered the ambassador: "Tell your prince that if I had two souls I would give him one; but as I have only one, I cannot consent to lose it for his sake." Thus should we answer the devil or the world when they offer us forbidden fruit.

O God! how often have I lost my soul by forfeiting Your grace! But since You offer me Your pardon, I detest all the offences I have committed against You, and love You above all things.

3. If only we were fully impressed with the meaning of that great maxim of St. Francis Xavier, "There is but one evil, and there is but one good in the world!" The only evil is damnation; the only good, salvation. No: poverty, infirmity, ignominies are not evils; these when embraced with resignation will increase our glory in heaven. On the other hand, health, riches, and honors [99] are not goods for too many Christians, because they become to them greater occasion of losing their souls.

Save me then, O God! and do with me what You please. You know and will what is best for me. I abandon myself to Your mercy: *Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.*¹ I am so sorry for having been

until now opposed to Your will, as even to die to atone for my offences; but now I love You, and will nothing but what You will. Grant me Your love, that I may be faithful to You. And Mary, give me Your powerful assistance.

MEDITATION 41

The Certainty of Death

1. How is it possible, O God! that there should be any Christians who believe that they must one day die, and that after death an eternity of happiness or misery awaits them; who know that on the moment of death will depend their being happy or miserable forever; and yet adopt not all the means of securing for themselves the blessing of a good death?

Give, O Lord, tears to my eyes that I may bewail my offences against You! I knew that by offending You I would forfeit Your grace and condemn myself to eternal torments; I knew this, and yet I was not restrained from committing sin. I am sorry, O God! for having dishonored You, by renouncing You for the sake of my own wretched inclinations; have pity on me.

2. If we hear of one dying suddenly who did not live prepared for death, we pity him, and say, "Alas! what has become of his poor soul?" And yet why are we not ourselves prepared at all times to die? It may be that the misfortune of a sudden death may

1 "In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum." Ps. 30. 6.

[100] happen to us; but whether sooner or later, whether prepared or unprepared, whether we think of it or not, we must one day surrender our souls into the hands of God. The place of execution is already prepared for us, and the malady which is to be our executioner and take us out of the world is stealing upon us; why then do we

not endeavor to become daily more and more united with Jesus Christ, who will soon become our Judge?

My dear Redeemer, I hope through the merits of Your death to live and die in Your grace and favor. I love You, O infinite goodness, and I hope to love You always in this life and for all eternity in the next.

3. In every succeeding age, cities and kingdoms are peopled with new beings, and their predecessors buried in their graves. Those who lived here a century ago, where are they now! gone into eternity! And thus, dear reader, in a hundred years from now, even in a much shorter time, neither you nor I will be alive in this world, but we shall be either happy or miserable forever in the next; either saved or lost for all eternity, one or the other will most certainly be our lot.

I may then, O God, either be saved, as I hope I shall be, or I may be lost on account of my sins. And is it possible that I may be lost, and yet not think of adopting every means of securing my salvation? Enlighten me, O Lord! and make known to me what I must do to be saved, for with Your help I will do all that You require of me. I have many times lost my respect for You, my Father, but You have not ceased to love me. I detest all my offences against You, and I love You, O God! with my whole soul. Give me Your blessing, Father, and never permit me to be again separated from You. Mary, my mother, have pity on me.

MEDITATION 42

The Last Judgment

[104] 1. The last day is called in Scripture a day of wrath and misery; 1 and such it will be for all those unhappy beings who have died in mortal sin; for on that day their most secret crimes will be made manifest to the whole world, and themselves separated from the com-

pany of the saints, and condemned to the eternal prison of hell, where they will suffer all the agonies of ever dying yet always remaining alive. St. Jerome, in the cave of Bethlehem, devoted to continual prayer and penance, trembled at the bare thought of the general judgment. The Ven. Fr. Juvenal Ancina hearing that sequence for the dead sung, "Dies irae, dies illa," was so struck with the anticipation of judgment that he left the world and embraced a religious life.

O Jesus! what will become of me on that day? Shall I be placed on Your right with the elect, or on Your left with the reprobate? I know that I have deserved to be placed on Your left, but I know also that You will still pardon me, if I repent of my sins: and so I do repent of them with my whole heart, and am resolved rather to die than offend You any more.

2. As this will be a day of calamity and terror for the reprobate, so will it be a day of joy and triumph for the elect; for then, in the sight of all mankind, will the blessed souls of the elect be proclaimed queens of paradise, and spouses of the immaculate Lamb.

O Jesus! Your precious blood is my hope. Remember not the offences that I have committed against You, and inflame my whole soul with Your love. I love You, my sovereign good, and I trust that in that day I shall be

1 "Dies irae ... dies calamitatis et miseriae." Zeph. 1. 15.

[105] associated with those loving souls who will praise and love You for all eternity.

3. Choose, my soul; choose now either an eternal crown in that blessed kingdom, where God will be seen and loved face to face in the company of the saints, of the angels, and of Mary the Mother of Jesus; or the prison of hell, where you must weep and lament forever, abandoned by God and by all.

"O Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us." O divine Lamb, who, to deliver us from the pains of hell, were pleased to sacrifice Your divine life by a bitter death upon the cross, have compassion on us; but more particularly on me who have more than others offended You. I am sorry above every evil for having dishonored You by my sins, but I hope on that day to honor You before men and angels, by proclaiming Your mercies towards me. O Jesus! help me to love You; I desire You alone. O Mary, holy queen! protect me in that day.

MEDITATION 43

The Intensity of the Pains of Hell

1. In this life when a person suffers, however great his sufferings may be, he may, at least occasionally, obtain some mitigation or repose. A sick man may suffer all the day long the pains of the most cruel disorders; but, when night comes, he may perhaps sleep a little and be somewhat relieved. Not so with the miserable reprobate. For him there is no relief, no repose. He must weep and lament forever, he must suffer forever, and suffer torments the most excruciating, without once having throughout all eternity one moment of ease or mitigation.

1 Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

[106] Such, O Jesus! would have been my lot, had You called me out of life in my sins. Dearest Redeemer, I refuse not to suffer, but will truly love You.

2. In this life by constantly suffering pain we become accustomed to it and better able to bear it; time mitigates sufferings which at first were most grievous to us. But will the souls in hell, by eternally suffering the torments which they endure, by the habit of enduring them for so many years, will they ever find their intensity dim-

inished? No, for the torments of hell are of such a nature that, at the end of a hundred or a thousand years, those souls will experience the same degree of pain from them as when they first descended into that bottomless abyss.

*In You, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded.*¹ I know, O Lord! that I have frequently deserved hell, yet I know likewise that You do not desire the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. O my God! I will not continue obstinate, but will repent with my whole soul of all my sins, and will love You more than myself; restore me to life, to the life of Your holy grace.

3. In this life, when a person suffers he has the pity and sympathy of his relatives and friends; and these afford at least some comfort. But how miserable would it be for a man in the most excruciating pains to be upbraided and reproached by his relatives and friends with the misdeeds for which he was suffering, saying to him without pity, "Rave on in rage and despair; you have deserved all you suffer!" The miserable wretches in hell suffer all kinds of torments, suffer them continually without any relief or comfort, and have none to sympathize with them. Not even God can sympathize with them, for they are his enemies; nor Mary, the Mother of Mercy; nor the angels, nor the saints; on the contrary,

¹ "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." Ps. 30. 2.

[107] they rejoice in their sufferings. And, at the same time, what is the conduct of the devils towards the reprobate? They trample upon them and reproach them with the crimes which they have committed against God, and for which they are now most justly punished.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, have pity on me, for You have it now in Your power to take pity on me and to recommend me to Your divine Son. O Jesus! You who

did not spare Yourself to have compassion on me, but did die upon the cross for my sake, save me, and may my salvation be to love You forever. I am sorry, O Lord! for having offended You, and will love You with my whole heart.

MEDITATION 44

The Love of Christ Crucified

1. Who could have conceived that the Son of God, the Lord of the universe, to show his love for us, would suffer and die upon the cross, if he have not really done so? With reason therefore did Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor speak of the death of Jesus Christ as of an excess of love. ¹ And what could be greater excess of love than for the Creator to die for his creatures?

To make You an adequate return for Your love, my dear Redeemer, it would be necessary for another God to die for You. It would therefore be but little, it would be nothing, were we poor miserable worms of the earth to give up our whole lives for You, who have given Yours for us.

2. What should still more excite us to love him is the ardent desire with which, through the course of his life, he longed for the hour of his death. By this desire he indeed proved how great his love was for us. *I have a*

¹ "Dicebant excessum ejus, quem completurus erat in Jerusalem."
Luke 9. 31.

[108] *baptism*, said he, *with which I am to be baptized; and how am I constrained until it be accomplished.* ¹ I must be baptized with the baptism of my own blood, to wash away the sins of men, and how am I dying with the desire of my bitter Passion and death! My soul, lift up your eyes, and behold Your Lord hanging upon a disgraceful cross; behold the blood which trickles down from his wounds; behold

his mangled body, all inviting you to love him. Your Redeemer in his sufferings would have you love him at least through compassion.

O Jesus! You did not refuse me Your life and precious blood, and shall I refuse You anything that You require of me? No, You have given Yourself to me without reserve. I will give myself to You in like manner.

3. St. Francis de Sales, speaking of these words of the Apostle, *The love of Christ impels us* 2 says: "Knowing that Jesus Christ, being true God, has loved us even to the laying-down of his life for us, and this upon a cross, do we not feel our hearts as it were in a press, forcibly straitened, and love expressed from them by a violence which is the more powerful as it is the more amiable?" And he adds: "Why, therefore, do we not cast ourselves upon Jesus Christ crucified, to die on the cross for the love of him who has willingly died upon the cross for the love of us? I will adhere to him, should we say, and will never abandon him; I will die with him, and be consumed in the fire of his love. My Jesus has given himself entirely to me, and I will give myself entirely to him. I will live and die upon his bosom; neither life nor death shall ever separate me from him. O eternal love! my soul seeks You and espouses You forever."3

1 "Baptismo habeo baptizari, et quomodo coarctor usquedum perficietur?" Luke 12. 50.

2 "Charitas Christi urget nos." 2 Cor. 5. 14.

3 *Love of God*, Bk. 7, ch. 8.

[109] Mary, Mother of God, obtain that I may belong entirely to Jesus Christ.

MEDITATION 45

The Irretrievable Loss of the Soul

1. There is no error so fatal in its consequences as the loss of eternal salvation. Other errors may be repaired;

if a person lose a situation, he may perhaps in time regain it; if he lose his goods, he may replace them, but if he lose his soul, he has no remedy nor hope of redemption. He can die but once; and if that once his soul be lost, it must be lost forever, and no power can save it for all eternity.

Behold, O God! a wretched sinner prostrate at Your feet, one who for so many years past has deserved to dwell in hell without further hope of salvation, but who now loves You, and is sorry above every other evil for having offended You, and hopes for mercy.

2. Does then nothing remain for the many wretched souls in hell but to lament bitterly, and say, "Therefore we have erred,"¹ and there is no remedy for our error, nor will there be so long as God shall be God?

Ah! my Redeemer, were I in hell, I could nevermore repent, nor love You. I thank You for having borne with me with so great patience, even though I have deserved hell; and now that I am still able to repent and to love You, I do sincerely repent for having offended Your infinite goodness, and love You above all things, more than I love myself. Never permit me, O Jesus! to cease to love You.

3. Oh, what a torment must it be to the souls in hell to think that they knew their error before they were lost, and that they are lost entirely through their own fault! If a person lose a gold ring through carelessness,

¹ "Ergo erravimus." Wis. 5. 6.

[110] or a valuable coin, he has no peace for thinking that he has lost it through his own fault. O God! how great is the internal torment of the wicked when they exclaim, "I have lost my soul, I have lost heaven, I have lost my God; I have lost my all; and this through my own fault!"

O my dear Savior! I desire never to lose You: if I have until now lost You, I have done ill; I am sorry for it with my whole soul, and love You above all things. O Jesus! You have saved me from hell that I may love You. I will therefore truly love You. Enable me to compensate by my love for the offences which I have committed against You. Holy Virgin Mary, You are my hope.

MEDITATION 46

We Must Die

1. How much is contained in these words, "we must die!" Christian brother, you must one day certainly die. As your name was one day entered in the baptismal register, so will it one day be entered in the book of the dead, and this day is already determined by Almighty God. As you now speak of the dear memory of your father, or of your uncle, or brother, so will posterity speak of you. As you now frequently hear of the deaths of your friends or acquaintances, so will others hear of your death, and you will be gone into eternity.

O God! what will then become of me? When my body is carried to the church, and Mass said over me, where will be my soul? Enable me, O Lord, to do something for Your service before death overtakes me! How wretched I would be if at this moment it should surprise me!

2. What would you say of a criminal on the way to execution who was looking about him here and there, and attending only to the amusements which happened to be [111] going on? Would you not think him mad, or a man who did not believe his impending fate? Are you not every moment advancing towards death? And what do you think of? You know that you must die, and that you can die only once. You believe that after this life another awaits you which will never end; and that this

eternal life will be happy or miserable according as your accounts are found at the day of your judgment; and how can you believe these truths and attend to anything else than making preparation for a good death?

Enlighten me, O my God, and let the thoughts of death, and of the eternity in which I must dwell, be ever present to my mind.

3. Look at the skeletons heaped up in cemeteries: they are silently saying to you, "What has happened to us will soon overtake you." The same is repeated to you by the portraits of your relatives who are dead, by the letters of their handwriting, by the rooms, the beds, the clothes which they once possessed and used, but which they have now abandoned and left behind for you. All these things remind you of death which is waiting for you.

My crucified Jesus, I will not delay to embrace You till the moment of my death, when Your crucified image will be presented to me; but I will embrace You now and press You to my heart. Until now I have frequently expelled You from my soul, but now I love You more than myself, and am sorry for having despised You. For the future I will be always Yours, and You shall be always mine. This is my hope through Your bitter Passion and death. And this also do I hope for through Your protection, O ever blessed Mary!

MEDITATION 47

The Resurrection of the Body

[115] 1. A day will come which will be the last of days, when this world will be no more. Before the coming of the Judge, fire will descend from heaven, and consume everything that is upon the earth : *The earth and the works which are in it shall be burnt up.*¹ So that in that day everything upon the earth will be reduced to ashes.

O God! what will all the vanities of this world then appear, for which so many now sacrifice the salvation of their souls? What appearance will all the highest dignities of this earth then make, its purple, its crowns, and its sceptres? O the folly of those who shall have loved them! And O the lamentations of those who for the love of such vanities shall have lost their God!

2. *The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again.*² This trumpet will call all men together from their graves to come to judgment. Oh how beautiful and resplendent will the bodies of the just appear! *Then shall the just shine like the sun.*³ On the contrary, how ugly and deformed will the bodies of the reprobate appear! What a torment will it be to these wretched souls to be again united with their bodies, for whose gratification they have lost heaven and lost their God, to be cast with them forever into hell, there to burn together in eternal flames! Happy will they then be who have denied their bodies all gratifications displeasing to God; and who, in order to hold them in greater subjection, have mortified them by fasting and penance!

Jesus! *turn not Your face away from me*, as I have deserved. ⁴ How often, for the sake of gratifying my

1 "Terra et quae in ipsa sunt opera exurentur." 2 Peter 3. 10.

2 "Canet tuba, et mortui resurgent." 1 Cor. 15. 52.

3 "Tunc justi fulgebunt sicut sol." Matt. 13. 43.

4 "Non avertas faciem tuam a me." Ps. 142. 7.

[116] senses, have I renounced Your friendship! Oh that I had died rather than have thus dishonored You! Have pity on me.

3. All mankind being assembled together, will be summoned by angels to appear in the valley of Josaphat, there to be publicly judged before all: Nations, nations in the valley of destruction? O my God! and must I appear in that valley? In what place shall I stand

there? with the elect in glory, or with the reprobate in chains? My beloved Redeemer, Your precious blood is my only hope. Woe to me! how often have I deserved to be condemned to dwell forever in hell, far, far from You, without being able to love You! No, my Jesus! I will love You forever, in this life and in the next. Permit me not to be ever again separated from You by sin. You know my weakness; be You always my help, O Jesus! and do not abandon me. Mary, my advocate, obtain for me the gift of holy perseverance.

MEDITATION 48

The Appearance of the Body immediately after Death

[120] 1. *Remember, man, that you are dust and into dust you shall return.* 1 At present you can see, feel, speak, and move. The day will come when you will no longer see, nor feel, nor speak, nor move. When your soul is separated from your body, your body will be consumed by worms and will moulder into dust; and your soul will go into eternity to be happy or miserable according as you have deserved by the actions of your life.

O God! I have deserved only Your displeasure and the punishments of hell; but You would not have me despair, but repent and love You, and place all my hopes in You.

2. Figure to yourself the body of one whose soul has just departed. Look on his corpse still remaining on the bed: the head fallen upon the chest, the hair in disorder and still bathed in the cold sweat of death, the eyes sunk, the cheeks fallen in, the face of the color of ashes, the lips and tongue black; so as to be loathsome and frightful to every beholder. See, dear Christian, to what a state your body will shortly be reduced which you now treat with so much indulgence.

O my God! I will no longer resist Your gracious calls.

What now remains of the many gratifications with which I have indulged my body, but remorse of conscience which continually torments me? Oh that I had rather died than ever offended You!

3. When the body begins to corrupt, it becomes still more horrible. Twenty-four hours have scarcely elapsed since that young person died, and already his corpse begins to be offensive. The windows of the apartment

1 "Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris." Gen. 3. 19.

[121] must be opened, and perfumes employed, that the stench may not infect the whole house. His relatives and friends are in haste to commit him to the grave. He may have been a person of high rank, and to what does the pampering of his body now serve? It only hastens its corruption and increases its offensiveness.

Dearest Redeemer, although I knew that by sin I would greatly offend You, still I did commit it. To grant myself a short-lived satisfaction, I was willing to forfeit the invaluable treasures of Your grace. With sorrow do I cast myself prostrate at Your feet; pardon me through the blood which You have shed for me. Receive me again into Your favor, and chastise me as You please. I will willingly accept every chastisement, provided I be not deprived of Your love. I love You, O God! with my whole heart; I love You more than myself. Grant that I may remain faithful to You till the end of my life. Mary, my hope, intercede for me.

MEDITATION 49

The State of the Body in the Grave

1. Consider now, Christian brother, to what a state your body will be reduced in the grave. It will first become livid and then black. Mould of a dirty white color will be produced over the whole surface of the flesh,

from which a rotten fluid will begin to ooze and flow upon the ground. In this fluid a multitude of maggots will be generated, which will feast themselves upon the putrid flesh. Rats and other vermin will join in the feast and prey upon your poor carcass, some upon the outside, while others will enter into the mouth and others into the bowels. See to what a state that body will be reduced which for the sake of pleasure you have so often offended God.

[122] No, my God, I will never more offend You. Too many already have been my offences. Enlighten me and strengthen me against temptations.

2. Then will your hair, cheeks, and lips fall off from your skull; your ribs will first be laid bare, and soon after your corrupted arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all your flesh, will at last be consumed themselves. After this, nothing will remain of you but a mouldering skeleton, which in time will all fall to pieces; the head will be separated from the trunk, and the bones from one another. See then what man is, considered as a mortal being.

O Jesus! have pity on me. For how many years past have I deserved to burn in hell! I have forsaken You, my God, but You have not yet forsaken me. Pardon me, I beseech You, and permit me not anymore to abandon You; and when temptations assault me, may I ever have recourse to You.

3. Behold, finally, that bright young soldier who a little while ago was considered the life and soul of society; where is he now? Enter his house; he dwells there no longer. His bed is occupied by another, and others have already seized and divided his possessions. If you would see him, look into that newly made grave and you will behold a putrid mass of corruption, horrible and offensive. Saints of God, happy indeed are you, who, for the love of God, whom alone you loved in this

world, were wise enough to mortify your bodies; now your bones are honored upon altars, and your souls happy in the enjoyment of God face to face. Your bodies at the last day will again be united with your souls, to be your companions in bliss as they were formerly your companions in suffering.

O God! I do not lament, but rejoice, that this my flesh, for which I have so often offended You, will one day be given to rottenness and worms: but I do indeed [123] lament the crimes I have committed against You, for You are infinite goodness. O Jesus! I love You, and will never, nevermore offend You. Mary, mother of God, pray for me.

MEDITATION 50

Man is soon Forgotten after Death

1. A young person has died early in life. A little while ago he was sought out for conversation, and everywhere welcomed by all; but now that he is dead, he has become the horror of those who behold him. His parents are in haste to get him out of the house, and call in bearers to carry him to the grave. How wretched if, to satisfy his parents or others of this world, he has lost God!

My dear Redeemer, though all may forget me, You will still remember me, for You have given Your life for my salvation. Oh that I had never offended You!

2. A little while ago the fame of his wit, gracefulness, refinement, and good humor was spread far and wide; but now that he is dead he is almost out of mind and will soon be quite forgotten. Upon hearing the news of his death, some may remark of him, "He did himself great credit;" others may exclaim, "Oh, how sad! What a clever, humorous, and delightful man he was!" Some may grieve for him because he was pleasant or useful to them; while others may perhaps rejoice, because his

death may be of advantage to them; but in a short time no one will so much as mention him. Even his parents and nearest relatives do not like to hear him spoken of, that their grief for him may not be renewed; and from here in visits of condolence everything is made the subject of conversation but the person who is dead; and if any one begins to allude to him, he is immediately stopped with an exclamation, "Pray do not mention him to me!" [124] See what becomes of the affection of our parents and friends for us in this world!

My God, I am content that You alone should love me, and will for the future love only You.

3. Your relatives will at first be afflicted at your death, but it will not be long before they will console themselves with the portion of your property which may fall to their lot; and in the same room in which your soul departed and was judged by Jesus Christ, they will feast, joke, dance, and laugh as before, and who knows where your soul will be?

Give me, O Lord, time to lament the offences I have committed against You before You summon me to judgment! I will no longer resist Your calls : who knows but that this meditation may be the last call I may receive? I confess that I have deserved hell, and as many hells as I have committed mortal sins; but You will not despise poor penitent sinners. I am sincerely sorry with my whole soul for having abused Your infinite goodness by sensual gratifications. Forgive me and grant me grace to obey You and to love You till the end of my life. O Mary! I place myself under Your protection, and confide in Your holy intercession.

MEDITATION 51

The Appearance of all Mankind in the Valley of Josaphat

1. *The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked*

*from among the just.*¹ What would be the confusion of a person who, on entering into a church in the presence of a great concourse of people, would be forcibly expelled as one excommunicated! Alas! how much greater will the shame of the reprobate be to see themselves

¹ "Exibunt angeli, et separabunt malos de medio justorum." Matt. 13. 49.

[125] in the day of judgment expelled from the company of the saints in presence of all mankind! In this life the wicked are honored equally with the saints, and frequently more. But in that day, when the figure of this world passes away, the elect will be placed on the right hand, and caught up into the air to meet Jesus Christ, advancing to place crowns of glory on their heads, according to the words of the Apostle, *Then shall we be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ in the air.*"¹ But the wicked, surrounded by their tormentors, the infernal spirits, will be placed on the left hand, waiting for the appearance of the judge coming publicly to condemn them. O foolish worldlings! you who now hold the lives of the saints in derision and contempt, in the valley of Josaphat, you will change your sentiments. There will you acknowledge your folly, but it will be too late.

2. Oh, what a splendid appearance will the saints make on that day, who have forsaken all for God! How beautiful will be the appearance of the many young persons who, despising the riches and delights of the world, have shut themselves up in deserts or in cloisters, to attend only to their eternal salvation! And of the many martyrs who were so much despised and so cruelly tortured by the tyrants of this world! All these will be proclaimed courtiers of Jesus Christ in his heavenly glory. On the contrary, what a horrible appearance will a Herod make, or a Pilate, a Nero, or many others, who made so great a figure in this world, but died under God's displeasure!

Jesus, I embrace Your holy cross. What are riches,

what are honors, what is the whole world? Besides
You, what do I desire?

3. Christian, what will be your station at the last day?

1 "Rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obviam Christo in aera." 1 Thes. 4. 16.

[126] the right hand or the left? If you would occupy the right, you must walk in the way which conducts there; it is impossible to keep the way to the left, and at length arrive at the right.

O Lamb of God! who came into the world to take away our sins, have pity on me. I am sorry for having offended You, and will love You above all things; permit me not to offend You any more. I seek not worldly goods; give me only Your grace and Your love, and I ask for nothing more. O Mary, You are my refuge and my hope.

MEDITATION 52

The Blindness of those who say, If we be lost we shall not be lost alone

1. What do you say? that if you go to hell you will not go alone? But what consolation will the company of the wicked be to you in hell? Every condemned soul in hell weeps and laments, saying, Although I am condemned to suffer forever, would that I might suffer alone! The wretched company which you will meet with there will increase your torments by their despairing groans and moanings. What a torment to hear even a dog howling all night long, or an infant crying for five or six hours, and not to be able to sleep! And what will it be to hear the yells and howlings of so many wretched souls in despair, who will continually torment one another with their dismal noises, and this, not for one night, nor for many nights only, but for all eternity!

2. Again, your companions will but increase the torments of hell, by the stench of their burning carcasses. *Out of their carcasses*, says the prophet Isaiah, *shall a stench arise*.¹ They are called carcasses, not because they are dead, for they are alive to pain, but because of the

¹ "De cadaveribus eorum ascendet foetor." Isa. 34. 3.

[127] stench which they will emit. Your companions will also increase the torments of hell by their numbers; they will be in that pit as grapes in the wine-press of the anger of God: *He treads*, said St. John, *the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty*.¹ They will be pressed on every side, so as to be unable to move hand or foot so long as God shall be God.

3. O accursed sin! how can you so blind men who are gifted with reason? Sinners, who pretend to despise damnation, are yet more careful to preserve their goods, their situations, and their health; they do not say, "If I lose my property, my place, my health, I shall not be the only one who will lose such things." Yet when the soul is at stake, they say, "If I be lost, I shall not be lost alone!" He who loses the good things of this world and saves his soul will find a recompense for all he has lost; but he who loses his soul, what compensation will he find? *What shall he give in exchange for his soul?*²

O my God, enlighten me and do not forsake me. How often have I sold my soul to the devil, and exchanged Your grace and favor for a wretched transitory indulgence of sense! I am sorry, O God! for having thus dishonored Your infinite majesty. My God, I love You: permit me not to lose You any more. O Mary, Mother of God! deliver me from hell, and from the guilt of sin by Your holy intercession.

MEDITATION 53

The Care of our Salvation

1. The devil makes salvation appear to some too difficult to be accomplished, in order to dishearten them and induce them to abandon themselves to a disorderly life. It is true that if to obtain salvation it were necessary to retire into a desert, or to shut one's self up in a cloister, we ought to do so. But these extraordinary means are not necessary; ordinary means are sufficient,

1 "Majorem hac dilectionem nemo habet, ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis." John 15. 13.

[131] such as the frequentation of the sacraments, the avoiding of dangerous occasions, and the frequently recommending of ourselves by prayer to God. At our death we shall see that these things were easy; from here will our remorse be very great if until then we have neglected them.

2. We should resolve and say, "I will save my soul, whatever the cost may be." Let all other things perish - property, friends, and even life itself if only I can save my soul! Let us never think we can do too much to obtain eternal salvation. Eternity is at stake, the being happy or miserable forever. "No security can be too great," says St. Bernard, "where eternity is at stake."¹

O God! I am ashamed to appear before You; how often for a mere nothing have I turned my back upon You! No, I will never more forfeit Your grace, nor willfully become Your enemy. *In You, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be put to shame.*² I would rather a thousand times lose my life than lose Your friendship.

3. If during the past we have forfeited salvation, we must now endeavor to remedy the evil; we must change our lives, and this without delay. It is to no purpose to say I will do so in a short time. Hell is filled with souls who formerly said the same; but death surprised them, and prevented them from doing so. What a favor would

God bestow upon a dying man on the point of breathing his last, were he to grant him one more year, or even one more month! Christian brother, at this very time, God bestows such a favor upon you, and what use do you make of it?

Why, O God, do I delay? Do I wait for the period when there will be no more time for me, and when I shall find that I have in reality done nothing for You? I have the consolation of still being assisted by Your

1 Nulla nimia securitas, ubi periclitatur aeternitas.

2 "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." Ps. 30. 2.

[132] grace. I love You above every good, and desire rather to die than to offend You. But You know my weakness, and the many treasons I have been guilty of against You. Help me, O Jesus! in You do I place all my hopes; and to You, O Mary, Mother of God, do I fly for protection!

MEDITATION 54

The Leaving of All at Death

1. Christians are well aware that they must die, yet for the most part they live as though they were never to die. If after this life there were no other life, if there were neither hell nor heaven, could they think less of death than they now do? If, dear Christian, you desire to live well, endeavor to spend the remainder of your days in the continual remembrance of death. Oh, how correctly does he judge of things, and how rightly does he direct all his actions, who performs them with a view to his departure from here! The remembrance of death destroys in him all affection for the good things of this world, by reminding him that he must soon leave them all behind him.

O God! since You give me time to remedy the evil

which I have done, make known to me Your will, and I will do all that You require of me.

2. If a traveller, on his journey to his own country, were to stop and spend all his money in building a palace in a land through which he ought only to pass, and neglect to provide a dwelling for himself in that country in which he was to reside his whole life, he would be thought insane. And must not the Christian be deemed insane who thinks only of gratifying himself in this world, through which he has only to pass during a few days, and heeds not the danger of being miserable in the next, where he must live forever, as long as God shall be God?

[133] Woe to me, O God! If you had called me out of life in my sins! I thank You for having borne with me with such great patience. Never permit me to be again separated from You. My God, my sovereign good, I do and will love You above all things.

3, Death will rob us of all things. Whatever we may have acquired in this world we must leave all behind us at our death. Nothing will then be allowed us but a coffin and a shroud, which will soon moulder away and become dust with our bodies. We must then leave the house which we now inhabit, and a dismal grave must be the dwelling-place of our bodies until the day of judgment, when they must go either to heaven or to hell, accordingly as our souls have gone before them.

All things will therefore end with me in death. Then shall I find that nothing will remain for me but the little which I have done for God. And were I to die this moment, what should I find that I have done for You, my Jesus? For what do I delay? that death may come and find me thus miserable? No, my God, I will amend my life. I detest all the offences I have ever committed against You. For the future I will not seek to gratify my own inclinations, but solely to do Your will, who are the God of my soul. I love You, O infinite goodness!

I love You above all things; mercifully grant me Your grace. And do You also, Mary, Mother of God, pray to Your divine Son for me.

MEDITATION 55

The Moment of Death

1. Imagine yourself, dear Christian, just now dead, and your soul entered into eternity. If now you have just departed from this world, what would you not wish to have done for life eternal? But what would such wishes [134] avail you, if you had not spent the days of your mortal life in serving God? If you would now prevent that which you have time to prevent, frequently place yourself in your imagination inside your future grave, or rather upon your death-bed; imagine yourself to be dying, on the point of breathing your last, listen to the reproaches of your conscience and delay not to silence them by repentance. Delay not, for you have no time to lose.

Ah, my God! enlighten me, make known to me the way in which I should walk, and I will obey You in all things.

2. St. Camillus de Lellis, looking at the graves of the dead, was accustomed to say, "If those who are here interred could now return to life again, what would they not do to become saints! And I who have time at my disposal, what do I do for God?" Thus did this saint animate himself to become more and more closely united with his Lord. Know then, dear Christian, that the time which God in his mercy now grants you is of the greatest value. Do not wait for time to labor for your salvation until you are gone into eternity, or until the arrival of that awful moment when it will be said to you, "Depart, Christian soul, out of this world;" make haste to go forth, for there is no more time for you to labor: what is done is done.

O Jesus! remember that I am the lost sheep for which You have laid down Your life. "We beseech You, therefore, help Your servants, whom You have redeemed with Your precious blood." Give me light and grace to do that now which I shall wish to have done at the hour of my death.

3. O eternal God! I tremble at the thought of being that unhappy tree of which You have said: *Behold for three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down therefore : why should it encumber [135] ground?*¹ Yet so it is, O Lord! for the many years I have now lived upon this earth, what good have I until now done? What fruit have I given You all this time, but sin and bitterness? Alas! how have I deserved to have dwelt long ago in hell! Dearest Redeemer, spare me yet a little longer; I will not be obstinate; death will never find me in the state in which I now am. I will deplore and detest the days which I have spent in offending You, and will pass the remainder of my life in loving and honoring Your infinite goodness. I do and will love You, my sovereign good. Take not Your help away from me. And You, O Blessed Virgin Mary, deprive me not of Your powerful protection.

MEDITATION 56

The Examination of our Sins at the Last Day

1. Behold the heavens will open, and the angels and saints will descend to be present at the judgment followed by the Queen of Heaven, the ever blessed Virgin, and after her will appear the eternal Judge of the living and of the dead, encompassed with great power and majesty. The appearance of Jesus will be to the just the greatest consolation; but to the wicked, the indignant countenance of the Son of God will be horror and confusion worse than hell itself. *They will say to the mountains : Fall upon us, and hide us*

*from the wrath of the Lamb.*² They will desire that the mountains may immediately fall upon them rather than behold the indignant countenance of the Lamb, that is, of the Redeemer, who in their lifetime was as a lamb

1 "Ecce, anni tres sunt, ex quo venio quaerens fructum in ficulnea hac, et non invenio." Luke 13. 7.

2 "Dicunt montibus et petris: Cadite super nos, et abscondite nos a facie sedentis super thronum et ab ira Agni." Rev. 6. 16.

[136] towards them, in silently bearing with their repeated injuries against him.

O Jesus! You who will one day be my Judge; I am heartily sorry for having so grievously offended You. Pardon me my sins, and grant that when You appear as my Judge, I may not behold You indignant against me.

*2. The judgment sat, and the books were opened.*¹ Then will it be impossible to conceal our sins; Jesus himself, who will be our Judge, having long ago witnessed them, will manifest them to the whole world. *He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness.*² Even the most secret sins, the most abominable impurities, and cruelties the most horrible, he will make known to all mankind.

O my Redeemer! You who already know all my iniquities, have mercy on me now, before the time of mercy ends.

3. In a word, Jesus Christ will on that day make himself known as the great Lord of all : *The Lord shall be known*, says the Psalmist, *when he executes judgment.*³ At present more account is made of some pleasure, of a mere vapor, of a fit of passion, than of God. Hence will the Judge then justly say to the sinner, *To whom have you likened me, or made me equal?*⁴ To what have you compared me and postponed me? Have your base inclinations, or a mere caprice, prevailed with you more than my grace? O God! what shall we then answer to such

reproaches? Oh, how will our utter confusion close our mouths! But let us now answer and say:

O Jesus! I know that You will one day be my Judge, but now You are my Savior. Remember that You have died for me. I am sorry with my whole heart for

1 "Judicium sedit, et libri aperti sunt." Dan. 7. 10.

2 "Illuminabit abscondita tenebrarum." 1 Cor. 4. 5.

3 "Cognoscetur Dominus iudicia faciens." Ps. 9. 17.

4 "Cui assimilastis me? . . . dicit Sanctus." Isa. 40. 25.

[137] having despised You, my sovereign good. But if until now I have despised You, behold I now esteem and love You more than myself, and am willing to die for Your love. O Jesus! pardon me, and never permit me to live any more deprived of Your love. Mary, most gracious advocate of sinners, help me now while I can yet receive your powerful assistance.

MEDITATION 57

The Great Love of God for our Souls

1. The love which God bears our souls is eternal and infinite. *I have loved You with an everlasting love.*¹ So that God has from all eternity loved every human soul. For the salvation of souls he placed all other creatures in the world: *All things for the sake of the elect.*² And lastly he sent his only Son into the world, made man for our sake, to die upon the cross for the salvation of our souls.

You, O God! have indeed loved me from all eternity, and have died for me, and how could I ever so grievously offend You?

2. The only begotten Son of God, for the love of our souls, came down from heaven to free them from eternal death by his own death upon the cross; and having redeemed them with his blood, he called his angels to rejoice with him for the recovery of his lost sheep:

Rejoice with Me, because I have found the sheep that was lost.³

Dearest Redeemer, You came to seek me, and how have I until now fled away from You. No, my Jesus! I will no more fly from You. I will love You; and oh! do You so bind me to You by Your holy love that I may live and die in Your sacred embraces.

1 "In charitate perpetua dilexi te." Jer. 31. 3.

2 "Omnia . . . propter electos." 2 Tim. 2. 10.

3 "Congratulamini mihi, quia inveni ovem meam quae perierat. Luke 15. 6.

[138] 3. The eternal Father has then given his Son, and the divine Son has given his precious blood and life for the salvation of my soul; and how often have I withdrawn myself from God and sold myself for something worse than nothing to his and my mortal enemy the devil!

Truly, my God! You have spared nothing to save me from being lost, while I, for the sake of some paltry gratification, have many, many times renounced Your friendship and love. You have borne with me, that I might have time to bewail my sins and to love You, the God of my soul. I will therefore love You, my only good, and will grieve above every evil for having so often offended You. Oh! permit me not to be anymore separated from Your love. Remind me continually how much You have done for my salvation, and how great has been the love which You have shown me, that I may never cease to love You, my treasure, my life, and my all. Grant that I may ever love You, and then dispose of me as You please. Mary, Mother of God, Your divine Son denies You nothing; recommend to him, I beseech You, my sinful soul.

MEDITATION 58

The Remorse of the Reprobate

1. The condemned soul is tormented with three kinds of remorse. The first arises from reflecting for what a mere trifle it has incurred everlasting misery. For how long does the pleasure of sin last? only for a moment. To a man at the point of death, how long does his past life appear? a mere moment. But to one in hell, what do the fifty or sixty years of his sojourning upon the earth appear, when, in the gulf of eternity, he foresees that after a hundred or a thousand million years he will be only beginning eternity? Alas! does he exclaim, for a few moments of indulgence in poisonous pleasures, [139] which I did but just taste, I must forever suffer, lament, and despair in this fiery furnace, abandoned by all, as long as God shall be God.

O my God! I give You thanks for Your great mercy to me, and implore You still to have mercy on me.

2. The second kind of remorse arises from the reflection of the condemned soul on the little which it need have done to be saved, but did not do it; and that now there is no remedy. Alas! does it say, if I had frequently confessed my sins, given myself to prayer, restored that ill-gotten property, pardoned my enemies, avoided that dangerous occasion, I would not have been lost. What would it have cost me? Although it might have cost me much, yet I ought to have been most willing to do my utmost to be saved. But I did not do it, and now I am lost forever. With how many inspirations did God favor me! How many times did he call me and admonish me that unless I desisted I should certainly be lost! I might then have remedied my past iniquity, but now I have no remedy. Ah! how does this thought afflict the wretched soul, even more than the fire and all the other torments of hell, that it might have been happy forever, but now must be miserable for all eternity!

O Jesus! it is now the time of mercy; do mercifully pardon me. I love You, my sovereign good, and

am exceedingly sorry for having ever despised You.

3. The third and most bitter kind of remorse arises from the consciousness of the wretched soul of the great happiness which it has forfeited through its own fault. It recollects that God afforded it abundant means of gaining heaven, that he died for its salvation, permitted it to be born in the bosom of the true Church, and bestowed upon it numberless graces, and it reflects that all had been rendered useless through its own fault. I am lost, it exclaims, and neither the merits of Jesus Christ, nor [140] the intercession of the Mother of God, nor the prayers of the saints are of any avail to me; every gleam of hope is vanished from me forever.

Oh that I had died, my God, rather than ever offended You! Receive me now into Your favor; I love You, and will love You forever. Mary, most gracious advocate of sinners, intercede for me.

MEDITATION 59

The Miserable Death of the Sinner

1. Poor unhappy being! see how he is oppressed with sorrows! Alas! he is now about to die; a cold sweat is stealing over him, his breath is failing him, and he frequently faints away; and when he comes to himself, his

1 Rex meus es tu.

2 "In hoc enim Christus mortuus est et resurrexit, ut et mortuorum et vivorum dominetur." Rom. 19. 9.

[142] head is so far gone and so weak that he can do very little, understand but little, and speak but little. But the worst is, although he is drawing near his end, instead of thinking of the account he must shortly render to God, he thinks only of his medical attendants, and of the remedies they may be able to allow him to save him from death. And those who stand around him,

instead of exhorting him to unite himself to God, flatter him by telling him that he is better, or say not a word, that they may not disturb him.

O my God! deliver me from such an unhappy end.

2. But at last the priest admonishes him of his approaching departure, saying to him, "You are now, dear brother, in a state of great danger, and must bid farewell to the world; give yourself then to God, and receive his holy sacraments." On hearing this fatal announcement, how dreadfully is he agitated, what sadness and remorse of conscience overwhelm him, and how dreadful is the conflict which he suffers! All the sins he has committed appear in confusion before him, the inspirations which he has neglected, his broken promises, and the many years of his past life now lost and gone forever, all rush upon his mind. He now opens his eyes to the truths of eternity, of which during his past life he made but very little account. O God! what terror do the thoughts of loss of Your favor, of death, of judgment, of hell, and of eternity, strike into his unhappy soul!

O Jesus! have pity on me and pardon me; do not abandon me. I am aware of the evil I have done in despising You, and would willingly die for Your love. Assist me, O God, to begin now at least a new life!

3. The dying sinner exclaims, "O what great folly have I been guilty of! How have I squandered away my life! I might have been a saint, and I would not; and now, what can I do? My head wanders, and fears oppress me and will not permit me to bring to my mind [143] even one good work! In a few moments what will become of me? Dying in this manner, how can I be saved?" He wishes for time to make his peace effectively with God, but time is no longer his. "Alas!" he cries out, "this cold sweat is a sure symptom of the near approach of death; I begin to lose my sight and my breath; I can no longer move, I can hardly speak." And

thus, in the midst of so much confusion, despondency, and fear, his soul departs from his body and appears before Jesus Christ.

O my Jesus! Your death is my hope. I love You above every good, and because I love You, I am sorry for having offended You. Mary, Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

MEDITATION 60

The Happy Death of the Just

1. To the just man death is not a punishment, but a reward; it is not dreaded by him, but desired. How can it be dreadful to him if it is to terminate all his pains, afflictions, and conflicts, and all danger of losing God? Those words, "Depart, Christian soul, out of this world,"¹ which strike such terror into the soul of the sinner, fill the soul that loves God with joy. The just man is not afflicted at leaving the good things of this world, because God has always been his only good; not at leaving honors, because he has always regarded them as smoke; not at being separated from his friends and relatives, because he has always loved them in God and for God. Hence, as in life he frequently exclaimed, "My God and my all!" he now repeats the same in death, with ecstasies of delight; the time being at hand for him to return to his God who made him, to love him face to face forever and ever in heaven.

¹ Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo.

[144] 2. The sorrows of death do not afflict him; he even rejoices to sacrifice the last remnants of his life as a testimony of his love for God, uniting the sufferings of his death to the sufferings of Jesus when dying on the cross. The thought that the time of sin and the danger of losing God are now past overwhelms him with delight. The devil fails not to suggest to his mind thoughts of

despondency at the recollection of his past sins; but as he has for many years bewailed them, and loved Jesus Christ with his whole heart, he is not dismayed, but comforted.

O Jesus! how good and faithful are You to a soul that seeks and loves You!

3. As the sinner who dies in mortal sin experiences, in the internal troubles and rage which he suffers in death, a foretaste of hell; so does the just man experience in death a foretaste of heaven. His acts of confidence and of the love of God, and his ardent desire to see God, allow him a beginning of that happiness which is soon to be completed for him in heaven. With what gladness does he welcome the holy Viaticum when brought into his chamber! He exclaims like St. Philip Neri when he was on his death-bed, "Because I have offended You, my God, I will say to You, with St. Bernard, Your wounds are my merits."

O my God! if I am in Your grace, as I hope I am, grant me soon to die, that I may presently behold and love You face to face, and be secure of never more losing You. Mary, my Mother, obtain for me a holy death.

MEDITATION 61

At the Point of Death

1. If now you were at the point of death, already in your agony and almost breathing your last, and about to appear before the divine tribunal, what would you [145] not wish to have done for God? And what would you not give for a little more time to make your salvation more secure? Woe to me, if I do not make use of the light that is now given me, and amend my life! *He has called against me the time.*¹ The time which is now granted me by the mercy of God will be a great torment

and a subject of bitter remorse to me at the hour of death, when time for me will be no more.

O Jesus! You did spend Your whole life for my salvation, and I have been many years in the world, and yet what have I until now done for You? Alas! all that I have done gives me only pain and remorse of conscience.

2. Christian, God now gives You time, be then resolved: in what will you spend it? What do you wait for? Do you wait to see that light which will show you your wretched neglect, when there will be no remedy? Do you wait to hear that "Go forth" which must be obeyed without demur?

O my God! I will no longer abuse the light which You have given me; but which I have until now so much abused. I thank You for this fresh admonition, which may be the last You will ever give me. But since at present You thus enlighten me, it is a mark that You have not yet abandoned me, and are desirous of showing me mercy. My beloved Savior, I am sorry above all things for having so often despised Your graces and neglected Your calls and inspirations. I promise with Your help nevermore to offend You.

3. O God! how many Christians die in the greatest uncertainty as to their salvation, and tormented with the thought that they have had time to serve You, and are now arrived at the end of their life, when no more time is left them for any good works! They are sensible that now all that remains to them is to render a strict account

1 "Vocavit adversum me tempus." Lam. 1. 15.

[146] of the many graces and inspirations bestowed upon them by God, and know not what to answer.

O Lord! I will not die under such a torment. Say

what You require of me, make known to me the way of life in which I should walk, and I will obey You in all things. Until now I have despised Your commands, but I am now sorry for it with my whole heart, and love You above all things. O Mary, refuge of sinners! recommend my soul to Your divine Son.

MEDITATION 62

The Trouble and Confusion of the Hour of Death

1. Be always ready : for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come. 1 "Be always ready." Our blessed Savior does not tell us to begin to prepare ourselves when death has arrived, but to prepare ourselves beforehand; because the time of death will be a time of confusion, when it will be morally impossible to prepare ourselves in a proper manner to appear for judgment, and to obtain a favorable sentence. "It is a just punishment," says St. Augustine, "upon him who, having it in his power to do good, will not do it, not to be able to do it afterwards when he desires to do it."

No, my God! I will not wait until that time to begin a change of life. Make known to me what I must now do to please You, for I desire to do without reserve whatever You require of me.

2. The time of death is the time of night, when nothing can be done. *The night comes on, when no man can work.*³ The fatal news of the disease being mortal, the grief and pains which accompany it, the disordered state of the head, and, above all, remorse of conscience, will cast the poor sick man into such a state of distress and confusion as to hinder him from knowing what he is doing. He will anxiously desire to escape damnation, but will not find the means, for the time of chastisement will be at hand. *I will repay them in due time, that their foot may slip.*⁴

My God! I give You thanks for allowing me time to

1 "Et vos estote parati; quia, qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet." Luke 12. 40.

2 *De lib. arbit.* Bk. 3, ch. 18.

3 "Venit nox, quando nemo potest operari." John 9. 4.

4 Et ego retribuam in tempore, ut labatur pes eorum." Deut. 32. 35.

[154] amend, now that it is the time of mercy and not of punishment. I would rather lose all things than forfeit Your grace. My sovereign good, I love You above all things.

3. Imagine yourself in a boat overtaken by a storm in the midst of the sea, already struck upon a rock and on the point of sinking; think how great would be your confusion, and that you would not know what to do to escape death. And from here imagine how great will be the confusion of the sinner, who at his death finds himself in a bad state of conscience. His will, his relatives, the last sacraments, restitutions to be made, the calls of God which he despised, oh, what a storm will all these things create in the soul of the poor dying sinner! Go then, go now and put your troubled conscience in order.

O my God! let not Your blood be shed for me in vain. You have promised pardon to him that repents, and so I now grieve from the bottom of my heart for the many offences I have committed against You. I love You, O Lord! above all things, and will never more offend You. How is it possible I should ever again, after so many mercies, offend You? No, my God! I will rather die. Holy Mary, pray for me to Your divine Son, that I may never more offend him.

MEDITATION 63

The Sentence of the Wicked at the Last Judgment

1. Consider how great the rage of the wicked will be, to behold on the last day, the just, shining with glory,

[159] waiting with joyful eagerness for that *Come, you blessed*,¹ with which Jesus Christ will invite them into heaven; and how great the shame and confusion of the wicked will be to behold themselves surrounded by devils, and trembling with expectation of that *Depart from me, you cursed* ² with which Jesus Christ will pronounce their condemnation before the whole world. O my dear Redeemer! do not allow Your death, which You did undergo with so much love, to become of no avail to me.

2. *Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire.*³ Such will be the sentence of condemnation, such the unhappy doom, which will fall upon the wicked: to burn forever in the flames of hell, accursed of God and separated from him. Do Christians believe that there is a hell? How is it, then, that so many voluntarily expose themselves to its terrible torments? O my God! who knows but that I also may be of their number at the last day? I hope through Your precious blood that so dreadful an evil will not befall me; but who will make me certain of this? Enlighten me, O Lord! and make known to me what I must do to escape Your wrath, which I have until now so often provoked; take pity on me and forgive me.

3. At last, in the midst of the valley of Josaphat, the earth will open and swallow up the wicked, together with the devil and all his evil spirits; who will all hear those gates shut over them which will never again be opened for all eternity. O accursed sin, to what a miserable end will You one day conduct innumerable souls! Unhappy they for whom is reserved such a lamentable doom for all eternity! O my God! what will my lot be? The fire of hell does not terrify me so much as the thought of being forever separated and at

1 Venite, benedicti.

2 Discedite, maledicti.

3 "Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem aeternum." Matt. 25. 41.

[160] a distance from You, my only good. My dear Redeemer, if until now I have despised You, I now love You above all things and with my whole heart. I know that the punishment of remaining forever separated from You will not befall those who love You; grant therefore that I may love You forever; bind me and unite me closely to You; unite me daily more and more to You, that I may never be separated from You, and then do with me whatever else You please. Holy Mary, advocate of sinners, never cease to protect me.

MEDITATION 64

The Sentence of the Elect

1. *Come, you blessed of my Father.*¹ Such will be the glorious sentence which in the day of triumph will be pronounced in favor of those who have loved God. St. Francis of Assisi, having had it revealed to him that he was one of the predestinate, almost died of the consolation which such a revelation afforded him; what then will be the joy of the elect when they hear Jesus Christ inviting them, Come, you blessed children, come and possess the inheritance of your divine Father; come and reign with him forever in heaven!

How often, O God! have I through my own fault forfeited Your blessed kingdom! But, O Jesus! Your precious merits encourage me to hope that I shall regain it. My dear Redeemer, I trust in You and love You.

2. Oh, how will the blessed congratulate one another when they behold themselves placed upon thrones and united in the enjoyment of God for all eternity, without the least fear of ever being again separated from him! What joy and glory will be theirs to enter on that day crowned into heaven, singing together songs of glad-

1 "Venite, benedicti Patris mei." Matt. 25. 34.

[161] ness and the sweet praises of God! Happy souls,
that are destined to such a blessed lot!

O God of my soul! bind me to You with the sweet
bonds of Your holy love, that in that day I may enter
into Your kingdom and praise and love You forever.
The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.¹

3. Let us arouse our slumbering faith. It is certain
that we shall one day be judged, and that we shall re-
ceive sentence either of eternal life or of eternal death.
If we be not secure of obtaining the sentence of life, let
us endeavor to make it certain. Let us fly from all those
occasions which might expose us to the loss of our
souls; and unite ourselves to Jesus Christ by frequently
approaching the sacraments, by pious meditations, by
spiritual reading and continual prayer. The adoption
or neglect of these means will be the sign of our salva-
tion or of our perdition.

My beloved Jesus, and my Judge, I hope through Your
precious blood that You will on that day bless me;
and from here do bless me now, and pardon me all the
offences I have committed against You. Grant me to
hear the same consoling words that You did address
to Magdalen, *Your sins are forgiven you.*² I am sorry with
my whole heart for having offended You; pardon me,
and at the same time give me grace always to love You.
I love You, my sovereign good; I love You more than
myself, my treasure, my love, my all. *You are the God
of my heart, and my portion forever.*³ O my God! You
only do I desire. Holy Mary, by Your powerful interces-
sion You can procure my salvation, and You desire it;
in You do I confide.

1 "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo, in aeternum cantabo."
Ps. 88. 2.

2 "Remittuntur tibi peccata." Luke 7. 48.

3 "Deus cordis mei, et pars mea Deus in aeternum." Ps. 72. 26.

PART II. PIOUS REFLECTIONS ON DIFFERENT POINTS OF SPIRITUALITY.*

And [Jesus] told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'For three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" (Lk 13. 6-9)

"But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day [of judgment] come upon you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. 36 But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape the tribulations that will take place, and to stand with confidence before the Son of man." (Lk 21. 34)

1. The Thought of Eternity

SAINT AUGUSTINE called the thought of eternity the great thought: *Magna cogitatio*. This thought has brought the saints to count all the treasures and greatness of this life as nothing more than straw, dust, smoke, and refuse. This thought has sent many anchorites to hide themselves in deserts and caves, and so many noble youths, and even kings and emperors, to shut themselves up in cloisters. This thought has given courage to so many martyrs to endure the torture of piercing nails and heated irons, and even of being burnt in the fire.

No; we are not created for this earth: the end for which God has placed us in the world is this, that with our good deeds we may inherit eternal life. *The end is*

* This little work was published in 1773, with the "Considerations on the Passion." The saintly author wrote on the 8th of September, 1773, in one of his spiritual letters: "Here are two little works, one of which may aid you to meditate on the Passion; I use it myself every day. ... I also read every day something of the other little work, entitled Pious Reflections, etc. I wish you to do the same; for I wrote it specially for those souls that desire to give themselves up entirely to God." ED.

[172] *eternal life*.¹ And, therefore, St. Eucherius said that the only affair that we should attend to in this life is eternity; that is, that we should win a happy eternity, and escape a miserable one. *The object for which we struggle is eternity*.² If assured of this end, we are forever blessed; if we fail of it, we are forever miserable.

Happy is he who lives always with eternity in view, with a lively faith that he must soon die, and enter upon eternity. *The just man lives by faith*.³ It is faith that makes the just to live in the sight of God, and which gives light to their souls, by withdrawing them from earthly affections, and placing before their thoughts the eternal blessings which God promises to them that love him.

St. Teresa said that all sins have their origin in a lack of faith. Therefore, in order to overcome our passions and temptations, we ought constantly to revive our faith by saying: *I believe in life everlasting*.⁴ I believe that after this life, which will soon be ended, there is an eternal life, either full of joys, or full of pains, which will come to me, according to my merits or demerits.

St. Augustine also said that a man who believes in eternity, and yet is not converted to God, has either lost his senses or his faith. "O eternity!" (these are his words), "he that meditates upon You, and repents not, either has not faith, or he has no heart." ⁵ In reference to this, St. John Chrysostom relates that the Gentiles, when they saw Christians sinning, thought them either liars or fools. If you believe not (they said) what you say you believe, you are liars; if you believe in eter-

1 "Finem vero, vitam aeternam." Rom. 6. 22.

2 Negotium pro quo contendimus, aeternitas est.

3 "Justus ex fide vivit." Gal. 3. 11.

4 Credo vitam aeternam.

5 O aeternitas! qui te cogitat, nec poenitet, aut fidem non habet, aut, si habet fidem, cor non habet.

[173] nity and sin, you are fools. 1 "Woe to sinners who enter upon eternity without having known it, because they would not think upon it!" exclaims St. Caesarius; and then he adds, "But oh, double woe! They enter upon it, and they never come forth."2

St. Teresa said constantly to her disciples, "My children, there is one soul, one eternity." By which she meant to say, My children, we have one soul, and when that is lost, all is lost; and, once lost, it is lost forever. In a word, upon that last breath which we breathe in dying, it depends whether we are forever blessed, or in despair. If the eternity of the next life, if paradise, if hell, were mere fictions of literary men, and things of doubtful reality, even then we ought to bestow all our care to live well, and not to risk our soul forever. But no; these things are not doubtful; they are sure things, they are things of faith; they more surely exist than those things which we see with our bodily sight.

Let us, then, pray to our Lord, *Increase our faith*;3 for, if we are not strong in faith, we may become worse than Luther or Calvin. On the other hand, one thought of living faith upon the eternity that awaits us may make us saints.

St. Gregory wrote that they who meditate on eternity are neither puffed up by prosperity, nor cast down by adversity; for they desire nothing and they fear nothing in this world. 4 When it happens to us to suffer any infirmities or persecutions, let us think of the hell which

1 Exprobrabant gentiles, aut mendaces aut stultos esse Christianos: mendaces, si non crederent quod credere dicebant; stultos, si credebant et peccabant.

2 Vae peccatoribus qui incognitam ingrediuntur aeternitatem! Sed, vae duplex! ingrediuntur, et non egrediuntur!

3 "Aauge nobis fidem." Luke 17. 5.

4 "Quisquis in solo aeternitatis desiderio figitur, nec prosperitate attollitur, nec adversitate quassatur; dum nil habet in mundo quod appetat, nihil est quod de mundo pertimescat." *Mor.* Bk.10, ch. 22.

[174] we have deserved through our sins. When we do this, every cross will seem light, and we shall thank the Lord, and say, *It is the mercy of the Lord that we are not consumed.*¹ We shall say, with David, *Unless the Lord had been my helper, my soul had almost dwelt in hell.*² Through myself I was already lost; You have done this, O God of mercy! that You have stretched forth Your hand, and drawn me forth from hell: *You have delivered my soul, that it should not perish.*³

My God! You know how often I have deserved hell; but, notwithstanding, You bid me to hope, and I desire to hope. My sins terrify me; but Your death gives me courage, and Your promise of pardon to him that repents. *A contrite and humbled heart, O God! You will not despise.*⁴ I have dishonored You for the time that is past, but now I love You above all things; and I grieve more than for any other evil, that I have offended You. O my Jesus! have mercy upon me. Mary, Mother of God, pray for me.

2. We are Pilgrims on Earth

While we live in this life, we are so many pilgrims who wander up and down upon the earth, far from our country, which is heaven, where the Lord awaits us, that we may rejoice forever in his glorious countenance. *While we are in the body*, writes the apostle, *we are absent from the Lord.*⁴ If, then, we love God, we ought to have a continual desire to leave this place of exile, by being

1 "Misericordiae Domini, quia non sumus consumpti." Lam. 3. 22.

2 "Nisi quia Dominus adjuvit me, paulo minus habitasset in inferno anima mea." Ps. 93. 17.

3 "Tu autem eruisti animam meam, ut non periret." Isa. 38. 17

4 "Dum sumus in corpore, peregrinamur a Domino." 2 Cor. 5. 6.

[175] separated from the body, that we may go and see him. It was for this that St. Paul ever sighed, as he said, *We*

*are confident, and have a good will to be absent rather from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*¹

Before the common redemption of us miserable sons of Adam, the way of approach to God was closed up; but Jesus Christ, by his death, has obtained for us the grace of having it in our power to become the sons of God; ² and thus has opened to us the gates by which we can have access, as children, to our Father, Almighty God. ³

On this account St. Paul says, *Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners; but you are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.*⁴ Thus, so long as we are in the grace of God, we enjoy the citizenship of paradise, and belong to the family of God, St. Augustine says, "Nature corrupted with sin produces citizens of an earthly city; but grace, which frees our nature from sin, makes us citizens of a heavenly country, and vessels of mercy."⁵

This made David say, *I am a stranger on earth; hide not Your commandments from me.*⁶ O Lord! I am a pilgrim upon this earth, teach me to keep Your precepts, which are the road by which I may reach my country in heaven. It is not wonderful that the wicked should wish to live

¹ "Audemus autem, et bonam voluntatem habemus magis peregrinari a corpora et praesentes esse ad Dominum." 2 Cor. 5. 8.

² "Dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri," John 1. 12.

³ "Quoniam per ipsum habemus accessum ambo in uno spiritu ad Patrem." Eph. 2. 18.

⁴ "Ergo jam non estis hospites et advenae, sed estis cives Sanctorum et domestici Dei." Eph. 2. 19.

⁵ "Cives terrenae civitatis parit peccato vitiata natura, qui sunt vasa irae; cives vero caelestis patriae parit a peccato naturam liberans gratia, qui sunt vasa misericordiae." *De Civ. Dei*, 1. 15.

⁶ "Incola ego sum in terra, non abscondas a me mandata tua." Ps. 118. 19.

[176] forever in this world, for they justly fear that they shall pass from the pains of this life to the eternal and infi-

nately more terrible pains of hell; but how can he who loves God, and has a moral certainty that he is in a state of grace, desire to go on living in this vale of tears, in continual bitterness, in difficulties of conscience, in peril of perishing? How can he help sighing to depart at once to unite himself to God in a blessed eternity, where there is no danger of his destroying himself? Oh, how souls that love God groan continually while they live, and cry out with David, *Woe is me, for my banishment is prolonged!*¹ Unhappy is he who must continue to live a long time in this world, in the midst of so many perils to his salvation! Therefore it is that the saints have continually had this prayer upon their lips, *Thy kingdom come.*² Quickly, O Lord! quickly carry us to Your kingdom. Let us make speed, then, as the apostle exhorts us, to enter that kingdom, where we shall find perfect peace and contentment: *Let us hasten to enter into that rest.*³ Let us hasten, I say, with desire, and not cease to walk onwards till we come to that blessed harbor which God prepares for them that love him.

"He that runs," says St. John Chrysostom, "pays not heed to the spectators, but to the crown of victory; he stands not, but hastens on his course." ⁴ Therefore the saint argues that the longer has been our life, the more we should hasten with good works to win the prize. Thus, our one constant prayer for the relief of the troubles and trials which we endure in this life ought to be this: *Thy kingdom come.*⁵ Lord, may Your kingdom

1 "Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est." Ps. 119. 5.

2 Adveniat, adveniat regnum tuum.

3 "Festinemus ergo ingredi in illam requiem." Heb. 4. 11.

4 "Qui currit, non ad spectatores, sed ad palmam attendit; non consistit, sed cursum intendit." *In Ep. ad Heb.*, hom. 7.

5 Adveniat regnum tuum.

[177] speedily come, where, united eternally with You, and seeing You face to face with all our powers, we shall no longer know fear, or danger of falling away. And when we find ourselves afflicted with the labors or dishonors

of the world, let us comfort ourselves with the great reward that God prepares for those who suffer for the love of him: *Rejoice in that day, and be glad; for behold, your reward is great in heaven.*¹ St. Cyprian said that with good reason our Lord wills that we should rejoice in labors and persecutions, because then the true soldiers of God are proved, and crowns are distributed to the faithful.²

Behold, O my God! *my heart is ready*;¹ behold me prepared for every cross that You give me to endure. No, I desire not delights or pleasures in this life; he who has offended You and deserves hell, deserves not pleasures. I am ready to suffer all the infirmities and adversities that You send me; I am ready to embrace all the insults of men; I am content, if it pleases You to deprive me of all bodily and spiritual consolations; it is enough that You do not deprive me of Yourself, and of the eternal love of You. This I deserve not, but I hope for it, through the blood that You have shed for me. I love You, O my God, my love, my all! I shall live forever, and I shall love You forever, as I hope; and my paradise will ever be to rejoice in Your infinite joy, which You truly merit, through Your infinite goodness.

1 "Gaudete in illa die, et exsultate; ecce enim merces vestra multa est in coelo." Luke 6. 23.

2 "Gaudere nos et exsultare voluit in persecutionibus Dominus, quia tunc dantur coronae fidei, tunc probantur milites Dei." *Epist. ad Thibar.*

3 "Paratum cor meum." Ps. 56. 8.

3. I Must One Day Die

It is a most useful thought for salvation to say often to ourselves, "I must one day die." The Church every year on Ash Wednesday brings this remembrance to the faithful. *O man, remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*¹ And this certainty of death is brought to our recollection many times in the year; sometimes by the burial-grounds which we pass upon the road, sometimes

by the graves which we behold in churches, sometimes by the dead who are carried to burial.

The most precious furniture that was carried by the anchorites to their caves was a cross and a skull; the cross to remind them of the love which Jesus Christ has had for us, and the skull to remind them of the day of their own death. And thus they persevered in penitential works till the end of their days; and thus, dying in poverty in the desert, they died more content than if they had died as kings in their palaces.

*The end is at hand; the end is at hand.*² In this life, one man lives a longer, another a shorter time; but for every one, sooner or later, the end comes; and when that end is here, nothing will comfort us at the point of death but that we have loved Jesus Christ, and have endured with patience the labors of this life for the love of him. Then not the riches we have gained, nor the honors we have obtained, nor the pleasures we have enjoyed, will console us. All the greatness of the world cannot comfort a dying man; it rather adds to his pains; and the more he has gained of it, the more does he suffer. It was said by Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a nun of the Discalced

1 "Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris." Gen. 3. 19.

2 "Finis venit, venit finis." Ezek. 7. 2.

[197] Carmelites, and daughter of the Emperor Rodolph II:
"What profit is a kingdom in the hour of death?"

Oh, how many worldly persons are there to whom, at the very moment when they are busy in seeking for gain, power, and office, the word of death comes: *Set Your house in order; for You shall die, and not live.*¹ Why, O man! have You neglected to make Your will till the hour when You are in sickness? O my God! what pain is suffered by him who is on the point of gaining some lawsuit, or of taking possession of some palace or property, who hears it said by the priest who has come to pray for his soul,

"Depart, Christian soul, from this world. 2 Depart from this world, and render Your account to Jesus Christ." "But now," he cries, "I am not well prepared." What matters that? You must now depart.

O my God! give me light, give me strength to spend the rest of my life in serving and loving You. If I should die now, I would not die content; I would die disturbed. What, then, do I wait for? That death should seize me at a moment of the greatest peril to my soul? O Lord! if I have been insane until now, I will not be so for the time to come. Now I give myself wholly to You; receive me, and help me with Your grace.

In a word, to every one the end comes, and with the end comes that decisive moment on which depends a happy or a wretched eternity. Oh, what a moment, on which eternity depends! 8 Oh, that all would think upon that moment, and the account they must give to their judge of their whole life! Oh, that they were wise, and would understand, and would consider their last end! Truly,

1 "Dispone domui tuae, quia morieris tu, et non vives." Isa. 38. 1.

2 Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo.

3 O momentum, a quo pendet aeternitas!

4 "Utinam saperent, et intelligerent, ac novissima providerent!" Deut. 32. 29.

[198] they would not then devote themselves to amassing riches, or labor to become great in this perishing world; they would think how to become saints, and to be great in that life which never ends.

If, then, we have faith, let us believe that there is a death, a judgment, an eternity, and labor for the rest of our life to live only for God. And, therefore, let us take care to live as pilgrims in this earth, remembering that we must speedily leave it. Let us live ever with death before our eyes; and, in all the affairs of life, let us take care to act precisely as we should act at the point of death. All things upon earth either leave us, or we leave

them. Let us hear Jesus Christ, who says, *Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy.*¹ Let us despise the treasures of earth, which cannot content us, and speedily end; and let us gain those heavenly treasures which will make us happy, and never be ended.

Miserable I am, O Lord! in that I have so often, for the sake of the goods of this life, turned my back upon You, who are the infinite good! I see my folly in having sought for a great name, and for making my fortune in the world. I see what my true happiness is: it is henceforth to love You, and in everything to fulfil Your will. O my Jesus! take from me the desire of gain; make me love a simple and humble life. Give me strength to deny myself in everything that displeases You. Make me embrace with a calm mind, infirmities, persecutions, desolations, and all the crosses that You may send me. Oh, that I could die for the love of You, abandoned by all, as You died for me! Holy Virgin, Your prayers can enable me to find my true happiness, which is to love earnestly Your Son. Oh, pray for me; in You I trust.

¹ "Thesaurizate autem vobis thesauros in coelo, ubi neque aerugo neque tinea demolitur." Matt. 6. 20.

4. Preparation for Death

Death is certain. "It is appointed to all men once to die." On the other hand, the time and manner of our death are uncertain. Therefore, Jesus Christ exhorts us, "Be ready, for you know not the hour when the Son of man will come." He says, "Be ready;" and, therefore, it is necessary not only to prepare for death when death comes, but we must be ready to embrace it in whatever manner and in whatever circumstances it may come to us. It is accordingly very desirable that everyone, at least once a month, should make the following acts of devotion:

Behold, O my God! I am ready to embrace that death which You destine for me. From this time I embrace it, and I sacrifice my life in honor of Your Majesty, and also in penance for my sins; being satisfied that this flesh, to please which I have so often offended You, should be devoured by worms, and be reduced to dust. O my Jesus! I unite the pains and agonies which I must then suffer to the pains and agonies which You, my Savior did suffer in Your death. I accept death with all the circumstances You may appoint; I accept its time, whether it be near or distant; I accept the manner, whether in bed or out of it, whether sudden or not, and from that more or less painful illness which may please You. In everything I resign myself to Your holy will. Give me strength to suffer all with patience.

*What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits He has given to me?*¹ I thank You, O my God! first for the gift of faith, declaring that I desire to die a son of the holy Catholic Church. I thank You for not having

¹ "Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quae retribuit mihi?" Ps. 115. 12.

[200] caused me to die when I was in sin, and for having so often pardoned me with so much mercy. I thank You for so many lights of grace with which You have sought to draw me to Your love. I pray You to grant me to die after receiving the holy Viaticum, that, united with You, I may present myself at Your tribunal. I do not deserve to hear from Your mouth, *Well done, good and faithful servant, because You have been faithful in a few things, I will set You over many things; enter into the joy of Your Lord.*¹ I do not deserve it, for in nothing have I been perfectly faithful to You; but Your death gives me hope that I shall be admitted to heaven, to love You there eternally, and with all my powers.

O my crucified Love! have mercy upon me; look upon me with that love with which You did look upon me

from the cross when dying for me. *Remember not the sins of my youth and my ignorance, O Lord.*² My sins terrify me, but I am comforted by that cross, on which I see You dead through the love of me. "Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the salvation of the world."³ I desire my life to end, that I may cease to offend You; by the blood that was shed for me, pardon me all my sins before death comes upon me. "O blood of the Innocent, wash away the stains of the guilty."⁴

My Jesus, I embrace Your cross, and kiss the wounds of Your holy feet, before which I desire to breathe my soul away. Leave me not at that last hour; "We pray You save Your servants, whom You have redeemed with Your precious blood."⁵ I love You with all my heart,

1 "Euge, serve bone et fidelis; quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam; intra in gaudium Domini tui." Matt. 25. 21.

2 "Delicta juventutis meae et ignorantias meas ne memineris." Ps. 24. 7.

3 Ecce lignum crucis, in quo salus mundi pependit.

4 O sanguis innocentis! lava sordes poenitentis.

5 Te ergo quaesumus, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.

[201] I love You more than myself, and I repent with all my soul that I have displeased You. O Lord! I was lost, but You in Your goodness have delivered me from the world; receive, then, my soul from this hour, until that hour when it leaves the world. Therefore, I pray with St. Agatha, "Lord, You who have taken from me the love of this world, receive my soul." 1 *In You, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth!*²

Holy Virgin! help me at the moment of my death; holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me a sinner, now and at the hour of my death; in You, O Lady, have I hoped, I shall not be confounded forever. St. Joseph, my protector, obtain for me a holy death. My guardian angel, St. Michael the Archangel, defend me from the evil one in that last conflict. My holy patron saints, and all

saints in Paradise, attend to me in that last hour. Jesus, Joseph, and Mary, be in my company at the hour of my death.

5. He that Loves God must Love and not Abhor Death

How can he ever abhor death who is in the grace of God? *He that abides in love dwells in God, and God in him.*³ He, therefore, that loves God is secure of his grace and, thus dying, he is sure of going to rejoice forever in the kingdom of the blessed; and shall such a one fear death? David truly said, *Enter not into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight shall no man living*

1 Domine, qui abstulisti a me amorem saeculi, accipe animam meam.

2 "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum; . . . redemisti me, Domine, Deus veritatis." Ps. 30. 2-6.

3 "Qui manet in charitate, in Deo manet, et Deus in eo." 1 John 4. 16.

[202] *be justified.*¹ This means that no man may presume to be saved by his own merits; for no one but Jesus and Mary can say that he has been without sin throughout his life. But he ought not to fear death if, with true repentance for his sins, he trusts in the merits of Jesus Christ, who came on earth to save sinners. *The Son of man came to save that which was lost.*² And for this end he died, and poured forth his blood to save sinners. The blood of Christ Jesus, says the Apostle, speaks more in favor of sinners than the blood of Abel spoke against Cain, who slew him.³

It is true that, without a divine revelation, no man can possess an infallible certainty of his own salvation; but he that has given himself with a true heart to God, and is ready to lose everything, even life itself, rather than lose the divine grace, has a moral certainty that he will be saved. This certainty is founded on the divine promises; no man, says the Scripture, ever trusted in God and was confounded. ⁴ Almighty God declares in many passages that he does not desire the death of the

sinner, but that he be converted and live. *Is it My will that a sinner should die, says the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways, and live?*⁵ In another place he makes the same declaration, and adds an oath: *As I live, says the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*⁶

1 "Et non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo, quia non justificabitur in conspectu tuo omnis vivens." Ps. 142. 2.

2 "Venit enim Filius hominis salvare quod perierat." Matt. 18. 11.

3 "Accessistis ad ... Mediatorem Jesum, et sanguinis aspersionem melius loquentem quam Abel." Heb. 12. 22.

4 "Nullus speravit in Domino, et confusus est." Sir. 2. 11.

5 "Numquid voluntatis meae est mors impii, dicit Dominus Deus, et non ut convertatur a viis suis, et vivat?" Ezek. 18. 23.

6 "Vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus, nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat." Ezek. 33. 11.

[203] And, in the same chapter, God laments over those obstinate sinners who choose to perish because they will not leave their sins, and says, *Why will you die, O house of Israel?*¹ And to those who repent of their sins he promises to forget all their iniquities. *If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he has committed he shall live, . . . I will not remember all his iniquities that he has done.*²

When a sinner also hates the sins he has committed, it is a certain sign that he has been pardoned. A holy Father ³ says that whoever can say, with truth, *"I hate and abhor my iniquities,"*⁴ may be certain that they are forgiven. We have another sign of pardon when we recover grace and persevere in a good life for a considerable time after having sinned. It is also a sure sign to the same effect when we have a fixed resolution to die rather than lose the friendship of God, as also when we earnestly desire to love him, and to see him loved by others, and when we feel distress at seeing him offended.

How is it, then, that certain great saints, after having given themselves wholly to God, and after a life of mor-

tification and detachment from all earthly things, at the hour of death have felt great terror at the thought of appearing before Christ their judge? I reply that those great saints who have suffered these fears at the moment of death have been very few, and that it was the will of God that they should thus purge away the remains of their sins before entering on eternal blessedness; but that, ordinarily speaking, all the saints have died in remarkable peace, and with earnest desires to depart to the presence of God. And for the rest, this is

1 Et quare moriemini, domus Israel?

2 "Si autem impius egerit poenitentiam . . . vita vivet . . . omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor." Ezek. 18. 21.

3 *Bas. M. Reg. brev.*, int. 12.

4 "Iniquitatem odio habui, et abominatus sum." Ps. 118. 163.

[204] the very difference between sinners and saints at the hour of death, that sinners from fear pass on to despair, and saints from fear pass on to confidence, and thus die in peace.

Therefore, every one who has a hope that he is in the grace of God ought to desire death, repeating the prayer which Christ Jesus has taught us, "Thy kingdom come;" and he ought to embrace death with joy when it comes that he may thus be freed from sin, and leave this world where no one lives without imperfections, and go to behold God, face to face, and love him with all his powers in the kingdom of love.

O my beloved Jesus and my judge! when You shall judge me, for Your mercy condemn me not to hell. In hell I cannot love You, but must hate You forever; and how can I hate You who are so worthy of love, and who have so loved me? If You will condemn me to hell, at least grant me grace to be able to love You there with all my heart. This grace I do not deserve, through my sins; but if I do not deserve it, You have purchased it for me with the blood which You did shed with such anguish for me upon the cross. O my

Judge! inflict on me every pain, but deprive me not of the power of loving You. O Mother of God! behold the peril in which I stand of being condemned to be unable to love Your Son, who deserves an infinite love; help me; have pity on me.

6. The Words of a Dying Man to Jesus Crucified

Jesus, my Redeemer! who within a few moments will be my judge, have mercy upon me before the moment comes when You will judge me. No, my sins do not terrify me, nor the rigors of Your judgment, while I see You dead upon this cross to save me.

Yet, cease not to comfort me in the agony to which I have come: my enemies would terrify me by saying that there is no salvation for me: *Many say unto my soul, there is no salvation for him in his God.*¹ But I will never cease to trust in Your goodness, and say, *You, O Lord are one who lifts me up.*² Do comfort me; do make me feel that You are my salvation; *Say unto my soul, I am Your salvation.*³ Oh, let not all those pangs, those insults endured, that blood poured forth by You, be lost for me. "You have redeemed me, dying upon the cross; let not so great labor be in vain." Especially, I pray You, through that bitterness You did feel when Your blessed soul was separated from Your most holy body, have mercy upon my soul when it departs from my body.

It is true that through my sins I have continually despised You; but now I love You above all things, I love You more than myself; and I grieve with all my heart for all the offences that I have committed against You; I detest them, I hate them above every evil. I

1 "Multi dicunt animae meae: Non est salus ipsi in Deo ejus." Ps. 3. 3.

2 "Tu autem, Domine, susceptor meus es." Ps. 3. 4.

3 "Dic animae meae: Salus tua ego sum." Ps. 34. 3.

[242] see that through the offences I have been guilty of, I have deserved a thousand hells; but the bitter death which You have been willing to endure for me, and the great mercies You have already shown me, make me confidently hope that when I appear before You, You will welcome me with the kiss of peace.

Trusting all in Your goodness, O my God! I abandon myself into Your loving arms. *In You, O Lord, I have hoped: I shall not be confounded forever.*¹ Through the sins I have committed, I have again and again deserved hell; but I hope in Your blood, and that You will pardon me; and I hope that I shall come to heaven to praise Your mercies forever: *The mercies of God I will sing for ever.*²

I willingly accept all the pains You have prepared for me in purgatory: it is just that the fire should purge away the wrongs I have done You. O holy prison, when shall I find myself shut up in You, secure from being able ever to lose my God! O holy fire, when will You purge away my vileness, and make me worthy to enter the kingdom of the blessed!

O eternal Father! through the merits of the death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, make it be that I die in Your grace, and in Your love, that I may come to love You throughout eternity. I thank You for all the graces You have given me through my life, and especially for the great grace of Your holy faith, and for having caused me to receive, in these my last days, all the holy sacraments. You will that I should die, and I desire to die to please You. It is little, O Jesus, my Savior! that I should die for You, who have died for me. I am satisfied to say to You, with St. Francis, "Let me die for love of You, who have vouchsafed to die for love of me."

1 "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." Ps. 30. 2.

2 "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo." Ps. 88. 2.

[243] I receive death with peace, and also the pains that I must endure so long as I breathe; give me strength to suffer with a perfect conformity to Your will. I offer them all to Your glory, uniting them to the pains that You did suffer in Your Passion. O eternal Father! I sacrifice to You my life, and all my being; and I pray You to accept this my sacrifice, through the merits of the great sacrifice that Jesus Your Son offered up of himself upon the cross.

O Mother of God, and my Mother Mary! You have obtained many graces from God for me during my life; I thank You with all my heart. Oh, abandon me not in this hour of my death, in which I have greater need of Your prayers. Pray to Jesus for me, and increase Your prayers; obtain for me sorrow for my sins, and more love for God, that I may come to love him forever, in company with You, and with all my powers, in heaven. "In You, O Lady, I have hoped: I shall not be confounded forever." Mary, my hope, in You I trust.

7. Acts of Devotion for the Time of Death

It was revealed to St. Lidwina by an angel that the crown of merits and glory that awaited her in heaven could only be completed through the sufferings which she was to endure in the days which would immediately precede her death. The same thing happens to all devout souls when they depart from this world. It is certain that all good acts, and especially those of resignation in accepting death, performed with the view of pleasing God, are of great merit to every one who dies in the grace of God. Let us here set down certain acts of devotion, which may be very acceptable to the Lord at the time of death.

O my God! I offer You my life, and I am prepared to die at any hour that may be pleasing to Your holy will. "Your will be done;" forever and ever, may Your will be done.

[244] Lord! if You will to leave me in life for some

time longer, blessed be Your name; but I desire not life, except to spend it all in loving You and giving You pleasure. If You will that I should die of this sickness, still blessed are You. I embrace death to do Your will, and I repeat, "Your will, Your will be done;" I only beg You to help all through this hour. "Have mercy on me, O God! according to Your great mercy." If, then, You will that I should leave this earth, I declare that I desire to die, because thus You will have it.

I desire also to die, in order that, by the pain and bitterness of my death, I may satisfy Your divine justice for all my sins, through which I have offended You and deserved hell.

I desire also to die, that I may nevermore offend You, or cause You displeasure in this life.

I also desire to die in acknowledgment of the gratitude which I owe You for all the benefits and gifts that You have given me, contrary to all I have deserved.

I desire to die, that I may show that I love Your will more than my life.

I desire, if it pleases You, to die now, at a time when I trust I am in Your grace, in order to be assured that I shall praise and bless You forever.

I desire, above all, to die, in order that I may come to love You eternally, and with all my powers, in heaven; where, through Your blood, O my Redeemer! I hope to come, and to be sure of never ceasing to love You through all eternity. O my Jesus! You did accept the death of the cross through love of me; I accept death, and all the pains that await me, through love of You. Therefore I say with St. Francis, "May I die, O Lord! through love of You, who, through love of me, did not disdain to die."

I Moriar, Domine, amore amoris tui, qui amore amoris mei dignatus es mori!

[245] I pray You, O my Savior, my love, and my only good! by Your holy wounds and Your bitter death, make me to die in Your grace, and through Your blood do not allow me to perish. O sweetest Jesus! permit me not to be separated from You.

Lord! drive me not away from Your face. I confess that, through my sins, I have deserved hell, and I mourn for them more than for any evil; and I hope to come to heaven to praise forever the great mercies You have shown to me. "The mercies of the Lord I shall sing forever."

I adore You, O my God! who have created me. I believe in You, O Eternal Truth! I hope in You, O Infinite Mercy! I love You, O Supreme Goodness! I love You above all things; I love You more than myself, for You are worthy of being loved. And because I love You, I repent with all my heart for having despised Your grace. I promise You to suffer every kind of death, and a thousand deaths, rather than displease You.

O Jesus! Son of God, who did die for me, have pity upon me! My Savior, save me; and let it be my salvation to praise You through eternity.

O Mary, Mother of God! pray to Jesus for me; now it is the time for You to aid me. Mary, Mother of grace, Mother of mercy, do defend us from the enemy, and receive us in the hour of death. To Your protection we fly, O holy Mother of God! O Mary, holy Mother of God! pray for us sinners.

St. Joseph, my patron and father, help me in this hour. St. Michael the Archangel, deliver me from the devils who lie in wait for my soul. O my holy advo-

cates, and you saints of paradise, pray to God for me.

And You, my Jesus crucified, at the moment when I must breathe my last breath, receive my soul in Your arms; to You I recommend it; remember that You have [246] redeemed me with Your blood. "We therefore pray You, help Your servants whom You have redeemed with Your precious blood." 1 O my crucified Jesus! my love and my hope, whether I live or die, I declare that I desire You alone, and nothing more. You are my God and my all, and what else can I desire but You! "What have I in heaven or upon earth! You are the God of my heart and my portion forever." 2 You are the love of my heart; You are all my riches!

To You, then, I recommend my soul; to You, who have redeemed it with Your death. Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. 3 You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth! Trusting in Your mercy, I therefore say, *In You, O Lord! have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever.* 4 O Mary, You are my hope; to You, therefore, I say again, In You, O Lady! have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever.

8. The House of Eternity

A man shall go to the house of his eternity. 5 We err in calling this our habitation in which we now dwell; the habitation of our body in a little while will be a grave, in which it must rest until the day of judgment; and the habitation of the soul will be either paradise or hell, according as it has deserved, and there will it continue through all eternity.

1 Te ergo quaesumus, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.

2 "Quid mihi est in coelo? et a te quid volui super terram? . . . Deus cordis mei, et pars mea Deus in aeternum." Ps. 72. 25.

3 "In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum; redemisti me, Domine Deus veritatis." Ps. 30. 6.

4 "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." Ps. 30. 2.

5 "Ibit homo in domum aeternitatis suae." Eccles. 12. 5.

[247] At our burial our corpses do not go to the grave of themselves, they are carried there by others; but the soul goes itself to the place which awaits it, either of eternal joy or eternal woe. A man shall go to the house of his eternity. According as a man lives well or ill, so he departs himself to his habitation, in paradise or in hell, which he shall never change.

Those who live on this earth often change their home, either to please themselves, or because they are compelled. In eternity the habitation is never changed; where we enter the first time, there we abide forever. If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in whatever place it shall fall, there shall it be. He that enters into the south, which is heaven, will be ever happy; he that enters the north, which is hell, will be ever miserable.

He, then, who enters heaven will be always united with God, always in company with the saints, always in the profoundest peace, always abundantly contented; because every blessed soul is filled and satisfied with joy, nor will he ever know the fear of losing it. If fear of losing their happiness could enter among the blessed, they would be no longer blessed; for the mere thought of losing the joy they possess would disturb the peace they enjoy.

On the other hand, whoever enters into hell will be forever far from God: he will ever suffer in the fire of the damned. Let us not think that the pains of hell will be like those of earth, where, through the force of habit, a trouble continually grows less; for, as in paradise, the delights never cause weariness, but seem ever new, as though they were for the first time enjoyed (which is implied by the expression of "the new canticle," which the blessed are ever singing); so, in hell, the pains never grow less through all eternity; long cus-

tom will never diminish their torment. The miserable beings who are damned will feel the same anguish [248] through eternity that they feel the first moment they experience its pangs.

St. Augustine said that he who believes in eternity and is not converted to God, has either lost his sense or his faith. Woe, cries St. Cesarius, woe to sinners who enter eternity without knowing it, through having neglected to think upon it! And then he adds, "But, O double woe! they enter it, and they never come forth." It is a double woe, the first of which will be to fall into that abyss of fire; the second, that he who falls into it will never come out: the door of hell opens only to those who enter, not to those who would depart.

No; the saints did not do too much when they went to hide themselves in caves and deserts, to eat herbs, and to sleep on the ground, in order to save their souls. "They did not do too much," says St. Bernard, "because, where eternity is in question, no certainty can be too great." When, then, God visits us with any cross of infirmity, poverty, or any evil, let us think of the hell we have deserved, and thus every sorrow will appear light. Let us say, with Job, *I have sinned, and truly gone astray, and I have not received in accordance with my deserts.*¹ O Lord, I have offended You, and many times betrayed You, and I have not been punished as I deserved; how, then, can I lament if You send me any tribulation? I, who have deserved hell!

My Jesus! send me not to hell, to the hell in which I could no longer love You, but must hate You forever. Deprive me of everything, of property, health, life; but deprive me not of Yourself. Grant that I may love You and praise You forever; and then chastise me, and do with me what You will. O Mother of God! pray to Jesus for me.

¹ "Peccavi, et vere deliqui, et, ut eram dignus, non recepi." Job 33. 27.

9. Souls Who Love God Desire to Go to See Him in Heaven

[249] *While we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord.*¹ Souls that, in this life, love nothing but God are like noble pilgrims, destined, according to their present state, to be the eternal bride of the King of heaven, but who now live far away without seeing him; and so they do nothing but sigh to depart to the country of the blessed, where they know that their Spouse awaits them.

They know, indeed, that their Beloved is ever present with them, but that he is, as it were, hidden by a veil, and does not show himself. Or, to speak more correctly, he is like the sun behind clouds, which, from time to time, sends forth some ray of its splendor, but displays not itself openly. These beloved brides have a bandage before their eyes, which prevents them from seeing him whom they love. They live, nevertheless, contented, uniting themselves to the will of the Lord, who chooses to keep them in exile, and far away from himself; but with all this, they cannot but continually sigh to know him face to face, in order to be more inflamed with love towards him.

Therefore, every one of them often sweetly laments with their beloved Spouse, because he shows himself not; and they say, "O You, the only love of my heart, since You have so loved me, and have stricken me with Your holy love, why do you hide Yourself, and make me not see You? I know that You are an infinite beauty, I love You more than myself, though I have never yet beheld You; open to me Your fair countenance; I desire to know You totally revealed, in order that I may no more look to myself nor to any creature, and may think only of loving You, my highest good."

¹ "Dum sumus in corpore, peregrinamur a Domino." 2 Cor. 5. 6.

[250] When to these souls thus filled with love for God there appears any ray of the divine goodness, and of the love which God bears them, they long to be dissolved and fade away for desire of him; and though for them the sun is still hidden behind the clouds, and his fair face is covered by a veil, and their own eyes are bandaged, so that they cannot gaze on him face to face; yet what shall be their joy when the clouds disperse, and the gate opens, and the bandage is taken from their eyes, and the fair countenance of their Beloved appears without a veil, so that in the clear light of day they look upon his beauty, his goodness, his greatness, and the love which he bears to them!

O death, why do You so delay to come? If You come not, I cannot depart to behold my God. It is You that must open to me the gate, that I may enter into the palace of my Lord. O blessed country, when will the day be here when I shall find myself beneath Your eternal tabernacles? O beloved of my soul, my Jesus, my treasure, my love, my all! when will that happy moment come when, leaving this earth, I shall see myself totally united with You? I deserve not this happiness; but the love which You have shown me and, still more, Your infinite goodness make me hope that I shall be one day joined to those happy souls who, being wholly united with You, love You, and will love You with a perfect love through all eternity. O my Jesus! You see the alternative in which I am placed, of being either ever united with You, or ever far from You; have mercy upon me; Your blood is my hope; and Your intercession, O my Mother Mary, is my comfort and my joy!

10. The Affair of Eternal Salvation

The business of our eternal salvation is for us that affair which is not only the most important, but the only thing that ought to trouble us; because, if this goes wrong,

all is lost. One thought upon eternity, well weighed, is enough to make a saint. The great servant of God, Fr. Vincenzo Carafa, would often say that if all men thought with a living faith upon the eternity of another life, the world would become a desert, for no one would attend any more to the affairs of this life.

Oh, if only all had ever before their eyes the great truth taught us by Jesus Christ! What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? ¹ This truth has taught many a man to leave the world; many noble virgins, and even those of royal blood, to shut themselves up in a cloister; many anchorites to live in deserts, and many martyrs to give their lives for the faith; because they considered that if they lost their souls, all the good things of the world would profit them nothing in the eternal state.

Therefore the Apostle wrote to his disciples: We entreat you, brethren, that you attend to your own business. ² And of what business did St. Paul speak? He spoke of that business which, if it fail, implies that we lose the eternal kingdom of Paradise, and are cast into an abyss of torments that never end. It is an affair of eternal punishments, and of the loss of the heavenly kingdom, says St. John Chrysostom.³

¹ "Quid enim prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur?" Matt. 16. 26.

² "Rogamus autem vos, fratres . . . ut negotium vestrum agatis." 1 Thess. 4. 10

³ "De immortalibus suppliciis, de coelestis regni amissione, res agitur." *In Matt.* hom. 25.

[254] St. Philip Neri, therefore, have good reason for calling all those persons insane who undergo pains in this life for the gaining of riches and honors, and give little heed to the salvation of the soul. "All such," said the venerable John Avila, "deserve to be shut up in an asylum for lunatics." How can this be? This great servant of God meant to say, "You believe that there is an eternity of joys for those who love God, and an eternity of pains for those

who offend him; and do you offend him?"

Every loss of property, of reputation, of relatives, of health, can be repaired in this life, at least by a good death, and by the acquisition of eternal life, as it happened to the holy martyrs; but for what good things of the world, even the greatest fortune, can be given in exchange for the loss of the soul? *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*¹

He that dies in the wrath of God, and loses his soul, loses with this every hope of repairing his ruin. *To the wicked, when he is dead, there is no more hope.*² O God! if the doctrine of eternal life were but a simple, doubtful opinion of theologians, we ought surely to give all our care for gaining a happy eternity, and avoiding a miserable one. But no; it is not a doubtful thing; it is certain, it is an article of faith, that we must come to one or the other.

But what do we see? Every one who has faith, and thinks upon this truth, says, "So it is we must attend to the salvation of the soul;" but few are they who truly give heed to it. They devote themselves with all their energies to win this case, or to obtain this position, but lay aside the care of eternal salvation. "Truly, it is the greatest of errors to neglect the business of eternal salvation,"³ said St. Eucharius; it is an error that exceeds

1 "Quam dabit homo commutationem pro anima sua?" Matt. 16. 26.

2 "Mortuo homine impio, non erit ultra spes." Prov. 11. 7.

3 "Sane supra omnem errorem est dissimulare negotium salutis suae." *De Contemptu mundi*.

[255] all others; for to lose the soul is a mistake without a remedy.

Oh, that they would be wise, and would understand, and consider the last things! Miserable are those learned men who labor at many things, and know not how to take forethought for their souls, that they may obtain a favorable sentence in the day of judgment!

O my Redeemer! You have given Your blood to purchase my soul, and I have so often lost it, and given it to destruction! I give You thanks that You have given me time to recover it, by recovering Your grace. O my God! would that I had died before I had offended You! It comforts me to know that You know not how to despise a heart that humbles itself and repents of its sins. O Mary, refuge of sinners! help me a sinner, who recommends himself to You, and trusts in You.

11. What will be the Joy of the Blessed

*Enter into the joy of Your Lord.*¹ When the soul enters the kingdom of the blessed, and the barrier which hinders its sight is taken away, it will see openly and without a veil the infinite beauty of God; and this will be the joy of the blessed.

Every object that the soul then will see in God himself will overwhelm it with delight; it will see the rectitude of his judgments, the harmony of his regulations for every soul, all ordained to his divine glory, and its own good.

The soul will especially perceive, in respect to itself, the boundless love which God has entertained towards it in becoming man, and sacrificing his life upon the cross through love of it. Then will it know what an excess of goodness is comprehended in the mystery of the

¹ "Intra in gaudium Domini tui." Matt. 25. 21.

[256] cross, in the sight of a God become a servant, and dying condemned upon an infamous tree; and in the mystery of the Eucharist, in the sight of a God beneath the appearance of bread, and made the food of his creatures.

In particular the soul will perceive all the graces and favors shown to it, which, until then, have been hidden.

It will see all the mercies he has bestowed on it, in waiting for it, and pardoning its ingratitude. It will see the many calls, and lights, and aids that have been granted to it in abundance. It will see that these tribulations, these infirmities, these losses of property or of loved ones, which it counted punishments, were not really punishments, but loving arrangements of God for drawing it to the perfect love for him.

In a word, all these things will make the soul know the infinite goodness of its God, and the boundless love which he deserves; and so, as soon as it has reached heaven, it will have no other desire but to behold him in his blessedness and joy; and, at the same time, comprehending that the happiness of God is supreme, infinite, and eternal, it will experience a joy that is only not infinite because a creature is not capable of anything that is infinite. It will enjoy, nevertheless, a pleasure that is extreme and full, which fills it with delight, and with that kind of delight that belongs to God himself; and thus will be fulfilled in it the words, *Enter into the joy of Your Lord.*

The blessed are not so much blessed through the delight which they experience in themselves as in the joy with which God rejoices; for the blessed love God so infinitely more than themselves that the blessedness of God delights them infinitely more than their own blessedness, through the love which they bear to him; the love which makes them forget themselves, and all their delight is to please their Beloved.

[257] And this is that holy and loving inebriation which causes the blessed to lose the memory of themselves, to give themselves wholly to praise and love the dear object of all their love, which is God. *They shall be inebriated with the fullness of Your house.*¹ Happy from their first entrance into heaven, they continue, as it were, lost and, so to say, swallowed up in love, in that boundless ocean of the goodness of God.

And so every blessed soul will lose all its desires, and will have no other desire but to love God, and to be loved by him; and knowing that it is sure of ever loving him, and of being ever loved by him, this very thing will be its blessedness, which will fill it with joy, and will make it throughout eternity so satisfied with delight that it will desire nothing more.

In a word, it will be the paradise of the blessed, to rejoice in the joy of God. And thus, he who in this life rejoices in the blessedness that God enjoys, and will enjoy through eternity, can say that even in this life he enters into the joy of God, and begins to enjoy Paradise.

Yet, O my sweet Savior, and the love of my soul! in this vale of tears I still see myself surrounded by enemies, who would separate me from You. O my beloved Lord! permit me not to perish; make me ever love You in this life and in the next life, and then do with me what You will. O Queen of Paradise! if You pray for me, assuredly I shall be with You eternally, to be in Your company, and to praise You in Paradise.

12. The Pain of having Lost God will be that which Constitutes Hell

The weight of punishment must correspond to the weight of the sin. Mortal sin is defined by theologians

1 "Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tuae, et torrente voluptatis tuae potabis eos." Ps. 35. 9.

[258] in a single phrase, "a turning away from God;" 1 and in this consists the wickedness of mortal sin; it consists in despising the divine grace, and in being willing, of one's own accord, to lose God, who is the greatest good; and so justly the greatest punishment of sinners in hell is the punishment of having lost God.

The other pains of hell are terrible: the fire which devours; the gloom which darkens; the cries of the damned which deafen; the stench, which would be enough to cause those miserable beings to die, if die they could; the crowdedness which oppresses and hinders their breath; but these pains are nothing in comparison with the loss of God. In hell the reprobate wail eternally; and the bitterest subject of their wailing is the thought that, through their own fault, they have lost God.

O God! what a blessing will they have lost! In this life of present objects, passions, temporal occupations, sensible pleasures and adverse events hinder us from contemplating the infinite beauty and goodness of God; but when the soul has departed from the prison-house of the body, it does not instantly behold God as he is; for, if it saw him, it would be instantly blessed; but it knows that God is an infinite good, and worthy of infinite love; for which the soul, which is created to see and love this God, would instantly go to unite itself to God; but if it were in sin, it would find an impenetrable wall (which is sin) that would forever close up the path which leads to God. O Lord! I thank You that this life is not yet closed to me, as I have deserved. I still can come to You; cast me not away from Your face!

The soul that is created to love its Creator, by natural love cannot find itself impelled to love its ultimate end, which is God; in this life, the darkness of sin, and earthly affections, lull to sleep this inclination which it has to unite itself to God, and therefore it is not greatly

1 Aversio a Deo.

[259] afflicted at being separated; but when it leaves the body and is delivered from the senses, then it comprehends with a clear knowledge that God only can give it happiness. And for this reason, as soon as it is separated from the body, immediately it flies to embrace its greatest good; but

finding itself in sin, it perceives that, as an enemy, it is driven from God. But though driven away, it will not cease to feel itself ever drawn to unite itself to God; and this will be its hell, to find itself ever drawn towards God, and ever driven away from God.

But it would be said that the miserable soul, if it has lost God, and can no more see him, can at least comfort itself in loving him. But this is not so; for being abandoned by grace, and made a slave to sin, its will is perverted; so that, on one side, it finds itself ever drawn to love God, and on the other, compelled to hate him. Thus, at the same time that it knows that God is worthy of infinite love and praise, it hates him and curses him.

Yet perhaps it might, at least in this prison of torments resign itself to the divine will, as holy souls do in purgatory, and bless the hand of this God that justly punishes it. But no; it cannot resign itself, because, to do this, it must be assisted by grace, while grace (as has been said) has abandoned it; thus it cannot unite its will to that of God, because its own will is altogether contrary to the divine will.

On account of this it also happens that the wretched soul turns all its hatred upon itself, and thus will live forever, torn by contrary desires. It desires to live, it desires to die. On one part, it wants to live, in order to hate God, who is the object of its greatest hatred; on the other, it wants to die, that it might not feel the pain it experiences of having lost him, while it perceives that it cannot die. Thus it will live forever in one continual mortal agony. Let us pray God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, to deliver us from hell; and especially he ought to pray thus, [260] who, at any time in his life, has lost God through any grievous sin.

O Lord! (let him say) save me, and therefore bind me forever to You with Your holy love; redouble these holy and sweet chains of salvation, which may ever bind me

the more to You. Miserable that I am, I have despised Your grace, and deserved to be forever separated from You, my greatest good, and to hate You forever. I thank You for having borne with me when I was at enmity with You; what would have become of me, had I then died? But now that You have lengthened my life, grant that it may not be that I may still more displease You, but only to love You, and to mourn for the offences I have committed against You. O my Jesus! from this day forth You shall be my only love, and my only fear will be to offend You, and to separate myself from You. But if You do not help me, I can do nothing; I hope in Your blood, that You will give me help to be all Your own, O my Redeemer, my love, my all! O Mary, great advocate of sinners, help a sinner who recommends himself to You, and trusts in You.

If we would be assured of not losing God, let us give ourselves indeed wholly to God. He that does not give himself wholly to God is ever in danger of turning his back upon him, and of losing him; but a soul which resolutely detaches itself from all things, and gives itself all to God will no more lose him; because God himself will not allow that a soul that has heartily given itself all to him should turn its back upon him and perish. Thus a great servant of God would often say that when we read of the fall of any who had before given tokens of living a holy life, we must consider that such persons had not given themselves all to God.

13. The Sight and Love of God in the Next Life will Constitute the Joy of the Blessed.

Let us see what it will be which in heaven will make those holy citizens completely happy. The soul in heaven when it sees God face to face, and knows his infinite beauty, and all his perfections that render him worthy of infinite love, cannot but love him with all its powers, and it loves him far more than itself; it even, as

it were, forgets itself, and desires nothing but to behold him satisfied and loved who is its God; and seeing that God, who is the only object of all its affections, enjoys an infinite delight, this joy of God constitutes all its [271] paradise. If it were capable of anything that is infinite, in seeing that its Beloved is infinitely content, its own joy thereupon would be also infinite; but, as a creature is not capable of infinite joy, it rests at least satisfied with joy to such an extent that it desires nothing more; and this is that satisfaction that David sighed for, when he said, *I shall be satisfied when Your glory shall appear.* 1

Thus also is fulfilled what God says to the soul when he admits it into paradise, *Enter into the joy of Your Lord.* 2 He does not bid joy enter into the soul, because this his joy, being infinite, cannot be contained in the creature; but he bids the soul enter into his joy, that it may receive a portion of it, and such a portion as will satisfy it, and fill it with delight.

Therefore, I am of opinion that in meditation, among all acts of love towards God, there is none more perfect than the taking delight in the infinite joy of God. This is certainly the continual exercise of the blessed in heaven; so that he who often rejoices in the joy of God begins in this life to do that which he hopes to do in heaven through all eternity.

The love with which the saints in paradise burn towards God is such that if ever a fear of losing it were to enter their thoughts, or they were to think that they should not love him with all their powers, as now they love him, this fear would cause them to experience the pains of hell. But it is not so; for they are as sure, as they are sure of God, that they will ever love him with all their powers, and that they will be ever loved by God, and this mutual love will never change throughout eternity. O my God! make me worthy of this, through the merits of Jesus Christ.

This happiness, which constitutes paradise, will be further increased by the splendor of that delightful city

1 "Satiabor, cum apparuerit gloria tua." Ps. 16. 15.

2 "Intra in gaudium Domini tui." Matt. 25. 21.

[272] of God, the beauty of its inhabitants, and by their companionship, especially by that of the Queen of all, Mary, who will appear fairer than all, and by that of Jesus Christ, whose beauty again will infinitely surpass that of Mary.

The joy of the blessed will be increased by the dangers of losing so great a good, which they have all passed through in this life. What, then, will be the thanksgivings that they offer to God when, through their own sins, they have deserved hell, and now find themselves there on high, from where they will see so many condemned to hell for less guilt than their own, while they are saved, and sure of not losing God, being destined to enjoy eternally those boundless delights in heaven, of which they will never grow weary. In this life, however great and continual be our joys, with time they always weary us; but for the delights of paradise, the more they are enjoyed, the more they are desired; and thus the blessed are ever satisfied and filled with these delights, and ever desire them: they ever desire them, and ever obtain them. Thus that sweet song with which the saints praise God and thank him for the happiness he has given them is called a new song: *Sing to the Lord a new song.*¹ It is called new, because the rejoicings of heaven seem ever new, as though they were experienced for the first time; and thus they ever rejoice in them, and ever ask for them; and, as they ever ask for them, they ever obtain them. Thus, as the damned are called "vessels of wrath,"² the blessed are called "vessels of divine love."³

Justly, then, does St. Augustine⁴ say that to obtain this eternal blessedness there is needed a boundless labor. Hence, it was little that the anchorites did with

1 "Cantate Domino canticum novum." Ps. 97. 1.

2 Vasa irae.

3 Vasa charitatis.

4 *In Ps.* 36. S. 2.

[273] their penitential works and prayers to gain Paradise; it was little for the saints to leave their riches and kingdoms to gain it; little that the martyrs suffered from instruments of torture, and burning irons, and cruel deaths.

Let us, at any rate, give heed to suffer joyfully the crosses that God sends us, because they all, if we are saved, will become for us eternal joys. When infirmities, pains, or any adversities afflict us, let us lift up our eyes to heaven and say, "One day all these pains will have an end, and after them I hope to enjoy God forever." Let us take courage to suffer, and to despise the things of the world. Blessed is he who in death can say with St. Agatha, "O Lord, who have taken from me the love of the world, receive my soul." 1 Let us endure everything, let us despise everything that is created; it is Jesus who awaits us, and stands with the crown in his hands to make us kings in heaven, if we be faithful to him.

But how can I, O my Jesus! aspire to so great a good - I, who have so often, through the miserable desires of earth, renounced Paradise before You, and trodden under foot Your grace? Yet Your blood gives me courage to hope for Paradise, though I have so often deserved hell, because You have died upon the cross, in order to bestow Paradise upon those who have not deserved it. O my God and Redeemer! I would no more lose You; give me help to be faithful to You; Your kingdom come; through the merits of Your blood grant me one day to enter Your kingdom; and, in the meanwhile, until death comes, enable me perfectly to fulfill Your will, which is the greatest good, and is that Paradise which can be pos-

sessed upon earth by him who loves You.

1 "Domine, qui abstulisti a me amorem saeculi, accipe animam meam." Office of Readings for her feast, 6.

[274] Therefore, O you souls who love God! while we live in this vale of tears, let us ever sigh for Paradise, and say, "O fair country, in which love bestows itself upon love, I sigh for You hour by hour, when, O my God, when will it be here?"

14. Precious is the Death of the Saints

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*¹ Why is the death of the saints called precious? "Because," answers St. Bernard, ² "it is so rich in blessings which deserve to be purchased at any cost."

Some persons, attached to this world, would wish that there was no such thing as death; but St. Augustine says, "What is it to live long upon this earth, except to suffer long?" ³ "The miseries and difficulties that constantly weary us in this present life are so great," says St. Ambrose, "that death seems rather a relief than a punishment."⁴

Death terrifies sinners, because they know that from

1 "Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus." Ps. 115. 15

2 *In Trans. S. Mal.*, Serm. 1.

3 "Quid est diu vivere, nisi diu torqueri?" Serm. 84 E. B.

4 Ut mors remedium esse videatur, non poena.

[295] the first death, if they die in sin, they will pass to the second death, which is eternal; but it does not terrify good souls who, trusting in the merits of Jesus Christ, have sufficient signs to give them a moral assurance that they are in the grace of God. And so those words, "Depart, Christian soul, from this world," which are so terrible to those who die against their will, do not afflict

the saints, who preserve their hearts free from worldly love, and with a true affection can continue repeating, "My God and my all."¹

To these, death is not a torment, but a rest from the pains they have suffered in struggling with temptations, and in quieting their scruples, and their fear of offending God; so that what St. John writes of them is fulfilled: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors.*² He that dies loving God is not disturbed by the pains that death brings with it; but rather it is delightful to such persons to offer them to God, as the last remains of their life. Oh what peace is experienced by him who dies, when he has abandoned himself into the arms of Jesus Christ who chose for himself a death of bitterness and desolation, that he might obtain for us a death of sweetness and resignation!

My Jesus! You are my judge, but You are also my Redeemer, who have died to save me. From my first sin I have deserved to be condemned to hell, but in Your mercy You have given me a deep sorrow for my sins, for which I confidently hope that now You have pardoned me. I have not deserved to love You; but with Your gifts You have drawn me to Your love. If it is Your will that this sickness shall bring death to me, I willingly receive it. I see truly that I do not now deserve to enter

¹ Deus meus, et omnia!

² "Beati mortui, qui in Domino moriuntur. Amodo jam dicit Spiritus, ut requiescant a laboribus suis." Rev. 14. 13.

[296] Paradise; I go content to purgatory, to suffer as much as it pleases You; there my greatest pain will be to continue far from You, and I shall sigh to come and see You and love You face to face; therefore, O my beloved Savior! have mercy upon me.

And what else is this present life, but a state of per-

petual peril of losing God? "We walk amidst snares," says St. Ambrose; amidst the deceits of enemies, who seek to cause us to lose the divine grace. Therefore St. Teresa, every time that the clock struck, gave thanks to God that another hour of struggle and peril had passed without sin; and therefore she was so rejoiced at the tidings of her coming death, considering that her struggles were over, and the time was near for her to depart and behold her God.

In this present life we cannot live without defects. This is the motive that makes souls that love God even desire death. It was this thought that, at the time of death, gladdened Father Vincent Carafa, when he said, "Now that I finish my life, I cease to displease God." A certain man gave directions to his attendants, that at the time of his death they should often repeat to him these words, "Comfort yourself, because the time is near when You will no more offend God."

And what else is this body to us but a prison in which the soul is incarcerated, so that it cannot depart to unite itself to God? On this account, St. Francis, inflamed with love, at the hour of his death cried out with the prophet, "Take my soul out of prison." O Lord, deliver me from this prison which prevents me from seeing You. O death, worthy of love, who can fear You and not desire You, since You are the end of all toils, and the beginning of eternal life! St. Pionius the martyr, standing by the instruments of death, showed himself so full of joy, that the people who stood by wondered at his delight, and asked him how he could be so happy when he [297] was just going to die. "You are mistaken," said he, as Eusebius relates, "you are mistaken; I am not hastening to death, but to life."

O most sweet Jesus, I thank You for not having called me to death when I was under Your wrath, and for having won over my soul with such gentle means as You have employed. When I think of the displeasure I have caused

You, I am ready to die with grief. This my soul, which was lost, I now commit wholly into Your hands: into Your hands I commend my spirit; remember, O Lord! that You have redeemed it with Your death. I love You, O infinite goodness! and I desire to depart quickly from this life, that I may come and love You with a more perfect love in heaven. And so long as I shall continue to live on this earth, make me continually to comprehend better my obligation to love You. O my God! receive me; I give myself wholly to You, and I trust in You through the merits of Jesus Christ. I also trust in Your intercession, O Mary, my hope!

15. Aspirations after the Country of the Blessed

Happy is he who is saved; who leaves this place of exile, and enters into the heavenly Jerusalem, and enjoys that perfect day which will be always day and always joyful, free from all molestation, and from all fear of ever losing so infinite a happiness.

Jacob said, *The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty; few, and evil.*¹ The same may be said of us miserable pilgrims, while we remain on this earth, to endure the toils of our exile, afflicted by temptations, torn by passions, and tormented by miseries, and still more by the fear of losing our eternal salvation at last. Seeing all this, we should conclude, and ever keep it in mind, that this is not our country, but a land of exile, where God detains us, in order that we may, through suffering, come to merit the reward of entering one day into our happy country. And thus living detached from this earth, we ought always to aspire after Paradise, saying: "When shall it be, O Lord, that I shall be delivered

¹ "Dies peregrinationis meae centum triginta annorum sunt, parvi et mali." Gen. 47. 9.

[304] from all these distresses, and think only of loving

You and praising You? When will it be that You will be all to me in all things, as the Apostle writes : *That God may be all in all?*¹ When shall I enjoy that unchanging peace, free from all affliction, and from all danger of being lost? When, my God, shall I find myself dwelling with You, and enjoying the sight of Your infinite beauty face to face, and without veil? When shall I attain to the possession of You, my Creator, in such a manner that I may say, My God, I cannot lose You anymore?

My Savior, while You see me an exile, and full of trouble, in this land of enemies, where I live in continual warfare, help me with Your grace, and console me in this sorrowful pilgrimage. Whatever the world may offer me, I know that nothing in it can bring peace; but yet I fear lest, if I have not help from You, the pleasures of the world, joined to my evil inclinations, should draw me on to some terrible precipice.

Exile as I am in this valley of tears, I would think of You continually, O my God! and share in that infinite happiness which You enjoy; but the evil appetites of sense make themselves heard within me, and disturb me. I desire that my affections were ever occupied in loving You and thanking You; but in my flesh I feel drawn towards sensual delights, and thence I am constrained to exclaim with St. Paul, *Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*² Miserable man that I am, in continual combat, not only with external enemies, but with myself, whence I am weighed down and a trouble to myself. ³

Who, then, will deliver me from the body of this death? that is, from the danger of falling into sin, from

1 "Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus." 1 Cor. 15. 28.

2 "Infelix ego homo! quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?" Rom. 7. 24.

3 "Factus sum mihi metipsum gravis." Job 7. 20

[305] that peril, the fear only of which is to me a continual

death, which torments me, and will not cease to torment me during all my life: *Go not far from me, O God; my God, in Your help I put my trust.*¹

My God, go not far from me; because if You go from me, I fear I shall displease You. Therefore, draw nearer to me with Your powerful help; attend to me continually, that I may be able to resist the attacks of my enemies. The royal prophet has said that You are ever near, that You do endow with holy patience all those who are of sorrowful heart, afflicted within themselves.² Remain beside me, then, my beloved Savior, and give me that patience that I need to overcome the continual attacks by which I am tormented. As often as I try to give myself to meditation and prayer, troublesome thoughts draw me away, and distract me with a thousand follies; do give me power to drive them from me, and to crucify all the evil inclinations that hinder me from uniting myself to You. And take from me, I pray You, the great repugnance that I feel for embracing in love and peace everything that is not according to my own self-love.

O house of my God, prepared for those that love You, to You I sigh from this land of misery. "I have gone astray as a sheep that is lost: O, seek Your servant." O beloved Shepherd of my soul, who did descend from heaven to seek and to save the lost sheep, behold me, one of these who has turned from You, and lost itself! Seek Your servant; Lord, seek me; abandon me not, as I deserve; seek me and save me; take me and keep me safe within Your arms, that I may not leave You any more.

While I am looking towards Paradise with strong

¹ "Deus, ne elongeris a me; Deus meus, in auxilium meum respice." Ps. 70. 12.

² "Juxta est Dominus iis qui tribulato sunt corde." Ps. 33. 19.

[306] desire, my enemy frightens me with the remembrance of my sins; but the sight of You, my crucified Jesus, consoles me, and gives me courage to hope that some day I may come to love You, and behold You unveiled, in Your blessed kingdom. Queen of heaven, continue to be my advocate. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, and through your intercession, I have a firm hope of being saved.

RULE OF LIFE. (Abridged*)

[502] I. On rising in the morning make the following acts:

1. "O my God! I adore You. I love You with my whole heart, and thank You for all Your benefits, particularly for having preserved me this night."
2. "I offer to You all that I shall do or suffer throughout the day, in union with the actions and sufferings of Jesus and Mary, intending to gain all the indulgences in my power."
3. "I intend, O Lord! to avoid this day every offence against You; but You must extend Your protecting hand over me, that I may not betray You. Most Holy Mary, take me under Your protection. My angel guardian and patron saints, assist me."

Then say one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and the Creed; with the Hail Mary three times in honor of the purity of the Blessed Virgin.

II. Take care to make half an hour's meditation as soon as possible in the day. For though meditation is not absolutely necessary, it is morally necessary, in order to obtain the grace of perseverance. Those who neglect it will find it very difficult to persevere in the grace of God. The reasons for this are twofold: the first is, because the eternal truths cannot be seen by the eyes of the flesh,

but by the eye of the understanding, which is reflection. Hence he does not perceive them who does not meditate; and for lack of perceiving them he will hardly arrive

* This abridgment of a Rule of Life was made by the holy author himself. ED.

[503] at a due appreciation of the importance of salvation, of the means which secure it, and of the obstacles which hinder it; so that his salvation will be placed in imminent risk. The second reason is, because the soul that does not practice meditation will also be undisposed to practice prayer. Now, prayer is necessary, not merely as a precept, but as a means to observe the commandments, since, as a general rule, and speaking of adults, God only gives his grace to those who ask for it. But without meditation a person has a very faint notion of his own spiritual needs, and he is moreover but slightly impressed with the necessity of praying, in order to overcome temptations and to save his soul: thus he is led to pray but little or not at all, and for lack of prayer is eventually lost. The eminent Bishop Palafox said, "How will the Lord give us perseverance, unless we ask him for it? And how shall we ask him for it without prayer?" On the other hand, St. Teresa declares that it is hardly possible for a man that prays to remain long in sin; he will either forsake prayer or forsake sin: prayer and sin are incompatible.

With regard to practice, meditation has three parts: preparation, consideration, and conclusion. In the preparation must be made three acts: 1, Of the presence of God; 2, Of humility; 3, Of petition for light. We say, 1, "My God, I believe You are here present, and I adore You;" 2, "I deserve at this moment to be burning in hell. O my God, I am sorry for having offended You!" 3, "Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus and Mary, grant me light in this meditation, that I may profit by it." Then say a Hail Mary to the heavenly Mother, and a Glory be to the Father, etc., in honor of our angel guardian.

Then read the point of meditation, and be sure to meditate, at least occasionally, on the Passion of Jesus Christ. It must also be understood that the fruit of prayer does not so much consist in meditating, but rather in producing [504] affections, for instance, of humility, confidence, love, sorrow, offering, resignation, and the like; 2, In making petitions, and especially imploring God to grant us perseverance and his holy love; 3, In making the resolution to avoid some particular sin, and of practicing some particular virtue.

Finally, the conclusion is made thus: "I thank You, O God, for the lights You have given me;" 2, "I intend to keep the resolutions I have made;" 3, "and I beg Your grace to fulfil them." Nor must we ever forget to recommend to God the holy souls in purgatory, and all poor sinners. We must never omit our accustomed meditation, whatever coldness and weariness we may feel over it; for St. Teresa says, "To do so would be to cast ourselves into hell with our own hands." Moreover, let all bear in mind that Benedict XIV granted a plenary indulgence to every one who makes a meditation of half an hour, or at least a quarter of an hour, every day for a month, with confession, Communion, and prayers to the intention of the Church, and partial indulgences are also granted every day to those who meditate. This indulgence is applicable to the souls in purgatory.

III. Do not omit to hear Mass daily. But what is of the greatest importance is that those who hear Mass should make a special application to their own souls of the merits of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Mass should be heard for the same ends for which it was instituted; namely, 1, To honor Almighty God; 2, To thank him for his benefits; 3, To make atonement for the punishment due to our sins; 4, To obtain divine grace. So that we ought then to pray as follows: "Eternal Father, in this Mass I offer You Jesus Christ, with all the merits of his Passion: 1, To honor Your Majesty; 2, To thank You for

[505] all Your benefits towards me; 3, In satisfaction for my sins, and for those of all the living, and of those who died in Your grace; 4, To obtain all the graces necessary for salvation." At the elevation of the Host, we may say, "By the blood of Jesus Christ, grant me to love You in this life and in the next." When the priest communicates, make the spiritual Communion thus: "My Jesus, I love You, and I long for You in my soul; I embrace You, and wish nevermore to be separated from You."

IV. In addition to this, read some spiritual book for half an hour, or at least a quarter; and it will be best to make use of the lives of the saints.

Moreover, do not fail to pay every day a visit to the Most Holy Sacrament, when you should make at least the following acts: 1, "O Lord, I thank You for Your love in leaving Yourself to me in this holy Sacrament;" 2, "With my whole heart I love You, O God! above every other good; and because I love You I am sorry for all my offences against You, whether great or small;" 3, "I beseech You to grant me perseverance in Your grace and Your holy love." At the same time make a visit to our Blessed Lady, before one of her images, and beg of her also the same graces of perseverance and the love of God.

VI. In the evening make the examination of conscience, and then add the Christian acts [Acts of faith, hope, and love].

VII. Frequent the holy sacraments of confession and Communion at least once a week, and more often if possible.

[506] With regard to confession, say beforehand: "I thank You O my God! for having waited for me until now! I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of all my offences against You! I am sorry for them, and repent of them with my whole heart, because by them I have lost heaven and have deserved hell; but,

above all, I am grieved to my inmost soul, and hate and detest my sins more than all evils, because they have offended Your infinite goodness. I resolve in the future rather to die than offend You any more."

After confession, thank Almighty God for the pardon which you hope to have received, and renew your good resolution never more to offend him, and to avoid all occasions of sin; and pray to Jesus and Mary for perseverance.

As to Holy Communion, we must know that it is the grand medicine, as the Council of Trent terms it, which purifies us from our daily venial faults, and preserves us from mortal ones. He who communicates most frequently will be freest from sin, and will make farthest progress in divine love; only let him communicate with a good desire. But, in order to derive more abundant fruits from Communion, he should manage to spend half an hour after receiving in producing devout acts, or at least in praying out of some spiritual book.

VIII. It is well to make choice of a good confessor, and to follow his direction in all spiritual matters, and even in temporal matters of importance; nor should he be left without a good reason. St. Philip Neri spoke thus: "Let those who are desirous of advancing in the way of God put themselves under an enlightened confessor; and let them obey him, as occupying the place of God. Who- [507] ever does this may feel assured that he will never have to render an account to God of what he does." And this is only conformable to the words of Jesus Christ, that whoever hears his ministers hears himself: *He that hears you hears Me.* 1 A general confession should be made, if it has not until now been made, for it is a most excellent means of bringing one's life into good order; and it is advisable to make it to the director himself, that he may be the better able to guide us.

IX. Avoid idleness, dissipated companions, immodest con-

versations, and, more than all, evil occasions, especially where there is danger of unchastity; and for this reason one cannot be too cautious in keeping one's eyes from dwelling on any dangerous objects. For a person that does not avoid the voluntary occasions of sin, especially those which have frequently proved fatal to his innocence, it is morally impossible to persevere in the grace of God: *He that loves the danger shall perish in it.*²

X. In temptations trust not to yourself, nor to all the good resolutions and promises which you have made, but rely solely on the divine assistance; and for this reason have immediate recourse to God and the Blessed Virgin. Especially in temptations against purity, the greatest care must be taken not to remain to dispute with the temptation. In such moments some are accustomed to set their will to make acts of the contrary virtue; but they run considerable risk. The best plan to adopt on these occasions is to renew the firm purpose rather to die than to offend God, and immediately to make the sign of the cross without agitation, and to call on God and the heavenly Mother, making frequent invocations of

1 "Qui vos audit, me audit." Luke 10. 16.

2 "Qui amat periculum, in illo peribit." Eccles. 3. 27.

[508] the most holy names of Jesus and Mary, which have a wonderful efficacy against filthy suggestions, and should therefore be invoked continually till the temptations are over. Of ourselves we have not strength to overcome the attacks of the flesh, our most cruel enemy; but God readily supplies the strength to all who ask him; but he that fails to do so, almost invariably falls a prey to the enemy. The same is to be observed in combating temptations against faith, protesting at such times, without remaining in dispute, that we are ready to die for the holy faith; and instead of then eliciting acts of faith, it is better to elicit other acts, as of love, contrition, and hope.

XI. If you commit a venial fault, make an act of the love of God and of contrition, purpose of amendment, and immediately resume your usual tranquillity. To remain troubled after a fault is the greatest fault that a person can commit, for a troubled soul is incapable of doing the least good. If, by mischance, the fault has been grievous, then immediately make an act of contrition (which is sufficient to recover the divine grace), resolve never to be guilty of the same again, and take the first opportunity of going to confession.

XII. Endeavor to hear all the sermons in your power. And it would be most advisable to make a spiritual retreat once a year in some religious house; or if that be impracticable, at least in your own house, by applying yourself for eight days to prayer and spiritual reading. During this time all company and conversation on secular matters should be avoided. In like manner make a retreat of one day every month, with confession and Communion. If your state of life allows it, become a member of some confraternity in which the Sacraments are frequented, and there make your eternal salvation the principle and sole aim. Whoever enters a confraternity for the sake of managing, directing, or factionalism, will derive more harm than good from it. If a person would really profit by it, he must enter it solely with a view to his spiritual interests.

XIII. In all the vicissitudes of life, such as illnesses, losses, and persecutions, be ever mindful to bow with resignation to the will of God, and repose on these words: "God wills it so, and so I will it likewise." Or thus: "God will have it so; so be it done." He that behaves in this manner stores up immense rewards for heaven, and always lives in peace. On the contrary, he that refuses to bow to the will of God only redoubles his afflictions; for he must endure them whether he will or not; and, moreover, by his impatience he lays up for himself an additional punishment.

XIV. Be especially careful to preserve a tender and marked devotion to most holy Mary, by performing daily in her honor some exercise of piety. Never omit the first thing in the morning and the last at night to say three times the Hail Mary in honor of her purity, imploring her to keep you from all sin. Read every day something, be it only a few lines, on the Blessed Virgin. Say her Litanies, and the Rosary, meditating on the mysteries. When you leave or enter the house, ask her blessing with a Hail Mary; and on passing by any of her images, salute her in the same way. When the clock strikes, say the Hail Mary; and then, "Jesus and Mary, I love you! Do not permit me to offend you." With the advice of your confessor, fast on Saturdays, on the vigils of the seven feasts of our Blessed Lady, and make the novenas for the said feasts, as also for Christmas, Pentecost, and for the feast of your patron saint.

Prayer to Jesus Christ, to obtain his Holy Love

[510] My crucified Love, my dear Jesus! I believe in You, and confess You to be the true Son of God and my Savior. I adore You from the abyss of my own nothingness, and I thank You for the death You did suffer for me, that I might obtain the life of divine grace. My beloved Redeemer, to You I owe all my salvation. Through You I have until now escaped hell; through You have I received the pardon of my sins. But I am so ungrateful, that instead of loving You, I have repeated my offences against You. I deserve to be condemned, so as not to be able to love You any more : but no, my Jesus, punish me in any other way, but not in this. If I have not loved You in time past, I love You now; and I desire nothing but to love You with all my heart. But without Your help I can do nothing. Since You do command me to love You, give me also the strength to fulfil this Your sweet and loving precept. You have promised to grant all that we ask of You : *You shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done unto you.* Confiding, then, in this promise, my dear Jesus, I ask, first of all, pardon of all my sins; and I repent, above all things, because I have

offended You, O Infinite Goodness! I ask for holy perseverance in Your grace till my death. But, above all, I ask for the gift of Your holy love. Ah, my Jesus, my Hope, my Love, my All, inflame me with that love which You did come on earth to enkindle! *"Enkindle in me the fire of your love."* For this end, make me always live in conformity with Your holy will. Enlighten me, that I may understand more and more how worthy You are of our love, and that I may know the immense love You have shown me, especially in giving Your life for me. Grant, then, that I may love You with all my heart, and may love You always, and never cease to beg of You the grace to love You in this life; that, living always and dying in Your love, I may come one day to love You with all my strength in heaven, never to leave off loving You for all eternity.

O Mother of beautiful love, my advocate and refuge, Mary, who are of all creatures the most beautiful, the most loving, and the most beloved of God, and whose only desire it is to see him loved! ah, by the love You bear for Jesus Christ, pray for me, and obtain for me the grace to love him always, and with all my heart! This I ask and hope for from You. Amen.

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.

Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins and that he will come

to judge the living and the dead.
I believe these and all the truths
which the Holy Catholic Church teaches
because you have revealed them
who are eternal truth and wisdom,
who can neither deceive nor be deceived.
In this faith I intend to live and die.
Amen.

Act of Hope

O Lord God, I hope by your grace for the pardon of all my sins
and after this life to gain eternal happiness
because you have promised it
who are infinitely powerful, faithful, kind, and merciful.
In this hope I intend to live and die.
Amen.

Act of Love

O Lord God, I love you above all things
and I love my neighbor for your sake
because you are the highest, infinite and perfect good,
worthy of all my love.
In this love I intend to live and die.
Amen.

The Memorare (attributed to St. Bernard)

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known
that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help,
or sought your intercession, was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence I fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To you do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions,
but in your mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

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