

96.3 Third Point

The Magi left the city of Jerusalem and proceeded to the poor village of Bethlehem to find there the King whom they were seeking. They were led there by *the star, which moved ahead of them until it reached and stopped at the place where the Child lay.*<sup>117</sup> Then *the Magi entered the stable and found a little Child wrapped in poor swaddling clothes in the company of his mother, Mary*<sup>118</sup>.

At this sight, how could the Magi not fear to have been deceived? Are these the marks of a king? asks Saint Bernard. Where is his palace, his throne, his court? The stable, replies the saint, is his palace, the crib serves as his throne, and his court is the company of the Most Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. This stable does not appear to them deserving of disdain; these poor swaddling clothes are not shocking in their eyes; they feel no disappointment to see a poor child being nursed by his mother.

*They prostrate themselves before him,*<sup>119</sup> says the Gospel, they honor him as their King, and adore him as their God. Consider what faith profoundly filled their spirit and caused them to respond in this way.

Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them. Love poverty and honor the poor after the example of the Magi. Poverty should be dear to you who are responsible for instructing the poor. May faith lead you to do this with affection and zeal, since *these children are the members of Jesus Christ*<sup>120</sup>. In this way this divine Savior will be pleased with you, and you will find him, because he always loved the poor and poverty.

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<sup>117</sup> Mt 2:9

<sup>118</sup> Mt 2:11

<sup>119</sup> Mt 2:11

<sup>120</sup> 1 Cor 12:27

## MEDITATIONS

### St. John Baptist de La Salle



JEAN-BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE

## THE CHRISTMAS CYCLE

*Note: Gospel readings today have changed from the Founder's time.*

## FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Gospel: Saint Luke, 21: 25-33

*On the Last Judgment*

### 1.1 First Point

Speaking of the Last Judgment in today's Gospel Jesus Christ says that *men shall see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with great power and majesty*.<sup>1</sup> The regal aspect in which Jesus Christ will appear, and the great power which he will display when he comes to judge the world, should make us fear his coming. This is what Saint Jerome says, commenting on these words of the Prophet Malachy: *Who can think of the day of his coming?*<sup>2</sup> If nobody dares think of the day of the Last Judgment because of the majesty and power of him who will be the Judge, who will be able to endure the strictness of his judgment? This will be all the more difficult, he adds, because the One who will act as witness will also be the One who will judge; this is what should lead us to dread this judgment all the more.

As the same saint says elsewhere, the very severity of the Judge *who will render to everyone according to his works*<sup>3</sup> will be such that those present will not dare to look him in the face. Then, says Saint Ephrem, there will be a minute and terrible scrutiny of our actions, and even of our thoughts, when each of us appears before this Judge's tribunal. *He will make known to the whole world all the thoughts of everyone, their words and their deeds, all of which were entirely hidden in this life because they were performed in darkness*.<sup>4</sup>

In order, says Saint Augustine that we may not endure a terrible and crushing sentence when we appear before the tribunal of this inexorable Judge who will judge us for eternity, let us constantly strive to free ourselves of our defects, for *we cannot know either the day or the hour*<sup>5</sup> when we shall die. One whose lifespan is so uncertain should not delay to take the steps needed to insure his salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Lk 21:27

<sup>2</sup> Mal 3:2

<sup>3</sup> Rom 2:6

<sup>4</sup> Lk 12:2-3

<sup>5</sup> Mt 25:13

### 96.2 Second Point

*The Magi reached Jerusalem and, entering Herod's palace, inquired after the new born King of the Jews*<sup>14</sup>. What a question to ask in the very palace of the prince! It is true, says Saint Augustine, that several kings had been born in Judea, and that Herod himself, who was then on the throne, had several children. However, it was not to adore or to acknowledge as king any of these that the Magi had come, because it was for none of them that heaven had brought them. True, as Saint Fulgentius says, a short time earlier a son had been born to Herod in his palace; they had placed him in a silver cradle, and all Judea paid him homage. But the Magi disdained him and did not even mention him in the king's palace.

What holy audacity filled the Magi, to enter the capital and make their way even to Herod's throne! They feared nothing because the faith which inspired them and the dignity of him whom they were seeking caused them to overlook and even to scorn all human considerations. They considered the king to whom they were speaking infinitely beneath the one announced to them by the star.

We certainly cannot sufficiently admire how these Gentiles, brought up in the errors of paganism, had such a lively faith, and how they were so faithful to follow its lights. Their faith was notably increased and strengthened when Herod gathered all the princes of the priests and the scribes of the people and found out from them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, *in Bethlehem*.<sup>15</sup> Thereupon he told the Magi that, when they found this Child whom they were seeking, *he himself would go to adore him*<sup>16</sup>.

But the Magi then left without concerning themselves any further about king Herod. So, too, should faith make you despise all that the world esteems.

<sup>14</sup> Mt 2:2

<sup>15</sup> Mt 2:4-6

<sup>16</sup> Mt 2:8

## 6 Jan: THE ADORATION OF THE HOLY MAGI

### 96.1 First Point

We cannot sufficiently admire the faith of the holy Magi since, as Saint Bernard says, nothing was found in Israel to match the faith shown by these admirable Gentiles. They behold a new, extraordinary star. At the sight they leave for a distant land to seek one whom they do not know, and who is not known even in his own land.

Enlightened by this star, and even more so by the light of faith, they go to announce a new *Sun of Justice*<sup>109</sup> in the place where he was born. They surprise everyone with the proclamation of this news. They themselves are not surprised by it because they are enlightened by the true Light, and because *it is by faith alone*, according to Saint Paul, *that we make our way towards Jesus Christ*<sup>110</sup>.

The star did not appear to them in vain, for this sight caused them to receive the grace of God, and made *this day a day of salvation for them*<sup>111</sup>, because they showed themselves most faithful to the divine inspiration.

Are we attentive to the inspirations we receive from God? Are we as quick to follow them as these holy Magi were in letting themselves be led by the star which guided them? Frequently the salvation and happiness of a soul depend on this prompt fidelity to grace.

*God graciously spoke to Samuel*, because three times in a row as soon as *he heard God's voice*<sup>112</sup> he presented himself to listen to him. Saint Paul merited to be entirely converted because *he was at once faithful to the voice of Jesus Christ who called him*<sup>113</sup>. This is what you should do, just as these persons did.

<sup>109</sup> Mal 3:20

<sup>110</sup> 2 Cor 5:7

<sup>111</sup> Is 49:8

<sup>112</sup> 2 Kgs 3:3-15

<sup>113</sup> Acts 9:4-5

### 1.2 Second Point

It is not only the wicked who need to apprehend the Last Judgment because of the evil lives they have led. It will be a harrowing experience for the good as well as the wicked, says Saint Augustine. For there will be few, asserts Saint Jerome, and in fact there will be no one in that general gathering who will not deserve to be reproved with severity and anger by the Judge. This is why, he adds, there is no soul that does not fear God's judgment, since *the stars themselves*, meaning the saints, *will not be pure in his presence*.<sup>6</sup> It will be very difficult, this holy doctor continues, to find anyone pure and irreproachable enough to appear before this Judge with assurance, and to dare say, *who will convict me of sin?*<sup>7</sup> Because of this, says Saint Ephrem, all creatures will be penetrated with fear and *all the legions of holy angels will shudder*<sup>8</sup> on the great day of the Lord's vengeance.

The main reason why the just themselves will falter while awaiting the Last Judgment is that *not only will we have to give an account of the idle words we have spoken*,<sup>9</sup> as Jesus Christ tells in the Gospel, but even of the good works we have performed, according to what God declares through the Royal Prophet: *I shall judge justices*,<sup>10</sup> meaning all the good that men have accomplished during their lives. He will probe it to see if it was truly good, and whether anything defective can be found in it. Who of us, then, will not fear God's judgment?

### 1.3 Third Point

How should we not fear God's judgments, since the greatest saints, despite their eminent holiness, did not fail to dread them? Job, whom God himself defended against those who reproached him falsely, says to God: *I trembled at every action I performed, knowing that you do not pardon the one who sins*;<sup>11</sup> and again, *What shall I do when God shall arise to judge me and when he demands an account of my life, what shall I answer him?*<sup>12</sup> After

<sup>6</sup> Jb 15:15

<sup>7</sup> Jn 8:46

<sup>8</sup> Mk 13:25

<sup>9</sup> Mt 12:36

<sup>10</sup> Ps 75:3

<sup>11</sup> Jb 9:28

<sup>12</sup> Jb 31:14

relating in considerable detail his manner of living, so upright and so free from sin, he adds *that he always dreaded the judgment of God, and that this fear had always penetrated him like a heavy burden.*<sup>13</sup>

Saint Hilarion, bowed down beneath the weight of years and austerities, was seized with terror at the hour of his death. Saint Jerome, who had grown grey in solitude and in all sorts of penitential exercises, declares that he had restricted himself in this way, and had condemned himself to a sort of prison out of ear of the Last Judgment. He tells us elsewhere that being, as he was, completely filled with sin, he hid himself day and night, fearing that he might hear the words; Jerome, come forth! and that he would then be forced *to pay the last penny.*<sup>14</sup>

Saint Ephrem, who led a solitary life from his childhood, and who was so pure, so penitent and so filled with the Spirit of God, says that his heart trembled and his whole body shook every time he reflected that all our thoughts, words, and actions will be made manifest on Judgment Day. Acknowledging that he was still guilty, he constantly feared to be judged in strict rigor, knowing that he had no excuse for his negligence.

If such great saints felt so much fear when considering this terrible day, what feelings of dread should we not experience, we who show such little fervor in God's service, and who fulfill our duties so negligently?

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Gospel: *Saint Matthew, 11: 2-10*

*You should prepare your own hearts and the hearts of those you are charged to instruct to receive Our Lord and his holy maxims.*

### 2.1 First Point

Today's Gospel informs us that Saint John the Baptist, while in prison where he had been thrown by Herod's command, sent two of his disciples to Jesus Christ to ask him whether he was the Messiah. This gave Jesus Christ the opportunity to praise Saint

<sup>13</sup> Jb 31:23

<sup>14</sup> Mt 5:26

secret life was most highly prized by the Holy Family; it was also what the Eternal Father had decreed for Jesus Christ until the time came for him to give himself to the preaching of his Gospel and to the conversion of souls, the primary purpose of his coming. His long hidden life was a preparation for his apostolic life.

When you are obliged to leave your place of seclusion to be active in the world, you too should behave in such a manner that nobody will know who you are, and that the very ones whom you teach will not even know your name. In your classroom be concerned only about how to fulfill your ministry in all that God requires of you for your disciples, and to do all you can to procure for them the spirit of Christianity. By acting this way, and following the example of the Holy Family, you will not make people talk about you, you will be mere passers-by, solely concerned with doing God's work and causing Jesus to live in the souls of those who do not recognize him.

### 6.3 Third Point

Right after Herod died, an Angel told Saint Joseph to go back to Judea to settle there, and to remain there permanently with the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus. This summons was all he needed. So prompt was he in carrying out what God wanted of him that *he got up at once, and taking the mother and the Child departed in all haste.*<sup>108</sup> What an admirable fidelity to God's orders does Saint Joseph display here.

Be faithful to follow the example of this great saint and do all God wants of you, considering that it is by his orders that you must be guided in all you do. Be prompt to leave everything as soon as the bell rings to call you to some other exercise; let nothing keep you back. When you have finished what is required by your ministry be careful not to delay or stop to do anything else. Return home as quickly as you can. The same God who had sent you out to do your work now calls you back. What more do you need? You should make it clear on all occasions that you depend on God, and that at the slightest sign you are quite prepared to go wherever he calls you.

<sup>108</sup> Mt 2:19-21

## SUNDAY BETWEEN THE CIRCUMCISION AND EPIPHANY OR ON EPIPHANY EVE

*Gospel: Matthew 2: 13-15*

*On the love for seclusion, following the example of Jesus Christ who lived hidden and unknown in Egypt.*

### 6.1 First Point

*Saint Joseph was warned by an angel to bring the Child Jesus to Egypt because Herod was searching for him to put him to death. Without delay Joseph took him with his most Blessed Mother to Egypt.*<sup>106</sup> He felt secure in Judea because this was the kingdom where the people of God lived; he would have been unwilling to leave this country to go and live among strangers except that God ordered it; his attitude was the same as that of Jesus Christ who declares in the Gospel that *he came into this world not to do his own will, but only that of God his Father.*<sup>107</sup> This is how we should act when we must adopt some line of conduct, or leave off doing something we have begun.

God has brought you into a secluded and holy place, his own house where he brings together those he has chosen to belong to him. If you leave it, that should be only because God wants you to do so, and commands you to do so, in order that you may preserve the life of Jesus Christ in the hearts of those entrusted to your care, or for some other necessity. The separation that should exist between you and people who are not a part of your life should make you fear to leave your place of seclusion and abandon the company of your Brothers, the place which God has given you for your usual residence.

### 6.1 Second Point

Saint Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, and the Child Jesus remained so unknown in Egypt that there is nothing to prove that anyone ever heard of them there. The Gospel itself tells us nothing about them nor about what they did during their entire sojourn in that country. No history book speaks of this, because they lived so obscurely that nobody knew they were there. This humble and

<sup>106</sup> Mt 2:13-14

<sup>107</sup> Jn 6:38

John before the people; he ended by saying that John was the man of whom it was written: *I am sending my angel before you, to prepare for you the path where you will walk.*<sup>1</sup>

You too, as well as Saint John, are real angels sent by God to prepare a path for him, so that he can enter your own hearts and those of your disciples. For this purpose you need to do two things: first, you must resemble the angels by your interior and exterior purity. Like the angels you must be entirely detached from your body and the pleasures of the senses, so that nothing seems to be left in you but your soul, that you are concerned about it exclusively, that is the only object of your care.

For you are destined by God only to apply yourselves, like the holy angels, to what refers to his service and the care of souls. In you, as Saint Paul says, *the outer man must decay, so that the inner man may be renewed day by day.*<sup>2</sup> You must become like the angels and like them, as the same Apostle says, *not consider things that are visible but only those which are invisible*, for, he continues, *the former are temporary and pass away, whereas the latter are eternal*<sup>3</sup> and will be forever the object of our affection.

### 2.2 Second Point

Jesus Christ highly praises Saint John in the Gospel of this day. He says that *John lived in the desert and was no reed shaken by the wind*<sup>4</sup> because he always continued the life of penance he had begun. He says *John was not wearing soft garments,*<sup>5</sup> for, as we read in Saint Matthew, *he was clothed in camel's hair, and wore a leather belt around his waist.*<sup>6</sup> Jesus Christ further adds that Saint John *ate no bread and drank no wine,*<sup>7</sup> in fact, as we learn from Saint Matthew, *he lived only on locusts and wild honey.*<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ then declared *that there has never been a prophet greater than Saint John the Baptist.*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mal 3:1

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor 4:16

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 4:18

<sup>4</sup> Mt 11:7

<sup>5</sup> Mt 11:8

<sup>6</sup> Mt 3:4

<sup>7</sup> Lk 7:33

<sup>8</sup> Mt 3:4

<sup>9</sup> Mt 11:11

Why, do you think, did Jesus Christ praise Saint John so highly? It was to lead the people to accept his teaching, and to make them understand that what John had said about himself was true; that Saint John had been sent to prepare their hearts to receive Jesus Christ himself and to profit by his teachings. This saint, who was Christ's precursor, began by living a life of seclusion, prayer and penance, to practice what he wanted to teach others, and thus to dispose his own heart to receive the fullness of the Spirit of God in order to make himself fit to carry out his ministry properly.

Since you have to prepare the hearts of others for the coming of Jesus Christ, you must first of all dispose your own hearts to be entirely filled with zeal, in order to render your words effective in those whom you instruct.

### 2.3 Third Point

After having prepared himself interiorly to preach to the Jewish people, and to make them ready to receive Jesus Christ, Saint John proposed to them six ways to prepare a path and an entry into their hearts for Jesus Christ.

First, he required of them a true horror for sin, reproaching them with *being a generation of vipers*.<sup>10</sup>

Second, he urged them to fear the Last Judgment, assuring them that at that moment their sins would be closely scrutinized and strictly judged. *Flee*, he urged them, *from the wrath to come*.<sup>11</sup> *Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire*.<sup>12</sup>

Third, to help them escape the rigor of that judgment he incited them to do penance by the words: *Bring forth worthy fruits of penance*.<sup>13</sup>

Fourth, he did not want them to be satisfied with lamenting their sins and doing penance for them; he wanted them to do good works, without which their penances would be of no avail. This he pointed out to them by these words: *Every tree that does not*

<sup>10</sup> Lk 3:7

<sup>11</sup> Lk 3:7

<sup>12</sup> Lk 3:9

<sup>13</sup> Lk 3:8

lead you astray from the true path to heaven.

### 5.3 Third Point

It is not enough for us to avoid contradicting the moral precepts of the Gospel. Saint Paul says that *he will show us an even more perfect, more excellent, way*<sup>101</sup> to which Jesus Christ calls us, which he has illustrated for us by his own example: *If anyone wishes to follow me, says Our Lord, let him renounce himself*<sup>102</sup> - that is, let him renounce his own spirit and his own will - *let him carry his cross daily, and follow me*. Who, indeed, does not contradict, if not in word at least in heart, this divine saying of Jesus Christ, our Master? How many would agree with this thought of Saint Bernard, that light and frivolous words in the mouth of a secular person may be only playful chatter, but that in the mouth of a person consecrated to God they are blasphemies? How many take to heart the words of Saint Dorotheus: Let us be faithful in the slightest matters lest they lead to regrettable consequences and unfortunate results? To how many do not these words of Jesus Christ seem harsh: *Blessed the poor in spirit*<sup>103</sup>; *it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through a needle's eye*.<sup>104</sup>

For us, let us probe the depths of our heart. Is it truly penetrated with what Jesus Christ said: *Blessed will you be when men falsely say all sorts of evil against you?*<sup>105</sup> How many there are who violate their rules on many points, as though they were obliged to observe only the rules which they find convenient? Such persons soon fall into disorderly living, for as Saint Dorotheus remarks, as soon as one begins to say: What does it matter if I say this word, what harm is there if I eat this morsel, what crime do I commit in doing this or that?, one ends up smothering all remorse of conscience even on the most essential points. Let us fear to lose ourselves by cultivating maxims that lead to relaxation, for we are people God has called to live according to the perfection of the Gospel.

<sup>101</sup> 1 Cor 12:31

<sup>102</sup> Lk 9:23

<sup>103</sup> Mt 5:3

<sup>104</sup> Mt 19:23-24

<sup>105</sup> Mt 5:11

remember the words of the Wise Man in Ecclesiastes: *Be not concerned over things that are above you.*<sup>95</sup> Let us leave to the learned all these learned disputes; let us leave to them the task of refuting heresies and of silencing heretics.

Let us teach only the common doctrine of Jesus Christ, and make it our practice to abide in all things by what the Church teaches to the faithful in the catechisms approved by her, that is those composed or adopted by the bishops who are united to the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Let us never take the liberty of dogmatizing on religious controversies.

## 5.2 Second Point

There is no less danger in contradicting the moral teachings of Jesus Christ than in rejecting his doctrine, for usually what causes the loss of faith is disorder in moral behavior. Jesus did not come so much to teach us the holy truths of Christian morality as to engage us to practice them faithfully.

Still, it is common enough to see Christians, and even members of regular communities, who do not accept these practical truths and who contradict them in their hearts, sometimes even in their external conduct. If someone reminds them: *that on Judgment Day they will have to account for a useless word;*<sup>96</sup> *that we must pray without ceasing;*<sup>97</sup> *that we must enter heaven through the narrow gate*<sup>98</sup>; that Jesus Christ has said *unless you do penance you will all likewise perish*<sup>99</sup>; that, consequently, it is an indispensable obligation for them to put these maxims into practice if they wish to be saved; that there is a command addressed to them *to love their enemies, to do good to those who hate them, to pray to God for those who persecute them and calumniate them so that they may be truly the children of their Father who is in heaven, who makes his sun rise on the good and the wicked alike*<sup>100</sup>; how many there are who believe that these teachings are only ideals of perfection? Yet Jesus Christ taught that they were necessary practices and the way to achieve salvation. Take care not to fall into this gross error which might

<sup>95</sup> Sir 3:22

<sup>96</sup> Mt 12:36

<sup>97</sup> Lk 18:1

<sup>98</sup> Mt 7:13

<sup>99</sup> Lk 13:5

<sup>100</sup> Mt 5:44-45

*bring forth good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*<sup>14</sup> Fifth, he declared that it was not enough for them to claim Abraham as their father, that they had no right to glorify themselves on that account unless they acted as Abraham did. *Do not say, he told them, we have Abraham for our father.*<sup>15</sup>

Sixth, he gave them to understand that they could not be saved, whatever good deeds they might perform, unless they practiced the good works proper and becoming to their state of life. For this reason he pointed out *to the wealthy their obligation of giving alms;*<sup>16</sup> *he told the publicans not to exact anything beyond what was due,*<sup>17</sup> *and enjoined on the soldiers to be content with their pay.*<sup>18</sup> Take these counsels to heart yourselves and follow them carefully; pass them on to your disciples, and see to it that they practice them.

## THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Gospel: *Saint John, 1: 19-28*

*Those who teach others are merely the voice which prepares hearts; it belongs to God himself to prepare them by his grace to receive him*

### 3.1 First Point

The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask Saint John who he was: *the Christ, or Elijah, or a prophet.*<sup>1</sup> Saint John told them he was none of these, but declared, *I am the voice of one crying in the desert: make straight the way of the Lord.*<sup>2</sup> Saint John wished to leave to Jesus Christ all the honor of converting souls, the task at which he himself labored so constantly. He said therefore that he was only *a voice crying out in the desert.*<sup>3</sup> He thus showed that the substance of the doctrine he taught was not his own, and that it was indeed the word of God which he preached; as for himself, he was only the voice which proclaimed it. In the same way that a voice is a sound which strikes the ear and makes it possible for a word to be heard, so it was that Saint

<sup>14</sup> Lk 3:9

<sup>15</sup> Lk 3:8

<sup>16</sup> Lk 3:11

<sup>17</sup> Lk 3:13

<sup>18</sup> Lk 3:13

<sup>1</sup> Jn 1:19-21

<sup>2</sup> Jn 1:23

<sup>3</sup> Jn 1:23

John prepared the Jews to receive Jesus Christ.

The same thing is true of those who instruct others. They are only the voice of the One who really disposes hearts to accept Jesus Christ and his holy teaching. *The one who disposes them, according to Saint Paul, can only be God,*<sup>4</sup> who imparts to humans the gift of speaking of him. According to the same apostle, *when you speak all the tongues, both angelic and human, if you lack charity,*<sup>5</sup> or rather, if it is not God who makes you speak and who uses your voice to reveal himself and his sacred mysteries, you are nothing *but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.*<sup>6</sup> All you say will produce no good effect and will not be capable of bringing about any good results.

Let us then humble ourselves, considering that we are nothing but a voice, and that of ourselves we cannot say anything that will do the least good for souls or make any impression on them. For we are a mere voice, only a sound which becomes nothing once it has echoed through the air.

### 3.2 Second Point

Those who teach are only God's voice. The word which makes God known to those whom they instruct must come from him; it is he who speaks in teachers when they explain him and what is related to him. This is why Saint Peter says, *If anyone speaks, let it always be clear that God is speaking by their mouth; if anyone fulfills any ministry, let them do so as acting only by the power God communicates to them, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.*<sup>7</sup>

Saint Peter also says on the subject of the truth he was preaching, *I shall never give over warning you of these things, even though you already know the truth about them and it is established in you.*<sup>8</sup> He adds, *we have the word of the prophets which is firmly established and to which you do well to attach yourselves, for it is like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts; for it was not through the human will that in times past prophecy was uttered; it was rather by the*

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 3:5-6

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor 13:1

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor 13:1

<sup>7</sup> 1 Pt 4:11

<sup>8</sup> 2 Pt 1:12

time that he offer himself exteriorly and publicly to God his Father to fulfill this ministry that it might not seem that he had this adorable name in vain.

It is only in vain that you have the name of Christians and *ministers of Jesus Christ*<sup>93</sup> in the work you do? Do you live in a manner that befits these glorious names? Do you instruct those for whom you are responsible with the application and the zeal God asks of you in so holy a work? By your good conduct make yourself worthy of this distinguished role, and so act that your life may begin today to be holy and edifying, and continue to be such in the future.

## SUNDAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

*Gospel: Luke 2: 33-40*

*We must contradict neither the truths, nor the precepts, nor the counsels of the Gospel*

### 5.1 First Point

Today's Gospel relates that Saint Simeon, *after blessing Jesus' father and mother in the temple, told Mary, his mother, that this Child had come for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel.*<sup>94</sup> Many would profit by his death, while many others, lacking fidelity to the grace which the Redeemer would merit for them, would make of this very grace the occasion of their damnation. This saintly old man then added that *Jesus Christ would be a sign of contradiction among men.* Indeed, there were many who contradicted his conduct during his life.

Even among Christians there are still many who every day contradict his teaching and his maxims. Some show little respect for the decisions of the Church. Others, at times, presume to argue about predestination and grace - topics on which those who are not learned should never utter a single word, because these matters are beyond their understanding. If someone broaches such subjects to them, their reply should simply be a general statement: I believe what the Church believes. Let us do the same concerning a number of other questions relating to doctrine which our minds simply cannot fully grasp. We should

<sup>93</sup> 2 Cor 5:20

<sup>94</sup> Lk 2:34



93.2 Second Point

In this mystery Jesus Christ carried out his ministry and revealed his role as Redeemer of men by shedding his blood out of the love he had for them. By this outpouring of his blood he showed that he was beginning to take on the burden of our sins, and to appear on earth as a sinner. First, because under the Old Law, circumcision was established only for sinners. Second, because *Jesus Christ appeared in this world as the high priest of future blessings*<sup>90</sup> according to Saint Paul, *and offered himself to God in the temple on this day as a spotless Victim to purify our consciences from dead works, so that in the name of all men he might offer to the living and eternal God an act of true worship in his role as Mediator of the New Testament*<sup>91</sup>.

Is there anything that could be more humiliating for the Son of God than to appear as a sinner, he who was holiness itself, and the Just One par excellence? Yet Jesus Christ, although exempt from sin, suffers today in his sacred body the pain that men were obliged to endure because of their condition as sinners. In contrast, we who have offended God so much, consider ourselves and wish to be considered as innocent and just. We seek and think we have a right to seek our comfort; we give all our attention to avoid work and suffering. Arouse in yourself sentiments of humility, and feel ashamed to see how you avoid occasions of suffering, whereas Jesus Christ sought them for love of you. Thank him such a great goodness that he showed you in his circumcision.

93.3 Third Point

The Eternal Father had informed the Most Blessed Virgin by the angel who announced to her the mystery of the Incarnation of his Son, *that she should call him Jesus*<sup>92</sup>. So, on this day she and Saint Joseph gave him this name, which means Savior. It was eminently proper that since Jesus Christ began to suffer and to shed his blood for our sins on this occasion, this name should be given him at the same time, so that from this moment on he might be known by this name so admirably suited to him because of the ministry he had been assigned. It was also fitting at that

<sup>90</sup> Heb 9:11

<sup>91</sup> Heb 9:14-15

<sup>92</sup> Lk 1:31

*movement of the Holy Spirit that these men of God spoke.*<sup>9</sup>

It is also by the movement of the Spirit of God that all those who today proclaim his kingdom continue to speak. But if God makes use of persons to announce the truths of Christianity to others and to prepare their hearts to be docile to these truths, *it is God alone*, as the Wise Man says, *who must guide their steps*<sup>10</sup> and impart to their hearts the docility they need in order to welcome these holy truths that he is making known to them.

Do not be content, therefore, to read and to learn from others what you must teach your students. Pray God to impress all these truths so firmly on yourselves that you will not have any occasion to be or consider yourselves to be anything, as Saint Paul says, but *the ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries.*<sup>11</sup>

3.3 Third Point

Saint Zachary, the father of Saint John the Baptist, says in the canticle which he sang at the birth of his son, that the reason why Saint John was to walk before Jesus Christ and *prepare the way for him, was to bring to his people the knowledge of salvation.*<sup>12</sup> But this knowledge is not enough; it is necessary for God himself, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, to show us the path we must follow, and to inspire us to walk in the footsteps of his Son.

Although in this life *we sigh under the weight of our bodies and long to be free of this burden,*<sup>13</sup> it is God who created us for this very purpose and *who has given us his Holy Spirit as a pledge.*<sup>14</sup> It is then up to God to direct our path straight towards heaven, so that we may surely arrive there. For this reason it was as the Son of God that *Jesus Christ became the Author of our eternal salvation.*<sup>15</sup> Since *salvation*, as the Prophet says, *comes from God,*<sup>16</sup> perfection likewise comes from him. Saint James assures us, *every excellent grace and every perfect gift comes from on high,*

<sup>9</sup> 2 Pt 1:19-21

<sup>10</sup> Prv 16:9

<sup>11</sup> 1 Cor 4:1

<sup>12</sup> Lk 1:76-77

<sup>13</sup> 2 Cor 5:2

<sup>14</sup> 2 Cor 5:5

<sup>15</sup> Heb 5:9

<sup>16</sup> Ps 37:39

*and descends from the Father of lights.*<sup>17</sup>

Beg God, therefore, to lead you on the way to heaven by the path which he himself has traced out for you. Ask him to help you embrace the perfection of your state, since he is the one who brought you into it, and who, in consequence, desired and still desires that you find in it the way and the means of sanctifying yourself.

## **FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

Gospel: *Saint Luke: 3: 1-6*

*By penance and freedom from sin we prepare ourselves to receive Jesus Christ*

### 4.1 First Point

According to today's Gospel, *Saint John went about all the country adjoining the Jordan preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins,*<sup>1</sup> in order to prepare the Jews for the coming of Our Lord. By doing this Saint John makes known to us that the principal disposition we should bring to the reception of Our Lord is penance and separation from all sin; we must, then, give our greatest effort to this, because penance washes and purifies a soul of the sins which sully it.

Saint Leo calls penance a baptism, plain and simple; Saint Gregory of Nazianzen calls it a painful baptism; Saint Ambrose says David spoke of this baptism when he tells us that *he wore himself out sighing and wailing, drenched his couch nightly with his tears, and soaked his pillow with his weeping.*<sup>2</sup>

We, too, should be able to say the same thing as David, because we need penance no less than he did if we wish to draw Jesus Christ to us. As the Gloss says, let each one expiate his sins of the past by penance, so that he may once again draw near to the salvation he has lost and recover the facility of returning to God from whom he has strayed.

This is why God declared by one of the prophets, *be converted to*

<sup>17</sup> Jas 1:17

<sup>1</sup> Lk 3:3

<sup>2</sup> Ps 6:7

## **1 JAN: THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD**

### 93.1 First Point

In his circumcision Our Lord Jesus Christ submitted to the law which required that *all male children be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth*<sup>83</sup>. He was, of course, exempt from and superior to this and to every other law, being the sovereign Legislator.

This law applied only to sinners; since he was incapable of sin, Jesus Christ was in no way bound by it. What admirable humility on the part of Jesus, who makes himself resemble sinners, even though he was not one, but rather completely innocent. *When he entered the world, he took upon himself the burden of our sins, for he came only to make satisfaction for them!*<sup>84</sup>

Today, let us admire the obedience and the humility of our Savior in this mystery. As he himself says, *he came into this world not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it*<sup>85</sup>. Learn from him to submit to those whom God has given you as your superiors, to humble yourself on the occasions that will arise, and to circumcise yourself with a true circumcision *not made by the hand of man*<sup>86</sup>, as Saint Paul says, but which, he says consists in mortifying your carnal body, that is, your sins, passions and selfish inclinations. For, as the same apostle remarks elsewhere, *true circumcision is not performed on the body, which is only exterior, but rather on the heart, performed by the Spirit*<sup>87</sup>.

This is why, since you belong to Christ, Saint Paul tells you to *mortify your flesh with its passions and disorderly desires*<sup>88</sup>. Jesus Christ will then make you live again with him even though your flesh has not been circumcised, for he will *totally abolish the decree of your condemnation*<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>83</sup> Lv 12:3

<sup>84</sup> Heb 10:5-7

<sup>85</sup> Mt 5:17

<sup>86</sup> Col 2:11

<sup>87</sup> Rom 2:28-29

<sup>88</sup> Gal 5:24

<sup>89</sup> Col 2:13, 14

during the day. The activities they engage in there are the ones in which they are most involved, and where they find the most occasions for distraction. For these reasons they cannot watch too closely over themselves in order not to lose any of the merit which they should gain in this work for the salvation of their souls, and in order not to fail there in any of their duties.

Have you been exact during this year to follow the order of the lessons, always to make use of the signal, and always correct your pupils when they have made some mistake? You cannot dispense yourself from this without failing in one of your principal duties. Have you been exact to teach catechism every day during all the prescribed time, and in the prescribed manner? Have you been concerned that your disciples be thoroughly instructed in their religion? This is your principal obligation, although other matters should not be neglected.

Have you not at times acted in a careless and negligent way? Have you not chatted with the children uselessly, asking them for news, or listening willingly to the things they told you? Have you not read books other than those that the children were reading whom you are responsible to instruct? In a word, have you not wasted time, time which in your profession no longer belongs to you any more than servants' time belongs to them, since they are obliged to use all of it in their master's service, just as you are obliged to use it for the benefit of your students.

Have you not accepted something from them? You know that this is in no way permitted, for if you fall into this fault your school would no longer be gratuitous, even if all you received from them was some tobacco. This is something which should not be done, or tolerated, because the use of tobacco is forbidden to you, and because you have to teach school gratuitously; that is essential to your Institute.

Examine whether you have fallen into these kinds of faults during this year, and how often, and whether in that case you have accused yourself exactly of them in confession. Take proper resolutions on all these matters. Finally, *strip off the old man today and put on the new man*, as Saint Paul exhorts you to do. Ask God, as the same apostle advises, *to renew in you tomorrow the spirit of your state and your profession*<sup>82</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> Eph 4:22

*me by fasting, weeping, and mourning*;<sup>3</sup> for these are the surest means of finding God when we have lost him, the means that contribute most to obtaining for us that purity of heart which David so ardently begged from the Lord. It was also with this in mind that he asked God, *wash me yet more from my iniquities and purify me from my sins*.<sup>4</sup> This penitent king was fully persuaded that the stains of a sinful soul will not be washed away save by the tears that flow from a humble and contrite heart. Let us frequently beg God for the grace to cleanse ourselves so perfectly that no trace of our sins will remain; and on our part let us contribute to this by the penance we perform for our sins.

#### 4.2 Second Point

It is said of Saint John that *he preached penance for the remission of sins*<sup>5</sup> because it is penance which procures the remission of sins in those who have offended God. Saint Peter said to the Jews in the Acts of the Apostles, *do penance and be converted, so that your sins may be forgiven*.<sup>6</sup> For such is the specific end of this virtue; it alone can appease the heart of God irritated against sinners. God himself tells us this in Ezechiel, saying *if the wicked man does penance for all the sins he has committed, and keeps all my precepts, and acts according to equity and justice, I will no longer remember all his iniquities, and they will no more be imputed to him*.<sup>7</sup> Saint Peter, preaching to the Jewish people to make known to them the truths of the Gospel, told them, *Do penance to obtain the remission of your sins*.<sup>8</sup>

It was also by means of this same virtue *that the Ninevites, who had outraged heaven by their disorderly conduct, induced God to revoke the sentence he had pronounced against them to destroy their city*.<sup>9</sup> This they could not do except by a conversion of their hearts, following the preaching of Jonas and the invitation of their king. To avert the calamity which threatened them, there was no other recourse for them, says Saint Ambrose, than to fast continually and cover themselves with sackcloth and ashes to appease the anger of God.

<sup>3</sup> JI 2:12

<sup>4</sup> Ps 51:4

<sup>5</sup> Lk 3:3

<sup>6</sup> Acts 3:19

<sup>7</sup> Ez 18:21-22; 33:16

<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>9</sup> Jon 3:1-10

By the same method you too will obtain the remission of all the sins which you committed in the world, and all those which you still commit every day in God's house. For, as Saint Jerome observes, every day God still addresses to people the same threats he addressed to the Ninevites, so that just as these menaces frightened those sinful people, they may in the same way convince people who are living now to do penance. Let us then profit by such an admirable example.

#### 4.3 Third Point

As the prophet Ezechiel informs us, not only does penance obtain for us the remission of our sins, it also preserves us from sin, which is the greatest blessing we can enjoy in this world. For after saying *that if the wicked man does penance for all his sins God will no longer remember them*, he adds *that man will live by practicing the works of justice and he will not die*.<sup>10</sup> This is why Saint Peter comforts us so much when he tells us that the Lord, on the day of his coming, *will find in peace of soul those who have brought forth worthy fruits of penance*<sup>11</sup> because he will find them free from sin. By this means, remarks Theodoret, they will have made their salvation certain. As the Church sings, it was by this means that Saint John the Baptist was able to preserve himself free from the slightest sins. In the same way you will return to the grace of Our Lord and, according to Saint Peter, *you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*<sup>12</sup> who will make you firm in goodness thanks to his dwelling in you.

This Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Beg him to establish your heart so firmly in good that on the day of his coming, as Saint Peter says, *you may be found pure and irreprehensible in his eyes*.<sup>13</sup> Take care that when he comes he will not address to you the same reproach that Saint John in the Apocalypse made to a bishop, telling you that *you have fallen away from your first charity*.<sup>14</sup> If he upbraids you with this now, *remember the state from which you have fallen*, as this bishop was enjoined to do. *Do penance, and return to the practice of your first works*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ez 18:21-22

<sup>11</sup> 2 Pt 3:14

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>13</sup> 2 Pt 3:14

<sup>14</sup> Rev 2:4

<sup>15</sup> Rev 2:5

direction of the community, for obedience is the first virtue of a community, and distinguishes it essentially from secular houses.

#### 92.2 Second Point

It is no less important to be faithful to Rule outside the house than in it, because we should give edification to our neighbor, and this should especially be required of religious persons.

The first thing we must pay attention to is great self-control<sup>79</sup>. Saint Paul recommends this to the faithful above all things. *Let your self-control*, he says, *be known to all men*<sup>80</sup>. This is as if he said, do not be self-controlled only when you are alone and in private, as you should be, of course, because the Lord is near, but also act in the same way before all men. Thus, when you are outside of the house act in such a way that all men may recognize and be edified by your self-control. This is necessary because you work for the salvation of others and you must begin by giving them good example so as to win them to God.

You must also carefully observe silence in the streets and, as your Rule prescribes, say the rosary so as not to be distracted by what comes before your eyes; you should rather be occupied with the presence of God. Patience and silence especially are equally necessary for you when people say something insulting or something that is liable to hurt you.

Have you been faithful to all these practices during this year? They are very important for you if you wish not to scandalize others, and not to become distracted in the streets. A person consecrated to God must be easily distinguished from a secular by his exterior appearance and by the way he acts, because he owes edification not only *to prudent people*, as Saint Paul says, *but also to those who are not such*<sup>81</sup>, and who often take scandal over everything, especially in the case of religious.

#### 92.3 Third Point

School is the place where the Brothers spend most of their time

<sup>79</sup> Different translations of the New Testament render this word differently: unselfish(ness) (NAB), kindness (revised NAB), tolerance (Jerusalem), forbearance (RSV and Kleist), courtesy (Knox), gentleness (Gideon), gentle attitude (Good News), moderation (Image).

<sup>80</sup> Phil 4:5

<sup>81</sup> Rom 1:14

assignment for which all your needs were provided. Take proper measures for the future on all these matters, which are important.

### **31 Dec: HOW YOU FAILED DURING THIS YEAR IN REGARD TO YOURSELF AND IN FIDELITY TO RULE**

#### 92.1 First Point

You can fail in fidelity to Rule either in the house, outside the house, or in school. In the house there are three ways of failing: first, in fidelity and punctuality regarding the exercises. Have you considered this point as one of the main means of salvation, as it is in fact? The reason for this is that fidelity gives you a sort of guaranty of keeping exactly the commandments of God, because *he who is faithful in little things will also be in those which are great*<sup>78</sup>, says Our Lord.

Have you not sometimes been quite willing to dispense yourself during the past year from receiving Holy Communion simply out of dislike? Have you not neglected interior prayer, or allowed yourself to be distracted while making it? Have you considered these two exercises as the ones which draw down the graces of God on all the others? With this in view have you applied yourself to them with affection?

Have all your exercises been dear to you? Have you looked upon them as the absolutely necessary way to reach the perfection of your state, and consequently of making sure of your salvation? Have you left everything at the first sound of the bell, even when you were with persons from outside the community. This must always be done without fail, for it is exactly at the first sound of the bell that you hear God's will indicated to you.

Have you been strict in keeping silence? This is the first means of establishing fidelity to Rule in a house; without this you must not expect that there will be any order in a religious community. Consequently, since you are obliged to contribute to the good order of your house, be faithful to these two points. By means of them, good order will be established and maintained with ease, if you add obedience in all things to the one responsible for the

<sup>78</sup>Lk 16:10

### **VIGIL OF THE NATIVITY OF JESUS CHRIST**

*In the Rule of the Brothers written in 1718 it is stated, at 10:30 the Brothers will go to the oratory where a subject of meditation will be read, afterwards they will go directly to the church to be there for the beginning of Matins; they will make their prayer there until the time for Mass, at which they will receive Holy Communion (CL 25:115). No doubt De La Salle wrote this meditation for that occasion. It is a good example of the Christocentric character of Lasallian spirituality, for the mystery of the Incarnation is a key to the prayer of De La Salle. See also the meditation for 25 March.*

#### 85.1 First Point

*The Emperor Augustus issued an edict ordering a census to be taken of all the inhabitants of all the cities belonging to the Roman Empire. Every person was obliged to register in his native town. This made Saint Joseph leave Nazareth, a city in Galilee where he lived, to go to Bethlehem, a town in Judea, in order to register there with Mary, his wife<sup>16</sup>. On arriving there, they looked for a house where they could stay, but nobody was willing to accept them, because they were occupied by people more wealthy, more distinguished than they.*

See how the world acts! People consider only what is externally apparent in persons, and pay respect to them only if they are attracted by what fascinates the eyes of the world. If the people in Bethlehem had looked upon Mary as the Mother of the Messiah, as the woman who would soon bring forth for the world God made man, who would have dared to refuse to lodge her in their home? What marks of respect would not all Judea have paid her? But as they considered her only as an ordinary person and the wife of a workingman, there was no part of a shelter for her.

For how long has Jesus been presenting himself to you and knocking at the door of your heart, in order to make his dwelling within you and you have not wanted to receive him. Why? Because *he only presents himself under the form of a poor man, a slave, a man of sorrows*<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup>Lk 2:1, 3-5

<sup>17</sup>Mt 25:44-45; Is 53:3

85.2 Second Point

The Most Blessed Virgin, Mother of Jesus, not finding anyone willing to offer her lodging in Bethlehem, was obliged to withdraw to a stable. While she was there *it happened that the time of her pregnancy was completed and she brought forth her first-born child into the world.* This is why she found it necessary *to lay Jesus Christ, her Son, in the bed of a manger*<sup>18</sup>.

You often receive Jesus Christ in your heart, but is he not there as though in a stable, finding there only dirt and corruption, because you have affection for other things besides him. If you looked upon him as your Savior and your Redeemer, what honor would you not pay him? Would you not keep him company, regarding him as God by paying attention to his holy presence and regarding him as man by meditating on his sufferings and his passion?

To find out whether you profit by the coming and dwelling in you that Jesus desires very much, consider if you are more reserved, more recollected, and better behaved than you are on other days. On Communion days do you watch over yourself more carefully in order not to let yourself give way to any ill humor, or to any disorderly impulse?

If you wish to profit by the coming of Jesus Christ in you, you must let him be the master of your heart, and make yourself docile to whatever he may require of you, often saying to him with the prophet Samuel: *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*<sup>19</sup>, and with David: *I will hear what the Lord God will say in me*<sup>20</sup>.

85.3 Third Point

Since we know that Jesus Christ is coming to us today, let us recognize him for what he is, and prepare for him a dwelling place worthy of him; let us prepare our hearts to receive him in such a way that he may be pleased to make his home there! With this in view let us apply ourselves to detach our hearts from whatever is profane and earthly in them. *The earthly man*, says Saint Paul, *speaks affectionately of the things of the earth, and knows not how*

<sup>18</sup> Lk 2:6-7

<sup>19</sup> 1 Sm 3:10

<sup>20</sup> Ps 85:9

with them. *This is what Saint Paul frequently exhorts us to do in his epistles*<sup>75</sup>.

Is this how you have acted during this year? Union in a community is a precious gem, *which is why Our Lord so often recommended it to his apostles before he died*<sup>76</sup>. If we lose this, we lose everything. Preserve it with care, therefore, if you want your community to survive.

91.3 Third Point: Regarding your Students

The first thing you owe your students is edification and good example. Have you applied yourselves earnestly to the practice of virtue in order to edify your disciples? Have you reflected that you should be their model of the virtues you wish them to practice?

Have you acted this year as good teachers should? You should have taught them their religion; did you apply yourself sufficiently to this during the year? Have you looked upon this task as your principal duty in their regard? Do they know their religion well? If they are ignorant of it, or if they do not know it perfectly, is it not due to your negligence?

Have you been careful to teach them the maxims and practices of the holy Gospel, and to see that they practice them? Have you suggested to them practices appropriate to their age and condition? All these matters of instruction should have often been the subject for your reflections and you should have studied how to succeed with them. A teacher who has piety in his heart, says the Wise Man, will *bring forth wisdom*<sup>77</sup>, i.e. he will procure wisdom for himself and at the same time he will make those wise whom he instructs.

Have you taught those under your guidance the other matters which form part of your duty, such as reading, writing and all the rest, with all possible earnestness? If that has not been the case during this year, you will give God a strict account, not only for your time, but also for the food and all the rest that has been furnished for your livelihood, since that was the intention of the

<sup>75</sup> Col 3:14-15

<sup>76</sup> Jn 17:11; 21-23

<sup>77</sup> Prv 10:31

you depend on God? With this conviction have you felt obliged to obey them in all things, as you feel obligated to obey God, who has said: *Who hears you, hears me*<sup>68</sup>. Have you been firmly convinced in the depths of your heart that all they tell you is from God, or to say it better, that it is God himself who is telling you? From this day onward, adopt these dispositions towards your superiors.

### 91.2 Second Point: Regarding your Brothers

Perhaps you have not reflected sufficiently during this year on the obligation that you have to be closely united with your Brothers. Yet this is one of the principal obligations of your state because *you are all brothers*<sup>69</sup>, as Jesus Christ says in the holy Gospel.

The first reason why there is sometimes little union in a community is because some wish to place themselves above others for some human consideration. This is why Our Lord says to his apostles that *none of them should either call himself or let himself be called teacher, because they had but one teacher, who was Jesus Christ*<sup>70</sup>. Our Lord says that *the one who believes himself to be the greatest among you, or who really is, must even consider himself and look upon himself as the least of all*<sup>71</sup>. Examine whether you have acted this way during the past year towards your Brothers.

If you have experienced any ill feeling towards any of them, think of what *Moses said to the two Israelites in his day who were quarreling and seeking to harm each other*<sup>72</sup>, they are our brothers, and, as Saint Paul says, *we must support one another in charity*<sup>73</sup>. Pay attention to this word, *support*, which he uses; it shows you that we should suffer from one another. This was why in another place he says *bear each others' burdens*<sup>74</sup>. Each Brother has his own burdens, but as a rule he does not carry his own, since he does not feel their weight. It is the others who must put up with him, and so each one must carry willingly and charitably the burdens of the others, if he wishes to keep peace

<sup>68</sup> Lk 10:16

<sup>69</sup> Mt 23:8

<sup>70</sup> Mt 23:8-10

<sup>71</sup> Lk 22:26

<sup>72</sup> Ex 2:13

<sup>73</sup> Eph 4:20

<sup>74</sup> Gal 6:2

*to speak of anything else*<sup>21</sup>. The same apostle says *the heavenly man, on the other hand, speaks of the things of heaven and rises above everything else*. It is for this purpose that the Son of God has come to earth and wishes to come into our hearts: *to make us share in his nature*<sup>22</sup> and help us become altogether heavenly men.

## NATIVITY OF JESUS CHRIST

### 86.1 First Point

Today Jesus Christ is born poor in a stable. The Most Blessed Virgin brings him into the world in a place where she finds no comfort, nor any human help. *She has no other bed on which to lay this new-born Child except a manger*<sup>23</sup>. Behold the palace and the royal bed of Jesus our Savior on his entry into the world! This is how he is lodged in the middle of the night in a very rigorous season, and despite his pressing needs nobody goes to any trouble to help him.

The poverty which Jesus practices so eminently at his birth should commit us to have great love for this virtue, for it was to make us love it that he was born in this condition. Let us not be surprised, then, when something is lacking to us, even necessities, since at his birth Jesus was lacking everything. This is how we must be born in the spiritual life, dispossessed and deprived of everything. And as the Son of God willed that the humanity he took upon himself should be in this condition, he also wants us to share this disposition, so that he may take entire possession of our hearts.

### 86.2 Second Point

It is not enough for Jesus to be born poor. *He likewise chose lowliness as his lot*<sup>24</sup> in this world, according to the words of the Royal Prophet. He wished to make his entry into the world in a place where he was unknown, and where no attention would be paid either to him or to his holy Mother, a place where he would be abandoned by everybody. It is true that *he was visited at his*

<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor 15:47-48

<sup>22</sup> 2 Pt 1:4

<sup>23</sup> Lk 2:7

<sup>24</sup> Ps 22:7

*birth, but it was only by poor shepherds<sup>25</sup> who could honor him only by their good wishes; even so, it was necessary for an angel sent by God to notify them that *this Child born in Bethlehem was their Savior whose birth would be for all the people a subject of great joy<sup>26</sup>.**

Outside of these poor shepherds nobody even thought of Jesus when he was born. It would even seem that God did not want the rich and the great to find their way to him since the angel who announced his coming gave the shepherds no other sign by which to recognize him than the poor and lowly circumstances in which they would find him, which could only have turned away those who only love what is renowned.

When we chose our state we should have made up our minds to be as lowly as the Son of God when he became man, for this is what is most noticeable in our profession and our work. We are poor Brothers, forgotten and little appreciated by the people of the world. Only the poor come looking for us; they have nothing to offer us but their hearts, ready to accept our instructions. Let us love what is most humiliating in our profession in order to share in some way in the lowliness of Jesus Christ at his birth.

### 86.3 Third Point

*The shepherds, says the Gospel of this day, made haste to go over to Bethlehem, where they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in a manger. On seeing him they recognized what had been told them, and then went back glorifying the Lord for all that they had seen and heard<sup>27</sup>.*

Nothing draws souls to God more strongly than the poor and humble condition of those who wish to lead them to him. Why did the shepherds praise and bless God? Because they had seen a poor Infant lying in a manger, and because on seeing him they had recognized, thanks to an interior illumination with which God enlightened them, that this Infant was truly their Savior, and that it was to him they should have recourse to escape the misery of their sins.

<sup>25</sup> Lk 2:16

<sup>26</sup> Lk 2:9-11

<sup>27</sup> Lk 2:16-20

made him, from whom he receives everything, and to whom he owes all the good that he can do in this life.

Have you often reflected during this year that since God gives you life and helps you to perform all your actions, all of them should be consecrated to him, and that you do him injury when you perform them for any other purpose except for him? Has it been your sole aim, as it was Saint Paul's, not *to live or act any longer except for God<sup>63</sup>*? Like him, have you been of a mind not *to make God's grace useless in you<sup>64</sup>*? It has been useless, no doubt, every time that your actions have not been done for love of him. In the future, act, as Saint Paul says, *in a manner worthy of God, striving to please him in all things<sup>65</sup>.*

## **30 Dec: HOW WE SHOULD HAVE ACTED TOWARDS OUR NEIGHBOR DURING THIS YEAR, AND HOW WE HAVE FAILED IN THIS**

### 91.1 First Point: Regarding our Superiors

You are required to act towards your superiors *as towards God himself<sup>66</sup>*. Such is the judgment given you by Saint Paul. Since you have a body with senses, and because God's interior guidance does not suffice to lead you to him, you need guides to lead you with exterior guidance. This is why God has given you superiors whose duty it is to hold God's place in your regard and to guide you externally on the way to heaven, as God guides you internally.

How have you acted during this year towards your superiors? Have you looked upon them as God's ministers who have been given to you by him and hold his place, since *it is only through the authority that God has entrusted to them and shared with them, that they have a right to guide you and command you<sup>67</sup>*? Is it for this reason that you have been submissive to their guidance?

During this year have you been dependent on your superiors, as

<sup>63</sup> 2 Cor 5:15

<sup>64</sup> 1 Cor 15:10

<sup>65</sup> Col 1:10

<sup>66</sup> Eph 6:7

<sup>67</sup> Rom 13:1-4



yourself in an attitude of recollection appropriate to his grandeur? And since God is present everywhere, have you adored him in all places? Pay attention to all this in order to show God how great an esteem you have for him.

### 90.2 Second Point

Our soul has been created by God only that we might enjoy him; *all our happiness on earth consists in being attached to him alone*<sup>57</sup>, as the Royal Prophet says so well. It would be disgraceful for a soul, says Saint Leo, that shares in the divine nature, to fall so low from its original nobility as to degrade itself by taking its pleasure in creatures. And to whom should we attach ourselves, if not to the One from whom we have received everything, who alone is Our Lord and our Father, and who, as Saint Paul says, *has given being to all things and has made us only for himself*<sup>58</sup>? It is this thought and the gratitude we owe him for all his goodness to us that should have frequently occupied our minds and touched our hearts during this year in order to engage us to give ourselves entirely to God, and to tell him with Saint Augustine: My God, you have made us for yourself alone, and our hearts will never be at rest until they rest in you!

### 90.3 Third Point

If we truly love God, *everything we do we should do for his glory*<sup>59</sup>, Saint Paul says. It should be for no other reason that you have withdrawn yourselves from the world, for it is God who must be the purpose of your actions, just as he is their source. *If you seek to please anyone other than God you would not deserve*, says Saint Paul, *to bear the name of servants of Jesus Christ*<sup>60</sup>, because you would really not be such, since a servant must do everything for the service of his master. Such was the advice that Saint Paul gave to the faithful in his day. *Whether you eat, he says, or whether you drink, or whatever else you do, do it all for the glory of God*<sup>61</sup>, and again, *Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*<sup>62</sup>. Such should be the whole consolation of a Christian in this life: to act for the God who

<sup>57</sup> Ps 73:28

<sup>58</sup> 1 Cor 8:6; cf Acts 17:28

<sup>59</sup> 1 Cor 10:31

<sup>60</sup> Gal 1:10

<sup>61</sup> 1 Cor 10:31

<sup>62</sup> Col 3:17

Be convinced that so long as you remain bound in your heart to poverty and to everything that can humble you, you will do good for souls. The angels of God will make you known and will inspire fathers and mothers to send you their children to be instructed. Through your instructions you will touch the hearts of these poor children, and most of them will become true Christians. But if you do not resemble the new-born Jesus by these two outstanding qualities, you will be little known and little employed, nor will you be loved or appreciated by the poor, and you will never be their savior as you should be in your work, for you will draw them to God only in so far as you resemble them and Jesus at his birth.

## 26 Dec: SAINT STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR

### 87.1 First Point

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that Saint Stephen *was filled with faith*<sup>28</sup>. He certainly showed this, for he always guided himself and acted by the spirit of faith.

Was he not, in fact, animated by this spirit when he spoke so zealously to the Jews, and when *several of them who disputed with him could not resist the Holy Spirit who was in him and animating his zeal*<sup>29</sup>? Because, after *he recounted for them all the benefits with which God had honored their forefathers, and recalled the little gratitude that most of them had shown*<sup>30</sup>, he reproached them for *being just like their ancestors, and for not observing any better than they the Law which they had received through the ministry of the angels*<sup>31</sup>.

Was he not filled with faith when, following the recommendation given by Jesus Christ, he pardoned his enemies and *begged God not to impute to them the sin they were committing by putting him to death*<sup>32</sup>, and when, in the fervor of his prayer *he saw the heavens opened and the Son of God made man at the right hand of God his Father*<sup>33</sup>?

<sup>28</sup> Acts 6:5

<sup>29</sup> Acts 6:9-10

<sup>30</sup> Acts 7:1-50

<sup>31</sup> Acts 7:51, 53

<sup>32</sup> Acts 7:60

<sup>33</sup> Acts 7:55, 56

This is how faith should make you act. Like Saint Stephen you should make known by your conduct that you are true disciples of Jesus Christ, having only God in view in all your actions, and announcing with a boldness and intrepidity equal to his the maxims of the holy Gospel. In all this what should strengthen your zeal as well as your faith is the fact that *you announce these truths in your position as ministers of God*<sup>34</sup>.

### 87.2 Second Point

This saint was not satisfied to be filled with faith; he wanted to share his abundance of faith with those of his nation by preaching to them the new religion which had just been established. With the authority of holy Scripture he wanted to make known to them this Jesus Christ whom they did not know, and who had come to give them the means of salvation, and to die for them. He also made them realize that they were the ones who, moved by hatred and envy of the good he had done, *had him condemned to death*<sup>35</sup>. But these Jews *had hard and uncircumcised hearts*<sup>36</sup>, as Saint Stephen told them; they showed indeed how true is the saying of Saint Paul, that *all do not obey the Gospel*<sup>37</sup>, and what Isaiah had said: *Who are those who have believed what you have preached to them*<sup>38</sup>?

You have been chosen by God to make Jesus Christ known, and to proclaim him. Therefore, *admire the goodness of God to you*, as the same apostle says, *provided, however, that you remain firm in the state where his goodness has placed you*<sup>39</sup>. Following the example of Saint Stephen, then, make Jesus Christ known to those whom you have to instruct; teach them the rules of the Christian life, and the means they must use to be saved. This is the reason why *God entrusted to you this ministry in which you are employed. Do not make yourself unworthy of it by any negligence*<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Cor 4:1; cf Rom 15:16

<sup>35</sup> Acts 7:52

<sup>36</sup> Acts 7:51

<sup>37</sup> Rom 10:16

<sup>38</sup> Is 53:1

<sup>39</sup> Rom 11:22

<sup>40</sup> 1 Cor 4:1-2

lives in order to preserve the life of Jesus Christ!

We can have the same opportunity as they by giving our lives to prevent Jesus Christ from dying in us. *Sinners*, says Saint Paul, *crucify Jesus Christ again*<sup>53</sup>. If then we do not want him to lose his life, we must do violence to ourselves so as not to fall into sin and not to commit the slightest faults. To procure this benefit, we need great vigilance over ourselves. In this way, *dying daily*<sup>54</sup> through continual mortification, you will give your life in order to avoid miserably crucifying and putting to death Jesus Christ in yourself.

## **29 Dec: WHAT WE HAVE DONE OR FAILED TO DO FOR GOD DURING THIS YEAR**

### 90.1 First Point

We are in this world only to love God and to please him. This is what we should do throughout all our lives, for *this is the first thing God commands of us, which includes the whole law*<sup>55</sup>, as Our Lord says. Our love for God should be so great that we must love nothing but God or for God. We can prove our love in three ways: the first is when we have a high esteem for God; the second is when we attach ourselves to God alone; the third is when we do all our actions for God.

Was it apparent during this year that you esteemed God alone? Have you often considered with admiration his infinite greatness, and then were you filled with profound respect at the vision of his sublime perfections? Have you cried out with the Royal Prophet that *their excellence cannot be conceived by man, nor can they be adored or praised as much as they deserve? Have you recalled to yourself that God was present with you everywhere? Have you interiorly realized your nothingness with a feeling of adoration at the thought of God's presence?* And since there is nothing more pleasing for a soul who loves God than to pay attention to him, *have you made this your joy*<sup>56</sup> as David did? Out of respect for the presence of so great a God, have you been careful to maintain

<sup>53</sup> Heb 6:6

<sup>54</sup> 1 Cor 15:31

<sup>55</sup> Mt 22:38-40

<sup>56</sup> Ps passim, especially Ps 139:6; 145:3; 139:7-12; 13-14; 9:2-3

of fidelity to the Rule. In this way we shall make up for the injury that the world, which we have so fortunately left, may have done to our innocence; we shall also place ourselves in a sort of guaranty of not sinning any more during the rest of our lives.

### 89.2 Second Point

*These holy children died as martyrs because of the cruelty of an evil prince who, as a result of what the Magi had told him concerning the birth of the Messiah<sup>51</sup>, feared that one of them might rob him of his crown. Thus he procured for them the means to live eternally in heaven almost as soon as they had appeared on this earth. He did them more good, says Saint Augustine, by the hatred that he showed in putting them to death, than he might have done for them by all the affection he could have had for them and by all the benefits which he could have given them in this world. They gave testimony to our religion and to the divinity of Jesus Christ not by speaking, but by laying down their lives in his place.*

If you do not have either the happiness or the opportunity to suffer martyrdom for the faith, make martyrs of yourselves for the love of God through the practice of mortification. A Christian's life, says Saint Gregory, ought to be a continual martyrdom, since he is a Christian only to be conformable to Jesus Christ, who suffered all through his life. This sort of martyrdom is often more painful than to shed one's blood, because it lasts incomparably longer and is consequently all the more difficult to endure. Encourage yourselves, then, to accept this martyrdom by the example of the saints, and especially the example of Jesus Christ, for he spent his entire life suffering for love of you.

### 89.3 Third Point

These little children died not only as martyrs, but also taking the place of Jesus Christ. *Herod wanted to kill him, and looked for him everywhere. Not finding him, he resolved to kill a great number of children, assuring himself<sup>52</sup> that Jesus Christ would be included in their number. For he wanted no exception made among those who had been born since before the time the Magi had come to Jerusalem up to that moment. Fortunate children, to lose their*

<sup>51</sup> Mt 2:16

<sup>52</sup> Mt 2:16

### 87.3 Third Point

After teaching the faith, Saint Stephen also died for the faith. The Jews could not endure the reproaches and accusations he leveled at them for their ingratitude to God and their hardness of heart. *They threw him out of the city and stoned him<sup>41</sup> as a blasphemer. That is how they treated all the prophets<sup>42</sup>, said Our Lord. This saint considered himself fortunate to be treated like those who had preceded him, and, says Saint Augustine, he welcomed with gratitude this shower of stones which fell upon him. It was the faith that filled his being that *made him feel truly honored at being persecuted in this way, as Jesus Christ, his Master, had been<sup>43</sup>. All he did during this time was raise his eyes to heaven to show God his gratitude for so great a favor.**

Make these dispositions your own from today on. Willingly accept all the trials people give you, and do not be troubled by any of them or complain of anything. After the example of Saint Stephen, your faith must make you consider all you have to suffer from your neighbor as gifts and benefits coming from God. But only pure faith can inspire such sentiments.

## 27 Dec: SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST

### 88.1 First Point

Saint John was so specially loved by Jesus Christ, that he is called his well-beloved disciple above everyone else. Saint John himself, not wishing out of humility to name himself in his Gospel, does not call himself anything but *the disciple whom Jesus loved<sup>44</sup>*. Here are the ways the Savior gave him his special love: *he allowed John to rest his head on his chest<sup>45</sup>*; he revealed to John the highest mysteries of his divinity and of his holy humanity *when dying he chose him to take his place and be the adoptive son of his holy Mother<sup>46</sup>*.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 7:58

<sup>42</sup> Mt 5:12

<sup>43</sup> Jn 15:20

<sup>44</sup> Jn 13:23

<sup>45</sup> Jn 13:23, 25

<sup>46</sup> Jn 19:26-27

Saint Jerome gives us no other reasons for such a special love on the part of Jesus for Saint John except he always remained a virgin. This was what made him so worthy of the friendship of Jesus, to whom this virtue is especially dear.

You are in a vocation where you need to be honored by the friendship of Jesus; cherish very specially, then, this favorite virtue of Jesus, so that this divine savior may love you tenderly and take pleasure in being with you, for he delights to be with pure men. Also, apply yourself much to interior prayer, in which Jesus will teach you secrets that remain unknown to most men.

### 88.2 Second Point

If Saint John was much loved by Jesus, he also loved Jesus very much. The first sign he gave of this love was that *he gave up everything in order to follow him*<sup>47</sup>.

If Saint John *followed Jesus to Mt. Tabor where he manifested his glory to his apostles*<sup>48</sup>, he also *accompanied him to Calvary*<sup>49</sup>, where *he appeared as an object of malediction*, and he did this although *all the other disciples had abandoned the Lord*. He was then, the only apostle who followed Christ even to death, for he wanted to be *the witness of his sufferings right up to the end*.

*He was also the first to arrive at the tomb of Jesus Christ to make sure of the truth of his resurrection*, and to be able afterwards to announce it to the others. See what his tender love made Saint John do to respond to the love of Jesus for him. Reflect often that since Jesus gave himself entirely to us and for us, we too should give ourselves totally to him, do everything for him, and not seek ourselves in anything. Our whole care should be to detach ourselves from all things, in order to attach ourselves to God alone, because nothing is equal to him, and he is the only one to whom we can securely give our hearts.

### 88.3 Third Point

The love Jesus had for Saint John and Saint John had for Jesus produced a reciprocal love of Saint John for the Blessed Virgin,

<sup>47</sup> Mt 4:22

<sup>48</sup> Mt 17:1-2

<sup>49</sup> Jn 19:26

and of the Most Blessed Virgin for him. *From the moment when Jesus, dying on the cross, entrusted his holy Mother to his dear disciple and gave him to her as her son*, Saint John always kept the Blessed Virgin close to himself, and gave her all the marks of tenderness that a son can have for his mother. He took care of her in all her needs, and the Blessed Virgin in return honored Saint John with her protection before God.

If we have love for Jesus and are loved by him, we cannot fail to be deeply loved by the Most Blessed Virgin. For, since there is such a very close union between Jesus and his most holy Mother, all those who love Jesus and are specially loved by him, greatly honor Mary, and are consequently deeply cherished by this holy Mother of God. Let us make ourselves worthy of this tenderness of the Blessed Virgin, and to obtain what we desire from her more easily let us address ourselves to Saint John; as her dear son in place of Jesus, he will secure for us from her what by ourselves we cannot obtain.

## 28 Dec: THE HOLY INNOCENTS

### 89.1 First Point

Today let us honor the innocence of these holy children who had the privilege to die before knowing evil and being able to do it. How fortunate they are, since their lives were consecrated to God at an age when evil had not yet taken possession of their hearts. *They were snatched out of this world when they had scarcely entered it*, and this by a very special grace, *to be preserved from the corruption*<sup>50</sup> which is so difficult to escape in the society of men.

We have known the misery of the world, and we know only too well through our sad experience how rare it is to preserve innocence and purity of heart there. God has done us the favor of withdrawing us from it; let us, then, thank him every day for so great a benefit, and make our lives innocent by seclusion, penance, and the holiness of our actions.

To merit perseverance in so saintly a life, let us be faithful to all the smallest practices of the community, and to the least points

<sup>50</sup> Wis 4:11