

OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

The Immaculate Heart of Mary

My heart hath rejoiced in the Lord, and my horn is exalted in my God, because I have joyed in thy salvation (I Kings 2, 1). With these words begins the Canticle of Anna, which this proud mother spoke when she offered her son Samuel at the altar of the Lord, as it is recorded in the First Book of Kings. In setting up the new Office for the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother Church turned back the pages of Sacred Scripture until her finger rested on this beautiful sentence, which seems so admirably to express the sentiments of Mary's heart at the moment when she found herself to be mother, not merely of a great prophet of Israel but of the Son of the Most High God. In fact, if we compare the stately lines of Anna's venerable canticle with the joyous tones of Mary's Magnificat, sung amid the palms and presses that encircled the home of Zachary and Elisabeth in the hill country of Judea, we shall observe a remarkable similarity. The minor key of the former bells into rousing major harmonies on the lips of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Queen of Heaven and the mother of men. On that day her heart rejoiced in the Lord with a joy ineffable, the horn of her spiritual dignity was exalted in the Almighty. To her, salvation signified the salvation of all of Adam's children.

The exalted dignity of Mary's Immaculate Heart is set forth in the official prayer of her Feast, which reveals to us that "the Eternal God prepared for Mary's Heart a worthy tabernacle of the Holy Spirit." In the lessons of the Feast of Saint Bernardine of Siena, one of the earliest promoters of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Saint speaks in glowing terms of Mary's relation to the Most Blessed Trinity. "Who of us mortals," he exclaims, "dares with polluted lips to speak the smallest thing or the greatest thing of the true Mother of God and of man, unless he is inspired by God — of her, whom the Father of God had chosen as His Mother, whom the Holy Spirit had fitted out as the shrine of every grace." How can I, this great lover of Mary continues, give expression with my humble tongue to the noble motives and sentiments that adorned Mary's virginal Heart, for which even the tongues of all the celestial angels fail to give worthy expression? For nine months, the Saint of Siena tells us, Mary harbored the Son of God in her Heart and Womb. What better name then, he asks, may we give to Mary's Heart than a "burning furnace" of Divine Love?

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It is well for us to ponder over this beautiful truth. *God is charity*. Saint John, the Beloved Disciple. The Franciscan Order has adopted as its brief definition of the Triune God as the underlying and all-embracing of all spirituality. The God of Love became man, and made Mary's Heart a storehouse, the earthly treasury, the burning furnace of this infinite divine love.

In his inimitable manner Saint Bernardine proceeds to set forth that Mary's Heart should be called a burning furnace of divine love. From this furnace, he explains, sprang forth seven sparks that shed luster over her life and illumined in a brilliant manner the way that her children should follow.

These sparks are the Seven Words that Mary spoke. Mary, a Saint of Siena with a twinkle in his eye, spoke only seven times. We feel certain that when he made this remark from the pulpit in Siena he paused with a knowing look surveyed the ranks of the Sienese ladies before him. No, there was none to be found among those, nor, we may safely add, among the ranks of all woman folk that ever trod this earth, who spoke only seven words — a day, an hour, or less, not to say during her lifetime. Perhaps no women are different; although there is no evidence at hand. However, this example may well serve as a stimulus to Religious to keep the rule of silence.

Be that as it may, Mary spoke twice to the Angel; twice to Elizabeth; twice to her Divine Son — in the Temple and at the Marriage Feast at Cana. Once to the servants. Her words were brief and direct. Only once, in her conversation with God at Elisabeth's home, did her heart expand into the glorious Magnificat.

Seven sparks of divine Love! How shall we understand this? The Annunciation of the Archangel that she was to be a mother disturbed her for she had vowed her virginity to the God of Love. Hence her brave question: *How shall this happen since I do not know man?* (Lk. 1, 34). To her the fulfillment of her virginal vocation meant the forfeiture of God's love. Her heart was broken. The Maiden of Nazareth stood her ground steadfastly in the face of a command from heaven, until the latter explained that she would retain her virginity inviolate in spite of her motherhood. Only then did she give her consent to that immortal act of obedience to the divine command: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word* (Lk. 1, 38). There is a parallel in history where a maiden's heart was made to overflow with the joy of inviolate virginity and divine motherhood. Only Infinite Love could create this marvel within the small compass of a human heart. The lily of purity was encased with the gold of divine motherhood.

Mary's third word is enshrined in the brief remark that she *saluted Elisabeth*, her cousin (Lk. 1, 40). It was a mark of friendship — a friendship flowing from the love of God, by which the hearts of these two holy women were knit together. And forthwith this love burst forth into the most beautiful canticle ever sung by human tongue, the glorious Magnificat. Origen sums up the wealth of its content when he declares that in this one instant a human heart had the courage to magnify God's infinite glory, as if such were possible for human tongues.

We wonder if Mary foresaw that her gentle rebuke to her divine Son, when after three days she found him in the Temple among the doctors, was to serve as the highest standard of Christian education for all days to come. *Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing* (Lk. 2, 48). Here we find a mother's love conveyed in words that reveal the two essential rules of pedagogy — firmness and kindness, both flowing from divine love.

To the inspired pen of Saint John we owe Mary's two last words. The wedding feast at Cana was the occasion. Amid the hustle and bustle of the festivity the mother of Jesus observed the embarrassment of the young couple, and she whispered to her Son: *They have no wine* (Jo. 2, 4). Mountains of books have been written on this remark, and the Lord's answer to His mother, but all the learning in the world cannot overshadow this eloquent act of genuine sympathy and unfeigned charity. *Charity believes all things*, says Saint Paul (I Cor. 13, 7), and Mary believed that her Son would answer her prayer. Therefore she immediately turned to the waiters: *Do whatever he tells you* (Jo. 2, 5). By doing what her Divine Son tells us we cannot go wrong; we cannot depart from Charity's ways.

Mary spoke only seven times; and these seven words are the seven sparks that allow us to look deep into her Immaculate Heart and that are most apt to fit and fashion the heart of every Religious after the sublime pattern of the Heart of our heavenly mother. All of which makes us appreciate more and more why the Holy Father has surrounded Mary's pure Heart with such festal glory.

This conference might be extended over pages and pages. However, there will be another occasion when we shall dwell on Mary's Heart as the source and fountainhead of apostolic tradition, namely, of those teachings and reminiscences that were not committed to the inspired writings of the Bible.

the two sisters, and dragged Agnes out by the hair. It seems he had all hopes of getting Clare back. The frail fourteen year old girl was unable to withstand the brute force of her irate uncle, cried out for him to come to her rescue. But Clare knelt in prayer while Agnes was being dragged down the mountain side. Her uncle meant to keep his word and bring her back home dead, if not alive. Suddenly Agnes became aware of the heavy the combined strength of her relatives could move her not withstanding his insane wrath the uncle raised his sword to strike Agnes, but his arm was paralyzed. In spite of his anger he could not but recognize the divine intervention of God in favor of his niece. Overcome with fear and remorse his companions desisted. While Agnes prayed, the power of his arm was broken but he had no further desire now to take her back home. He acknowledged himself vanquished by a higher power and left Agnes to return to Clare. Clare and her companions were henceforth left unmolested in their untiring zeal for greater perfection. Saint Francis must have felt a great joy indeed when he heard of the success of Clare and the strength of purpose of the two little foundresses of her Order. It had been much like the battle he had fought and won on Mount Alverna when he stood before the bishop of Assisi with the folds of the episcopal vestments thrown about his naked shoulders and exclaimed in ecstatic joy, "Now I truly say, 'Our Father Who are in heaven.'" Did Francis at that time already realize that Clare was indeed the strong woman, who was to fulfill the prophesy of an earlier day, when standing on the walls of San Damiano he declared there would one day dwell there holy women whose lives would glorify God throughout Holy Church? In any case he seems to have been taken for granted that he would need Clare more than she would need him for we know how much he looked to her for comfort and advice.

Saint Clare's influence on our Seraphic Father and his infant Order was greater than we shall ever know; greater, perhaps, than that of any of his companions. Did anyone understand Saint Francis' message more clearly, did any heart more fully that message, so pregnant with the spirit of the Gospel, than the seraphic heart of the Poverello was endeavoring to save from extinction? Did the youthful eager heart of Clare? Theirs was an age when politics and worldly ambition too much into the offices of the Church; and a worldly-minded, insufficiently instructed clergy needed to be brought back to the spirit of the Gospel. How often the words "the Gospel" occur in the Rules of Saint Francis and Clare, and how large a field of observance do they cover in the lives of their followers.

Much as has been written of Saint Francis through the centuries, the literature on Saint Clare has been exceedingly meager. One wonders why she is not mentioned in the many biographies of Saint Francis for the most part only in passing. Yet, she fully imbibed his spirit from its initial inception and passionately clung to it without faltering. While there arose in the ranks of his Order disagreements and misunderstanding, we know his "Little Plant" had her roots deeply and firmly established in that spirit which she never doubted but embraced with a loving instinct. That light led her and her daughters in the path Saint Francis trod and in which he invited his sons to follow. She never doubted wherein lay the spirit of his Order.

Saint Clare and her daughters were dear to the heart of Saint Francis and no others. Though Brother Leo, "God's Little Sheep," was indeed his confidant, yet the Lady Clare held heart-secrets of Francis which no one else shared. He had the heart of a contemplative, as did she; and no one can doubt that the secrets of their union with the Bridegroom of their souls was the topic never new of their converse. Can we forget the light that seemed to set all Portiuncula ablaze during that one memorable conversation of which we know, that has been chronicled merely as "speaking of God" and "forgetting their meal"?

As time went on and the Order of Saint Francis grew, spreading itself out into all the countries of Europe, his visits to Saint Clare and San Damiano came more seldom; and she complained to him that he left his daughters for long intervals without the encouragement of his presence and the comfort of his burning words of love for God. But when his emaciated body had been consecrated by his Beloved, and the stigmata glowed like bloody rubies on his hands and feet and side, he mistrusted no longer his gallant heart's love for his first and dearest daughter, as he had in the earlier years. His love for her was now a white flame gloriously brilliant, and he hesitated not to spend hours in her company. Clare's love for her Divine Spouse was a brighter flame in Francis' presence and they could speak of it now that his life was slowly ebbing. How well we can see Clare bending low at Francis' feet when she was making and fitting the little slippers which were to give comfort to his feet, stinging with the pain of the nails. We can see her very carefully fitting them in order to ease the pressure of the pain. He who carefully hid even from his Brothers the secret of the great and singular favor God had bestowed upon him freely permitted Clare to bend over those pierced feet. With tender tears she must often have kissed them.

Clare lived on for nearly twenty-five years after the departure of her Father and Guide. With a heart as tender and as loving as his she must remain unceasingly for His Order and its consolidation. We can see Clare at the moment when the body of Saint Francis was brought to San Damiano for its burial, as she bent over it in a last farewell. She sent her messages to her Beloved through him and consented to live on for her own daughters and his brethren. Saint Francis' sons loved the Lady Clare and depended much on her wise counsel through the years after their beloved Father died from them.

Saint Clare loved the Church after the example of her Seraphic Father and took a deep interest in its welfare and propagation, as well as the good of her own beloved Italy. The humble convent of San Damiano which Saint Clare and her community stood as a silent sentinel outside Assisi's walls. When Frederick's armies of Saracens invaded Italy and were about to pass Assisi they would first attack that sentinel which seemed frail and weak enough. Those blood-thirsty Saracens did not reckon with the God of Heaven within and the strong heart of His virgin bride. She would plead protection and safety for herself and her daughters from Him and not from any human being, and He did not betray her trust. She would go out and meet the enemy already scaling San Damiano's walls. But she was not alone. She carried in her hands her God, and facing them she held aloft the lowly pix containing her Divine Spouse under the mystic veils of His Sacrament of Love. Terrified they fled, as we all know, and a small voice from the Sacred Vessel in her hands spoke, saying: "I will always protect you!" The inhabitants of Assisi to this day claim Saint Clare as their protectress and have erected in honor a bronze statue in gratitude for this miracle which saved their city.

When Saint Clare had fled her father's castle that ever memorable night of 1212 and divested herself of everything, she understood her spiritual Father and grasped his love for Lady Poverty more fully than any other. She was wedded to this love as was he. She strove ceaselessly for the idea so often understood even in the ranks of his sons. As she lay dying forty years later clasped to her heart the Papal Bull granting her and her daughters what she had so bravely fought for, namely, the privilege of highest Poverty, her faltering heart-throbs consecrated that privilege. Her eyes were dimming with death, but her spiritual sight, grown keener after the death of her beloved Father, discerned more clearly his ideal and the legacy bequeathed to her by him to his sons. Innocent IV would have absolved her and her daughters from

the vow Saint Clare esteemed and prized, but brought fear to the heart of the Pontiff. The Poor Ladies were cloistered away from the world, and at some future time they might suffer dire want. Clare, in deep humility, craved absolution and forgiveness of her sins but not from the vow of absolute poverty, and for seven centuries her daughters have continued to live on alms. Who can doubt but that her vision at that supreme moment looked down through the centuries and saw her Order holding firmly to Seraphic Poverty, and never consented to sever its alliance with Saint Francis and his Bride. Clare won the battle and died still clasping the precious Bull to her heart.

The influence of Saint Clare on her century, hidden and cloistered as she was, can never be fully calculated. It has come down in the Church even to the twentieth century. Can the emancipated woman of our day, who steps out before the public, hope to do what Saint Clare did and continues to do? Hidden within their cloister walls as in the days of their holy Foundress, the daughters of Saint Clare are still pleading for a world grown more worldly and more sinful, hating God and His Church with a more organized and diabolical hatred than ever in the Church's history. After the example of their holy Foundress, her daughters still endeavor to humbly raise supplicating hands for His mercy, content to be the lightning rods that catch the wrath of God's justice and save the world from His just vengeance.

Vocations to the Order of Saint Clare have never been numerous, though the Order has quietly spread throughout the world into every civilized country. It has been said that as Saint Francis was the saint most like to Christ, so Saint Clare is most like to our Blessed Mother. In her hiddenness and powerful influence she surely was. Her Order has never been publicised and consequently is little known. But the Holy Spirit, whose inspirations of grace know where to find generous souls, still inspires young hearts to follow in the footsteps of Saint Francis and Saint Clare.

Even though the standard of values has changed vastly in our age, there are still souls who would go the whole way with God and not compromise. In this modern age, when a scientific persecution of the Church makes martyrs not only of the bodies but even of the minds and wills of God's heroes, there is a need greater than ever of the life of complete self-abnegation which Saint Clare has provided for the Church in the observance of the Rule she has handed down to her daughters.

*Monastery of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mother M. Immaculata, P.C., Abbess
Roswell, New Mexico*

NOTES ON THE PORTIUNCULA INDULGENCE

Regular tertiaries with simple vows, aggregated to the First Order, can gain the Portiuncula Indulgence in the churches and public chapels of the three Orders, provided the church or public chapel actually belongs to the given Institute. Regular Tertiaries can also gain the Indulgence in the convent chapel, subject to the following conditions: 1) In Franciscan churches of all three Orders, without a church or public chapel, the Indulgence attached to churches (and hence the Portiuncula) may be gained by the principal oratory of the house. The usual convent chapel will meet the requirement of "principal oratory"; 2) Not all religious Institutes legitimately aggregated to our Order enjoy the privilege of the Portiuncula Indulgence; hence neither do their churches or public oratories; but only those Institutes legitimately aggregated, which enjoy the title of Tertiaries. Such Institutes which lack the title of Tertiaries should, if they wish, request the privilege of the Portiuncula Indulgence from the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiaria, or the commendation of the Ordinary. (*Acta OFM*, LXIX (1950), 123).

During the time appointed for gaining the Portiuncula Indulgence, there must be exposed a picture or a statue of Saint Francis or of the Queen of Angels, or a picture of the Holy Father, invocation of the Blessed Virgin and of Saint Francis, the Litany of All Saints, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The pastor or the rector of the privileged church or oratory is obliged to carry out these latter provisions. But the omission of some or even all of these provisions would not invalidate the indulgence.

Personal conditions for the Indulgence: confession must be made on the feast day, or in the week preceding or following the feast. Communion must be received on the feast day, the day preceding, or in the week following the feast day. A visit must be made to a qualified church or chapel, and at each visit *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys*, and *Glories* must be recited for the intention of the Holy Father. These prayers are essential; prayers of equivalent length may be substituted.

If the privilege of the Portiuncula is transferred for just reasons to the following Sunday, by the qualified Ordinary, pastor, or rector of the church or chapel, the time reckoning for Confession and Communion is based on the date of the Sunday. The same person can gain the Portiuncula Indulgence on both days.

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Roch Knopke, O.F.M.

IN PRAISE OF POVERTY

(From the letters of our holy Mother Saint Clare to
Blessed Agnes of Prague)

Agnes of Prague was born in 1205, the daughter of King Ottocar, of Bohemia. Although betrothed to the Emperor Frederick II, of Germany, she determined to retract her promise of marriage and follow the example of Clare of Assisi. This she did in 1234 by entering the religious life in the monastery of the Holy Savior, which she herself had built. Saint Clare wrote her four letters, describing her own delight that Agnes had chosen the heavenly Spouse, and extolling the life of poverty. Agnes was the daughter of the late king and the sister of the reigning one; this accounts for the dry irony of some of the Seraphic Mother's remarks.

When I heard the news of thy holy conversion and the glory of thy spotless life, news that has not only come to us but already has penetrated almost the whole world, I had deep rejoicing and joy in the Lord; and not only myself but all those who do, and want to do, the will of Jesus Christ, and show him service. For it is well known how you, above all others, could have had worldly honor and glory, namely, by wedding the Most August Emperor, as had been agreed upon by yourself and His Majesty; but in the entire love and deep service of your heart you chose the far holier poverty and mortification of the flesh by choosing in marriage a far more noble Spouse, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He will guard your uninjured and unstained virginity forever inviolate; when you love Him, you remain forever chaste; when you touch Him, you become the purer; when you receive Him, a virgin you remain. His power is stronger than all power; His comeliness, more lovely; His presence, more beautiful than that of any other; His love, unparalleled, surpassing all delights. Thou art the chosen one for the embrace of this Spouse, who has adorned thy breast with a precious stone and thy ears with pearls of matchless price; He has girded thy whole being with chrysolite and crowned thee with a golden crown stamped with the sign of holiness. Wherefore, beloved Sister, Reverend Lady rather, for thou art the bride and the mother and the sister of my Lord Jesus Christ, adorned gloriously with the banner of uninjured virginity and holy poverty, be strong in the sacred bondage thou hast in burning desire begun after the example of the poor Jesus Crucified, Who, suffering in dire torment on the cross for us all, snatched us from the power of the prince of darkness, by whom we were held captive because of the sin of our first parents, and

reconciled us with God the Father. O blessed poverty, that bestows riches upon those who love thee, embrace thee, and kiss thee! O holy to whose possessors the kingdom of heaven is promised and eternal without doubt a life of blessedness is given to them! O lovable poverty the Lord Jesus embraced so particularly, Who governed and governed heaven and the earth, Who spoke and all things were made! For He said that *the foxes have dens, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man, that is, Christ, has nowhere to lay His head, and bowing Himself on the cross, He gave up His spirit.* For this did so worthy and great enter the most pure Virgin's womb and will to come into this world without want and in poverty, so that men who are in poverty and want of the heavenly food might become rich in Him and lords of the heavenly kingdom. Then thou shalt then and exult exceedingly and be filled with spiritual joy. Seeing that thou hast chosen this world's contempt rather than honor, and poverty rather than temporal riches, and preferred the treasures in heaven to those on earth, thou art worthy to be considered the sister, bride, and mother of the Most High God and of the glorious Virgin Mary. I am sure thou believest and keep with the strongest faith that the kingdom of heaven is promised only to the poor, nor will it be bestowed by the Lord upon any others except the poor. While the possessions of this world are being loved, the fruit of love is lost. We cannot serve God and mammon, for either we shall love the one and despise the other, or serve the one and despise the other. Thou knowest too that he who has donned a robe cannot meet with one who is naked, nor is one who has donned a rich vesture able to give battle to the world, because he who has nothing whereby he may be dragged down will be dashed to the ground by the world. He gives battle. It is a difficult thing to live magnificently in this world and to be the next world to reign with Christ, for a camel will pass through an eye of needle easier than a rich man will enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, if thou hast cast aside thy vesture, that is, the world's riches, so that, having struggled with its deceits, thou mayest conquer mightily and enter the heavenly kingdom through the narrow way. It is surely a happy bargain and worth every praise to spend worldly riches for eternal ones, to buy heavenly treasures for mundane ones, to receive a hundred for one, to possess a life of happiness without end. Wherefore, I have resolved to entreat thy Highness and Holiness in the humblest of prayer and in the Heart of Jesus Christ to grow strong in His holy service and advance ever from the good to the better, from virtue to virtue, that He Whom thou servest in the love of thy heart may deign to adorn thee with His unstinted grace . . .

I give thanks to the Giver of grace, from Whom we believe comes every blessing and every perfect gift, Who has adorned thee to this perfection, that, becoming a worthy imitator of the Father's perfection, thou shouldst become perfect, lest His eyes view in thee anything at fault. This is the perfection wherewith the heavenly King will bind thee to Himself in eternal delight, where thou shalt sit in glory upon a throne of stars. Thou, who hast despised a lofty kingdom of the world and rejected wedded bliss with the Emperor, hast become the mistress of holy poverty and followed in Jesus' footsteps in the spirit of great humility and loving service, and art found worthy to join Him in marriage.

And because I know thee to be quite full of all virtue, I do not wish to burden thee overmuch with words, although perhaps nothing will seem to thee uncalled for in these things out of which some solace could arise. One word only would I impart, because it is necessary. I exhort thee through love of Him, to Whom thou hast offered thyself in a sacrifice of sweet odor, that thou rememberest thy calling, as another Rachel, looking ever to a beginning. What thou already hast, grasp firmly; what thou doest, do; nor ever stand still, but on swift course, in meek imitation, with flying feet lest thy going gather the smallest dust, surely and happily go forward in the way of this happiness; believing no one, consenting to no one, who would snatch thee from thy intent and place of hindrance in the way of thy running; run in that perfection to which the Spirit of God has called thee, that in it thou mayest fulfill thy promises to the Most High and walk the more surely the way of God's commandments . . .

Consider, O high-born Queen, that thy Spouse, *beautiful beyond the sons of men*, was made the most disfigured among men for thy salvation, His whole body torn by the whips, His life breathed out on the cross amid the most exquisite pain. Burn in thy whole love to imitate Him. If thou shouldst suffer, thou shalt likewise be glorified with Him; if thou shouldst grieve with Him, thou shalt rejoice with Him; if thou shouldst stay upon the cross with Him, thou shalt obtain with Him a heavenly home in the light of the Saints. Thy name, made glorious forever, shall be written in the book of life. Instead of the passing things of this world, thou shalt possess eternal blessings and live in happiness without end . . .

O most beloved virgin in Christ, the joy of Angels and the crown of Sisters! Place thy mind before the mirror of eternity, place thy soul in the splendor of glory, place thy heart in the image of the Divine substance; and through the

contemplation of God change thy entire and very self into the image of Godhead, so that thou mayest experience what His friends experience, the sweet secrets that the Almighty God has hidden from the beginning for those who love Him — as well as for all those who, living in this deceitful world, that beguiles its blind lovers, have abandoned Him. With thy whole heart love Him Who offered His whole being for love of thee. The sun and moon stand in awe of His beauty. The greatness and lavishness of His reward is endless. Cling, I say, to this Most High Son of God, Whom a Virgin bore and remained a virgin after His birth. Cling to His sweetest mother, who gave birth to such a Son Whom the heavens could not contain; but she carried Him in the tender womb of her own little body, and He rested on the Virginal

Now, through God's grace I am certain that the most worthy creature is the soul of a faithful man and that it is greater than heaven, because it cannot contain the Creator Himself with other creatures, but one faithful man is His home and throne, and that because of charity which the wicked cannot possess. For Truth Itself has said: *He who loves me will be loved by the Father, and I will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.* Now, in the same way in which the glorious Virgin of virgins carried God and true man in her virginal womb, so thou canst always carry the Lord spiritually by imitating Him in humility and poverty, containing Him in thyself. Whom all things are contained; and then thou and other women who are the queens of this world fail in this, although their pride rises to the heavens and their heads touch the skies; none the less, in the end they perish like dung.

O Mother and Daughter, Bride of the King of all ages! That I have not written to thee with that frequency hoped for by my soul and thine, do not wonder, and do not convince thyself that the fire of love, with which I burn towards thee, is in any way lessened; for just as the heart of thy mother loved thee, so do I love thee. There is this one and only obstacle, the scarcity of messengers and the great perils on the roads. Now, however, I seize the opportunity of writing to thy love. With thee I exult exceedingly, with thee I rejoice in the joy of the Holy Spirit, O Bride of Christ; for in the way in which the first Saint Agnes was united with the Immaculate Lamb Who takes away the sins of the world, so art thou; and to thee, O happy one, it is given to enter the heavenly union of this alliance before which the heavenly hosts stand amazed. Desire for Him draws all mankind to Him, the remembrance of Him is content, His goodness satiates with every sweetness, His perfume raises

the dead to life, the glorious sight of Him makes blessed all the citizens of Jerusalem above the heavens, a vision that is the splendor of glory, the light of eternal light, the mirror without flaw. Look into this mirror daily, O Queen, Bride of Jesus Christ, and in it contemplate thy face often, that within and without thou mayest so adorn thyself with the beauty of the most married flowers, so dress thyself in those garments, which best befit a daughter and bride of the heavenly King. O most beloved, while looking into this mirror thou art free to take delight in a hallowed loveliness. Come, and see first of all in this mirror Jesus lying in a manger, in the greatest poverty, wrapped in the swaddling clothes of the poor. What wondrous humility! What amazing poverty! The King of the angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is lying in a manger. In the depths of this mirror look upon the blessed poverty of holy humility, because of which He suffered the greatest distress for the redemption of the human race. Within the borders of the mirror gaze upon the unspeakable love that made Him suffer upon the wood of the cross and there withal die a vile death. This Mirror lying upon the wood of the cross calls out to those passing by and says: *O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow.* As this mirror calls and groans, let us answer it in a single voice and spirit: *I will be mindful and remember thee, and my spirit is in anguish within me.* Burn, O Queen, with this fire of love, and remember too the ineffable delights of the heavenly King, His eternal riches and dignities; in a sigh of overwhelming longing cry out in thy heart's love: *Draw me after thee, I will run in the odor of thy ointments, O heavenly Spouse; I will run, nor shall I stop until thou bringest me into the cellar of wine, until thy left hand is under my head, and thy right hand in rapture embraces me; kiss me with the kiss of thy mouth.*

In the midst of these considerations, remember thy poor mother, and know that I have written thy sweet memory indelibly upon the tablets of my heart since I esteem thee the most beloved of all. What more can I say? Let my bodily tongue fall silent in loving thee and give place to the tongue of my spirit, O blessed daughter, for the love I have for thee a tongue of flesh cannot express. Graciously and kindly, then, receive these matters I have so poorly written, and in any case heed the motherly love for thee and thy daughters with which I am consumed daily. Sincerely commend in the Lord, most esteemed Agnes our Sister, myself and my daughters to thy daughters. Farewell, most beloved, thou and thy daughters, until we meet at the glorious throne of the great God; pray for us to Him . . .

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Columban Duffy, O.F.M. (trans.)

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

According to Saint Bonaventure

This life is not only a pilgrimage; it is also a state of trial and probation. Here God wills to test us, to prove the sincerity of our love for Him, our submission of our will to His. He wills to force us to make clear decisions for or against Him. We must either surrender ourselves completely to Him, or purify our heart of all affection for the blandishments of the world, and of ourselves conquered by the tempter. God wills us to merit our share of glory by resisting the impulses of the lower man who is in constant rebellion against the law of the spirit. And, finally, God wills that we defend our own and His rights against the powers of darkness. Our life here upon earth is a pilgrimage, probation, and ceaseless battle.

Accordingly, we should not be surprised that we are made to undergo temptations. After all, was not Christ Himself led by the Spirit into the wilderness expressly to be tempted? Has it not always been the lot, or rather the privilege, of the saints to experience severe temptations of all kinds? Our exemplars, Saint Francis and Saint Clare, were not spared. Can we then, as followers of Christ, professing to live the holy Gospel according to the Rule of Saint Francis, expect to be purified in any way other than in the furnace of temptation? For this reason Saint Bonaventure makes this a special point in our examination of conscience when he would have us ask:

WAS I NEGLIGENT IN RESISTING TEMPTATIONS?

Before we can answer this question for ourselves, a few points may be clarified. First, we must bear in mind that temptation is not sin, but something that seeks to lure us into sin. A temptation is not even an imperfection; not even the most violent and humiliating temptation is an imperfection. For that reason temptations suffered by a religious do not indicate lack of holiness; on the contrary, if they are directed against his vocation they presuppose his vocation, for there would be no purpose in a temptation against something which does not exist. Temptations, therefore, should never cause us the least anxiety. Since they are neither sins nor imperfections they are not to be considered matter for confession, and we should never *accuse* ourselves of temptations. For the sake of humility, however, and to obtain help and advice, it is good to manifest certain temptations to our confessor. We should remember, too, that temptations are the work of darkness and usually vanish when exposed to the clear light of sincere and humble manifestation.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

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Since temptations are directed toward luring us away from God and into sin, it is obvious that we must be on the alert, that we must be watchful and use every means of avoiding and resisting them. With good reason the Lord warns us: *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation* (Matth. 26, 41); that is, into a temptation too strong for us.

Let us first consider temptation in general. Am I habitually alert to the danger of temptation, or do I frequently slip into an attitude of foolish overconfidence? Do I believe that I am not capable of certain sins, that they are beneath me, or that of myself — through my own will-power and judgment and prudence — I can resist any and all temptations? In regard to the so-called attractive sins, is my resistance weak and half-hearted, or prompt and resolute? Do I allow myself to toy with such temptations? Do I blindly and stupidly try to convince myself that, because temptation is not sin, I can allow myself to take pleasure in the excitement these temptations produce? In the case of prolonged temptation, do I resist valiantly for a time, then capitulate under the barrage of repeated attack? Do I sometimes deliberately close my eyes to the fact that a certain person, thought, or situation is, or can be, the source of temptation and that I must avoid or resist it? Do I pray for strength? Do I really and with conviction pray: *And lead us not into temptation*? Do I yield to a false sense of security? There is, of course, a right sense of security in God. We should have boundless trust in Him Who is the rock of our security, and be confident that with His grace we may hope to overcome every temptation.

For a more detailed examen, we shall select here only the "diabolical temptations" (*diabolica tentamenta*), as Saint Bonaventure calls them, and leave the temptations of the world and the flesh to a later discussion. The diabolical temptations are those which Christ Himself had to suffer.

The first temptation suffered by our Blessed Lord concerned the right order of the physical and spiritual life. What is meant here is aptly expressed by Saint Bonaventure when he says: "We do not preach in order to eat, but we eat in order to preach." This temptation is unquestionably subtle, slow-working, and dangerous. Its aim is to make us forget that our one and only goal in life is the salvation of our souls for the glory of God, and tries to convince us that our bodily welfare is of prime importance. We may well ask ourselves: Am I convinced, not only intellectually but practically, that the monastic life is a life of penance and mortification and not of physical comfort? Do I, unconsciously perhaps, seek an easy life? Do I give way to complaints when faced

with little hardships and privations? Am I inclined to criticize, without reason, such things as food, clothing, living quarters? Do I groan about too much work, not enough rest, insufficient recreation? Am I unwilling to up or curtail legitimate pleasure for the work proper to my state in life? Do I indulge in worldly pleasures?

The second temptation — to vain-glory — strives to attack the purpose of our religious vocation. We are led to abuse the religious state in order to puff up our own ego and to display our good works before men. Let us ask ourselves: Is my whole religious life centered around God, or around self? Do I make every effort to be a good religious to please my own self, or to win the praise of men? Why am I so painstaking in my work, in my charitable activities, in my profession? Why do I so assiduously avoid whatever may give scandal or occasion for unsavory gossip. Why do I avoid doing whatever may cause me to shine brightly in the eyes of men? Am I more concerned with my own reputation than that of my community than with the honor of God? It may not be beside the point to ask why we record our good works in statistics and reports and publish them. Is it really only *that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven* (Matth. 5, 16)? Why do we expose our people to our churches, to special exercises and devotions, to sermons and conferences and missions, even to the liturgical functions? We should indeed, and pray that we do not enter into this diabolical temptation to spiritual glory.

The third temptation concerns the will to power in religious life. This temptation leads us to throw off authority and subjection and be our own master, to have all for ourselves at the expense of others. To be sure, temptations do not usually attack us in so obvious and straightforward manner; the approach is much more subtle. But we may well ask ourselves: I honestly prefer being a subject to being a superior? Even if I can truly say I have no desire for authority over others, do I nevertheless, as a subject, use devious means of securing my own will? Do I tyrannize over others? If humiliated, does the devil to flight, pride and the urge to dominate offer him the easiest way? This evil is found not only in individuals but in entire communities and in religious orders. How much harm has been done in the Church of God by the scandalous competition among religious orders. It is a sad fact that while we may say: "All for the honor and glory of God!" we are really pleased with good works done in the Church only if they are done by us or by our order. Do we resist this temptation to jealousy in all its hateful ramifications? Let us watch and pray most earnestly that we do not yield to this dangerous tempta-

It is generally understood that the words: *And when the devil had tried him for forty days and forty nights, he departed from him for a while* (Luke 4, 13), refer to the first temptation of Christ in His passion. Here the religious will find the supreme temptation which is aimed at his very vocation. There is no doubt that the higher the religious has advanced in the spiritual life, the more will the seducer strive to ruin that life, to strike at its very vitals.

Christ, in His supreme sacrifice and ultimate surrender to God in the passion, was tempted to bitterness. His disciples had abandoned him; one denied Him, another betrayed Him. The people cried for His blood. Yet He remained the embodiment of consummate charity to His last breath on the cross. How do we act when tempted to bitterness? It is natural to feel pain when we are betrayed by those we love, when we are disappointed in persons we trusted, when we are unjustly accused or condemned. But if we feel the pain, do we resist the consequent temptation to bitterness and cynicism? More specifically, we may ask: When hurt, do I remain resentful? Do I allow bitter thoughts to return again and again and keep my soul in turmoil and misery? Can I really forgive and forget? Can I, as Christ did, forgive betrayal and denial and desertion and receive the offender back into the former intimacy of my friendship? Or do I remain hard and embittered? If there is anything of this kind in our souls, let us recognize it as a temptation, and reveal the festering wounds to the healing eyes of Christ in the confessional. Then let us surrender our pain completely to our Lord and unite it with His sacrifice.

The most bitter temptation Christ had to suffer was despair and the agony of desertion by God and by man. This is the supreme temptation in our religious life, and usually befalls souls who are close to God. It may occur in slight, intermittent attacks of discouragement, in long periods of desolation, and in severe attacks of despair. A few pertinent questions will help us to recognize this temptation: Do I easily yield to discouragement when I realize my faults and failures? Or do I humble myself in all simplicity, displaying my misery and poverty before the Lord? Do I use confession in this manner? Do I say, with our holy Father Francis, that up to now I have done nothing, but now I will begin? Do I grow weary of beginning again? Do I lose fervor and zeal when I no longer experience the nearness of Christ? Do I accept spiritual dryness as my just desert and put my whole trust in God? Do I give way to doubts as to whether I am in the state of grace, as to whether my sins are forgiven or duly confessed? Do I always abide by the word of my confessor and blindly believe him? Those religious especially who have advanced far in the

spiritual life should beware of this temptation to despair. It is truly diabolical. Despair aims at destroying our childlike attitude toward God whom we have a right and a duty to trust as our Father. It ruins our life. If we have to suffer with Christ the supreme loneliness which forced from Him the cry: *My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?* we must blindly fight the temptation to final despair and hold fast to Christ, our only hope, our only security.

Let us always keep in mind that temptations resisted and conquered are not only be as so many victories adding to the glory of our immortal crown but likewise the means of thwarting the tempter and bringing us very close to the heart of our blessed Lord.

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M.



FRANCISCAN BRIEF

The world's newest "San Damiano" is in the Southwest. A community of Poor Clare Sisters has been founded in New Mexico in the city of Roswell, best known for its New Mexico Military Institute and its large air base for the training of United States Airmen. There is little more to say about Roswell, except that it has forty-three churches of various denominations (including a church of Jehovah's Witnesses), but it has only two Catholic churches. Into this very non-Catholic town a small colony of Poor Clares came in the Fall of 1948 and established a miniature monastery and chapel. They remodeled an old twelve-room farmhouse, and in the past three years have added several rooms, starting a novitiate. While most of Roswell's Catholics were decidedly pleased at the privilege of having the Poor Clares in their midst, the non-Catholics wondered, inquired, or were afraid of what would happen to themselves with these cloistered nuns in the city. But, having watched the little extern Sister in her tours through the city, they too have learned to love and esteem the Sisters. The community lives

on alms, as have all Poor Clares during the past seven centuries, and, though Roswell does not yet entirely support her Poor Clares, the citizens in time will understand and do so, since already the Sisters have generous friends there. Roswell is not on the beaten path and the new foundation is as yet unknown. The monastery stands a good two city blocks from the highway and just outside the northern city limits. Inside the enclosure wall two acres of land are cultivated. The cloistered Sisters care for this garden; and, though all of them were city girls, they have made quite a success of their farming. The community has the nine original professed Sisters who came from Chicago, and two postulants. They have daily holy Mass by a Franciscan Father from Saint Peter's Church. The Sisters enjoy the privilege of private Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, day and night. They also chant the Divine Office during the day and night, and the people have come to appreciate the hours of prayer spent by the Community of Sisters in their midst.

OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

There are many reasons why the month of September should salute Mary the Queen of Martyrs. The calendar for this month is studded with numerous saints, of the old Church and the new, who have shed their blood for our holy Faith. Conspicuous among them is the glorious band of Jesuit martyrs, Saint Isaac Jogues and his companions, who planted the cross in the Northland of this nation and sealed it with their blood. Into this picture of palms and crowns of glowing red are set, mosaic-like, the feasts of our Blessed Mother: her Nativity, her Holy Name, Our Lady of Ransom; but most significant of all is the feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, right in the center, on September fifteenth.

Our Blessed Mother a martyr? At first the title may seem strange. Did she not die a natural death, perhaps in the arms of Saint John, the Beloved Disciple? Recently, on the occasion of the solemn definition of her Assumption into heaven, this question was warmly discussed. The best answer given was, we believe, that of the Venerable Duns Scotus, who claims that Mary died by the martyrdom of love. This bears out what Saint Bernard of Clairvaux said of her: that Mary was a *martyr in anima*, a martyr in soul, or desire. Numerous arguments, illustrations and sayings of saints might be adduced to prove this thesis of Mary's martyrdom of love and desire—as if it really needed proof in view of the Seven Swords that pierced her Immaculate Heart. The present writer heard this topic discussed by a group of venerable friars. One of them, who seemed to have the least to say, yet said the most by constantly repeating in a subdued tone: "The suffering of Jesus was the suffering of His mother." No more need be said.

We are all familiar with the Seven Sorrows of Mary; in fact, we meditate on them as the beads of the Crown of the Seven Sorrows glide through our fingers. But the mere meditation is hardly effective unless it produce in our souls the stimulus of imitation. The great mistake that Religious often make is that they fail to apply to themselves the pearls of practical wisdom that their prayers contain. Prayer brings us nearer to God in thought and affection, but affection is a fleeting and flitting thing unless it be sustained by strenuous action. Let us keep this in mind as we proceed.

The story of Mary's *First Sorrow* is given in her own words, as recorded by Saint Luke (2, 25-35). Well may we imagine how her eyes gleamed with holy