

## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

As religious we are consecrated to God. When we pronounced our solemn and public declaration that we were thereafter to be considered the exclusive property of the Lord, that we belonged to ourselves no longer nor to any human creature. Thus our whole life took on a new direction toward God. Our entire physical and spiritual existence was to become a prayer, an act of worship offered to the God in Whom we live and move and have our being. This was to be our consecration, our holy vocation; and this objectively, what is meant by the term, "good intention".

It is our daily task to keep alive the flame of our consecration and to avoid anything that might cause it to burn less brightly. We must shun everything that might alter or shift the direction of our life away from God, everything that might cause us to act for reasons not ultimately related to His glory. To be consistently negligent in the things of God would mean that our consecration has become void and meaningless; it would mean that our whole spiritual life is disintegrating. With good reason, then, Saint Bonaventure urges us to ask, *I negligent about acting with the right intention?* In other words (and Saint Bonaventure himself clarifies the question) was I on my guard against acting out of impure motives? For we should not aim at the practically impossible of trying to elicit a proper act of good intention at every moment and before every trivial action. It is sufficient to have an habitual good intention; and this means simply to have the interior disposition or inclination to do everything for love of God, for His honor and glory, and for the salvation of our own soul and the souls of others. We must bear in mind also that having the right intention necessarily demands rejecting every contrary motive. In fact, it is toward the more negative aspect of acting through bad or imperfect motives that our attention should be concentrated.

Let us first ask ourselves the broad general question: why are we religious? Am I habitually conscious, for example, that I am a person whose whole life is consecrated to God, and that the purpose of my life is to devote myself entirely to God? Can I give a clear and unequivocal answer to the question: why am I a religious? Why am I living in a religious house? Am I really here because I love God and wish to render Him perfect love-service, because I wish to sanctify my soul through the perfect fulfilment of my religious vows? Or do I, perhaps, confess to other motives? Am I resigned to being a religious simply because I do not know what else I could be? Do I remain a religious out of fear of hurting those who love me and believe in me, or because I fear the censure

## OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

Since Holy Week usually falls within the Month of April, and in the middle of this blessed week, namely, on Holy Thursday, our Divine Saviour instituted the Sacrament of His Love, therefore this Month is properly dedicated to the Holy Eucharist. No Christian heart will ever feel that this dedication detracts in any way from the significance of the other sacred events that occurred during the first Holy Week. Far from it. Somehow the Last Supper assembles all the wonderful things that Jesus did, all the beautiful words He spoke, and all the bitter pains He suffered from Palm Sunday to Easter Morn. They were stormy and dreadful and heart-rending days, but when the storm was over and the Tragedy of Calvary was history a period of peaceful serenity set in, a serenity that is with us to this day, and its source is the hushed silence of the Sanctuary: *Behold, I am with you all days* (Matt. 28, 20). The Holy Grail is a fascinating story of lovers of art and poetry; to the Christian and especially to Virgins consecrated to the Divine Spouse it is a perennial source of spiritual beauty, strength and love.

To the sons and daughters of Saint Francis the Holy Eucharist was a cherished theme in the very cradle songs of the Order. Saint Francis dwells on this mystery lovingly in both his Rule and his Testament. With up-lifted arms he would daily attend the Holy Sacrifice; on his shoulders he carried stones and boards to rebuild chapels and churches; with his hands he baked the hosts for the altar. Saint Clare fled the world to live with her Eucharistic Lord under the same roof; and boldly she threw back the Saracen with the ciborium in her hands. No wonder the See of Peter singled out a simple lay brother from our ranks to be the Patron of all Eucharistic leagues and societies—Saint Paschal Baylon who, it is narrated, reverently opened his eyes in his coffin when the Sacred Host was raised at the Consecration during his funeral Mass.

In this conference let us concentrate on the Sacrament of Love which our Saviour bequeathed to us on the first Holy Thursday. The memory of this day brings us face to face with the farewell banquet, the Last Supper of Jesus and His friends. The Upper Room where it took place was in an unadorned, gray-walled building which stood where Mount Sion gently slopes to the south into the gruesome Valley of Hinnom. To the north lies the Holy City. Tonight it is astir with commotion, for this is the preparation of Israel's greatest festival. The gates are crowded and in the narrow streets and

on the housetops the foreign accents of pilgrims mingle with the vendors and innkeepers. Only the holy temple in the north-west is wrapped in solemn silence. Somehow the serenity of this majestic edifice seems dimmed. Is it because of the noise of the motley multitude that surges up from the Mount of Olives, or is it because there still hovers in the heavy air a hushed echo of the words that fell from the Saviour's lips, a few days before when He wept over the city and said: *If thou hadst known, in this thy day, even thou, the things that are for thy peace* (Luke 19, 42)? Instinctively our eyes turn aside to the Mount of Olives at whose base the venerable olive trees in Gethsemane seem to blend their crowned heads, as if sorrowing over some great impending calamity.

Meanwhile the Apostles who reclined around the table in the Upper Room were oblivious to all this. Their minds and eyes were riveted upon the sad but loving countenance of their Master. There was high tension all around them. They knew that something momentous was at hand, but as yet "they understood none of these things." At last the Master broke the painful silence, slowly and feelingly He said: *With great longing have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer* (Luke 22, 15). Human language is a weak instrument when it carries the thought of God. And we doubt if any of the Apostles, except perhaps the Disciple whom Jesus loved and who reclined at His breast, fully realized that the longing of which the Master spoke reached far back into the dark corridors of eternity, into the fathomless depths of the heart of God. That ineffable longing now at last found an outlet on this first Holy Thursday night. But perhaps the Apostles did sense, and Judas could not escape the mysterious impact, that at this moment the atmosphere of the Upper Room was charged with all the love that He holds.

Not without good reason did our fore-fathers call this sacred Maunday Thursday. For Maundy is derived from the Latin word *mandatum* which means a mandate, a command. *A new commandment I give you*, the Saviour had said only a while ago, *that you love one another: that as I have loved you, you also love one another* (John 13, 34). And again, *By this shall all men know that you are My Disciples, if you have love one for another* (John 13, 35).

It is this commandment of love that gives to Holy Thursday a unique position in the entire Ecclesiastical Year. True, it does not share the entrance

of Christmas Night, nor the jubilant Alleluias of Easter morning, nor the rousing wonders of the Feast of Pentecost. Rather, there is a hallowed solemnity about this day, a subdued joyfulness that hides away in the heart's recesses and dares not manifest itself, because a dear Friend bids us farewell, because this is Holy Week, and Holy Week means suffering, ignominy and a bitter death on Calvary.

Holy Thursday is the confluence of all the great rivers of God's love for man. It is the central point in God's own tapestry, where all the thousand threads that His love has woven meet together and write "finis" to the mystery that wafts to us from the everlasting hills: *My delights were to be with the children of men* (Prov. 8, 31). But what mortal pen can describe for us the mystery of love divine? Let me ask you to watch our solar system in the heavens and see how the Almighty by the law of gravity makes all the planets gravitate towards the center. What the law of gravity is to the universe that is the law of love in the realm of the spirit. Again, observe your own body and see how your blood streams through the entire vascular system and courses back again to the heart. The heart in the spiritual kingdom of the Saviour is His infinite love for men. But tonight He reposes all this love in the Holy Eucharist, Which from now on functions as the Heart of His Mystical Body, for it is from the Tabernacle that His graces are continually diffused through the seven arteries of our Sacraments to every part and every branch of the living Vine that is Christ.

Holy Thursday—a day of mystery! It blends the mystery of divine love with the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. And, as the former baffles us by its immensity, even so the latter startles us by its simplicity. But such is the way of God. He teaches us great things in a simple way, lest the magnitude of the divine crush the frail intelligence of man. The mystery of Bread and Wine mirrors the mystery of divine love, but only he who looks into that mirror with simple faith may hope to comprehend, with the Great Saint Paul and *with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge* (Eph. 3, 18-19). It is hard to look straight at the midday sun for its effulgence blinds the naked eye. But let the solar orb reflect into a tiny glass of water and you can admire with ease its brightness, beauty and splendor.

But why is it, sternly asks Saint Paul in his Epistle, that *many among you are infirm and weak, and many sleep* (I Cor. 11, 30)? Is it the weakness of

doubt, or the sleep of indifference? Tell me: is man's life doomed to doubting and searching and shifting about? Is there no solid ground for his feet? No steady staff for his hands? Must every new fancy of some philosopher, every little atom that our scientists discover, make him change his whole philosophy of life every time he picks up the morning paper? Blessed is he, the Master warns, *who is not scandalized in Me* (Luke 7:33).

And shall we be scandalized because the Infinite God dwells in a host and in a few drops of wine? Why then are we not scandalized when He makes the wheat grow in our fields and the vine in our vineyards? Why are we not scandalized when we see that out of a little seed there grows forth the lordly oak tree; or that on some distant hill-side a groove as small as the palm of the hand there issues forth a spring which soon expands into a mighty river whose waves playfully balance the steamers as if they were nut-shells and threaten fortresses and cities on its shores; or that a pebble loosened by a little bird on an alpine peak rolls down through the snow and in seconds becomes a crashing avalanche which buries forests and valleys and the habitations of men, leaving only desolation in its track?

Poor little man, when will he learn to understand? When will he learn to be humble and small that he may grasp the things that are really great? Will he ever understand the prayer that was spoken by the Greatest of all? Who said: *I praise Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to the little ones* (Luke 10, 21).

At a time such as this, when all earthly greatness, when our scientific and educational heritage, are in jeopardy, it is well for us to be numbered among the "these little ones." It is well for us that we have clung to the little cenacle on the venerable Mount Sion. It is well for us that we have fallen heirs to the Master's words of that first Holy Thursday night: *Do this in remembrance of Me* (Luke 22, 19); for this command has proven the key to all "the glory and the wealth" in Our Father's house (Ps. 111, 3). It has proven the strength of our martyrs, virgins and confessors; the learning of our Fathers and Doctors; the inspiration of our glorious liturgy, which called into service the sciences, the Fine Arts and the entire galaxy of their immortal masters.

In that Upper Room the Catholic Priesthood was born, and be it so that it is to the eternal credit of the priests of the Church that for these nineteen hundred

years they have guarded our sanctuaries and with adamant fortitude defended the original literal sense, which is the only true sense, of the Master's words: *This is My Body; this is My Blood*.

If Christianity has failed, it is because it has forsaken this "vein of living water" (Jer. 17, 13); it has rejected "this chalice of benediction" into which the Saviour had poured all the love that filled His Sacred Heart.

Was He mocking when He said on that sacred, solemn night: *A new commandment I give you, that you love one another*? Was that legacy just another scrap of paper, or was He not rather thinking in terms of a universal peace when He bequeathed to this dissolute world at least one outward sign and symbol of mutual love and peace and unity?

Did not the two disciples in the village of Emmaus on the very night of the Resurrection recognize their Risen Master "in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24, 30-31)? Did not the Fathers who stood by the cradle of the Church impart to her the name of the Holy Eucharist when they fondly called her the *agápe*, which is "the bond or union of love"? For as the grains of wheat, so they explained, are gathered from the fields of the earth; as the grapes are gathered from our vineyards, to be assembled into this sacred Bread and this chalice, even so are we who daily partake of this banquet to be united in an intimate bond of love.

The gift of Holy Thursday to the world is the gift of love. Need we wonder then that "from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof" the priests of our Church offer up every morning this "clean oblation," and that our Catholic people throughout the world hasten from their homes and workshops to receive this Bread of Angels? May this Sacred Host of love prove a bond of peace among all men of good will amid this terrific world struggle with all the hatred and jealousy and greed that go with it. Every word in that ancient Book on our altars, the Holy Missal, breathes forth the love of God and peace among men. It was Saint Gregory the Great who with his own hand inserted the prayer, *Da pacem Domine in diebus nostris*: grant peace, O Lord, in our days. The world was in turmoil then even as it is now. It is the eternal prayer of peace, the prayer of this sacrifice of love. It shall also be our prayer on this Holy Thursday and throughout the month of April.

New York

Fr. Thomas Plassmann, O. F. M.

## THE GOVERNANCE OF THE SOUL

(The De Regimine Animae of Saint Bonaventure)

ways of  
senses

1. First of all, soul of mine, you should in your need have the most devoted and hallowed awareness of the God of all goodness by believing a firm faith, meditating with a fixed mind and considering Him wonderfully with the piercing insight of reason.

2. You will have this most lofty awareness of the God of all goodness going forth from yourself and returning within yourself and mounting yourself, you believe, wonder at and laud with a faithful, devoted and divine intuition! His unmeasured power in creating all things from nothing, maintaining them in existence, His infinite wisdom in directing and ordering all things, His boundless justice in judging, and requiting all things; then you may truly sing that prophetic song: *The daughters of Juda rejoice because of thy judgments, O Lord, for thou art the most high Lord over all the earth: thou art exalted exceedingly above all gods* (Ps. 96, 8). You will have this awareness of the God of all goodness, if you marvel at, embrace and glorify His boundless mercy: His supremely gracious mercy in assuming our humanity, His supremely pitying mercy in enduring the cross and death, His supremely bountiful mercy in giving the Holy Spirit and instituting the Sacraments, since He most freely gives Himself in the Sacrament of the altar; you may sincerely sing this psalm: *The Lord is sweet to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works* (Ps. 144, 9). You will have the most hallowed awareness of the God of all goodness, if you heed, wonder at and laud His ineffable sanctity and chant with the Seraphim, *Holy, Holy, Holy* (Is. 6, 4). For He is *Holy* because He has sanctity in Himself so exquisitely and purely that He cannot possibly will or approve anything unless it is holy; secondly, He is *Holy* because He loves sanctity so perfectly in others that He cannot possibly withhold the gifts of grace from those who preserve true sanctity or deny them the rewards of glory; thirdly, He is *Holy* because He detests sanctity's opposites so bitterly that He cannot possibly refrain from detesting sins or leaving them unpunished. But if you are aware of Him in this way, you will sing with the giver of laws: *God, faithful and unerring, God, holy and just!* (Deut. 32,

<sup>1</sup> As distinguished from intuition. Contuition is the knowledge of His invisible attributes which are clearly seen—His everlasting power also and divinity—being understood through the things that are made (Ro. 1, 20)

After this, turn your eyes to the law of God, that commands you to show the All-Highest a humble heart, the All-Merciful a devoted heart, the All-Holiest a undefiled heart. You should show the All-Highest a humble heart through reverence in mind, through obedience in act, through honor in word and deed, that in accordance with the Apostolic rule and teaching, *you may do all things in the glory of God* (I Cor. 10, 31). You should show the All-Merciful a devoted heart through the persistence of fervent prayers, through the tasting of spiritual sweetness, through the co-operating with manifold graces, so that your heart continually goes up by the desert road towards God, *erect as a column of frankincense, all myrrh and incense* (Cant. 3, 6). You should show the All-Holiest a undefiled heart, so that in you may reign no shoddy acclaim for earthly pleasure, neither in your senses nor in your consent, nor in your affections, no relish for earthly coveting, no love for interior diseases, so that, free of every stain of sin, you will be able to sing with the psalmist, *jealously let my heart observe thy bidding; let me not hope in vain* (Ps. 118, 80).

Give heed then in earnest and see if you have observed all these things from your youth. But if you should find it so in your conscience, lay it not to yourself but to the gift of God, and give thanks to Him. But if you should find that once or many times in one of these counsels or in many, or perchance in all, you have failed seriously or lightly, through weakness or through ignorance or with sure knowledge, then *with unutterable groanings* labor to be reconciled to God and take upon yourself the spirit of truth to show Him yourself cleansed, so that you can in truth sing this psalm with the penitent: *See, I bow before the lash, ever mindful of my wretchedness* (Ps. 37, 18).

Now soul-sorrow should have two companions in order to be cleansing for the soul and reconciling to God; these two attendants are fear of the divine judgment and the impatience of interior yearning, so that you may recover the humble heart by fearing, the devoted heart by yearning, the undefiled heart by grieving. Fear the divine judgments, which are a great *deep* (Ps. 35, 7). Fear, insist, mightily, lest perchance howsoever you may be repentant none the less you may even then be displeasing to God; fear more mightily, lest even afterwards you offend God once more; fear still more mightily, lest in the end you withdraw from God and forever lack the light, forever burn in fire, never to be free of the worm unless through true repentance you depart in final grace; then you may sing with the Prophet: *Overcome my whole being with the fear of thee; I am adread of thy judgments* (Ps. 118, 120).

6. And yet again, grieve and be troubled for sins committed. Grieve mightily for the destruction of every good divinely given you; grieve more mightily your assault upon Christ Who was born and crucified for you; grieve still mightily for your contempt of God, Whose laws you have dishonored in transgression, Whose truth you have denied, Whose goodness you have offended and Whose entire creation you have disgraced, disfigured, deflected, who opposing the divine law, decrees, judgments and all the creatures God for your service you have prostituted their natures, desecrated the Scriptures, fanned the judgments, abused the mercies and wasted the gratuitous gifts the promised rewards. After considering these things well, *as for an only make loud lament; day and night let thy tears stream down; never rest; never let that eye weary of its task* (Jer. 6, 26; Lamen. 2, 18).

7. *Desire for* None the less <sup>DESIRE</sup> strive for the divine gifts, mounting by the flame of divine love to God, Who so patiently endures you, the sinner, so long has awaited you, so mercifully has guided you back to repentance, by conceding you forbearance, infusing grace in you, promising you the crown; strive indeed for the divine gifts, provided however you pay back to Him—or rather receive from Him when you return to Him—the sacrifice of a broken spirit, a heart that is humbled, contrite (Ps. 50, 19) through bitter compunction, a true confession, a full satisfaction. <sup>DESIRE</sup> Strive, I repeat, mightily for acceptance by God through the abundant indwelling of the Holy Spirit, strive more mightily for conformity to God through the deliberate imitation of the Crucified Christ, strive still more mightily for understanding of God through an unclouded vision of the Eternal Father, so that in very truth you may sing with the prophet: *My soul thirsts for God, the strong, the living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?* (Ps. 41, 3).

8. Furthermore, in order to preserve in your inmost self this spirit of sorrow and yearning, train your outer self in modesty in all things, in justice in all things, in piety in all things, so that according to the teaching of the Apostle, *rejecting ungodliness and worldly lusts, we may live temperately, justly and piously in this world* (Tit. 2, 12). Train yourself in modesty in all things that according to the teaching of the Apostle *your moderation may be known to all men* (Phil. 4, 5). Train yourself in the moderation of frugality in food and dress, in sleeping and vigils, in resting and working, that you may be prodigal in nothing. Train yourself in the moderation of discipline through the wise observance of silence and speaking, of sadness and joy, of meekness and severity, according as the opportunity demands and right reason prompt. Train yourself in the modesty of repute through the regulating, ordering

adjusting of acts, movements, postures, dress and attire, members and senses, according as moral goodness and regular observance demands, so that you may fittingly be of that number to whom the Apostle speaks: *Let all things in you be done properly and in order* (I Cor. 14, 40).

Train yourself also in justice that this teaching may truly be applied to you: *Take thy crown, in the name of faithfulness, and mercy, and justice; thy own wonderful deeds shall be thy passport* (Ps. 44, 5). Train yourself in the whole of justice through a zeal for the divine honor, through obedience to the divine law, through desire for the salvation of your brother. Train yourself in an ordered justice through obedience to superiors, through sociability to equals, through correction to inferiors. Train yourself in perfect justice so that you assent to every truth, promote goodness, oppose evil in the mind as well as in word and deed, doing nothing to anyone that you do not wish to be done to yourself, denying nothing to anyone that you wish to be bestowed upon yourself; do these things so that you may be the perfect imitator of those to whom it is said that *unless your justice exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5, 20.).

Finally, train yourself in piety, because, as the Apostle says, *piety is profitable in all respects, since it has the promise of the present life, as well as of that which is to come* (I Tim. 4, 8). Train yourself in the piety of divine worship by discharging the canonical hours attentively, devoutly and reverently, by confessing and grieving for your daily sins, by receiving the Eucharistic Sacrament at the stated times, and by hearing Mass every day. Train yourself in the piety of salvation of souls, now by helping them through frequent prayers, now through oral teaching, now through the stimulus of example, so that *he who hears may say: come* (Apo. 22, 17). This should be done wisely in such a way that you do not incur the expense of your own salvation. Train yourself in the piety of relieving bodily need by patient ministration, friendly consolation, humble, cheerful and compassionate assistance, so that you may fulfill the divine law of which the Apostle speaks: *Bear the burdens of one another's failings; then you will be fulfilling the law of Christ* (Gal. 6, 2.).

I believe that the remembrance of the Crucified has above all the greatest power to accomplish all these things; then let your Beloved like a cluster of myrrh abide always between the breasts of thy soul (Cant. 1, 12). This may He deign to bestow upon thee, Who is blessed forever and ever. Amen.

## SAINT BENEDICT THE MOOR

The catholicity of the Church has been evident in all ages and among all people. The command of Christ to His Apostles, "Going forth teach all nations," has echoed and reechoed down the centuries throughout all lands. It is Divine Wisdom saying that Heaven is for all men—all men, whether they be rich or poor, learned or unlearned, black or white. The year 1807 gave tangible proof of the position of Christ's Church on the race question, for in that year Pope Pius VII amid the splendors of Saint Peter's announced to the whole world that one of its "little" ones is a saint. One whom the world considered "little" became "great" in the eyes of God. It was the canonization of a poor, unlearned, colored Franciscan lay brother, Saint Benedict the Moor. Here was the proof that sanctity knows no color line; that sanctity transcends worldly knowledge and that sanctity ignores riches. Class distinction, learning, wealth and all natural endowments melt in the brilliant sun of sanctity. Simply because an unlearned, colored man realized the truth that sanctity proves God's grace and made cooperation in that grace, we today can proudly boast of another Franciscan Saint. Because sanctity is what really counts, we can mention in the same breath with the eloquent and learned Doctors of the Church, Saint Bonaventure and Saint Anthony, the name of a simple and unlettered Saint Benedict the Moor.

The holy Negro, as Saint Benedict the Moor is often called, was born a slave on a farm in San Filadelfo, Sicily, in the year 1524. From a worldly viewpoint it would appear that Benedict had no glorious future in store for him. His parents certainly did not live as man and wife until their owner, Vincenzo Manasseri, promised that their first born would be free. Divine Providence was already at work for Benedict was to be slave of no one save God. Christopher and Diana, his parents, were deeply pious and Benedict was early instructed in the fundamental truths of the Faith. These truths were not only learned but also lived by the holy Negro. Benedict's industry in the field won for him a special friendship with the owner of the farm, who held him up as a model for the other workmen and slaves. This fact in addition to his black skin and evident holiness was to prove a trial to Benedict—a trial well borne and rewarded.

One day, Jerome Lanza, who had given up considerable wealth to lead the life of a hermit, happened upon Benedict and his fellow workers. As usual

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Benedict was the butt for the derision of the others. As the taunts mounted the bronze Benedict merely smiled. Jerome was immediately impressed with the youth's patience, and turning to the mockers said, "You joke now with this big fellow but in a few years you will hear of his fame." And to Manasseri, the owner of the farm, he continued, "I recommend this young Benedict to you because he will join me and will become a religious". These words rang in Benedict's ears for he, as well as all the hearers, respected Jerome because of his reputation for sanctity.

The seed of Benedict's vocation had been planted. Who will ever know the thoughts of young Benedict as he trudged home to the humble hut of his parents that evening? Who will ever fully realize the prayer and meditation that nourished the divine seed of vocation? Jerome had uttered his prophecy and it was not too long before he was to see its fulfillment. It was only a few days later that Benedict took leave of all that was his. Having sold his pair of oxen and bid farewell to his parents, Benedict departed for Saint Dominica's to become a hermit in the community which Jerome Lanza had founded. This community of hermits obtained the permission of Pope Julius III to follow the Rule of Saint Francis to the letter and was allowed to take a fourth vow of perpetual Lenten fast. At the time that Saint Benedict entered, it was considered the strictest community in the Church. The austerity of the life seemed to agree with Benedict and he made great strides in sanctity. It was not long before the young novice was an exemplar for the rest of the small community. His confreres recognized his sanctity and looked upon him as an angel. After five years the youthful Negro took his solemn vows as a Franciscan hermit. It was then that the peace of the hermitage was interrupted; for through Benedict's intercession several miracles were performed. It was then a matter of time before the days of prayers and nights of meditation of the hermitage were disturbed by throngs of people seeking the good Saint's advice and help. The hermits were forced to move on in hopes of once again finding a solitude in which they could follow the original schedule of their life. Since they had practically no personal property, moving merely meant finding a new secluded location with some caves. Two by two the hermits filed from Saint Dominica's to Pineda, another solitary place. But here too, they were besieged by many visitors; some coming out of curiosity, others for help. Another location atop a bleak inaccessible mountain called Mancusa was decided upon. Because this locale was fifteen miles from Palermo and near the town of Carini the hermits felt assured that their mountain

top abode would bring them the solitude they required for their form of life. One day, however, Benedict was sent by Jerome on an errand to Carini. On the way he was approached by a woman of the town who pleaded with him to help her in her affliction. For years she had suffered from cancer which the doctors had declared incurable. At her request Benedict made the sign of the cross over her and she was instantly cured. There was nothing left to do but move on again! This time the small band of hermits moved to Mount Pellegrino, thirteen miles from Palermo. It was here that Jerome Lanza died and the task of superintending the community fell upon Benedict. Even though no one desired the retired life more than Benedict he could never find the heart to refuse those who sought him. His broad smile and kind word of consolation assured the poor and the afflicted that they were welcome for he realized that in helping them he was doing God's will.

In 1562, after having spent 17 years in rigorous penances and mortification as a hermit, Benedict obediently complied with the order of Pope Pius IV that the hermits join an approved Order of the Church and abandon the solitary life. His first thoughts were to do God's will and to ask the Blessed Mother's assistance. For this purpose he retired to the cathedral church of Palermo to pray. It was here, kneeling before a statue of the Blessed Virgin, that he was told by her to join the Reformed Franciscans. Thanking God and His Blessed Mother for this assistance Benedict set out for the Convent of Saint Mary of Jesus outside the city of Palermo.

The friars received him with open arms for they realized that with such a holy person as a member of their community God would surely bless their work. The first three years as a member of the Reformed Friars Benedict passed in the Convent of Saint Anna of Guiliana, a house of solitude and recollection. Here his life was a hidden one of penance. He was then called by his superior to the Convent of Saint Mary of Jesus where he was to spend the remainder of his life. The next twenty-four years found him serving in turn as cook, Guardian, Vicar, and Assistant Master of Novices. Of all the offices, Saint Benedict preferred that of cook and after serving his term as Guardian requested to be returned to the kitchen. Throughout the years in religion Benedict perfected himself in all the virtues.

At his profession Benedict nailed himself to the cross by means of the three holy vows. Into his right hand the golden nail of poverty was driven to make

him truly poor; into his left hand the crystal nail of chastity was forced to give up his entire body to God; into his feet the silver nail of obedience was pressed in order to return his will to God. The years he spent on the cross of religion saw those nails sinking ever deeper into his flesh so that by the time he was to be taken down from this cross at death, to rise gloriously to his place in Heaven, the nails had been completely driven in. In the meantime his heart had been pierced with love—the greatest wound of all. He had made the great sacrifice of a perfect religious and was now to receive the perfect reward.

True to his Franciscan heritage, Saint Benedict had a profound love for the virtue of poverty. It was his conscientious observance of poverty that made him truly a Franciscan. An incident which occurred while he was cook in the convent is worth relating. It was the custom of the convent that the clerics help with the dishes. The young clerics were chiefly concerned with getting the task finished as quickly as possible. In their haste they very often disregarded the morsels of food left on the plates and washed them off. To see this pained Benedict. He constantly reminded them not to throw the wastes away, for every scrap was the blood of those who had given the food to the friars on the quest. Many of the clerics were amused at what they considered a pious fancy and continued their practice. One day Benedict gathered them around the sink into which they had thrown the morsels and carefully gathered all the scraps into his work-worn hands. Gently he squeezed what he had gathered up and slow drops of blood trickled forth from the scraps! God had manifested His pleasure at Benedict's high regard for poverty!

Poverty made Saint Benedict truly happy. After working hard about the monastery during the day, in the evening he would slowly make his way to his cell. Here too was poverty. A sack of straw served as his bed and the only other furnishing in his room was a cross drawn on the wall in chalk. This was what Benedict often referred to as his *palazzo*. It was in this palace where Benedict, the humble Negro brother, conversed with God. It was here that Benedict recaptured the treasure of poverty that his father, Saint Francis, had discovered, for he found the poverty of the cross—a cross which he happily clung to all the days of his life.

The really poor man trusts in Divine Providence. On one occasion Benedict and three other friars were travelling to Girgenti and as usual relied on

Divine Providence to supply their needs while on the journey. After walking day the friars were exhausted and hungry. With little hope of food to still pangs of hunger the friars asked Benedict what they should do. Benedict smiled and told them to trust in God. At that moment a man on horseback approached the small group and proved to be a ministering angel in the person of Vito Polizzi. Noticing that the friars were weak and tired he offered biscuits and wine which they thankfully accepted. When they had eaten, Benedict returned what little remained to Vito, who put them in a bag and continued his journey. When it came time for Vito to refresh himself he had little more than the scanty remains of the friars' repast. With a shrug of his shoulders, translated "It's better than nothing", Vito opened the bag and was amazed to find that instead of the few mere biscuits he had put there after the friars had eaten, it contained the full amount he had packed early that morning.

Although he loved the golden nail of poverty, Saint Benedict treated the crystal nail of chastity to such a degree that some were wont to call him scrupulous or prudish. Benedict always had a ready answer for this charge. "Even in what seems mere politeness, the devil always makes a gain for himself and often deceives a person." His advice to all was: "Temptations of the senses are not overcome by fighting but by flight". It is related that on occasions when grateful women wished to kiss his hands Benedict would let the sleeve of his habit fall over the hand so that they kissed the habit instead of the hand. In this way the appreciation and thankfulness was shown the habit of poverty instead of the person of Benedict.

It is perhaps the silver nail of obedience which merited for Saint Benedict the greatest earthly joy, for it was while practicing this virtue that Benedict received a privilege accorded only to the most perfect. One day while praying in the Church before an image of the Blessed Mother, Benedict received the privilege of holding in his coarse black hands the tender body of the Christ Child Himself. Tradition tells us that as he held the Infant the bell summoned the community to lunch and ever mindful of the *Vox Dei* Benedict handed the Infant back to His Blessed Mother. This tradition is today immortalized in stone in the Church of Saint Mary of Jesus, where a statue depicts the Child being held by the Virgin as though falling from her arms.

It was obedience that made Benedict take upon himself the task of superior.

It was obedience that made him abandon the life of a hermit and join an Order; it was obedience that made Benedict a true religious and eventually a Saint of the Church.

Benedict's life of penance and labor began to tell on his strength and he died in the 64th year of his life on April 4, 1589. Those whom Benedict had helped during life did not forget him but continued their prayers that through his intercession their requests might be answered. Numerous miracles were performed through him and devotion to him grew apace. Three years after his death his tomb was opened and his body was found to be incorrupt and gave off a heavenly fragrance. King Philip III of Spain provided a shrine for the body of Saint Benedict in which it was placed in 1611. The devotion had then already spread from Sicily to Spain, Portugal, and into the Spanish possessions in the New World, Mexico, South and Central America. He was beatified in 1743 by Pope Benedict XIV and the solemn declaration of canonization was issued by Pope Pius VII in 1807.

A colored man heard God's call to perfection and answered that call. A colored man joyfully fastened himself to the cross of religion with the nails of poverty, chastity, and obedience. A colored man loved God with his whole heart and mind. God looked down upon this whirling world and saw not black skin but the white soul of Benedict. That holy soul pleased God and was rewarded with eternal happiness. That infant born of slave parents made the greatest possible success of his life—he became a Saint!

Washington, D. C.

Fra. Kenneth Malone, O. F. M.



## CORRECTION

In the March issue of the *CORD* it was stated that the Sacred Congregation of Rites raised the Feasts of Saint Anthony and of Saint Bonaventure to the rank of double of the second class. This is an error. These two feasts are now doubles of the first class.



## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

*According To Saint Bonaventure*

It is impossible to live the religious life without prayer. "Indeed," Saint Bonaventure, "a religious who is tepid and weak in devotion, who does not pray assiduously, is not only wretched and useless but in the eyes of God is a dead soul in a living body." We know that the life of our Seraphic Father Francis was one continuous prayer, one uninterrupted act of loving and praising God. The solitudes into which he retired for prayer and contemplation were most dear to him, for he had learned from our Divine Master Himself to be in communion with God in the seclusion of mountain and desert. The life of prayer is synonymous with the life of sanctity. Hence it is absolutely imperative for us to keep alive in our soul at least an earnest desire for the life of prayer. It is necessary not only for our sanctification but even for our perseverance in the religious state. Saint Bonaventure, therefore, would have us ask ourselves:

### WAS I NEGLIGENT IN PRAYER?

We need not consider here the anomalous state of the religious who lives wholly without prayer; let us seriously examine our attitude toward prayer. For example: Do I love prayer, both private and common? Am I really convinced that prayer is as necessary for my soul as breath is for my body? Do I long for the time of prayer as time spent in communion with the God I love and adore? On the contrary, do I discharge the duty of praying coldly, mechanically, distractedly? Do I regard prayer as a burdensome obligation imposed by my Rule? Do I seek to be excused from prayer on the slightest pretexts? If I am legitimately excused from attending a certain exercise, do I always try to make up the time privately?

In order to prevent scruples on this point, we must understand that a dispensation from a certain prayer may be complete; that is, it may do away entirely with the obligation of supplying for the prayer privately. There is, however, an obligation to make up certain prayers, for example, the Office, if the Constitutions or other sources of authority so require, even though a dispensation from attending the recitation in common has been granted. In the first case the prayers must not be made up; it would not be even an imperfection to omit them entirely. In the second case, however, there still remains the obligation of either making up the prayer privately or obtaining a dispensation from that obligation.

With this in mind, we may ask ourselves more specifically: Do I see dispensations from prayer only when there is real necessity—work that must be done, health, or some other cogent reason? Have I allowed myself to be misled by the false maxim that work always substitutes for prayer, and have I accordingly, omitted formal prayer on the pretext that work takes its place? Have I even gone so far as to maintain that work is more profitable than prayer? Have I neglected prayer because of study, unmindful of the warning of our Seraphic Father that study must never be allowed to diminish in us the spirit of prayer? Have I sought dispensations from prayer because of study, and yet found time for unnecessary conversations, entertainments, social affairs? Do I realize that study unaccompanied by prayer is dangerous? When I have been unavoidably absent from a community exercise, do I make serious efforts to find time during the day to supply those prayers? Is it really a cross for me when circumstances beyond my control necessitate dispensations from prayer? Do I pray for the true Franciscan spirit of prayer, the passion for prayer that makes saints?

Superiors should question themselves as to whether they provide those entrusted to their care with sufficient time for prayer. Are those who are prevented from their duty from attending the common exercises given time to make up these prayers? In the matter of granting dispensations from prayer, is the honor of God and welfare of the soul given first consideration, and only then the good of the community?

The second general point for our examen should concern our interior disposition for prayer. Here we should ask ourselves: Am I always in readiness for prayer? When the bell summons me to a community exercise, do I realize that God Himself is calling me? Do I respond to that call with the alacrity born of love? Do I prepare myself interiorly for the sublime act of worship I am about to perform? Do I try to keep in the presence of God?

A third general question might concern our exterior conduct during prayer. When we pray we are putting ourselves, so to speak, in the presence of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; we are addressing ourselves to the King of kings, the Lord of lords. But as Franciscans, we should also realize that we are in the presence of our loving Father. Hence we should avoid the two extremes of rigidity and carelessness. To conduct ourselves in a manner that smacks of a military academy would hardly be consistent with the ideal of loving God as our Father. On the other hand, an easy familiarity or slovenliness in prayer would be

contrary to the filial reverence we owe God. Let us, accordingly, ask ourselves: Does my exterior conduct reflect my interior disposition at prayer? Is my posture in itself an act of worship? Do I make every effort to preserve the beauty, order and regularity in performing the prescribed bows, in genuflecting, kneeling, in sitting and standing? In reciting the Office, do I strive for a pleasant tone of voice? Do I make an honest effort to maintain the given pitch? Do I try to pronounce the words clearly and correctly, and in unison with the others, so as to bring out the full grandeur of the sacred texts? Is my genuflection before the altar and before the exposed Blessed Sacrament really an act of adoration? Is it really a prayer when I bow my head at the name of Jesus? When I make the Sign of the Cross? When I take holy water? Or must I confess that these have become merely mechanical functions which I perform thoughtlessly?

Then there is the matter of distractions at prayer. In the realization that we are only human, weak and unstable creatures at best, we should not be greatly disturbed about distractions. They are practically unavoidable. With the aid of a special grace from God and until we have reached a high degree of prayer, it is humanly impossible to pray without distractions. Consequently, it is particularly enlightening to our confessor when we accuse ourselves of having been distracted at prayer. We should accuse ourselves only of wilful distraction or of negligence in guarding against, or of reluctance in banishing, alien thoughts. Our examen should include such questions as: Do I honestly try to avoid distractions by keeping my mind occupied, in so far as possible, with God and the things of God? Do I unnecessarily expose myself to distractions, for example, by listening to the radio or indulging in secular reading just before going to prayer? Do I wilfully and deliberately entertain distracting thoughts, or toy with them even after I have become aware of their presence? Do I make a good preparation for prayer by putting aside my plans, my work, my worries? Do I try to forget self and concentrate only on loving and worshipping God?

In regard to distractions we should also consider our neighbor. For example, we might ask ourselves: Do I avoid disturbing peculiarities in reciting the Office? Do I avoid unnecessary noises during community exercises? In reciting the Office, do I strive for uniformity with the others, or do I follow my own whims? Do I try to force others to follow my lead? Do I avoid giving offense to others by loud coughing, clearing the throat, and similar crudities? Am I

usually reverent? Even though for Franciscans, especially the novices, an occasional smile during the recitation of the Office could hardly be considered blameworthy, we should do well to ask ourselves whether we do not sometimes overstep the limits of reverence and propriety.

After considering these more general points, we should go on to examine our attitude toward particular devotions and prayers. For example: How do I assist at Mass? Do I unite the sacrifice of my life and everything that I am—all my acts, all my sufferings—with that of Christ in order that I may be sacrificed in Christ and sanctified through Him? When I approach the Table of the Lord, do I strive to make the best possible preparation? Do I receive the Body of Christ with all the reverence and love I am capable of? Do I try to make a fervent thanksgiving? The best possible preparation for Holy Communion, of course, is the Mass itself, and we should try to receive Communion during Mass if at all possible. If our duties are such that we have little or no time for preparation or thanksgiving, we should offer our work for this intention.

In regard to performing the liturgical functions, priests may well look into their manner of saying Mass. Do I, for example, strive to carry out the prescribed ceremonial not only with interior devotion but also with dignity, grace and reverence? Do I realize that my appearance at the altar has a definite effect on those present; that I can distract and scandalize, or stir and inspire them? Religious in general should examine themselves on other points, for instance: Do I pray with the Church? Do I live the liturgy? What do the ecclesiastical feasts mean to me? Do I really take part in the liturgical year, try to conform to its spirit? Do I try to enter fully into the practices prescribed for the holy seasons?

Finally, there are our private prayers to be considered. Some prayers are prescribed by our Constitutions or by our superiors, for example, the rosary. Others we are free to add. Prescribed prayers, however, always take precedence over private devotions. In regard to this point we may ask: Am I faithful in saying the rosary daily, as prescribed by the Church for all priests and religious? Do I faithfully observe the practice of certain prayers I have imposed upon myself? Have I kept up the practice of little prayers learned in the novitiate? Do I pray not only for myself but for others—for the Church, for our Order, for the whole world? But we must not exaggerate the duty of praying for others; that is, we need not say special prayers for every person or for every intention we wish to remember. A general memento suffices. Those especially

who have reached a high degree of contemplative prayer should not be too concerned about various private prayers for various intentions. Sister Constance, a saintly Capuchin nun (+ 1946), once complained to Our Lord: "My Lord, I cannot pray." She received the answer: "Tell me, what prayer could you pray more beautiful than this: 'Jesus, Mary, I love you; save souls!'" At another time she was told: "Do you know what Jesus in the Tabernacle does? He loves the Father and He loves souls. That is all. He does not know the beautiful words, nothing of that kind. There is only silence and love."

Let us strive to obtain this spirit of prayer.

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O.S.B.



The charity whereby Jesus Christ loved us drew Him from heaven to earth. His charity was the rope that held Him against the pillar when He was so cruelly scourged. He loved us more than He loved Himself because He willed that we might live, willed to be sold to redeem us from the devil's power. He gave His soul and His body for us. It is charity that shows whether one is a true disciple of Christ, for He said that *by this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*. It is charity that makes man the son and disciple of Christ.

Saint Bonaventure



That which is more contrary to the salvation of souls than all other things in the world, that which is the cause of all evils in the world, the cause of wars, of all plagues, of all sickness, of all sins men commit and of all the pain and harm that come upon souls and bodies, is ignorance. *Quia omnis peccatum ignorat*. All sinners are ignorant. What was to blame that Adam sinned? Ignorance. What caused the death of Christ? Ignorance. All the sins and evils that have ever happened in the world have come from ignorance. Therefore we shall use the strength to conquer this beast of ignorance; and, every day we shall give it a beating. We cannot give place to light, if we do not chase away ignorance. Then there will be light.

Saint Bernardine of Siena

## OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

The oldest literary monuments of pagan antiquity bear witness that the inhabitants of this planet of ours have always welcomed and cherished the month of May as the springtime of life and of all that is beautiful, noble and uplifting. It seems that heaven is nearer the earth than at any other time during the natural year. The Christian Religion was quick to perceive that the forces of nature stem from the same divine Source as the gift of grace, and that the vigorizing light that surrounds us in May time, even as *every good gift and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights* (James 1, 17). With this thought in mind Mother Church has skillfully set up the ancient "Ladder of Jacob" to teach her children that if they believe, they can bring heaven down to earth and can admire and enjoy the beauties of this earth and the work of Creation in the light and by the pages of the book of revelation.

And without a moment's hesitation all her children give vent with one voice to what is nearest to their heart, namely, to dedicate this beautiful month to the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope (Eccli. 24, 24), the Virgin Mother of our Savior, the Mother of all Christians, and in particular of the consecrated spouses of her Divine Son. It was indeed a happy thought the many Religious communities have adopted the custom of assigning to each Sister the middle name of Mary.

But when we speak of the devotion to Mary, of Marian cults and Marian festivities, the Order of Saint Francis boldly marches to the very front. Little Porziuncula near Assisi was the favorite spot that Saint Francis chose for his dwelling because it bore the title, "Saint Mary of the Angels." Devotion to the Mother of God was the cherished treasure that he bequeathed to all his spiritual children. His illustrious son, the Seraphic Doctor, was the first to order the ringing of the Angelus so that the world might never forget that Mary the Virgin gave birth to the Savior of the world. Surely we are all aware of the fact that the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception was victoriously championed by the Franciscan School, in particular by the Venerable John Duns Scotus, known as the Subtle and Marian Doctor, whose early promotion to the rank of Blessed and Saints we are certain Mary Immaculate will bring about. And when recently our Holy Father saw fit to declare as a dogma of faith Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven, he singled out four great Franciscan teachers

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