

CHARTER

of

CHARITY



COMMUNITY OF SAINT JOHN

This Charter of Charity
intends to express the spirit which unites
in one same evangelical family
the Congregation of the Brothers of Saint John,
the contemplative sisters
and the apostolic sisters,
as well as the secular oblates.
This charter also seeks to indicate
the orientations that are proper to this spirit,
firstly, by clarifying what is common
to all these communities,
then by specifying what characterizes each one of them.

This charter wants to remain
as close as possible to the Gospel of Saint John,
which is indeed the source
where one must always return to
in order to live by the paternity of Saint John.
It is a question of understanding
what characterizes the grace proper to Saint John
in order to live for today by this same mystery for Jesus and the
Church



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| PROLOGUE | 1 |
| The “Little Scroll” | 1 |
| The Thousand Years | 2 |
| The Two Witnesses | 3 |
| Fraternal Charity | 4 |
| I. THE SPIRIT of the FAMILY of SAINT JOHN | 6 |
| 1. The Eucharist | 7 |
| The Multiplication of the Loaves | 7 |
| The Bread of Life | 9 |
| The Murmurings and the Promise of the Eucharist | 10 |
| The First Break-up | 12 |
| The Fulfillment of the Promise | 13 |
| <i>The Washing of the Feet</i> | 13 |
| <i>The Institution of the Eucharist</i> | 17 |
| 2. The Wisdom of the Cross and the Gift of Mary | 21 |
| The Gift of Mary to John | 21 |
| The Cry of Thirst | 25 |
| The Piercing of the Heart | 27 |
| The Sepulcher | 28 |
| The Covenant with Peter | 29 |
| Jesus’ Secret Bond with John | 32 |
| Docility to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete | 34 |
| From the Compassion to the Assumption | 36 |
| II. THE LIFE of the FAMILY: its Diverse Communities | 40 |
| 1. The Brothers and the Priests | 41 |
| 2. The Contemplative Sisters | 43 |
| 3. The Apostolic Sisters | 46 |
| 4. The Oblates | 47 |
| III. APPENDICES | 50 |
| 1. The Immaculate Conception | 50 |
| 2. Mary’s Consecration | 59 |
| 3. Mary’s Divine Maternity | 68 |

PROLOGUE

In his Gospel, Saint John unites the mystery of the Word and the mystery of the wounded heart of the Lamb. He gives us this ultimate perspective in superabundance. The Gospel of Saint John is in a certain sense unnecessary, and at the same time it is super-necessary if we understand that the new covenant is a covenant of love, thus a contemplative covenant. The Gospel of Saint John is the contemplative Gospel, the “*little scroll*”¹ given for the great struggles and for the surpassing of ourselves which consists in going all the way, “*until the end*,”² without stopping at ourselves.

We actually see in the Book of Revelation that, at the time of the greatest struggles in the Church’s history and in our history, between the sixth and the seventh trumpet, there is an expression of God’s mercy; and that we have a particular help from God so that we may be victorious in these great struggles. This particular help is symbolically expressed by the “little scroll” and the two witnesses. Now the Gospel of Saint John clearly shows us how these two witnesses – Mary and the Eucharist – are, moreover, linked to each other in an amazing way.

We must often reread chapters 10, 11, and 20 of the Book of revelation, because they shed great light upon the vocation of the Congregation of Saint John.

THE “LITTLE SCROLL”

We can indeed say that the “little scroll,”³ sweet to the palate but incredibly painful to the stomach, is the Gospel of

¹ Rev. 10.

² Jn. 13: 1.

³ Rev. 10.

Saint John. Yet Saint John's Gospel was not yet written at the time when he wrote the Book of Revelation! Therefore, we need to go further. Isn't the little scroll the mystery of Jesus' presence and the mystery of the Cross? The mystery of the Cross always implies these two aspects, for it is the strongest presence of Jesus – since He is totally given at the Cross, even more so than at Bethlehem. At Bethlehem, He is given in tenderness and in love. The Cross is a pure gift of love, and the Eucharist is there to help us understand this. In the Eucharist, it is *immediately* the Cross which is given to us in the first place, and through the Cross, glory. It is the sacrament of love in the strongest sense.

THE THOUSAND YEARS

The little scroll, pleasant to the taste but bitter to the stomach, is the mystery of the Cross, the mystery of the Eucharist, the mystery of our Christian life. It is actually in our Christian life that we have the greatest sweetness, the follies of God's sweetness, and follies of joy which are sometimes difficult to live because we are afraid of them. We are also afraid of pain although would be normal: it is the Cross! Whereas joy... Well, joy is found in the intimate depths of Mary heart at the Cross, it is in John's inmost depths at the Cross, it is in the inmost depths of our hearts; it must always exist.⁴

⁴ A marvelous blossoming occurs in Mary's heart at the Cross; there is the flowering of her divine love for Jesus instilling a fullness of joy in her. There is Jesus' smile on the Cross, there is Mary's smile at the Cross, and perhaps this is what the Congregation of Saint John must bear at the end of this 20th century. In the 12th century, Christ was portrayed smiling on the Cross, but Mary was never shown smiling. Perhaps it is us who must manifest this smile of Mary by our life – smiling through tears as she did at la Salette – expressing Mary's joy through sorrow and tears. This is what we must live by. This is somewhat reserved for those who want to enter very deeply into the mystery of Mary, desiring to be very close to Saint John in order to really receive him their father.

John received Mary's smile at the Cross. Mary's smile for Jesus at the Cross was for John, in order for John to receive it. The moment Jesus says to Mary, "Woman, behold your son," she looks at John through her tears and with a

Is this not the meaning of the “thousand years” which the Book of revelation speaks⁵ of where the devil is unable to penetrate? Millenarianism, condemned when taken in a temporal manner, is to be understood in a purely interior way: they are the thousand years of joy – a thousand years is employed to express intensity, force, and to signify that it is the direct fruit of contemplation, beyond the struggles.

We must ask the Virgin Mary to teach us how to make use of our struggles, accepting without letting them suppress joy, without letting them suppress silence, without letting them suppress the presence. The whole apostolic life is in a struggle and the devil tries, through the struggles, to distract us from giving our entire selves to the contemplative life.

The Holy Spirit wants to accomplish in us something much more profound which is beyond the struggle. This might be the meaning of these “thousand years.” Since the mystery of Jesus, peace has already come upon earth. There is peace which is already victorious and is present in the very depths of our heart, there is something which has been definitively won for God and is a mystery of joy – a zone of peace where the devil cannot penetrate.

We must ask that this joy might be *victorious* throughout all the struggles. We must ask for this joy to remain in us and be stronger than anything else. It is the sign how the love of the Father is victorious in us and how it is communicated to us out of pure mercy. It is the sign that this love is greater than anything else, that it envelopes and carries us. It is the Father’s prevenient

smile. She gives John the smile she gives to Jesus; and the smile she gives to John is the one we must receive so that, even in the midst of suffering and struggles, even when we are somewhat crushed, we might (still) have this smile of love for Jesus, for Mary, for our Brothers. *The smile is the expression of the victory of love.* When love is victorious, it blossoms into a smile – a virginal smile since it is a virginal love – a love that assumes everything, is welcoming (receptive), and a gift.

⁵ Rev. 20.

love for Mary in her mystery of the Immaculate Conception, a love He extends to all of His children. It is therefore the mercy of the Father and of Mary towards each one of us. Doesn't Mary wrap all her children in the mantle of the victorious Queen?

THE TWO WITNESSES

We must live by this mercy, and we must live by this joy (both) given to us by means of the Eucharist. But at the same time (and inseparably), we must live by the Cross, and the two witnesses⁶ are linked with this. Mary lives by joy and is herself source of joy, she is “cause of our joy,” and at the same time, she is the one who is given to us in her mystery of Compassion – from which we can be united to the Cross in a much hidden and totally divine manner. Thanks to Mary, we are more united to the Cross than if she were not there since she lived by the mystery of the Cross in a unique manner.

The “little scroll” thus sheds light on the two witnesses, and these two witnesses help us to understand our Johannine vocation.

These two witnesses possess a prodigious efficacy, and yet God allows the Dragon, the Beast to kill them. These two must accept an interior martyrdom (for this can only pertain to an interior martyrdom). And they are left exposed in public, they are not buried. This shows that if we desire to be faithful to the end, we will necessarily be calumniated, be the object of the most terrible scandal without the ability for defending ourselves – not able to be buried but left on the public square.⁷

If the mysteries of the “little scroll” and of the two witnesses are linked in a very particular way to Saint John and to all of the sons and daughters of Saint John who must all live by the same mystery, then we understand that this is a marvelous

⁶ Rev. 11.

⁷ Rev. 11:9.

grace that God has given to us. This is not all due to our merits, not due to our intelligence, not due to our virtues: this is all pure gratuitousness. And it is a marvelous grace to belong to Saint John, to be linked to him as our father, living by his paternity.

FRATERNAL CHARITY

In the light of the “little scroll” and of the two witnesses, we must reflect upon what Saint John brings to the Church. He precisely offers this testimony of love, Christ’s exigency in love, and of a love that goes to the end – Christ is the victim of love, “*He loved them to the end*”⁸ – all the way up to the thrusting of the lance which pierced Mary’s heart.

If we are attentive to this double witness – the Eucharist and Mary – we see that fraternal charity is its fruit. In his first epistle, Saint John demands from us fraternal charity in the midst of struggles – since it is in this letter where he speaks of the antichrists who “*went out from us, but they were not really of our number.*”⁹ These antichrists are not from the religions extrinsic to the Church; they are those who were born in the Church as parodies, by spoiling the finality and who go so far even up to the destruction of everything: the atheistic ideologies. In the midst of these all is a pressing demand for ultimate fraternal charity, and this is the great secret that Saint John wants to place in our heart. This is said in the Book of Revelation, the first Epistle and in the Gospel: “*As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.*”¹⁰ Chapter 15 shows that the fruitfulness of the Church is fraternal charity that glorifies the Father and bears witness to the totality of love.¹¹

⁸ Jn. 13:1.

⁹ 1 Jn. 2:19.

¹⁰ Jn. 13:34; 15:12.

¹¹ *l’absolu de l’amour*

This is what Saint John wants to accomplish among us: an overflowing of fraternal charity springing from the Eucharist, springing from the heart of Mary. We can live by fraternal charity only if we are *bound* by a covenant, the covenant through the Eucharist and the covenant through the heart of Mary. This double covenant has fraternal charity as the fruit. And it is this fraternal charity which is to be for us the final fruit of what our father Saint John wants. He lived fraternal charity in a most extraordinary manner thanks to Mary, thanks to the Eucharist. These are indeed the two secrets of Saint John. At the Last Supper, he lived the Eucharist by being very close to the heart of Jesus. This is why he is always referred to as “*the one who reclined upon Jesus’ chest*,” ο ἐπιστήθους.¹² This indeed is what characterizes John: he has a totally interior knowledge of the Eucharist, of the very fruit of the Eucharist – “*As I have loved you, so you also should love one another*” – and of Mary. Mary is also John’s privilege; he took her into his own home, *in a communal life with her*. Fraternal charity can only fully blossom in a community life, with all that it implies regarding difficulties, struggles, and joys.

The prototypes for the exercise of fraternal charity in communal life are John’s bonds with Mary. We must have sufficient love to bear our Brothers – whether they be smiling or not, shepherds or Magi, Isaac or Ishmael, Jacob or Esau – through the heart of Mary. In bequeathing Mary to John, Jesus gave him communal life because it is always a mother who is at the heart of communal life – otherwise it is impossible. Only in a mother’s heart may different atavisms – so often sources of very violent psychological oppositions – be united. All these oppositions are surpassed (outdone) in Mary’s heart, all are borne, and there are no limitations. Her children do not belong to

¹² Cf. Jn. 13:25 and 21:20.

a particular category; they are those who are wounded; and the poorest ones, the little ones are those who pass ahead in front of the rest. At Bethlehem she received the shepherds as well as the Magi because charity is above all, it is divine. We are of the divine race, and if we are of the divine race we accept supreme poverty, just like Jesus...

I. THE SPIRIT OF THE FAMILY OF SAINT JOHN

Saint John is our father; he is the one who brings about our unity within the Church. Do we not treasure in our heart, as our secret, those mysterious words of Jesus found at the end of John's Gospel? Just after receiving from Jesus Himself his mission: "*Feed my sheep*" (*Pasce oves meas*), upon seeing John following, Peter asks Jesus the question, "*Lord, what about him?*" Jesus says to him: "*What if I want him to remain until I*

come? What concern is it of yours?”¹³ Isn’t John’s mystery to be the one who remains in the Church until Jesus’ return? Shouldn’t all religious communities that desire to live by the paternity of Saint John be living by this same mystery? The Community of Saint John desires to live by this mystery at the end of the 20th century.

The mystery of John is the mystery of the beloved disciple, the one who reclined his head upon Jesus’ chest at the Last Supper. There is a unique bond between Jesus in the mystery of the Eucharist and the heart of His beloved disciple, and this bond is revealed to us through the presence, so personal and so intimate, of John close to Jesus during the institution of the Eucharist. Peter himself had understood this clearly since he used John as mediator in order to ask Jesus the question that so sorely wounds his heart: “*Who is it (the traitor)?*” – a question to which Jesus responds to in a manner that John alone will understand. But isn’t the mystery of John especially about the faithful disciple who followed his Master to the Cross? He is the only one of the twelve who is present at the Cross; and at the Cross, Jesus gives him His Mother.

There are three great mysteries which Saint John wants to teach us to live by in a very special manner: the Eucharist, the wisdom of the Cross, and the mystery of Mary. Let us understand well how these three great mysteries are intimately linked according to the Father’s wisdom. These three great mysteries fully reveal to us the mystery of Christ’s priesthood by manifesting its two most proper fruits: the gift of His body and blood, and gift of His beloved Mother. These two gifts can only be received through the very motion of the Paraclete who is truly given to us for this purpose and who will enable us to fully live by the mystery of *fraternal charity*. Is this not the fruitfulness of the vine that glorifies the Father?

¹³ Jn. 21:20-21.

1. THE EUCHARIST

In the 6th chapter of his Gospel, Saint John reveals the grand teaching of Jesus on the *Bread of Life*; this is a unique treasure that must never be forgotten.

THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES

This discourse is preceded by the amazing miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, performed after the long walk taken by the great crowd that followed Jesus like sheep following their shepherd. Jesus questions two of His disciples who appeared worried and might have been somewhat tempted: is Jesus sufficiently aware of what is happening? Will this crowd be able to eat? He can't be serious, leading them into a deserted place like this where there is nothing to feed them with! The small apostolic community is too poor to really assume responsibility for this. One can sense this rather tense climate, on the verge of murmuring. It is at this point that Jesus, after having questioned His disciples and received the expression of their anxiety, performs this miracle. It is a gesture of mercy which clearly manifests His solicitude, which is at the same time so human and so divine, for this people whom He loves: "*misereor super turbam.*"¹⁴ Jesus performs for his people this gesture of mercy which the Father had performed for Israel in the desert by gratuitously giving them manna. This multitude following Jesus really experiences a spiritual desert: are they really awaiting the Messiah who is to come in order to liberate them?

Yet in contrast to the Father who gratuitously gave them the manna in the desert, Jesus asks the child who has provisions to offer them to Him. It is with this gift that Jesus performs His

¹⁴ Mk. 8:2 "*My soul is moved with pity for them.*"

gesture of mercy. It is certain that He did not need it, yet He wants this cooperation, just as at Cana where He asked for the obedience of the waiters. He demands obedience from the waiters, whereas from the child, He asks for the offering of his goods. And starting from this goodwill from men, He performs a gesture of superabundant mercy in an entirely new gratuitousness.

After each one had sated his hunger, Jesus asks the apostles to gather what was left over. In the euphoria of thanksgiving, the crowd wants to proclaim Jesus king. It would be wonderful to have a king who freely gives bread and fish everyday without having to work for it! But Jesus did not come in order to promote laziness; He did not come primarily to carry out a temporal work. He does not want to be received primarily as a liberator-Messiah from temporal sufferings. This is why, in sensing that they want to proclaim Him king, Jesus withdraws from them “*by Himself.*”

Weren't the apostles contaminated through their contact with the crowd, having gathered with them the scraps which remained (filling up twelve baskets with left over from the five loaves)? They come to their senses much quicker than the crowd, understanding that they have wounded Jesus' heart; and as soon as they could, they went down toward “the sea” and head for Capernaum, the place where Jesus was staying. “*The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid. But he said to them, ‘It is I. Do not be afraid.’ They wanted to take him into the boat, but the boat immediately arrived t the shore to which they were heading.*” Note carefully these two signs: the multiplication of the loaves and the presence of Jesus at night on the lake, and also the efficacy of this presence. Isn't this a marvelous preparation for the mystery of the Eucharist?

The next day, after having slept, the crowd catches up with Jesus at Capernaum and asks Him, “*Rabbi, when did you get here?*” Jesus responds by harshly correcting them, revealing them the completely human way they seek Him and used the gift He had given them with so much love. “*Truly, truly, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.*” Jesus’ heart was wounded by this crude manner of using His gifts. Not only are they seeking not to believe in Him while being drawn by the signs, but they seek only their own material and physical well being. Jesus cannot tolerate being sought only for material goods, being considered as a temporal Messiah who came primarily to give bread “*that perishes*”¹⁵ and not the bread of God’s Word.

Thus Jesus gives them this order: “*Do not work for food that perishes but for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.*” This is the great innovation that Jesus brings and which is particularly true for our time: doesn’t the modern world only labor for temporal goods? Jesus requires from those who want to follow Him to labor for the sake of God’s Word and Eucharist. The Word of God is the bread that the Father and the Son give; and the Eucharist is the body of the beloved Son, given by the Father.

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Jesus’ entire teachings will be oriented towards this mystery of the Bread. He begins by recalling the grandeur of faith: “*This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.*” Here we are not able to analyze closely this great prophetic discourse of Christ, so important and so new, which sheds a completely divine light on the mystery of the Eucharist that Jesus announces. Let us simply touch upon certain points.

¹⁵ Jn. 6:27.

In order to believe Jesus, the crowd once again demands a sign. *“What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you?”* This request hinges upon the fact that their fathers ate manna in the desert. Jesus had just gratuitously given them a sign the day before, but they received it possessively. Thus it had turned into a right for them; Jesus must repeat the previous day’s gesture for them. But Jesus cannot accept this demand which is no longer the request of the poor: *“It was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the **true** bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* Jesus did not come primarily to give His people earthly bread, merely repeating the gesture of the manna. He came in order to give the true Bread, the one that comes from heaven, the one that gives life.

The moment when the crowd, astonished by what Jesus had just told them, asks Him to give them this new bread, He then presents Himself: *“I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”* This is the great new revelation. It is the revelation of the new presence of God for His people, the new way in which He gives Himself. Not only is He the Lamb; He is the true Bread. He is the One who is nothing but gift, entirely given, given to each one as bread; made relative to each one just as food is relative to the one who feeds on it in order to be transformed into oneself, or to be more precise here – in order to be substantially transformed into Himself. For this bread is *the* true Bread. It is Jesus Himself who, in His love, gives Himself in order to transform us into Himself, in order to realize a substantial unity of life with us. *“I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.”*¹⁶

The gift of the manna in the desert was a distant, prefigurative announcement of this true gift: Jesus-God giving Himself to His children and giving Himself as bread for the one

¹⁶ Gal. 2:20.

fed and nourished by it. One must *believe* in order to receive this gift and live by it. Then Jesus stresses the inability of men to believe. This is what pains His heart: *"Although you have seen me, you do not believe."*¹⁷ There is nothing more painful for one who is giving himself than not to be received. Why do these people who believe in God's Word refuse to believe in Jesus' words: *"I am the Bread of Life"*? Jesus says: *"Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day."* In order to receive Jesus as *"true Bread,"* we must be totally given to the Father; we must become beloved children, the little ones: *"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike."*¹⁸ It is only through faith in God's Fatherhood which will enable one to receive this mystery of Jesus, the Bread of Life; since it is the Father who gives the Bread, *His* Bread. This mystery puts us in the presence of the Father's own will, before the One who wants Jesus to lose nothing of what He gave to Him. Such is the Father's jealousy. And this jealousy requires that Jesus, the Bread of Life, raise up on the last day those whom the Father will have given to Him. It is the mystery of Jesus, the Bread of Life, which reveals this ultimate mercy of the Father: the resurrection of our bodies on the last day. (This is ultimate mercy) for it is precisely this mystery of Jesus, the Bread of Life, which reveals to us the substantial gift of His life as beloved Son. Through this gift, we become beloved sons of the Father, living by His eternal life, not only in our spirit but also in our body, in our entire person being.

¹⁷ Jn. 6:36.

¹⁸ Lc. 10:21.

THE MURMURINGS AND THE PROMISE OF THE EUCHARIST

Confronted by this revelation of an extreme love, the Jews began to *murmur*. They do not understand: how can this Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother they know, say: *"I have come down from heaven."*? Jesus reproves them with love: *"Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day."* It is a communal work of the Father and the Son. Everything begins with the Father's attraction. It is this premier love coming from the Father that He awakens in us, enabling us to believe in the mystery of Jesus Bread of Life; the One who accomplishes the Father's work through the Resurrection. If one discovers and accepts this attraction by the Father, then one can no longer murmur, one no longer places any obstacle to the action of His love that gives us Jesus. And He, Bread of Life, will raise us up on the last day. Jesus in fact reminds them: *"It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me."*

After having shown anew the difference between the manna - which did not give eternal life and the Bread come down from heaven which He wants to give - which gives eternal life, Jesus affirms: *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."* This is the second grand affirmation, relative to the first one, which places us prophetically in the presence of the mystery of the Eucharist. This mystery, prophetically announced, clearly shows how the first affirmation: *"I am the bread of life"* requires the concrete realization of the gift of Christ's flesh as food. For the Bread of life - the true Bread - must be for us a source of bread we are able

to receive as nourishment to be eaten. The realism of this affirmation: *"I am the True Bread"* makes it necessary for us to be able to eat it, even sensibly. This characteristic is totally proper to this affirmation, entirely different from: *"I am the light of the world"* which only engages the word.

But this realism is scandalous, it is unbearable: *"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* One can easily understand the human intelligence being scandalized facing this type of affirmation. Jesus even reaffirms it with more force by revealing how this mysterious food is so necessary for our salvation: *"I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink is blood, you do not have life within you."* And again: *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."* Such is the grand promise of the gift that Jesus wants to realize for those who believe in Him as Bread of Life. And it is truly through this personal gift of His flesh and blood that He wants to be the true Bread for us, since it is by this gift that He gives eternal life and promises to raise us. It is therefore through the gift of His flesh and blood, given as food and drink, that He can be for us the true Bread which brings to achievement the work of God which the Father started. Jesus gives more precision: *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."* The proper outcome of *"eating his flesh and drinking his blood"* is to remaining Him and Him in the one who feeds on His flesh and blood.

This gift of His flesh and blood as food and drink is the manner in which Jesus is the true Bread for us, the bread from heaven. Thus it is indeed this mystery of Jesus the true Bread which gives the gift of His body and blood its finality. It is indeed Christ's affirmation: *"I am the Bread of life"* that gives this gift all of its divine meaning, its deep significance. Jesus promises to give His flesh and blood so that we might be able to

remain in Him, to live by Him as Bread of life, and so that we might live in our very own flesh the mystery of His Resurrection on the last day.

By this promise of the gift of His flesh and blood as food and as drink, Jesus affirms the unity of life that He desires to realize with us, a unity comparable to that which exists between Him and the Father: *“Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”* Such is the infinite abyss existing between this mystery of the true Bread come down from heaven and the miracle of the manna: the first gives eternal life while the other one cannot give victory over death.

THE FIRST BREAK-UP

This teaching, so new and so divine, was not received by those who heard it. Many concluded: *“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”*

In a final act of mercy, aware from within the depths of His heart that His disciples are murmuring, Jesus tells them: *“Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have to you are spirit and life.”* As it was with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman, Jesus knows that His words are received by those who murmur in an entirely human and carnal manner. It is for this reason that He wants to help them keep from falling into this trap: that of interpreting His words in a purely material way. Thus He affirms: *“the flesh is of no avail”* at the very moment when He promises to give us His flesh as food. The contrast is astonishing. There is a divine manner of receiving His flesh as well as a carnal way. All of God’s words, all of God’s gifts must be divinely received for God is Spirit. Doesn’t the great suffering of Jesus’ heart come from seeing how men receive His teaching,

and especially how they receive His secrets - the gift of His flesh?

It is at that moment when Christ reveals to us His excessive love: the gift of His entire self as Bread of life, when *“many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.”* Wanting therefore to plumb the hearts of those who remained, Jesus asks: *“Do you also want to leave?”* Jesus gives them their freedom. *“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.’”* In the face of such a truthful statement, Jesus opens His own heart: *“Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?”* It is Jesus who first of all loved His apostles and His disciples the whole time; but this does not keep them from the possibility of not being able to respond to this call, that they might turn away, refuse to believe - just like Judas. It is in the presence of Jesus who has just revealed Himself as Bread of life and just before giving His flesh as food and His blood as drink that Judas refuses to believe and turns away from Jesus. *“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”* He does not even have the courage to admit or confess his weakness, or his lack of love. He instead accuses Jesus: *“This saying is hard.”* And he also relies on the opinion of others: *“who can accept it?”*

This ultimate revelation of love is like a *“two-edged sword.”*¹⁹ For some (Peter and John...), it is an opportunity for a new gift of fidelity; whereas for others it is an occasion for turning in on oneself and for a radical refusal – which is a source of great sorrow for Christ. Such is the first realization of Simeon’s prophecy. This sword pierces the soul of Jesus, and through Him Mary’s soul is also pierced.²⁰

¹⁹ Heb. 4:12.

²⁰ Lk. 2:35.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISE

The realization of the promise is transmitted to us by Saint John²¹ and Saint Luke.²²

THE WASHING OF THE FEET The beginning of the 13th chapter in Saint John underlines the exceptional importance of what is going to take place on the eve of this Passover. *“Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.”* It is this ultimate moment in the pilgrimage of Jesus that Saint John wants us to remember. Everything takes place in fidelity to love in its fullness. It is indeed the testament of Jesus’ love that Saint John would like to transmit to us – the one which will be given during this last Passover celebrated with the apostles. Judas is also present, as Saint John underlines: *“The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over...”* Judas is physically present in the midst of the apostles, near Jesus; yet his heart is distant. He separates himself from Jesus since he has already decided to betray Him. Jesus knows this and He bears it; He has accepted in His heart this ultimate will of the Father. This final joy to be in the midst of His own, the chance to spend this last meal with them in peace is taken away from Him. It is important to bear with the presence of this traitor who deeply wounds Jesus’ heart in the midst of the joys of the intimate farewells. It is Jesus alone who is aware of Judas’ perverse intentions. He bears them in the silence of His heart.

After celebrating this liturgical meal of the Jewish Passover with extreme fervor together with the twelve – thanking the Father for the unique mercy He has shown for His people – Jesus brings to completion in His heart this last Passover of

²¹ Jn. 13.

²² Lk. 22.

thanksgiving. *“He rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter..”* It is Peter whom Jesus approaches first. Simon Peter looks at Jesus’ gesture from an exterior gaze and cannot receive it, He resists it. *“Master, are you going to wash my feet?”* Not being able to understand this unexpected and unprecedented initiative by Jesus – shocked by this unworthy gesture of his Lord and Master – Peter refuses to cooperate in Jesus’ actions. But Jesus insists: *“What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later.”* Jesus simply asks for an act of pure obedience. Even if he is unable to understand, Peter is to make an act of total trust. Yet he continues to resist through his still too human love for Jesus: *“You will never wash my feet!”* In order to convince Peter, Jesus tells him what would be the consequence of his refusal: *“Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me.”* Peter is thus persuaded, he does not want to be separated from the One who is his Lord and Master. He wants to be with Him.

John does not write about the washing of Judas’ feet when this gesture is really most especially intended for him. Jesus indicates this well through His response to Peter who, in his generosity not only asked Him to wash his feet *“but his hands and head as well.”* Jesus answers: *“Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all.”* He in fact knew who was going to betray Him. Jesus wants to face Judas, one on one, so that He could be in an attitude of poverty and humility in Judas’ presence, to be his presence like a slave – who is in fact the Master and Lord – in order to express for this one last time His unique love for him, to show him that He loves him first and that this love will always be present no matter how grave his actual

fault is. He wants to show him his merciful forgiveness - His mercy as the Good Shepherd who only wants to be very close to His straying sheep. Isn't this new liturgy of the washing of the feet that distinguishes the two Passovers while uniting them, meant for Judas in the first place? Had Peter known Judas' intentions, wouldn't he even be more scandalized and more violent? For him, exercising mercy and pardon toward a traitor who has decided to go to the end of treason is out of the question; and a gesture of humility is not what one is to have for a traitor.

John is silent about his face to face encounter with Jesus at the washing of the feet. And nevertheless, in virtue of his privileged love for Jesus, he must have lived by this gesture in a unique manner, discovering thereby the infinite poverty and humility of Jesus' heart and especially the preferential love Jesus had for each of His disciples – desiring to unite them to His heart by going beyond or above the struggle and all the jealousies.

It would be interesting to try to discover the particular modality of each of the face to face encounter Jesus - the servant-slave - had with His disciples. Each encounter is a personal farewell wherein only Jesus alone is fully aware and carries a weight of love that is all the more much stronger since the disciples do not understand what is going on. These “good-byes” take place in extreme poverty and through a gesture of pardon and of purification from Jesus' part. As for what pertains to Peter, doesn't Jesus want to introduce him to a new sense of authority? Peter maintains the sense of authority according to how it was realized in the Old Law. Jesus, Master and Lord, wants to show him that he can exercise authority in an extreme poverty, without any domination since it is an authority entirely out of love. For Judas, doesn't Jesus want to show him that His authority of Master and Lord is that of the Good Shepherd who seeks primarily to forgive, no matter how grave the sin might be? If man only acknowledges himself as sinner, then the Good

Shepherd pardons and loves him. For John, doesn't Jesus want to show him that the stronger divine love is, then the greater is the limpidity and fidelity that He expects from him? John who is loved with such an intensity (of love) needs this ultimate purification in order to recline upon Jesus' chest and thereby fully live by the mystery of the Eucharist.

While this washing of the feet implies a personal significance for each disciple, it nevertheless has a universal value. Jesus affirms this: *"If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."* Jesus even adds: *"Blessed are you if you do it."* Jesus asks us to perform the same gesture after His example. Now, isn't the profound meaning of this gesture in view of teaching us the necessity of an ultimate purification in order to be able to live by the new Passover – the one that Jesus accomplishes for us? This ultimate purification pertains to a new precept, the one on fraternal charity. In order to fully live according to this precept, we must be able to perform towards our neighbor – the one whom God places along our path – this gesture of a slave: washing his feet, putting oneself entirely at his service, be totally relative to him, receiving him by being in the state of extreme poverty of a slave who puts himself entirely at the service of one's neighbor – such requires from us forgiveness of anything we might harbor in our heart against him, of anything that might keep us distant from him and which might create in us certain dissensions against him. It is Jesus, Lord and Master, who performs this gesture for us in order to manifest to us how the plenitude of fraternal charity present in His heart allows Him – while keeping His authority of Lord and Master – to perform this service, normally reserved for slaves, in a unique manner. He gives this gesture/service a new dimension since it was realized in the gratuitousness of fraternal love. Rather than highlighting

the difference existing between the one who commands from the one who obeys - and thereby giving rise to divisions, violent oppositions that lead to revolt (as exemplified by Hegel's famous dialectics between the master and slave, and taken up also by Marx) – fraternal charity allows the one who wields authority to become much closer to the one obeying him, be more united to him (in order to be one with him), than if he did not have this authority. When under the influence of fraternal charity, the exercise of authority, instead of separating and opposing, may on the contrary intensify unity. Isn't this the great victory of divine love - fraternal charity over all temptations of pride which very easily slip in to corrupt the exercise of authority by transforming authority-service into authority-power, domination? It is only divine charity that can bring this about. Isn't this what Jesus wants to proclaim before giving Himself as "Bread of Life"?

For those of us who want to live according to the spirit of Saint John, it is very important to understand the importance that Jesus accords to the acceptance of this gesture. It is a necessary condition in order to "*belong to Him*."²³ "*To belong to Him*" is to live that same mystery of divine love that He lives by: the mystery of the Cross, the mystery of the victory of Love. But in order for this to occur, we must accept to cooperate with Jesus, to live by His merciful love so meek and humble that forgives and makes use of the consequences of faults (sins) in order to be given even more; with Jesus, we must accept to live as servant of servants, as slaves of love for each of His disciples, each one being for Jesus the neighbor that the Father has placed beside Him. It is not enough to merely cooperate with Him by obeying Him, respecting His dignity as Lord and Master. We must live by the very mystery of His love towards our neighbor, accepting to be the servant, everybody's slave, to descend even lower than him, smaller, poorer than him – in order to be his savior in

²³ "*avoir part avec lui*"

mercy. It is not only in offering him a hand, but in carrying him in his fragility, his weaknesses; to wash his feet and from there disposing oneself to be capable of offering one's life in order to save him. *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."*²⁴

THE INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST

It is after the washing of the feet that Jesus institutes the Eucharist, the New Passover of His body and blood. Everything that He had prophetically announced in His great teaching on the Bread of life, He accomplishes it with the Twelve, Judas being present too. He brings it about by taking bread, giving thanks, breaking it, and giving it to them, saying: *"This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me."*²⁵ Then taking the cup after the meal, He said: *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you."*²⁶ Such is the extreme simplicity of this new covenant in His body and blood that is really and symbolically brought about through the gift of the bread and wine He consecrated – an astonishing and overwhelming covenant. When love goes to the very end of its exigencies, it is expressed in a language of extreme simplicity. There is nothing more simple than the sharing of bread and wine at a meal. There is nothing greater than the gift of Jesus' body and His blood shed for us. This is the gift of Jesus crucified, offered on the Cross in order to glorify the Father and save us. This act is the greatest act that was ever carried out and lived in the world; and this act is communicated to us by means of the double consecration of bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus crucified and glorified. This is the testament of His love, a testament prepared for by the first Jewish Passover and completed at the Last Supper, and which continues in the

²⁴ Jn. 15:13.

²⁵ Lk. 22:19.

²⁶ Lk. 22:20.

Church through the Twelve and their successors. Such is Jesus' explicit will: "*Do this in memory of me.*"

It is at the moment of giving oneself when one experiences the greatest vulnerability. It is thus at this moment when Jesus declares: "*And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me at table.*"²⁷ In the Gospel of Saint John it says: "*But so that scripture might be fulfilled, 'The one who ate my food has raised his heel against me'*"²⁸... *When He had said this, Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant.*"²⁹ During His apostolic life, Jesus kept the secret and the disciples had no clue in discovering Judas' profound attitude of refusal of the mystery of the Bread of life; Judas was able to hide his deepening opposition until the end.

This is the moment where the Evangelist specifies that: "*One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' side.*" John must have surely been the one occupying this choice place close to Jesus – "*reclining at Jesus' side*" – during the entire duration of this Paschal meal achieved at the Last Supper. Without telling us the manner how he lived this Eucharistic meal in his Faith, Hope and Charity, he simply indicates to us how close he was to Jesus, "*against Jesus' chest.*" This gesture only reveals to us, in a way more eloquent than words are able to express, that marvelous intimacy John's heart had with that of Jesus, that intensity of his love for Jesus. He received the gift of the body and blood of Jesus while being very close physically to Him. This expresses the profound silence of his divine love for the One who was everything for him and who gave Himself totally to him. John further specifies in his Gospel:

²⁷ Lk. 22:21.

²⁸ Ps. 41:10.

²⁹ Jn. 13:18.21.

“So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant.” Simon Peter had understood that it was John alone who could receive the secret of Jesus’ heart since he was so close to Him. That is why he uses him as mediator thus acknowledging (although it would have been appropriate for him to make this request given his authority) John’s greater intimacy with the heart of Jesus.

“He leaned back against Jesus’ chest and said to him, ‘Master, who is it?’” Once again, the Evangelist highlights John’s unique proximity to Jesus: *“leaning back (even) against Jesus’ chest”* – which gives him as it were the right to directly pose the question: *“Master, who is it?”* Jesus responds without naming him: *“It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it. So he dipped the morsel and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. After he took the morsel, Satan entered him.”* It is through His gesture of friendship for Judas that Jesus reveals to John who the traitor is since dipping the morsel in the cup of wine and giving it directly to the friend was the clearest sign of the love He had for him. Judas overtly and consciously lies to Jesus when he accepts the morsel from Him at the moment when he is already betraying Him; thus the Prince of lies enters him. Judas knew this perfectly well – he was perfectly aware of the meaning of this gesture; whereas with respect to the Eucharist, he did not really know what he was doing since he had no faith in this mystery.

It is according to His wisdom that God allows the sacrament of divine love – in its ultimate exigency - to be realized at the Last Supper, in the midst of a great struggle within the community of disciples, in order to show how despite this, Jesus still gives Himself entirely by disarming Himself, in this silence of a most gratuitous love, thus drawing John to Himself while accepting to be betrayed by Judas.

Just as Saint John lived the mystery of the Eucharist in a very special manner (in a very great intimacy) we too must live by it in a very fervent manner (if we truly want to be his beloved children), having the filial audacity to ask our father Saint John to enable us to live as he himself lived by it – in that astonishing intimacy with Jesus, close to His heart and hidden in Him. Jesus gives without reserve as Bread of life: the substantial servant who gives Himself as food; in other words, to be completely ordered to the living being who feeds on it, assimilates it. Jesus wants to be this food for us, giving itself entirely to the end, wanting to transform us into Him by substantially uniting us to Himself. This requires from us a fervent love, a self-giving love without reserve.

In today's Church, following in the footsteps of Saint John, we must be those who fully live by the mystery of the Eucharist, living by the *gift*.

After instituting the Eucharist, Jesus gives His faithful disciples "a new commandment:" *"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."*³⁰ In his first Epistle Saint John writes: *"Beloved, I am writing no new commandment to you but an old commandment that you had from the beginning."*³¹ It is precisely because it comes from Christ that this commandment is not written on tablets of stone (of the Law), but inscribed in the heart of Jesus.

Saint John received this new commandment in a very special manner. For him, it is this new precept on fraternal charity that gives the Christian community its proper character. It is a community of children by the same Father; the community begotten at the Cross. This community must give witness to the love of Jesus and *render it present* in the world. Fraternal charity

³⁰ Jn. 13:34. 15:12.

³¹ 1 Jn. 2:7.

is the proper fruit of the true vine wherein Jesus is the trunk and we are its branches. It is through this fruit that the vine glorifies the Father who is the vinedresser. This fraternal charity has no other model other than Jesus crucified, giving Himself at the Cross: *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*

We must try to live by this fraternal charity, by striving to live it with more intensity and fervor up to the point that it turns us into a total gift of self for our brothers, our neighbor, the one whom God has placed along our path and journeys with us, living the same life as ours. We must exercise this fraternal charity *joyfully* - one that blossoms forth in joy – exercised in an entirely interior joy which can coexist with struggles, sufferings, and even those sorrows which belong to our human psychological realm. To be precise, the exercise of our fraternal charity is not situated primarily at this level. It is much more profound, and at the same time, it is able to assume all of our sensitivity by purifying it without destroying it. This divine exercise does not compete with nor is it a rival to our passions - our sensibility - but it demands to be incarnated which can only be accomplished slowly and progressively.

2. THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS AND THE GIFT OF MARY

The Eucharist is entirely ordered to the mystery of the Cross giving it to us in a symbolic and real way. One cannot stop at the sacrament; it is to lead us to the reality, to the very mystery of Christ's Cross. Saint John reveals this mystery to us in a unique way, for he alone reveals the ultimate covenant which Jesus ratifies when He addresses Mary and John from the height of the Cross telling them: "*Woman, behold your son*" and "*Behold your mother.*"

THE GIFT OF MARY TO JOHN

Let us try to understand the meaning of these words. Being the last words that Jesus addresses to Mary and to his preferred disciple, they indeed express as it were, His testament for each one of them – His ultimate will for them. Saint Ambrose would say, a "domestic" or "familial" testament in contrast with the official testament realized at the Last Supper when everyone was present, even the traitor. This other one is the testament in His immolated body and in His blood poured out in order to glorify the Father and save men. After having given His body and

blood as food and drink, in a superabundance of love, He still wants to give the secret of His human heart: the one whom the Father gave Him as Mother: thus He wants to give her to us *as mother*. In giving her to John, He gives her especially to those who, following John, want to be *faithful*. In giving her to us, Jesus brings about the ultimate gift He can give to us. He strips Himself of the one whom He loves the most, the one who was not only given to Him by the Father as mother, but also the one with whom He is most united, the one who lives in a unique manner His mystery of the Cross, of Redemption.

Let us understand how Jesus bequeaths Mary to John. It is at the moment when Mary is living the mystery of Compassion, where she is “one” with Jesus in His holocaust of love – the holocaust of the Cross – that completes or fulfills His entire life. In her Faith, Hope and Love, Mary actually lives by the mystery of the Cross in order to fulfill it - in order to complete it. Completing does not mean to say as if the Cross of Jesus was imperfect, unfinished, and is in need of completion. It is a completion in superabundant love, in the total gratuitousness of love. If the Cross of Jesus was, in fact, primarily a sacrifice of justice, for the reparation of sins, then the mystery of Mary’s Compassion would not exist. For there cannot be any superabundance in the realm of justice; gratuitous superabundance can only be found in the realm of love. Mary completed and achieved the holocaust of Jesus’ Cross in living by His sacrifice in her Faith, Hope and Love. In this manner, she could offer as a holocaust to the Father that which Jesus is unable to offer to the Father. She offers that which is most profound in the intelligence of man living by theological Faith. She offers what is most profound in the desires of man living by theological Hope. By reason of the mystery of the hypostatic union, Jesus was in possession of the beatific vision in His human soul that was super-elevated by the plenitude of grace, from the first

instant of His existence. Because of this, the summits of His human soul could not be offered as a holocaust to the Father's glory and for the salvation of men. In order that the human soul might be offered in its entirety as holocaust to the Father's glory and for the salvation of men, it was necessary that there be "someone" living by the same holocaust of Jesus although living it in another manner – in her Faith, Hope and Charity. It is through Faith that our human intelligence can be totally offered to the Father and through Hope that our will might be offered to the Father according to its most intimate and profound desires. Thanks to the plenitude of her Faith and Hope and her Love, so intense for Jesus, she could live her mystery of Compassion at the Cross. She lives by the very same mystery Jesus lives but according to a proper modality that belonged to her, which is that of the immaculate Woman entirely transformed by the plenitude of grace.

With regard to the Priesthood of Jesus, we can equally say that Mary achieved and completed it. During His entire hidden life, Jesus wanted to live as Mary and Joseph's little child. Thus He did not exercise in act his ministry as High Priest, except at Jerusalem when He was 12 years old. Coming at that time to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover with His parents, Jesus took the initiative of teaching the doctors of Israel in the greatest mercy, by asking them questions. To Mary and Joseph who were looking for Him, He says openly: "*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house (affairs)?*"³² It is in obedience to His Father that Jesus performs this teaching; He does this as the Father's Envoy. Isn't this His first priestly work: giving a teaching for the doctors of the Law, a teaching on the Word of God? In their own way, through their Faith and Hope, Mary and Joseph cooperate with this work through their suffering and their anxiety. The Gospel

³² Lk. 2:49.

emphasizes how Mary and Joseph did not understand Jesus' words. But Mary "*kept all these things in her heart.*"³³ By rendering her to be thus attentive to the fulfillment of the Father's work, Jesus was preparing in her the heart of the Woman, the new Eve.

This shows clearly that from His birth until twelve years and from twelve to thirty years of age, Jesus did not openly live or manifest Himself as the Father's Envoy. Instead he spent those years in a hidden manner, as a child subject to its parents, obedient to them, not taking any individual initiatives, but instead went about His activities by relying on the authority of His parents. One may thus conclude how during His entire hidden life, Mary offered her beloved Son and all of His activities to the Father and therefore maternally anticipated the exercise of His priesthood all the way up to her intervention at Cana that hastened the hour of Jesus. During Jesus' entire apostolic life, Mary in her silence is totally relative to His life as the Father's Envoy. And at the moment when Jesus received the thrust of the lance at the Cross, just after having placed everything in the Father's hands, Mary once again in the silence of her wounded heart offers Jesus to the Father as the immolated Lamb. The piercing of the heart is what she offers primarily, the wound that achieves or fulfills the entire holocaust of the Cross. It is really Mary who offers this to the Father since Jesus' soul is longer informs His body in order to offer this ultimate wound to the Father – it is the only substantial wound, the only one that could have by itself cause death. The Father wanted that Jesus anticipates the thrusting of the lance in the offering of His entire life on the Cross, so that it would indeed be Him freely offering Himself in pure love; and that Mary might achieve or complete this sacrifice by offering the piercing of the heart.

³³ Lk. 2:51 & 2:19.

It is at the moment when Mary, whose soul has been made supernatural through the plenitude of grace, is experiencing this great unity with Jesus that He gives her to us. The one whom Jesus gives to John as mother is the same one who lives this mystery of Compassion, a mystery of unity with Jesus crucified. It is her whom John receives and takes “into his own (home),” into his intimacy. It is therefore primarily this mystery of Compassion that Mary transmits to John so that he may also live by it. It is certainly the Woman in her virginal purity and fecundity as Mother whom he receives: he receives Mary fully consecrated to her Father and freely accepting to be the Mother of the Son of God through her *fiat*; it is her through her consecration and her maternity in their ultimate completion at the Cross through the mystery of Compassion. It is in her mystery of Compassion that John receives Mary as mother. Through her, he is therefore called to live by the same mystery; otherwise she wouldn’t truly be his beloved mother.

John receives Mary in his contemplative Faith, in his Hope of a poor one and in the fervor of his Charity. From this point, he enters into a new intimacy with Jesus, looking at Him in a new gaze of love – of contemplation. He gazes at Jesus the way Mary looks at Him, the way Mary loves Him. This familial covenant with Mary is a contemplative covenant. It is a covenant that gives John access to all the secrets in the heart of Mary: her unity of love with Jesus’ heart, her unity as spouse with the heart of Jesus crucified. For it is the “*sponsabo in fide, in misericordia, in justitia*”³⁴ that Mary lives at the Cross and which is also given to John. John enters into an entirely new life since all of Mary’s maternal and merciful love for all men is communicated to him in order for him to live by it. Mary receives from Jesus the very same divine love He has for all sinners in the offering of His life in order to save all sinners. She thus offers her crucified Jesus for

³⁴ Cf. Hos. 2: 21-22. “I will espouse you in fidelity, in mercy and in justice...”

their salvation. For her, this is more heroic than offering her own life.

John receives from Mary, his Mother, this same merciful, this same offering. His perspective on men acquires a new depth of mercy, of pardon, most especially towards Peter and the others, on his brother James, towards Judas, towards the high priests. In this way the exercise of his ministerial priesthood blossoms forth in a new dimension, since its exercise is realized in a more profound intimacy with Jesus. Through Mary's example and with her, John will offer his entire life in order to glorify the Father, in order to proclaim that his love as beloved son is stronger than death, victorious over all sufferings, over all sadness, since his loving will is one with Mary's will (who is "one" with Jesus' will at the Cross): "*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me.*"³⁵ John will offer his entire life, like Mary and with her, in order to save all sinners, the poor. His apostolic zeal is rooted in Mary's unique love, in the heart of Jesus, who at the Cross became Mother of all men, rendering herself responsible before the Father for each one of them. In her mystery of Compassion, Mary rejects no one: she accepted to be "accursed"³⁶ for each one of them, especially the most miserable. In begetting John to his apostolic life, she transmits to him the same maternal love for the poor and the most little ones.

This indeed is what Saint John's fatherhood must communicate to all of his beloved children: a contemplative love for Jesus crucified and a merciful and maternal love for all sinners, for the poorest ones – like Saint John, knowing that this may only be realized if one fully lives by Mary's divine maternity through her mystery of Compassion.

THE CRY OF THIRST

³⁵ Jn. 4:34.

³⁶ Rom. 9:3.

In the Gospel according to Saint John, after bequeathing Mary to John so that she might be his own mother, Jesus utters a loud cry: “*I thirst.*” The premier fruit of Mary’s divine motherhood over John is to enable him to witness Jesus’ cry of thirst, enabling him to live by Jesus’ ultimate appeal as Mary herself lived by it – to live by it with her: “*He took her into his (own) home.*” The entire mystery of Compassion allows Mary, who is “one” with Jesus crucified, to live by the ultimate desires of His heart: living by His very thirst. And it is Mary, as she lives by this thirst, whom John receives into his own, into the most intimate depths of his heart.

This cry of thirst primarily addressed to the Father, is also addressed to all men, to Mary, to John, and to each one of us. This cry reveals to us a new thirst of love animating the human heart of the beloved Son for His Father: the thirst to love His Father, the thirst to love Him in a totally pure gratuitousness, loving Him even beyond (and above) the work of the Cross that was perfectly fulfilled in obedience. Doesn’t love surpass obedience? Love as the source of obedience demands that it be exercised gratuitously for itself. Isn’t this what characterizes all true love: its exigency for purity, for gratuitousness, and also its realism, in order to give testimony to its truthfulness? Isn’t there a link between this cry of thirst with Jesus’ request to His Father: “*Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began*”?³⁷ Jesus thirsts for this glory, the Father’s very same glory, thus manifesting His unity with the Father in the spiration of the Holy Spirit.

This cry of thirst is also for Mary, His Mother. Jesus thirsts for His Mother to fully live by His divine attraction. Just as He thirsts to be one with His Father in order to eternally spirate Love, He also thirsts for Mary to be “one” with Him, in order that, in Him, she might spirate Love and save men with

³⁷ Jn. 17:5.

Him. Isn't this the most intimate secret of His mediation of love? He thirsts that she might perfectly be their mother, communicating to them His grace - in the fullness of light and of love - that makes of them children of God. "*And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.*"³⁸ It is His beloved Mother whom He wants to draw to Himself first of all. He wants to draw her with as much force such that she experiences a new poverty, a new dispossession, and an ultimate separation. Each time Jesus asks from us for a new poverty He also takes us into a greater unity. Love makes use of poverty in order to realize a greater and more divine unity. If poverty is a fruit of divine love, it is also a disposition for a new love.

Through Mary, it is all those who are faithful and who are her children whom Jesus wants to attract profoundly into His heart – especially John and all those who desire to become his beloved children.

If we want to live by Mary's and John's divine filiation, we need to be very attentive to Jesus' cry of thirst. We must strive to receive it in the most profound manner possible and to live by it. For this is indeed the first fruit of Mary's divine motherhood over Saint John (and over us): making of him a witness to this cry. This is also the first fruit of Saint John's paternity over us since, by this cry received in the very intimate depths of our divine life, we preserve in us a great desire to always love the One who thirsts so much for our love.

John also mentions those who received this cry of thirst in a completely human manner: "*There was a vessel filled with vinegar. So they put a sponge soaked in the vinegar on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth.*"³⁹ Jesus does not disregard this gesture of kindness, an act of human mercy. He accepts to receive this material gift, while also showing that He does not use

³⁸ Jn. 12:32.

³⁹ Jn. 19:29

it in order to alleviate His suffering. So does the Evangelist underlines this: “*When Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said, ‘It is finished.’*” Everything ends or is completed with this affirmation of Jesus: “*It is finished!*” Jesus is the one who has accomplished His mission and at the same time the one who remains thirsty. The Father’s Envoy has accomplished what the Father has asked of Him, His mission; but the friend, the Son continues to be thirsty since this really pertains to the love that is in His heart of beloved Son – and this love is infinite: it can never be satisfied since it will always carve an ever-greater abyss of littleness (or lowliness), of poverty and of thirst. Jesus is indeed the faithful Servant who has accomplished His mission to the very end, in the manner as the Father had asked of Him. His earthly pilgrimage is over. He has only to give (surrender) everything back to the Father for what He has accomplished does not belong to Him: it really if the Father’s work realized through His sacred humanity. That is why it is so simple. The greatest work that has ever been accomplished in our universe ends in the greatest simplicity; since this work is above all a labor of love, a love that is pure that was realized in obedience.

THE PIERCING OF THE HEART

After the death of Jesus, John underlines the last gesture that men would have towards Him: the thrust of the lance. “*Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed*

out.”⁴⁰ This thrusting of the lance, piercing through the side of Jesus already dead, reached His heart that had already stopped beating and caused those last drops of blood and water to flow. It was not commanded by the authorities: it came from the personal initiative of a stupefied soldier upon seeing that Jesus was already dead. The order he received had become useless. It was his proper initiative to perform this gesture; this gesture, in fact, realized the only fatal wound – thereby making Jesus the *Immolated Lamb* whom John saw in glory in the ultimate revelation of the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation).

In accordance with the order of God’s wisdom, this wound was to be inflicted only after death so that we might understand that Jesus truly offered His life freely in order to glorify the Father (thus showing how His love for the Father is much stronger than death) and to save us (thus expressing the intensity of His love for us) – “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*” This piercing had to take place after His death so that we might understand that Jesus is the Lamb that is perfectly immolated: men did not even respect the corpse of Jesus. From the perspective of Faith – in the light of God’s wisdom – let us understand how Jesus truly offered everything that He could give: all of His blood was poured out, down to the last drops. Isn’t this gesture, as it were, the incarnation of His cry of thirst? Isn’t it for us like the “sacrament” of the thirst of love animating His heart? Doesn’t this piercing inflict on the body of Jesus the wound of love par excellence? This wound actually implies a total passiveness, the absolute passiveness of the corpse - Jesus’ heart has stopped beating. It also implies the greatest violence since it is realized through the thrust of the lance piercing His side and reaching the heart. On its own, this wound is fatal; thus it is indeed the wound

⁴⁰ Jn. 19:31-34.

par excellence revealing the infinite love in Jesus' heart for the Father and for Mary, for John and for us.

This wound is also the “passive” gesture par excellence. A corpse, in fact, no longer moves itself; yet it is can still be wounded, it can still endure violence (from the French: *“patir”*- which is, to suffer). To suffer and to be wounded, this is the proper gesture of a corpse, and it means suffering in the strongest manner. It means suffering in the pure state. And since it is the heart that is wounded, it indeed is the gesture par excellence of a corpse. If the whole Revelation is done by way of word and gesture, then we understand how the ultimate revelation is realized in this wounding brought about by the thrust of the lance. For if the gesture reveals love much more profoundly than the word, then this gesture – inflicted with extreme violence on one who receives it in an extreme passiveness – manifests the infinite love of the heart of Jesus in an ultimate manner. The cry of thirst, however eloquent it might be, could never manifest love in such an extreme manner as this wound does. We understand then how the Father, in His wisdom, willed for the whole Revelation to come to an end (and be accomplished) in and through the piercing of Jesus' heart – thanks to this gesture.

Saint John witnessed this ultimate gesture and he says it emphatically in his Gospel; and if he was a witness, it is primarily for his beloved children. We must receive this testimony and live by it. We must read the whole Gospel of John, and even all of Scripture, in the light of this testimony as this gives us the ultimate light upon all Revelation – which is the revelation of God's infinite love according to His proper mystery and in His mystery of mercy for us.

Mary was able to witness in a unique manner as Mother in the descent of the body from the Cross and in the laying in the tomb. The entire Christian tradition expresses this in art by representing the placing of Christ's lifeless body into the arms of

Mary; even the Shroud of Turin suggests this, according to the testimony of the doctor who studied (examined) the Shroud with great love.

THE SEPULCHER

The ultimate moment of Mary's Compassion is the mystery of the Sepulcher. In her Faith, Hope and Charity, Mary by lived this ultimate moment of the Incarnate Word's pilgrimage: the entombment of His corpse in the earth. Mary experienced this final separation Mary experienced out of respect for this last Sabbath. Mary could not hold on to this precious treasure, the corpse of her God that had been given to her. She had to accept for it to be wrenched from her arms in order to be deposited in our earth, in this corruptible earth, the proper place of decay for every human corpse ever since original sin. Such is the ultimate humiliation inflicted on Jesus' corpse. In her Faith, Hope and Charity, Mary remained united to this divine corpse. She lived this ultimate separation of the soul from the lifeless body of Jesus - living by the descent of His soul into Hades and at the same time by the repose of His lifeless body within the anonymity of the earth.

But beyond this substantial separation, she lives by the unity of the Incarnate Word. This is where she teaches John and all his children how to faithfully live by the mystery of the Church by following the Lamb all the way to the Cross, to the Sepulcher, up to the Resurrection. Aren't Christians always tempted to separate what God has united and of uniting what God has separated? Isn't this the constant temptation in our life of Faith and Hope - the temptation of living certain (necessary) distinctions as separations, and taking these separations in a dialectical manner? When the Church will live its "Last Week" (when she will be bound to the mystery of the Sepulcher in a very special way) then this temptation will become particularly intense

and violent. Isn't this what we might be able to already detect today? One separates what God has united by accepting the Church as the mystical body while rejecting the mystery of the hierarchy of the Church; in other words, one accepts the Church as being led by the Holy Spirit while rejecting the Church insofar as it is subject to the Pope and the Bishops. The contrary scenario may also be possible which is doubtlessly much rarer: accepting the Church in its visible social and temporal conduct or guidance while rejecting its hidden, invisible mystery – which is the Holy Spirit's guidance. The same is true for the mystery of God's Word – and it is even clearer. One accepts the Word in its dependence to a particular cultural milieu while no longer looking at it as an inspired word that contains a signification that surpasses the cultural and historic context. We can also consider this inversely (which in this case would be a rarer thing): accepting the Word as divine and inspired but rejecting all considerations about the milieu in which it was elaborated.

THE COVENANT WITH PETER

The final apparition of the risen Jesus that John communicates to us in his Gospel is the one about the miraculous catch of fish on the shores of the lake of Genesareth (Galilee). Jesus questions Peter three times in order to entrust His sheep to him: "*Feed my sheep.*" This last apparition and questioning of Peter by Jesus is totally proper to Saint John's Gospel: thus they interest us in a very special way. Let us take particular attention to the circumstances by which Jesus realizes this covenant with Peter.

Let us first consider Peter's initiative: he summons Jesus' disciples to go fishing. After his denial, this is Peter's first initiative that is recounted in John's Gospel. It is an initiative that has a completely temporal character. Isn't Peter being tempted to return to his former ways? After abandoning his nets in order to

follow Jesus, doesn't he seem to want to take them up again? Jesus is no longer visibly with him. Hasn't he succumbed to the temptation: of returning to a job that suited him well, so connatural to him, in which he excels? What is certain is how this initiative does not seem to bear fruit: is it really with God's blessing? They caught nothing during the entire night. Their work was sterile, humanly speaking. Isn't this a terrible blow for Peter upon going back to his old trade?

With gentle irony, Jesus points out the fact: "*Children, have you caught anything to eat?*"⁴¹ Yet in His great mercy He does not correct them; on the contrary He comes to their aid: "*Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.*" When work is performed under the gaze of Jesus it does not lead us away from Him. If done under obedience, it is therefore fruitful beyond expectation. On the contrary, if it be done according to our own initiatives, according to our own will, it will always run the risk of fostering our own desire for psychological autonomy, and thus it will remain sterile for our Christian life.

Finally, let us take note how John is the first one to recognize Jesus' presence. John must have responded to Peter's appeal out of pure charity! (While) his heart remained limpid, capable of detecting the veiled presence of Jesus. Peter immediately listens to what John says to him. After straightening up his appearance, he hurls himself towards Jesus. This is a significant small detail. One does not behave in the same way, especially interiorly, when Jesus is present as opposed to when He is not there. Very quickly, as soon as Jesus is absent from our heart, we go back to behaviors that are purely human...

John's role towards Peter is manifested here; it is John who takes the initiative. Isn't it the contemplative's role to unveil Jesus' presence through man's diverse activities? The risen Jesus

⁴¹ Jn. 21:5.

no longer depends on the diverse obstacles posed by our human conditioning. His life is entirely beyond these limits. There is, as it were, a participation in the omnipresence of God-Creator for He is, through His death and Resurrection, the savior God. He creates us in His plenitude of grace; He is present wherever His grace penetrates.

After this little meal by the lake where Jesus Himself provides for everything and where, after blessing the bread and fish, giving them to His disciples, Jesus pulls Peter aside and asks him the question: “*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*” This is really the first time in the Gospel that Jesus asks this question. He had already asked His disciples earlier concerning their Faith in Him as well as the content of this Faith; Peter had responded on behalf of the Twelve. Now, it is Jesus asking Peter directly of his love for Him: “*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*” Love is personal and it demands for a personal response, a personal choice that engages our entire life. The adhesion of Faith can be proclaimed as a community: Peter can respond on behalf of the Twelve,⁴² whereas love in that which is most proper to it cannot be proclaimed in the same fashion. By asking in this manner, Jesus wants to probe Peter’s heart before personally entrusting His own sheep to him. In fact, in order to govern Christ’s Church – a “*kingdom (which) does not belong to this world*”⁴³ – prudence is obviously needed, a profound sense of justice, but above all a faithful love for Jesus crucified and glorified is needed, such a love which might radiate in mercy upon all of Jesus’ sheep who belong also to the Father. The Church is not to be governed like a temporal kingdom which is based on justice, for the Church is founded upon divine mercy. Jesus questions Peter three times, something that he did not do concerning Faith and Hope. This is equally significant: for isn’t

⁴² Mt. 16:16.

⁴³ Jn. 18:36.

love for Jesus ultimate, something that is absolute? There can be nothing greater or above it.

From this we are able to grasp how this covenant of love through Jesus is Trinitarian. It is realized with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It takes up again in a new manner the covenants that were made with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in order to fulfill or complete them.

This covenant of love also implies a merciful pardon with respect to the triple denial. When Jesus pardons, He makes use of even the consequences of sin in order to bring about a more profound bond of love.

This new covenant of love remains completely relative to Jesus, the Good Shepherd who pastures His sheep in verdant pastures. Peter is there to be, as it were, the sacrament of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Being completely relative to Jesus, this covenant remains limited and must be exercised in a divine poverty. Jesus says this with clarity to Peter when the latter asked Him what He was going to do for John: *“Peter turned and saw the disciple following whom Jesus loved, the one who had reclined upon his chest during the supper and had said, ‘Master, who is the one who will betray you? When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is that of yours? You follow me.’”* This does not mean that John is excluded from this covenant, or that he is exempt from Peter’s authority but instead relies directly on the authority of Jesus Good Shepherd; this means that for John, Jesus Himself intervenes in order to reserve John’s mission for Himself, while John continues to remain fully docile to Peter’s authority wherever it must be exercised. In this realm, John must even be more docile than the rest for he is more closely united to Peter; although this docility may only be lived in a filial love towards Mary. Isn’t the filial obedience rendered to Peter the fruit of Mary’s divine

motherhood over John? And this remains true for those who are truly John's disciples, the beloved disciples, those within the Church who desire to lead a truly contemplative and apostolic life.

JESUS' SECRET BOND WITH JOHN

These words of Jesus for John remain mysterious and this is why they have been interpreted in so many ways. We must grasp the mystical meaning of these words. The words: "*if I want,*" don't they indicate a profound desire from Jesus' heart? To Peter, Jesus commands: "*You follow me.*" But here (for John), He does not give an order but rather expresses the most profound wish in his heart: "*if I want him to remain until I come.*" This desire, this wish is that John might "*remain,*" not just physically but divinely. The desire of Jesus' heart is for love to take possession over the heart of John, and make him love Jesus with Mary's heart, and for this love to remain until Jesus' glorious return. Such cannot be the fruit of a command, but the result of the superabundance of gratuitous love: the hidden work of the Holy Spirit and of Mary.

A marvelous complementarity is found between Peter and John, for both of them participate in the unique royal priesthood of Christ-Savior, thus shedding light on two essential aspects of His sacerdotal mediation. This mediation binds Christ to His Father in the first place, in order to adore and contemplate Him. In the second place, it links Him to men in order to save them and lead them to the Father. This is why Jesus must remain very close to men, to know them in order to love them insofar as they are capable of pleasing God and becoming children of God – in such a way that He perfectly adapts Himself to them, speaks their language, live with them according to their own culture - by being everything for them while remaining entirely oriented towards the Father.

One can observe how these two disciples of Jesus both live by His royal priesthood. One of them sheds light on the first bond with the Father; the other one highlights the second bond with men, which is also essential.

We then understand Jesus' profound desire - that the spirit of the beloved disciple might remain. Jesus wants contemplative apostles, beloved disciples like John. He cannot command this but for His friends, His wishes have even more imperative force than all the commandments. In order to realize this - that they might be John's beloved children and Mary's beloved children living by the same spirit - the Holy Spirit demands from them to become apostles (after John's example) who are very given, very zealous, very close to all those whom Christ place along their way, yet *never forgetting that the structure of their life is contemplative*. They must strive to become true apostles who desire to be contemplatives; they must unceasingly ask this grace from Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit, and from Mary, knowing that on their own they incapable of it.

In order for this desire to remain true and not turn out to be a mere velleity (short-lived burst of enthusiasm), they must take care to be faithful to times of silent prayer as it is required. This allows for the exercise of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity to be safeguarded and loved as the most profound necessary requisite for their life as Christ's disciples and children of the Father. Thanks to this daily exercise of their Faith, Hope and Charity, they express to the Holy Spirit their thirst to enter into an intimacy of a loving silence with Jesus' heart in what is most intimate and personal in it - His bond as the beloved Son with the Father.

Far from creating a distance between men and the disciples of the apostle Saint John, this intimacy enables his disciples to have a more divine, a more penetrating gaze on men

and to better discern what in them is the work of the Holy Spirit and what comes from the devil and everything that is under the devil's influence – the antichrists as mentioned by Saint John.

In the footsteps of Saint John, they will have a very great love for Peter, and for his successors, as well as a very great confidence (trust) in them; they will be desirous to come to their aid when they are asked to, and they will always assist them, in a very discrete manner, through prayer. What is true pertaining to Peter remains true also for all the successors of the apostles, the bishops and the priests: *we must never criticize them in public, but instead defend them with love.*

DOCILITY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE PARACLETE

Jesus' prophetic teaching on the Paraclete revealed for us in the Gospel of Saint John is an inexhaustible treasure and must be lived by us in a very special way.

Let us try to analyze and contemplate with ever greater desire chapters 14, 15, and 16, where Saint John shows to us how the Paraclete who is given to us by the Father is given to us thanks to the prayer of Jesus: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it."*⁴⁴ This Paraclete is sent by the Father in Jesus' name, *in persona Jesu*,⁴⁵ and He is sent to us by Jesus Himself while He remains *in sinu Patris*.⁴⁶ He is sent to us by Jesus in order to enable

⁴⁴ Jn 14:15-17.

⁴⁵ Jn. 14:26. "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

⁴⁶ Jn. 15:26. "When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me;" Thus the Holy Spirit puts us on our guard with respect to the world by showing us that as disciples of Jesus, we cannot be disciples of the world, following it and be schooled by it. Mt. 6:24. "No one can serve two masters." A radical choice is to be made through the Holy Spirit which must be repeatedly done more and more.

us to interiorly live by all that Jesus has taught us, to progressively lead us to the full truth by helping us live in an ever more profound unity with Jesus. *“But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.”*⁴⁷

It is really by living an intimate dependence towards the Spirit of truth that are able to fully glorify Jesus and the Father since, as Jesus says, *“Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.”*⁴⁸

Yet let us never forget what Jesus Himself says to us concerning the gift of the Paraclete: *“But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Paraclete will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”*⁴⁹ The necessary pre-condition for His coming is the visible and sensible departure of Christ. We must accept to go beyond the grace of Christ’s sensible presence in order to become capable of receiving this Paraclete. This departure takes place through the Cross - a separation that is extremely painful requiring the mystery of Compassion; we must accept to live by this mystery of love, of poverty and of Faith with Mary.

Jesus then stresses the importance of the Holy Spirit’s personal action: *“And when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation; sin, because they do not believe in me; righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; condemnation, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”*⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Jn. 16:13-14

⁴⁸ Jn. 16:15.

⁴⁹ Jn. 16:7.

⁵⁰ Jn. 16:8-11.

The world's greatest error is its rejection of God's Word by reducing it down to mere human language and by listening only to what comes from human science (or knowledge) – which leads to the disbelief in Jesus as beloved Son of the Father and our Savior. We cannot forget these words of Jesus: “*But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*”⁵¹ The progressive rejection of divine Faith is rooted not only in a personal but even in a collective pride (as prefigured by the tower of Babel): men wanting to do without God and claiming to be capable of saving themselves.⁵²

The Holy Spirit also shows us how the world's justice is not that of Jesus; for Jesus' justice is from the wisdom of the Cross enveloped in mercy and pardon.

Finally, the Holy Spirit rectifies our manner of judging which can no longer be that of the world but that of Jesus glorified; it is His judgment from the victory of love which should illuminate us.

If we want to be sons and daughters of Saint John, we need to progressively discover the place of the Paraclete - the Spirit of truth - in our life who is the one to help us understand how much we are children of the Father, how much we are His beloved children. We are certainly adopted, but nevertheless truly the *sons and daughters* whom He has chosen out of pure love and mercy in order that we might eternally live by the mystery of the Father in and through Christ Jesus. He is the Word made flesh

⁵¹ Lk. 18:8.

⁵² Cf. The “*meta-temptation*” which the Holy Father had particularly emphasized in his address to the French Bishops during his visit to Paris in 1980. “*We are experiencing a particular stage of temptation for man; a meta-temptation that goes beyond everything that, in the course of history, has constituted the theme of man's temptation and at the same time shows... the very foundation of all temptations. Contemporary man is subjected to the temptation of rejecting God in the name of his own humanity.*” (*Documentation Catholique* n° 1778, 15 Juin 1980, p. 590)

who accepts to be crucified in order to glorify the Father and save us. We live this filiation by the Father in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son. In the Book of Revelation, Saint John will speak of the Wedding Banquet of the Lamb⁵³ by showing us the Bride,⁵⁴ the Church in her triumph of love: *“He took me in spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal.”*⁵⁵

To be Saint John’s beloved children is to live by the current or present eschatological Hope. We are those who are sure of the victory which, through Charity and Faith, already reigns in our heart and in our intelligence. And we live in the presence of this victory that unceasingly supplies us with a totally divine strength. Aren’t we, in following Saint John’s footsteps, the “Apostles of the Lamb”?

FROM THE COMPASSION TO THE ASSUMPTION

The dogma of the Assumption (of Mary) is the last (dogma) that was revealed: it therefore gives the ultimate light. This light is indeed for us in a particular way, since this is Saint John’s last secret. It was the secret that he kept in silence, and thus left to the Church in these last times the task of officially revealing it. We must therefore ask this question: why does John defer to the Church with regard to this proclamation of Mary’s Assumption, as he had also deferred to Peter for the affirmation of Jesus’ Resurrection?

John’s silence is a component of his paternity over us; this silence is permitted and willed in order that we might come closer to Mary and might believe even more in her love of

⁵³ Rev. 19:9.

⁵⁴ Rev. 21:2 & 9.

⁵⁵ Rev. 21: 10-11.

predilection. If Mary had asked John to remain silent about the mystery of her Dormition and her Assumption, this was in order that he might become poorer and at the same time be more intimately bound to her secret, thus uniting him even more to her glorified heart. On his part, John would want us to let ourselves be educated by the silence of Mary in order to enter into a much greater intimacy with her glorified heart and with her entire self in her glory. Mary's silence is there to indicate for us the substantial character of her maternity, in other words: to allow us to understand how her maternity is one that takes over or assumes everything.

Shouldn't we pay particular attention to this for our time since the Holy Father has linked the mystery of the Assumption with the new Pentecost of love? Does the Holy Spirit want to us understand how He wants to reveal to us certain secrets that He has not yet revealed to the Church?

Yet these secrets are revealed to us in such great poverty, since we do not really know the *how* of our Mother's passage from earth into heaven, from the struggles into glory. Why does God permit this poverty, this ignorance? It is so that we might always live by the mystery of the Assumption beginning with the mystery of Compassion and by means of this mystery to never abandon it. It is a fact that we cannot have the experience of glory: on earth we will never experience the victory of love in the manner it is lived in glory. Yet we do not live it any lesser for *it is not the glorious mode that brings about the victory of love*. It is not Christ's Resurrection which makes the Cross glorious. No: the Cross of Christ is glorious in itself since it is suffering completely transformed by love that bears it. The great victory of love in its manifestation for us is the Cross and this is the wisdom of the Cross: it is the victory of divine love, stronger than death,

absorbing death, making use of death itself in order to reveal divine love's substantial totality.⁵⁶

Let us then ask ourselves the question: what does the mystery of the Assumption add to this victory of love which we already live by in the mystery of Compassion?

Let us first of all clarify that the mystery of the glorification of Mary is the ultimate fruit of the Cross. In fact, if the Immaculate Conception is the masterpiece of the Holy Trinity (especially of the Holy Spirit) by means of the Cross of Christ (a masterpiece which does not destroy human nature), we might say that the mystery of Compassion – whose ultimate moment is the Dormition of Mary – is the common masterpiece of Mary and of Christ, the common work of human nature and its Redeemer. Yet at the same time, entrance into glory is the ultimate gratuitous grace of the Father for His little child. In fact, Mary's ultimate act (her act of Faith, Hope and Love) is her common work with grace but entrance into glory is a purely gratuitous grace, even for Mary. This glorious entry is the Father way of thanking her as Father, wherein He brings her into this greatest intimacy with Him. Mary's glorification is indeed the paternal gesture par excellence; since the Father's proper work is to make that which comes from Him dwell in Him. All glory that Mary receives from the Father therefore renders her interior in a unique manner – "*All glory of the king's daughter is inward*."⁵⁷

Now this mystery is given to us. And as it is given to us, it gives the victory of love (that we live in the mystery of Compassion) a unique interiority;⁵⁸ this mystery is Mary in glory, becoming the instrument for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁶ Divine love's ... *dans son absolu substantial*

⁵⁷ Ps. 44:14 (Vulgate) "OMNIS GLORIA FILIIAE REGIS INTRINSECUS FASCEIS AUREIS VESTITA EST"

⁵⁸ Actually, the victory of divine love over matter implicates the body to no longer be an element that renders exterior, that disperse far from the center (soul), but instead renders interior all sensibility. This perhaps is one of the

Isn't this the meaning of the new Pentecost of love that the Holy Father, in a prophetic gesture, links to the mystery of the Assumption? God is going to use Mary in glory in order to communicate to us the Holy Spirit in His most hidden and most personal aspect. Since Mary is glorified even in her body, her mediation can be realized perfectly; as Mother, Mary, in some sort, suppresses or eliminates our limits. The mother carrying her child has him marching to a rhythm which is no longer that of a child.

The gift of the Holy Spirit in itself and for itself (the new Pentecost of love) requires that we be bound to the mystery of the Assumption, so that we might be bound to the Holy Spirit *just as* Mary was bound to Him interiorly. Far from diminishing the gift (just as a channel diminishes the flow from the spring), Mary's mediation allows us to receive grace *just the way as* Mary received it and to live by this grace as she lived by it, with the same fullness, the same force, and the same limpidity.

reasons why the mystery of the Assumption remains so hidden. Everything in Mary is, as it were, absorbed by God. Her body enables her to offer something substantial to the Father, and it is thanks to her body that this substantial offering can be gloriously realized, i.e., in the victory of love.

In her mystery of Compassion, Mary lived the victimal state in the fullness of love: she offered everything, gave all without keeping anything for herself. And the fact is, her body allowed this offering. It allowed for all that she had to be offered to the Father, that she be in this total poverty, so that everything might be gratuitously taken up again by love – not because of her merits, but due to a pure gratuitousness of love. The more the victimal state is strong and great, the more is the glorification realized in the most absolute gratuitousness, and the more does this glorification place the glorified body in a state of total dependence towards the Father's good will (or pleasure). This is what it is, to divinely love her body: loving it in its state of dependence to the Father and loving it inasmuch as it can be offered as victim of love. That which is greatest in the human body is its ability to be offered as love's victim. The mystery of glorification on the body therefore glorifies this offering. Here again is where we encounter interiority, since the victory of love can only be in the interiority of the soul that offers everything to the Father, in order to better be the one who wants to live of His love, and who understands that this love is only thing that is important.

This link between Mary's glorification and the gift of the Holy Spirit should make us understand that the Holy Spirit will be given to us *as* it was given to Mary in her glory, with the same intensity – if however we want to receive it.

From the Cross up to the Assumption, the gift of the Holy Spirit to Mary took place with John near her. After the Ascension, it was necessary for Mary to remain on earth in order that she might arrive at that ultimate act of faith, Hope and of Charity that could be lived on earth, in an intimate union with the crucified Christ, up to the point of joining up in the fullness of His grace.⁵⁹ Saint John is there in order to enable Mary to go to the end in her mystery of Compassion. Through his priesthood, John allows Mary to remain actual and faithful to the mystery of Compassion, and to live by it more and more. *"It is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Paraclete will not come to you."*⁶⁰ Jesus steps back in order to let the Holy Spirit bring about between the hearts of Mary and John a completely new covenant, which perhaps is that which is most hidden and most divine in the New Covenant.

On her part, Mary communicates to John her thirst for the beatific vision and teaches him how to live by God's Word, by the Eucharist (this one allowing her to live by the *current*-ness of the gift without looking back on the past, however divine it may have been⁶¹), and by fraternal charity.

⁵⁹ Mary lives the same plenitude of grace specifically, as recipient of this grace (whereas Jesus lives this grace as its source), just as in the Most Holy Trinity, the Son receives all from the Father and the Father gives everything to the Son. It is evident that at the level of being, Mary remains a creature; but at the level of divine life, there is a substantial unity between Jesus and Mary. There is the same plenitude of divine life for Mary at the level of Faith, of Hope and of Charity. Jesus communicated to His Mother everything that He could transmit to her in the order of grace. Thus, it is seen that He could communicate His plenitude of grace.

⁶⁰ Jn. 16:7.

⁶¹ Such is the great grace of the contemplative life: never to live of one's memories but instead to live always by the current mystery that is being given

Now, all that John lived by, he gives it to us. This is the reason why we must so often ask Saint John to exercise his fatherhood upon us, so that we might be able to receive *everything* of what he received from Mary, knowing that what is greatest in Saint John's fatherhood is giving us the silence of Mary.

II. THE LIFE OF THE FAMILY: ITS DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Everything that was just said about the *spirit* of the family of Saint John is what profoundly unites all the members of this family, and this spirit must be lived more and more until eternal life... and until Christ's return.

But we must also acknowledge that, in this big family, there are different ways of living by this spirit which substantially remains the same.

These diverse manners of living must not lead to and bring about oppositions, critical views, or rivalries – all of these would be false – but on the contrary to a holy emulation, each community taking seriously the placing in full light of what is one's proper vocation so that the *spirit* of the family of Saint John might be fully realized in the Church.

to us and is more and more given to us. Thanks to and in her mystery of Assumption, Mary is much more given to John at the Cross where she is given by Jesus in a sensible and visible manner.

Let us add how the exigency of fraternal charity should unite always more the various communities, requiring from each of the members – whether Brothers, Sisters or Oblates – never to criticize one another in front of persons from outside. Jesus Himself tells us: it is the devil who sows discord in the Father’s field.⁶² But when another is criticized, each one should instead help and support him. This is our first apostolate: giving witness before men that Christ’s love is victorious in our heart, over all rivalries, differences and oppositions. This is an indispensable witness; if it is not present, all other apostolate take the risk of being reduced to nothing, of losing their effectiveness.

The prayer of the beloved Son – the one responsible for the salvation of all men - remains at the heart of the family of Saint John: *“So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.”*⁶³

The common fruit of our contemplative love for Jesus and of our fraternal love for those whom God has placed along our path in order to live the same life together is this unity of heart and soul- that unity of the first communities of Christians who were of one heart and one soul.⁶⁴ Without slipping back into archaism, we need to be very attentive to what is said of the first Christian communities in the Acts of the Apostles and which today’s world is particularly sensitive to.

⁶² Cf. Mt. 13:24-30.

⁶³ Jn. 17:21-23.

⁶⁴ Acts 4:32. “The community of believers were of one heart and mind.”; Cf. 2:44-46.

1. THE BROTHERS AND THE PRIESTS

Having consecrated themselves to the Virgin Mary and receiving her from Jesus crucified in the manner that Saint John, their father did, the Brothers of the Congregation of Saint John will increasingly understand that their proper grace is to live by this spirit: it is Jesus' personal call for each one of them and for everyone to finally give witness to today's Church and to the entire world of the absolute primacy of the love of the heart of Jesus – of His filial love for the Father whom He glorifies and His love for men whom He saves. Through Mary, our father Saint John fully lived and desires that through him and in him we might also live by this love.

At the Novitiate and during the years of formation, the brothers will strive to fully live by this spirit in order to be a constant renewal for the entire Congregation. They will strive to live by this call with renewed fervor so that the Congregation does not become the object of Jesus' reproach in His correction for the Church of Ephesus – the Church which is John's in a very special way.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit expect this unceasing renewed fervor from the Congregation of Saint John. The two Houses of Formation must therefore be attentive to their very particular responsibility in this regard. Mary will see to this if only the Brothers keep on asking this from her.

In the Desert Pories and those other pories which are more immediately devoted for contemplation, this fervor close to the Eucharist must be most specially lived. Indeed, such is the role of the Desert Pories. Obtaining permission to spend a year, six months, or two months of Desert is obviously for a brother's personal sanctity although it is also for the sanctification of all the brothers of the Congregation.

This exigency for sanctity applies also for those (brothers) living in a more contemplative priory, this is in order

that fraternal charity might be exercised with greater fervor. We have been linked to each other through our profession (conceived) in the hearts of Jesus and of Mary. We cannot isolate ourselves; we must understand that the stronger is the love of Christ in our heart, the more we should be capable of giving ourselves to those whom God places beside us and along our path.

In the apostolic priories, the priests and brothers will strive to be very faithful in living by the fatherhood of Saint John. This means being the beloved disciples of Jesus who keep in their heart and in their will that thirst to love the Father's will above all else, and to do everything in order to accomplish this will: to be like Jesus who is "entirely after (heedful of) the affairs of His Father." It is this alone which can bring about unity in our apostolic life: by maintaining a contemplative gaze and at the same time being attentive to the spiritual needs of our brothers, in order to help them emerge from their miseries. For it is the Father who wants to draw us into His intimacy, to make of us "His beloved sons," and to entrust to us the very same mission entrusted to His beloved Son, Jesus

Yet Jesus wants us to be sufficiently prudent, with a divine prudence, to accept in our apostolic life only those which won't become an obstacle for our contemplative life and even for our religious life. This is really the problem which we must always confront directly, with the advice and light from our superiors - for we must not simply accept just any kind of apostolic activity. Our life has its specific characteristic in itself. It is not our apostolic activities that give our life its proper characteristic, even though certain apostolic activities might be an essential aspect of our life. These apostolic activities should be the *proper fruit* of our contemplative and religious life, as it were, their radiance. There is a way of being pastor of a parish according to the manner of the diocesan priest and another

manner as a brother-priest of Saint John. We must discover this by asking Mary and Saint John to teach us how. No apostolic *activity*, by itself and in itself, is contrary (in opposition) to our apostolic *life*, i.e., if we truly seek to discover the spirit in which these activities are to be undertaken. For this we must clarify what characterizes an apostolic activity in the face of responsibility and the realization of actual works. Apostolic activity primarily concerns the sanctification of persons; these works imply a common good. Before a parish can be received under the responsibility of priests of the Brothers of Saint John, and in order for the Brothers to communicate the proper grace of the contemplative religious life, wouldn't it be important for our secular oblates to actively cooperate in the apostolic life (since it is precisely the vocation of the laity to be involved in dealing with all the temporal aspect of the Christian life)? It is important that the parishes which have been entrusted to the Congregation of Saint John be carried from within through the apostolate of the brothers and oblates, while respecting the proper structures of organization of the parishes according to different dioceses. In this manner, the Congregation of Saint John will be able to contribute its specific grace to the Church; this is the apostolic grace in the broadest sense of the term, according to the particular modalities and the proper work (project) of the parish.

Above and beyond the parish tasks, shouldn't every religious and apostolic community of Saint John have a link with the School of Saint John – bearing that concern for establishing a spiritual center for retreats and teaching (which might be referred to as a “Saint John Center”)?⁶⁵

It is thanks to our contemplative life that our apostolic activity draws Christians and non-Christians towards Jesus, towards Mary, drawing them towards these two presences of Jesus and Mary lived in the Eucharist and through the Word of

⁶⁵ *Foyer Saint Jean*

God. Shouldn't the parish above all be the *place* where Jesus is present – His presence radiating through His witnesses and thanks to fraternal charity lived between the members of the priory and all the faithful?

Here we have the three main sources of attraction: God's Word, the Eucharist and fraternal charity. These three are very demanding and may only be lived thanks to a contemplative life and in a community. Isn't each of them in accordance with Saint John's proper charism: the mystery of God's Word (Word of life),⁶⁶ the Bread of life (Eucharist), and the fruitfulness of fraternal charity? It is evident that the order of wisdom among God's Word, the Eucharist, and fraternal charity will be lived differently in each priory, in reference to the different apostolic demands of these priories, and depending on the particular graces of the members in these priories. These three great mysteries must always be present and lived in the manner that Mary and Saint John did. This life must be sought by each of the members of the priory as their profound intention, done with the greatest truth and with a concern for adapting to the Christians and non-Christians who are close to them.

2. THE CONTEMPLATIVE SISTERS

With respect to the (Contemplative) Sisters of Saint John, through their consecration to the Virgin Mary and in receiving her from Jesus crucified in the manner that their father Saint John received Him, they will more and more understand that their proper grace is to live by this spirit according to its greatest exigency and in the greatest purity. They must be consciously aware that the Holy Spirit asks of them to live in today's world the mystery of Mary in the manner that Saint John lived it.

They must understand the very special responsibility that they have for the entire Congregation. They understand how

⁶⁶ 1 Jn. 1:1.

difficult it is for the apostles who are very devoted in their apostolic life to be able to maintain the primacy of silent prayer (*oraison*) and contemplation, to maintain that constantly renewed exigency of fervor in responding to Jesus' call to follow Him wherever He goes; in other words, keeping in the depths of their heart the fervor of the first love. This is why, in front of Jesus and Mary, they must accept to live by all the demands of the primacy of silent prayer and contemplation, not only for themselves according to their personal vocation, but also in relation to their brother apostles and their Apostolic Sisters. Like Mary and in her, they must become "mothers" of the contemplative lives of their brothers and sisters. They must carry their brothers and sisters through their struggles and difficulties; they must accept to be faithfully present in the silence of Faith, Hope and Love, near Jesus for them – similar to Moses on the top of the mountain with his arms extended towards God while the people of Israel were fighting in the valley; each time his arms fell, the army retreated.

The Sisters will never realize enough how their fidelity is the necessary condition for the fidelity of their Apostle-brothers and Apostolic Sisters. This does not repose on their greater sanctity but is due to the Father's will desiring from them this divine cooperation. This cooperation must be realized in a very great poverty and humility. For this, the Contemplative Sisters must fully enter into the mystery of evangelical littleness. This implies for them to be following in the footsteps of Mary - very hidden from the gaze of others, from their brothers and sisters, and especially from their own eyes – so that Jesus and Mary (through her and in her) might bring about this grand family mystery, this divine cooperation.

In order to respond to their vocation – a vocation similar to Mary's with respect to John – the sisters must strive to live in a totally divine, totally interior manner which constitutes the spirit of the Congregation: the primacy of silent prayer, thirst for

contemplation, fraternal charity, the search for truth, manual labor which most particularly for them, is to be realized in the light of John 6: 27, "*Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*"

For the sisters, contemplation must blossom in an extremely intense and interior fraternal charity that is manifested throughout their entire life in common. In this way they will bear witness to the victory of their exclusive and jealous love for Jesus and Mary. They will ask Mary to always unite this intensity of silence with the ardor of their generous gift of self to others - in great poverty and discretion which are characteristics of the incarnation of fraternal charity in the contemplative life.

The Sisters' oraison and contemplation must be totally hidden in Mary. *Her* mystery is to be their mystery also. It is obvious that they are to live by her mysteries of joy close to the Infant Jesus, but these are in order to live also by her mysteries of the struggles and sorrows of Jesus in agony and crucified, and her mysteries of glory. The rosary is given to them for this reason - so that they might place themselves in the school of Mary under the motion of the Holy Spirit. It is evident how they must above all constantly go back to the mystery of Mary in her Compassion for this is the great mystery that John received from Mary in a privileged manner. It is the mystery of Mary living her compassion at the foot of the Cross whom John received as Mother, the very moment when she was "one" with Jesus crucified. This is the moment when Jesus bequeaths Mary to John, and not at Cana.

Mary lived her mystery of Compassion in the plenitude of Faith, Hope and Love. Such is the mystery of Christian contemplation which is entirely relative to Jesus' adoration, His holocaust of love, and the offering of His whole life in order to glorify the Father and save us. It is the mystery of the Bride who

truly carries out a common work with her Bridegroom in order to achieve and complete His proper work as much as she can as Bride. Mary perfectly lived this in her Faith, Hope and Charity, since this is precisely how she is able to complete and achieve the work of Jesus crucified, her Bridegroom. We have already mentioned this earlier and we repeat it here in order to emphasize what the Sisters must be entirely devoted to in their contemplative life. They must live primarily by that mystery prophetically announced by Hosea: “*sponsabo te mihi in fide, in misericordia, in justitia* ” – “*I will espouse you to me forever. I will espouse you in right(eousness) and in justice, in love (tenderness)*⁶⁷ *and mercy*; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.”⁶⁸ This is where Yahweh’s covenant with man reaches the summit and it is also here that Mary is present: *Stabat Mater*. This is where she is the Mother of the Savior, the Bride of His offering of love.

Whatever Mary lived must also be lived by her beloved son John. All of her children must also live it in the manner John did. This is exactly what Jesus wants Peter to understand. A secret of love binds Jesus to Mary and to John. This is the family covenant par excellence. Such is the covenant that our Contemplative Sisters are to live.

Their entire life is to be ordered by this secret since it is from this secret that their life attains its profound signification (or meaning). They must live by this for the whole Congregation, for the entire Church, and for all men since Jesus died for all men.

The more that Christian contemplation is united to Mary the Compassionate one’s contemplation, to that of Christ crucified – and therefore the more this contemplation is personal, engaging what is most intimate in us, in our heart; then the more

⁶⁷ *Hesed*: love of friendship, the *gift* which must be reciprocal. God’s *hesed* calls for the *hesed* in man, the gift of his soul.

⁶⁸ Hos. 2:21; Jer. 31:31-34; Eze. 36:26-27.

also would it be universal excluding no one. Christian Contemplation extends to all men and to the poorest. The most disinherited (or deprived, under privileged?) ones will always occupy the privileged place⁶⁹ reserved for them in the hearts of Jesus and of Mary, and in the hearts of our Contemplative Sisters. In the Holy Spirit and in the heart Mary, shouldn't our Contemplative Sisters always be living by the mystery of Compassion for today's Church and for all men of today? The first foundation (of the Sisters) at Pellevoisin is very significant in this sense. The poor, the poorest ones asked for them. They called the sisters, asked for their presence.

3. THE APOSTOLIC SISTERS

The Apostolic Sisters also have an essential role of complementarity in the Congregation of Saint John. What is said of the Contemplative Sisters is also true for them: they must live by the same thirst for contemplation, which for them demands to be the source of an apostolic life bearing witness to Jesus' mercy for today's world. Their gift of self must be lived in the greatest divine generosity and in the most radical poverty. Such will require entering always more into the spirit of the Congregation: contemplative oraison, the search for truth, an apostolic life in view of evangelization, witnessing to the love of Jesus for men in our world so secularized – all these lived in small priories striving to be *oases* of light and of love.

Fidelity to silent prayer will enable the Apostolic Sisters to have a more intense liturgical life - realizing it with a certain beauty, never however, losing its interiority. Often and because of the demands of their apostolic life, the Brothers cannot have a liturgical life as beautiful as they might want. To the extent they are able to, the Apostolic Sisters must strive to realize a liturgical life which would help the faithful to pray and to discover the

⁶⁹ *place de choix*

presence of Mary praying in their midst and with them. This seems important as a complementarity to their apostolic life with respect to their Brothers' apostolates. Our Contemplative Sisters' liturgical life should always remain very discreet, similar to those of the Carmelites: such is an aspect of their proper charism. However, the Apostolic Sisters must place more emphasis on their liturgical life in a realization which will always remain simple, bare⁷⁰ (or sober) but beautiful. Nevertheless, this task must not jeopardize the primacy of silent prayer which remains the fundamental and premier exigency of the entire Congregation of Saint John. Moreover, it is this primacy of oraison which imprints that note of simplicity and great interiority into our Apostolic Sisters' liturgical life.

By their life of silent prayer, the Apostolic Sisters remain united to Mary's mystery of Compassion and they will progressively understand how there can be no apostolic life without a great thirst for contemplation. Although they may not be able to consecrate times of silent prayer as much as their Contemplative Sisters, they must strive – using all means possible – to maintain a very great thirst for contemplation in their heart. It is for this reason that they will always keep a great desire for seeking the truth – both philosophical as well as theological. They will ask their Brothers to help them maintain in their heart this very strong desire for the truth, all the while progressively trying to acquire for themselves their specific intellectual formation – without ever forgetting that faithfulness to silent prayer, to liturgical prayer, to the thirst for truth is their great means for completing and helping their Brothers.

But perhaps it is through unity – the fruit of their fraternal charity – that they can best give witness to their membership in the Congregation of Saint John. By truly living according to the spirit of the First Epistle of Saint John, they will

⁷⁰ *dépouillée*

be mindful to remind their Brothers always of the desires contained in the heart of Jesus expressed in His great prayer as the beloved Son (in John chapter 17). This is where the Apostolic Sisters will give the first witness of the presence of Jesus in today's world, so divided by hatred, jealousy and rivalry. This is primarily the manner how the Apostolic Sisters must bear witness of their love for Jesus and their Brothers. As for the Contemplative Sisters – who must live by the same unity – this (witnessing) remains more hidden. With the Apostolic Sisters, this witness must be very clearly manifest to all. As it is already hurtful to hear a religious criticizing his brother, how much more unbearable would it be to have one sister criticizing her sisters – since one expects a greater expression of love and mercy from women. Shouldn't Mary and the Holy Family be even more present and more manifest in the heart of our (Apostolic) Sisters?

4. THE OBLATES

The spirit of the Community of Saint John demands its incarnation among Christians living in the world, either as husbands and wives responsible for a Christian family or as single persons having their own parish, social, political commitments, or as hermits. These are our **Secular Oblates**. These oblates are not religious; but by being consecrated to Jesus and Mary through baptism, their oblature must enable them to live their Christian grace even more profoundly in their quest for sanctity.

The goal of Christian life – sanctity, intimate union with Jesus and Mary in an “affective” interior way – is the same for all the members of the Community of Saint John, religious or oblates. Jesus alone who knows who among them are the most united to Him, who are His disciples of predilection. As for the “effective” union, this comes in many diverse modalities since union is incarnated through all our human activities, down to our

body, our sensitivity, and our passions and even, in a certain way, in the exercise of our instincts.

In fact, a religious must bear witness to his total consecration to Jesus and to the Father with his entire life, thereby witnessing also to the transcendence of divine love, of its jealousy that demands everything from him and requires him to live a life more and more like that of Jesus, beloved Son of the Father. This life will be lived in accordance to the spirit of virginity, of poverty and of obedience incarnated in a visible manner through a life of solitude or in community. Religious must choose the means proper to this life; of separation from the world and in complete devotion to Jesus. It won't be the world in which he lives that dictates these means but instead discover them on his own through the Constitutions of his order.

The oblates consecrated to Jesus and to Mary must live a life of consecration *in the world*, living it in the temporal milieu where they are. They may certainly still choose other means which are more fitting for their sanctity – for the incarnation of their sanctity – but these means must remain those of the human community. The oblates however must understand how these means are often imposed upon them since they still need to work in the world, earn their living as well as take care of the responsibilities at home for those who are married. Thus it will truly be the *spirit* in which they will be using these means that will enable them to bear witness and distinguish them from others with whom they live. This is why the community (of oblates) that they form should not be a new community added on to the existing one they already are in (i.e., household, parish). It pertains more of a communion in spirit and of heart, a communion of searchers, lived under the light of the Gospel of Saint John and according to the spirit of the Congregation which they are to form amongst themselves. Thus they will be helping each other by sustaining each other and live a very simple

fraternal charity with each other. They are not to separate themselves from other Christians nor from other people they are with. Therefore their testimony will above all be personal; nevertheless, they will be attentive to bear witness to their communion with each other and with their connection to a Priory to which they are attached.

This does not, however, exclude oblates from being able to take on a common charge (responsibility) or even to realize a communal work (common work) – for example a temporal or educative responsibility under the supervision of a priory like that of *Saint-Jean Espérance* at Pellevoisin or *Saint-Jean Éducation*. The Congregation has no other work other than the School of Saint John.⁷¹ The community may however set up a work (project) and promote it; and in the beginning direct the project. Nevertheless, the priest who initiated the project must be sufficiently poor enough to step aside progressively by handing it over to a lay oblate and to remain present only to assure the work of evangelization.

These small communities of oblates will remain available at the service of the project initiated by the priest who will be able to continue to help them spiritually. This will not be religious communities, but some sort of a base community united around some common work (task) to be realized.

⁷¹ *École Saint-Jean*

APPENDICES

As we have already said previously concerning the gift of Mary to John,⁷² it is primarily her mystery of Compassion in which she is given to him that Mary communicates to John so that he might live by her mystery. But the mystery of Compassion is the ultimate culmination of Mary's *consecration* to the Father – her response to the Father's prevenient mercy that made her *immaculate* – as well as the summit of her *divine maternity*. Through the Compassion, John is called to live very particularly by these three mysteries.

This is why it would be appropriate to include as appendices three (recent) conferences about the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, Mary's Consecration and her Divine Maternity.

1 - THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

We need to be particularly attentive to these last three revelations of the Church, the last three dogmas: the Immaculate Conception, Papal Infallibility and the Assumption. They are for us. The Holy Spirit wanted these last three dogmas to be, as it were, hidden (present but hidden) throughout the official Revelation in Scripture. It is Tradition that kept them, and the Church has proclaimed them towards the term of her journey under the direct motion of the Holy Spirit. It is very important for us to understand this since we need to be attentive to what the Holy Spirit wants us to keep in a very special way. Father

⁷² Cf. p. 21.

(Maximilian) Kolbe does not hesitate in saying that the mystery of the Immaculate Conception must renew our entire theology. This would only be true for mystical theology but not for scientific theology since this is but an effect; but surely so for mystical theology. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is a mystery that we must contemplate more and more. For Fr. Kolbe, this was like a very great revelation concerning the Most Holy Trinity, especially on the Holy Spirit. We can understand what he means. He is saying this from a mystical gaze - therefore, in a manner which is not very precise, but which must be understood from an interior perspective. These were his last words, or almost the last, pertaining to the Immaculate Conception. In a way, it is a Franciscan grace... The Franciscans are very proud of this, to have always upheld the mystery of the Immaculate Conception... But Saint Thomas (Aquinas) did not say this in scientific theology... But Fr. Mandonnet used to say that he (Saint Thomas A) preached it - which is a very nice thing to say, moreover. Since Fr. Mandonnet was a historian - a "good Burgundian" (from the Burgundy region) historian - I believe that when he said this, he wanted to express something very profound.

Fr. Kolbe's contemplation at Lourdes - "I am the Immaculate Conception," "I am" - brings together into a single gaze God's eternal *I Am* and Mary's *I am*... Mary did not say: I am the Compassion (which is also true). But instead she says: "I am the Immaculate Conception" to little Bernadette who understood nothing. Neither do we really understand any better than her; but we know that our Faith implies a very great light. And so even if we understand nothing in saying: "Mary is the Immaculate one," or "the Immaculate Conception of Mary," there is still a very great light in this mystery.

This very great light concerning Mary must enable us to have a new mystical gaze on the Most Holy Trinity, on the

mystery of Jesus, on the mystery of the Church, over the mystery of our soul transformed by grace, over the mystery of our religious life. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception sheds a new light on everything; all is renewed. Here is the great renewal of the Church – seen from the viewpoint of the theology on the divine economy, from the perspective of mystical theology since this mystery places us in the presence of the grand victory of the Cross. The wisdom of the Cross can only be grasped through the mystery of the Immaculate Conception; it is the fruit par excellence of the Cross.

In His wisdom, God has wanted - the Father wanted – that there be a little creature who would be immaculate; a creature who would not suffer the consequences of original sin. This victory of love in Mary which is the victory wrought through the Cross is such that she is not tainted by the consequences of original sin. God uses original sin in order to realize this grand “*surpasement*”⁷³ which is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception that implies the plenitude of grace. This is indeed very mysterious. We do not say: “Original sin does not exist in Mary.” In one sense, we can say that for Mary, original sin does not exist. But if Mary formally elaborated a theology, if she wrote a book, she wouldn’t have said: “original sin does not exist for me; my own experience is that original sin does not exist.” No. She wouldn’t have said this. Since we might be led to believe certain modern theologians who claim that original sin does not exist thus place themselves in the same position or in the same light as the Immaculate Conception: this is not true, it is a temptation. Mary would have affirmed that original sin does exist and that God, out of the folly of love, the Father – it is the Father’s grace for His beloved little child – wanted that there be a creature who divinely benefits (if I may say) of the victory of love over all the consequences of original sin.

⁷³ A transcending above the usual or expected

Here are the consequences of original sin: lust of the flesh, concupiscence of life, the lust of the eyes. This is mentioned in Saint John.⁷⁴ In order, therefore, to understand the mystery of the Immaculate Conception – to be able to *speak* of the mystery – and to grasp what makes Mary unique, it is very important to grasp the victory over the three consequences of original sin. We must first understand that in Mary, the spiritual aspect is so much stronger than her sensitivity. Her sensitivity is completely absorbed (assumed) by the spiritual aspect. Mary never stopped (got stuck) at the sensible level. She immediately went beyond it. It exists in her but is completely surpassed by a divine love. The divine is beyond this distinction between spiritual and sensible: both are divinized. In her sensitivity, Mary lived by this grace: of the victory of love over all the consequences of original sin – in the realm of the concupiscence of the flesh.

Mary also lives by this great victory of love over the concupiscence of the eyes (the “crude” vanity: of wanting always to be the first one, of wanting to be waited upon by others). Even more little that Therese who wanted to be like “God’s little ball” hidden under a piece of furniture, Christian grace hides Mary from her own eyes and from the gaze of others. The victory of love over vanity makes us want to be hidden in order to belong only to God, for anything that exposes us to the eyes of men draws us away from this gaze of God. Therefore, we want that it be only God and God’s gaze taking a hold of everything; and we would like to live before Him and in the presence of this gaze from God.

The victory of love over pride is something even much greater. Pride is the exultation of the intelligence that refuses the primacy of love. Pride comes from our intelligence wanting to always know everything, explain everything, and not being able

⁷⁴ 1 Jn. 2:16.

to accept anything that is outside of what one has understood. Such is what pride is: one wants to understand everything, accepting only what one has understood, and one wants that everything be in accord with what one has understood, for one thinks of self as the most intelligent - the first. Pride is the exaltation of being the first in the order of the intelligence. There is, therefore, a victory of love in the realm of the intelligence: that the intelligence accepts to be totally at the service of love. Mary's intelligence has a unique perspicacity: she is much more intelligent than us, because we have been weighed down by sin. Sin has made our intelligence somewhat crude;⁷⁵ it has lapsed down to mere reason. One would then prefer to reason about everything and thus have an enormous difficulty in understanding everything from the interior (*intus legere*). Mary understands everything from the interior, from the perspective of love, and her intelligence has a unique refinement⁷⁶...

These three grand victories of love that the Immaculate Conception gives to Mary are so much more superior to a mere return to the earthly paradise: a return to the earthly paradise - as Duns Scotus says - is not correct. Mary does not return to the earthly paradise. Mary's grace is a *Christian* grace; it is (comes from) the victory of love, the victory of the Cross. Besides, it is for this reason that Mary is capable of suffering more than any other woman, more than any other creature; she is the creature who suffered the most. The creature who is most capable of suffering is Mary since her grace of Immaculate Conception gives her a new capacity for suffering (the entire mystery of Compassion), able to suffer in humility – which means suffering without even understanding. She accepts to not understand; this is due to love that is victorious in her and which assumes

⁷⁵ *grossiere*

⁷⁶ *Une finesse unique*

everything. She accepts to be the lowliest,⁷⁷ totally hidden to herself and to others. She never claims any rights...

We all have our little privileges (each one, according to one's own individuality, has his own privilege: born on a particular date, had a particular education...), and we claim them (these privileges), but when others don't pay attention to these or notice them, we are hurt. We have such a tremendous difficulty in accepting to be hidden. Yet Christian grace hides us. Mary hides herself in order to be under the shadow of the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit overshadows her so that He might always be first (for and in her); and so coarse vanity⁷⁸ disappears so that Mary might be entirely relative to the Lamb, entirely relative to Jesus. Her sensibility, which is much greater than ours, is completely ordered to spiritual and divine love. One can never be too sensitive. When somebody tells me: "I am much too sensitive," I would answer him, "No! Mary is more sensitive than you." And this is true, one can never be too sensitive; although one can misuse one's sensitivity – then this would be different. We abuse it; one gets stuck in it when one should instead always go beyond it. We must never remain at the sensitive level, we must go beyond it; we must use it in order to love divinely, spiritually. One is never too passionate, although one may use their passions badly. It is marvelous to see the mystery of the Immaculate Conception as this great victory of the Cross over all the consequences of sin – since the mystery of the Cross is given primarily to liberate us from the consequences of original sin, and over all other sins, but primarily from original sin. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is thus understood as the great victory of love over all these consequences of original sin that places us in a state of disequilibrium (disharmony).

⁷⁷ *la plus petite*

⁷⁸ *la gross vanité*

We are not saying that Mary is the most well-balanced being; no, she is the most loving being. Everything in her is in order that she might love more, and therefore so that she might be the Woman, the little Benjamin,⁷⁹ the smallest among all the creatures, the poorest, the most fragile of all creatures, the most vulnerable of all, the most capable of loving, the most capable of suffering, the most capable of being totally turned towards Jesus.

This is where we reach (or touch) something that is very mysterious in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception: in His wisdom, the Father wanted that the Sacred Humanity of Jesus to know its complementarity in a creature. Such would be an expression of the folly of God's love, and the folly of the Father's love for Mary. Christ's Sacred Humanity is perfect – it is the “man in himself”⁸⁰. Plato would have never understood how the Woman could be the complementarity of the “man in himself”! But in His wisdom, the Father willed Jesus – Him who is the Man-God and the humanity divinized in the person of the Word – to have a complementarity in Mary, thanks to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate Conception is like a breach – (understand well how our language is always awkward when it comes to expressing the things about God) – in the very mystery of the Sacred Humanity of Christ putting its complementarity in a lowly creature, the Woman.

It is the Book of Genesis that reveals to us the premier complementarity willed by God: woman is created for man in order to be his “*socia*,” his companion, in order to complement him, in order to be his achievement. Woman is created from the side of man, from his heart; but original fault introduced pride into the heart of Eve and in the heart of Adam which led this complementarity, due to the consequences of sin, to be broken. The consequence of sin clearly shows this: the woman will

⁷⁹ This refers to the one who is the youngest child in the family.

⁸⁰ This is a loose translation from the French: *l'homme en soi*.

experience an exaggerated desire for man - she is no longer his complement; and the man will have an exaggerated sense of authority – he will exercise a tyrannical power over the woman. Disequilibrium (or disharmony), consequence of sin, is established firstly with respect to the couple, man and woman; and with respect to fraternal charity which is there to perfectly harmonize man and woman.

These consequences of original sin will be completely surpassed by the victory of divine love, through the mystery of the Cross wherein God establishes a new, divine “equilibrium” between the new Adam and the new Eve. Jesus at the Cross is the new man par excellence, the man of sorrows,⁸¹ the man of love, and the man who is victim of love and who has a divine stature. At the Cross, Jesus manifests that the Father is love; the Cross is all about the beloved Son of the Father proclaiming His love for the Father, showing how He is entirely turned towards the Father. He is the One who lives for the Father and solely for the Father as beloved Son. And in order to live solely for the Father, He accepts to become the victim of love in a radical and total poverty. And at the Cross Mary, the little creature becomes the complementarity, Jesus’ bride, in order to become the achievement or completion of Christ’s victimal state, in order to be the completion of His priesthood, in order to be the completion of the man of sorrows – the achievement of the man who manifests (reveals) love.

Finally, if we carefully consider from the perspective of wisdom: why the Immaculate Conception? This is in order that a little creature might be the complementarity to the man who is the beloved Son of the Father, the man perfect in His sorrows, in His poverty; the man who is perfect since He is nothing else but love. The wounded heart of Jesus, burning furnace of Charity, is the place of divine and human love – and both of these in a single

⁸¹ Is. 53:3.

love. It is important for Mary to be the complementarity of this love – that God might become, as it were, a beggar (a mendicant) for this complementarity of love in and through Mary’s heart. It is for this that it was necessary for Mary’s heart to be that wounded heart, that immaculate heart – immaculate in its wounding, immaculate in its capacity to love and to suffer in order to be the complementarity to Jesus’ victimal state.

God has wanted this in His goodness, and this is the Father’s work. This is where we understand who the Father is and this alone is what makes us understand who He is in an ultimate way. This is where we discover God’s paternity over Mary, the Father’s beloved little daughter so that she might be the complementarity, the achievement of the entire mystery of the beloved Son. This is where we see the Father’s jealous love for His little child. He asks His beloved Son (Him who is the beloved Son) to become a beggar for Mary’s love at the Cross, through His wound, through His cry of thirst. The Father asks His Son to beg for the Woman’s heart, of the immaculate Woman, the one who received the plenitude of love, and a love the never ceased to grow. This is in order that Mary – that absolutely pure and immaculate creature – might be truly complementary to the beloved Son, to Christ’s Sacred Humanity assumed by the Word.

Since Christ’s Sacred Humanity is absolutely perfect, one might therefore believe that it has no need of complementarity. This is what we would say philosophically speaking. This would be a return to Plato’s “man in himself.” We would say that the man of sorrows, the man of love, this man - by virtue of the mystery of the Incarnation – would know such a plenitude, such perfection, that he would be in no need of a *socia* - as Saint Albert the great says - there would be no need of someone who would be present in order to be the bride of His heart, of someone who would be there as the one who completes

or achieves everything. The mystery of Compassion is so infinitely mysterious.

Let us try to make more explicit the link between the Immaculate Conception and the mystery of Compassion from a theological viewpoint since there is something very great in this.

Mary, the lowliest of all creatures, is the one who is most aware of her littleness (lowliness) and her fragility. No other creature has been more conscious of such fragility, of such lowliness. It is the mystery of Immaculate Conception that brings this about... It is in order to love even more, to be more dependent for it is in dependent that she could achieve, complete what is lacking in the Sacred Humanity of Christ, whatever is lacking in His passion. At this point, we touch upon something that only mystical theology is able to say. In the realm of scientific theology, one looks at Christ's *existence* and one can add nothing to Christ's existence since His existence is that of the Word. In the mystery of the Incarnation, Christ's Sacred Humanity is assumed by the Word and subsists in the Word, and therefore *exists* in the Word of God. But from the aspect of love, from the perspective of *life*, there is a possibility: this is the "breach" which I spoke about earlier in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Thus we are able to understand Father Maximilian Kolbe said: that the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is like a "breach" in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, since Mary in her immaculate heart can complete and achieve what is lacking in the Jesus' Passion, what is lacking at this victory of love. She is the one who completes everything, and it is the Father who wants this. It is the Father who wants to show His love for His *tiny* little creature; He wants to associate her to the proper work of Christ, associating her in such a manner that she be the Woman, the bride of Jesus' heart, of Jesus' wounded heart. She is associated in such a manner that she is "one" with Jesus' wounded heart,

“one” with His holocaust at the Cross, so that she might the “one” achieving and completing it.

Everything is completed; everything finds its term in the heart of Mary. And *through* Mary, it is the Church, it is us in her. This is the great mystery of religious life if one wants to go to the end. Religious life is in order to live what Mary lives in her mystery as the Immaculate. We are not immaculate and this evident enough; but through religious life we can be associated with the mystery of the Immaculate and thus achieve and complete what is lacking in the Passion of Christ. This means living fully and entirely by the mystery of Mary in her Compassion. This is what we must try to grasp and to live by in Faith – but in that absolute gratuitousness⁸² of the Father’s mercy for us. For this can only be an absolute gratuitousness; it is not because of our merits, our intelligence, nor our virtues. It is through *pure gratuitousness*. This is why we have so much difficulty understanding this; as soon as one reasons, you say: “No. This is impossible.” That is why when one reasons, one would no longer be able to understand what religious life is. Religious life springs from pure gratuitousness, just like the Immaculate Conception... They are both of the same order. This gratuitousness is beyond anything that the intelligence can understand: it is love surpassing the intelligence thus leading us deeper into the very mystery of Jesus, and through Him into the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. In itself, the mystery of the Incarnation is already a divine “breach.” And this mystery of the Incarnation is in view of the Cross. In the mystery of the Cross, there again is another new “breach” thanks to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. This divine “breach” is that of the Woman associated with the mystery of the Cross, living by it through the mystery of Compassion in her Faith, Hope and her Love.

⁸² *la gratuité absolue*

Today, on this feast of the Immaculate Conception, we must beg the Holy Spirit help us understand the grandeur of this divine call over us; to understand that we are consecrated in the depths of our soul and through our entire body. Religious takes possession of our entire body. This is the grandeur of religious life: to give witness in time and space by means of our body, because of our body, in order to live, in our own way, by this mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Religious requires this of us, in order to achieve and complete what is lacking in Christ's Passion for today's Church, for today's world, and to go as far possible in this mystery of love, and to be able to recognize - through the hearts of Jesus and Mary - this folly of the Father's love for us. Here is where we discover the Father's "*ivresse d'amour*."⁸³ Such is the Father's folly; He asks poor lowly creatures to complete and achieve what is lacking in the proper work of the beloved Son! The beloved Son's proper work is perfect since it is the work of the beloved Son. *Operatio sequitur esse*;⁸⁴ now, the *esse* of the beloved Son is the *esse* of the Word, and His proper operation (or activity) is the Cross. And so, since His *esse* is perfect, then His operation should be perfect. Now, look how in His operation, which is the work of the Cross, He leaves room for Mary - and it is the Father who wants this as the prayer at the Agony gives witness to. In leaving room for Mary, He leaves room for the Church, and to the members of the mystical Body who may then also have this thirst to follow up to this point: that of achieving, completing what is lacking in the Passion of Jesus.

Let us ask her to help us live by this for today. We must ask this from Mary. This is her secret; the secret she communicated to Saint John since she was given to him at the moment of her Compassion. It is therefore her Compassion

⁸³ Literally translated as: the intoxication of love

⁸⁴ Operation (activity) follows being.

which is given to us, and therefore that complementarity which occurred at the Cross which is given to us so that we too might also live by this same mystery.

Saint-Jodard, the 8th of
December 1990.

2 – MARY'S CONSECRATION

Tomorrow we shall celebrate the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady. We must, therefore, ask the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary herself to help us fully live by this mystery since we will be renewing our vows into her hands. This will not be just as a rehearsal, but in order to be able enter into what is most divine, most profound in her consecration. If we have already professed our vows, it is in this spirit that we perform this gesture. If we have not yet made our vows, this is in view of pronouncing them and in order to understand that it is the grand secret hidden in the heart of Mary – it is the great secret of the Church and the great secret of humanity. Martha⁸⁵ was very much attached to this feast because for her, it was precisely the great secret hidden in Mary's heart. Moreover, it is for this reason why the mystery of Our Lady's Presentation is celebrated in religious life as a family secret. It is from this that religious life is, if I may say, the

⁸⁵ Martha Robin – a French mystic and stigmatist

maternal dimension of the Church in the strongest sense of the word. Religious life is the heart of Mary. Mary had certainly communicated her secret (consecration) to Joseph, and he received it. The marriage between Mary and Joseph takes place in the light of Mary's consecration, like a fruit of her consecration.

We are dialectically in opposition with this mystery since we do not understand the divine superiority of this consecration to God. We place all the different states of life in the same level: "one can choose either to marry or to become a religious." No. It is not that simple. Basically, we cannot choose. God chooses for us. This is what is so extraordinary: God chose Mary. This is something so eminent, it is something so great! The great theologians such as Saint Thomas Aquinas show the *objective* superiority of religious life. When one says this today, the response you get is: "But one can also be holy in marriage!" This is true; one can become a saint regardless of one's state of life:⁸⁶ it is God who takes care of this (with our cooperation). (Religious life has) an objective superiority that consists in the understanding that love for God is *always first*. I cannot love my neighbor if I do not love God with a divine love: "God be served first" – are the words of Saint Joan of Arc. When God is only "served second," we no longer are able to serve our neighbor because we can no longer look at Christ in the same way. God is God, which is why, Charity towards God is premier. Since this Charity towards God is premier, it is this which gives the sense or

⁸⁶ In the Christian life, one must consecrate himself totally to God at all times, and one expects everything from God. If one isn't able to directly live religious life, one lives by the *spirit* of religious life. Our oblates live by the *spirit* of religious life, and God's will for them is that they live in the world, and this is generally in a married life. This *spirit* of religious life surpasses, "informs" the sacrament. The *spirit* of religious life among our oblates carries the grace of the sacrament that sanctifies the love between the spouses, so that the sacrament might be totally imbued with Charity. Such is the *spirit* of religious life: that God might always be loved first, even in marriage.

meaning to our fraternal charity, which springs forth from this love for God.

This is what took place in Mary's heart in such an astonishing way. Under the motion of the Holy Spirit, Mary consecrated herself totally to God; this consecration is such that everything will blossom from it, everything will come from this consecration: such as her encounter with Joseph and in her divine maternity. There is certainly a new grace, something new which is made explicit, but this is something which originates from her consecration. The mystical catacombs of the Church, the ecclesial sanctuary are truly Mary's heart in her consecration to God.

We must consider this very curious passage in Scripture which tells us about Jephtha's vow.⁸⁷ Facing an impossible situation, Jephtha begs God to be with him in order to gain victory; he made a vow, done with such foolish imprudence yet still acceptable to God – thus revealing to us how God does not always have the same outlook as we do. He promises that if God allows him to win his battle, he would offer God the first person he meets after his victory. Well, the first person he meets is his daughter, his own little daughter. This is a remote prefiguration, although in the theology of divine economy it is indeed a prefiguration linking Mary's consecration to the Father's grand victory; and we know that the Father's grand victory for us is brought about by the mystery of the Cross. We must look at it through the mystery of the Cross in order that we might be able to understand the meaning of Mary's consecration. Jephtha's vow comes before or ahead of his daughter's desires – she was in the fullness of life, his daughter did not have any desire to be offered to God, this is clear! But her father's will is stronger than anything: she accepts, but she also asks for two months in order to mourn! How touching is this, it is so true, and at the same time

⁸⁷ Jdg. 11:30.

so human! Yet she must be offered all the same. The daughter's tears did not change the father's mysterious will.

I am convinced that behind this prefiguration (as it always is behind prefigurations) is something very great to be grasped: the bond with the Father. It is truly the will of this father to offer God "the first." Such indeed is what happens for Mary. The premier, the first in every sense, of all of the Father's children is Mary. Whereas for us, we follow after her! The Father draws her to Himself in such a strong way that she must be totally and entirely consecrated to the Father: beloved little child of the Father, reserved for the Father in order to glorify Him. The greatest thing for a beloved little child is to be able to glorify her Father by being totally offered to Him, without keeping anything for herself. We, however, always keep something for ourselves. This is why we have such difficulty entering into this folly of love. We measure out things (calculate); we try not to upset things, but... this only proves how we have not understood. This is not what love is. Love is an absolute. As soon as we try not to upset someone, it is better not to do anything! This is because we will always upset somebody, this is clear. Think of the fable of, "*The Miller, his son, and the donkey*": one is always capable of upsetting others and this fear becomes a handicap that one stops. But when it pertains to the Father's will, then it is the will of the Father; and the Father's will is premier and something absolute. There is no need for further discussion facing the Father's will, one loves it. And one is even happy to be chosen by Him in thanksgiving. For this Father's will is transmitted by His victory, it is linked to His victory; and the great victory of the Father is the Cross. The Cross is the victory of love in its strongest and most absolute sense. This sheds light upon the entire universe and which is present for us.

Let us try to enter a little more into the mystery and have a contemplative gaze on this mystery of Mary's consecration in

order to understand how relevant and actual this mystery is for us. Each religious vocation is begotten and remains within the light of Mary's consecration. If we have responded to this calling it is because, under the motion of the Holy Spirit, we focused mainly on the Father's will. Had we began to look to the right and to the left – how this would upset our mother, father, brother, to the ones who love us – then we wouldn't have entered at all, this is clear. *“The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force.”*⁸⁸ And again: *“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”*⁸⁹ This is really strong language! And yet it is Jesus who says this in His gentleness: *“... is not worthy of me.”* Very good. Christian life is tough! It is just like love: love is something that surpasses us; it is not merely an adaptation. Today everyone speaks only about adapting, of harmony, equilibrium... No! Love is beyond all these. It is something infinitely greater. It is something which must take possession over our entire life, our whole intelligence, our entire being, so that we may be given - since it means placing ourselves in direct relation to the Father's will and pleasure for us. It is a dialogue with the Father. I find this to be something so great... And this is the way that the Christian renewal begins. The Old Testament ends (or is achieved) in Mary, this is certain; everything that is said beforehand is prefigurative. All women in the Old Testament, those who are holy, those who follow the guidance and light of God prefigure Mary under a particular aspect. Mary is *the woman*, and the woman is the Father's little girl, the Father's beloved little child.

If we try to enter into this mystery of Mary's consecration (Mary's Presentation in the Temple), we can say that it is Mary's response to a mysterious call by God as Father.

⁸⁸ Mt. 11:12.

⁸⁹ Mt. 10:37.

Every consecration to God is realized in love; it implies adoration, but is more than adoration. Of course it implies adoration since one is unable to consecrate oneself to God without adoring Him, just as one is unable to consecrate oneself to God without thanksgiving. Consecration goes beyond adoration and thanksgiving since it is a labor of love. It is the little creature transformed by Christian grace hiding itself in the mystery of its Father - *in sinu Patris*, in the Father's bosom – under a mysterious attraction brought about in the obscurity of Faith and in love. It is a profound attraction; this is why I say it is: a call.

No one knows exactly about Mary's consecration, when it happened, where it took place: nothing at all! Christian Tradition which has kept the feast of Mary's Presentation tells us nothing about the modalities (details of the event). That is why I spoke about "divine catacombs." This is the foundation of the entire Christian life and the fruit par excellence of the triumph of the Cross. We can say all of these, but we still know absolutely nothing about the *how*. This is in order that we might look into *the mystery* itself, without knowing the details of the how. We leave it up to painters, to Fra Angelico, to show us how Mary consecrated herself to God. This is very beautiful but we must go on even further; we cannot stop at an image since Tradition has not given us one.

Nor does Tradition speak of the prefiguration which we have just evoked (above) since it is a hidden and mysterious prefiguration. This prefiguration leads us to understand that it is a sacrifice of love. Every consecration is a sacrifice of love; otherwise it wouldn't be a consecration. It is a sacrifice of love in joy, precisely because it is a sacrifice of love. There is a choice, a choice of predilection; now every choice of predilection necessarily requires a sacrifice. Mary could have chosen not to consecrate herself. One must not say that she was forced into it,

not at all: she was perfectly free, just as each of us was perfectly free to enter or not to enter religious life. God always wants to safeguard freedom for there would otherwise be no veritable love. Yet if God imposes Himself with such force, one may say in all truth that one *couldn't* do otherwise without hurting the Father. Jephtha's daughter could have refused. She could have told her father: "Continue on your journey, it will be the second person you meet, not the first." This is the reasoning we often use! In Christian families where there is a vocation, parents are quite agreeable for this to happen to neighbors, but not at home... We are all this way: "Oh, how beautiful, how admirable; it is very beautiful objectively but it is not for us!" The objective grandeur is recognized but it is ignored since it demands a sacrifice.

All loves demand sacrifice. And divine love demands a sacrifice corresponding, if I might say, to God's stature. It therefore requires a sacrifice that acknowledges that God is first and lets God come first - otherwise He would no longer be God. We have such difficulty realizing that God is first in our life; we instead prefer that the first would be us. No. It can't be us; it can only be God. Starting from that moment when God gives us the light to understand this, we can no longer consider that which has been as if it were not, since God's gifts are irrevocable,⁹⁰ and God knows this. If we were to say that what has been is not, then this would be a lie. It is very demanding.

In Mary there is no turning into self, thanks to the grace of the Immaculate Conception, thanks to this prevenient mercy wherein God envelopes her in His love in such a strong way that she is completely in God, entirely for God. Prevenient mercy... Mary is taken possession by the Father, and she remains entirely free by the very reason of her purity of heart. She is therefore aware of the grandeur of this personal act which binds her

⁹⁰ Rom. 11:29.

personally to her Father, to her beloved Father, to the One who loves her. In the Old Testament, even before the explicit revelation of the Most Holy Trinity, Yahweh is Israel's Bridegroom.⁹¹ Mary is therefore aware that He is Father and Bridegroom, and that it is He, her Creator who chose her, and she responds in a personal choice.

Mary's consecration is the premier fruit of this prevenient mercy, of this totally gratuitous mercy, of this mercy which in reality is the fruit of the victory of the Cross since it is a *Christian* grace. This helps us understand how Christian grace has a particular exigency which can only be understood in the light of the Cross. On the Cross, Jesus preferred to give divine life to Mary, to John and to us over His own temporal life. He offered His life for us. He offered His life as a thirty three year old man in His full vigor, in His entire splendor, with His entire intelligence and all of His capacities. He offered all of these for us in order to save us, out of pure love for us. This is the quality of love with which we are loved, with Mary being in the first place.

Mary responds to the Father's call without explicitly considering the mystery of the Cross for sure, since the mystery of the Incarnation - and therefore the mystery of the Cross - had not yet taken place in time. Yet under the motion of the Holy Spirit, in a Charity divinely exercised thanks to the gift of wisdom, in a completely divine Faith thanks to the gift of understanding, and a totally poor Hope thanks to the gift of fear, Mary responds to the Father's call. Her plenitude of grace has that particular modality of being totally gratuitous since Mary is immaculate, she is full of grace. It is her fullness of grace which will respond to the Father's call, in a choice wherein she offers herself. Whenever God gratuitously gives Himself He expects from us a gratuitous gift. This is what is proper to love. At this

⁹¹ Is. 54:5; 61:10; 62:5.

moment, we understand that towards God, we can only give *ourselves*; we cannot give to God something which is not ourselves. And the stronger is Gods' grace, the stronger too is the Father's attraction, then the more must it be what is most personal in us, what is most intimate in us, what is most profound in us that must be offered, be given.

This Father's love is inseparable from the gift that He will give to Mary. This love is inseparable from the gift which He will give to her at the Annunciation, at Christmas, throughout the entire hidden life, at Cana, and at the Cross. It is certain how the Father's gaze upon Mary, and therefore the Father's attraction for Mary implies all of these in the light of the Father's eternal love for her. In drawing Mary, the Father is the one loving by giving her, as at the Cross, His beloved Son – giving Him to her in that victimal state of love in which everything is offered, wherein everything is given to Mary in the first place. Perhaps this is where we touch on what the mystery of Hope is, and what the mystery of Faith is: "*Faith is the substance of what is hoped for*" – the definition of Faith in the Letter to the Hebrews⁹² - to mean how the things which we hope for are already in act thanks to Faith: they are present. They are not explicit, nor are they conscious, but these things are in act. When the Father draws Mary in this mystery of consecration, it is through that same attraction with which He will draw her at the Cross when He gives her His Son. Mary responds without understanding, except by living by the Father's attraction, placing her total confidence in the Father, knowing that Father can only do what is good for her, and that the Father, in drawing her, necessarily attracts her over and beyond what she is able to understand. I said previously: one does not reason out with the Father's love, one instead receives it and lets oneself be drawn by it. One cannot discuss it, because if one began to reason with it, one ends up

⁹² Heb. 11:1.

suppressing the Cross. Someone might say: "I really want to love you, but not the Cross." Now, one cannot love the Father without accepting the Cross. Mary couldn't have known it; we can say this, and we must say it. But under the motion of the Holy Spirit, Mary lived by the Father's attraction and it is within this attraction by the Father that she completely gives herself, as the Father wants her to. This is why I can say that Mary's response arises from the grace of the Immaculate Conception on one hand and from the totally particular exigency of the Cross on the other hand, since her grace, being a Christian grace, is bound to the Cross. Without her knowing it, this grace is bound to the Cross; that is why there is such an exigency.

Our vows may only be understood in the light of the Cross. Our Christian choices, when they are really Christian, are only understandable in the light of the wisdom of the Cross. The wisdom of the Cross alone gives these choices their true significance; otherwise they would not be Christian. These choices would remain human, keeping their human modality which therefore is not under the motion of the Holy Spirit, but a turning inward upon our own selves.

It is beautiful to see how the Christian vocation first of all considers the Father in His totality as Father.⁹³ It is the Holy Spirit who brings this about. Mary gives herself to the Father as a beloved little child. She does this in her Faith, Hope and Love. She offers herself in the total obscurity of Faith. And since this gift requires the offering of her entire self, thus of her entire life, it is in this sense that a sacrifice is involved. She understands how supreme freedom consists in binding herself to the Father. She understands that the greatest act of freedom is in accepting the fact that the Father's will imposes itself upon us as the only one that is worth living for and that all the rest can only disappoint us.

⁹³ *Dans son absolu de Père*

It is only the will of the Father that will never disappoint us: we can be certain of this in advance.

Thus there is this purely interior sacrifice which is so grand, very strong, that makes itself more explicit in the mystery of the Compassion, although it is already present in the mystery of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. Without her, our consecration, which can only be made in the light of the Cross, would be different from that of Mary. The fact is that ours is no different from hers. Mary is the first in the order of this consecration. Hers is the most perfect one which has ever been realized. This is the reason we celebrate her consecration (Presentation of Mary) in order to better understand our own consecration. In Mary everything is very pure, everything is joyous – everything is joyful in the midst of suffering and sacrifice because letting the Father's will come first is always a source of joy because it brings about a total liberation: it is in order to be true. If we do not let the Father's will come first, we are not in truth. Therefore everything is obscured, everything becomes weighed down, and one withdraws into self. We must ask the Holy Spirit to help us enter into this consecration, by letting ourselves be drawn by the Father.

Saint Albert emphasizes how this consecration is realized in a conditional manner, precisely because Mary could not ask any advice from anyone. What she did was to inaugurate something very great: all religious orders originate from this consecration of Mary. She inaugurates religious life; she inaugurates the royal response of a lowly creature to her God. In the greatest simplicity, Mary perfectly realizes what Jephtha's daughter could only do but imperfectly. This is why nothing much is said about this consecration, we know nothing about its details. Everything here is reserved for God. For us, this (consecration) must be done as a community through which the grandeur of fraternal charity is proclaimed. And so, this takes

place within a communal setting because of fraternal charity: this is what is so beautiful about it. However, since the precept of fraternal charity was not yet proclaimed as Jesus would proclaim it: “*Love one another as I have loved you*,”⁹⁴ this consecration could only occur in the most profound silence, in a totally hidden way, and in complete abandonment: if such were God’s will and pleasure - since Mary could not seek counsel. She remained therefore in that attitude of one who, under the motion of the Holy Spirit, acts but always in a chaste and reverential fear: can this really be God’s will and pleasure? Her choice is made in poverty. And if the Father’s will or God’s will were to become more explicit, then one is immediately ready to change the choice that had been made. One therefore does not have any human assurance. One is suspended in an attitude of divine abandon wherein one seeks only the Father’s will in total loyalty. This is not something to be merely said in words but is to be lived in complete loyalty, lived in radical poverty. This means that one wants to seek *only* the accomplishment of the Father’s will. Such is the only desire being sought. One always let God be first.

It is under the motion of the gift of fear (enabling divine Hope to go to the end of its exigencies) that Mary consecrates herself to God, “if this is the Father’s will and pleasure,” and *in the manner* in which the Father would want it to be done, *as* He would want it. Mary is unable to foresee things and she does not seek to anticipate them; this is exactly like the moment when we give our entire life to God, we cannot foresee things. On the day of our profession, we do not ask God: “Give me a little road map giving the details of the itinerary: first year, second year, third year, fourth year... and then of those moments when we can pause.” Never! One gives everything to God and one accepts everything. We can be sent to China: fine! We may be asked to stay behind in Saint Jodard: fine! It doesn’t matter. All this is so

⁹⁴ Jn. 13:34; 15:12.

secondary in relation to the Father's will. Everything is made relative when we truly live by what it means to *give oneself to God*, and when we know that God indeed receives this gift. This is what gives us absolute freedom, the freedom of the children of God. Mary had the foolish freedom⁹⁵ to give herself completely to God and this enabled her to have an intense desire for the coming of the Messiah. When we give ourselves entirely to God, knowing that God receives this gift, we have this freedom: we are no longer bound to the opinions of others since the Father's will has taken hold of us, and takes total possession of us. We are then in possession of this interior joy and of the possibility of letting God do exactly what He wants with us. At the same time, we are also attentive to what is referred to as the "sign of the times" in accordance to God's guidance, the way how God leads us, manner in which He is present in order to indicate to us the way to go. We have this lucidity about ourselves and on the events.

We must ask the Virgin Mary to help us enter fully in this gift, and to do so in order to glorify the Father out of love for our brothers and for the salvation of the world.

Saint-Jodard, the 20th of
November 1990.

3 - MARY'S DIVINE MATERNITY

We must contemplate the poverty of Mary's divine maternity - the beatitude of the poor (in spirit) as it is lived in her

⁹⁵ *une liberté folle*

maternal heart. To be the Mother of God poses such great demands upon Mary. It is a motherhood that is lived in an extraordinary poverty in order to be capable of receiving the Father's gift. The more the Father wants to grant us great and marvelous gifts, the more will He require a very great poverty from us. How curious this is: God immediately stops bestowing His gifts the moment He sees us becoming possessive of them. Once we become possessive of God's gifts, He stops giving them immediately, He cannot give them. And very often in our spiritual life, in our divine life, it is this lack of poverty which stunts our growth in love. It is for this reason that we must have such great thirst in asking Mary for this poverty. Saint Dominic had this thirst for poverty in a very great way; it is like an echo of Mary's heart in the heart of her son. And I believe that we must have this in a very strong way; this (echo) enormously marks the life of Saint John. When Saint Thomas takes note of Saint John's youth,⁹⁶ I believe that he took note of Saint John's poverty, for when one does not possess one has a desire that continually grows. It is the one who is somewhat self-sufficient: he no longer desires, who no longer is eager. Everything is "*déjà vu*," it is "already known," and so one no longer progresses. This is true in the realm of knowledge and even more so in the realm of the heart.

This very great poverty enables Mary to become like an abyss thirsting to receive everything, *in the manner* that God wants to bestow her His treasure. When we lack poverty, we prefer to receive God's gifts *in our own manner*, according to our way of receiving them. And our own manner of receiving God's gifts is always much narrower than the way how God Himself would want to give them to us. This is what is admirable in Mary's divine maternity: she receives the gift God makes of His Son in the manner how God wants to bestow Him without

⁹⁶ *Commentary on saint John*, XXI, n° 2639.

planning ahead anything at all. Mary lived with Jesus in total poverty – she lived in total dependence, entirely relative to Jesus, always letting Him be first – going after what is the Father’s will and pleasure for Him... She lived not according to the mother’s will and pleasure, but the Father’s will and pleasure for Him! Such is the poor one: it is one whose only desire is the accomplishment of the Father’s will.

It is so important to ask for this poverty in our world today, in order not to become possessive and in order not to restrain the gifts of God from coming. This is tough. It is very tough because we sometimes have the impression of being flayed alive. Poverty removes our skin cover. The skin normally guards and protects; where we are somewhat being flayed alive. The Holy Spirit, like a steel scouring pad, removes everything that constitutes for defenses in the one who is possessive. The one who possesses is like an ivory tower. When enemies begin their approach, he throws down tar on them in order to protect himself. Mary did not have any defenses at all; and she is truly the one who receives the gift, she receives the treasure of the Father, *according to* the way Father wants to give it to her and she receives this gift in her poverty. This allows us to understand the words of the angel Gabriel when Mary asks: “What must be done?” – “None at all.” Now this is not easy at all. We always want to do something. But in this case, there is none, nothing at all to do: except wait, receive, be in an attitude of one who receives. This is the poor one, the beggar. The beggar does not dictate. When a beggar approaches you to ask for something and you tell him: “I will give you what I can, I still have something left...” but when he demands, you would think: “This man is not a true beggar, for If he were a true beggar, he would jump immediately at the smallest thing that is offered to him.” At the supernatural realm, Mary was the beggar poorer than Saint

Francis of Assisi, even more stripped with a stripping⁹⁷ that goes very far in poverty that accompanies her love. We must often ask the Holy Spirit to help us contemplate this poverty, because it is thanks to this poverty that her motherhood according to flesh and blood, her human maternity, could be entirely transformed by grace, could be entirely assumed by grace. God's grace, the Father's grace could be entirely victorious in her heart and in this maternity.

This maternity is ordered to that other motherhood, to that one coming from the mystery of Compassion. There is an order between these two; this is very important to understand. That which is most *dignified* is ordered to that which *finalizes* everything. This is something very curious and very important to understand since this is always the case in the realm of the supernatural and in the divine economy. It is almost a law on the divine economy. Mary's divine motherhood towards Jesus has a quasi-infinite dignity. To be the Mother of God!... Living by the mystery of the cross is much less dignified; it is something that is crushing, although it is also something infinitely great in the order of *love*.⁹⁸ The Compassion allows Jesus, through Mary and with her, to become fully victim.

⁹⁷ "*plus dépouillée d'un dépouillement...*"

⁹⁸ From the viewpoint of *dignity*, Mary's divine maternity is the greatest mystery that a lowly creature could have lived. This is where participation in God's grace is the greatest, the most *dignified*. Note that I say "*dignified*"; I do not say that it is ultimate since Mary's divine maternity will be achieved or completed in the mystery of Compassion when Mary becomes John's mother. These two maternities go hand in hand: we cannot speak of one without speaking of the other, just as we cannot speak of the Redemption without speaking of the Incarnation, and how we cannot truly see the Incarnation without looking at the mystery of Redemption. The connection between these two is the same.

Divine maternity shows us what is most *dignified* in Christian grace: in Mary, Christian grace blossoms into a divine motherhood. This is the *substantial* aspect. Mary's divine motherhood is *completed* in her motherhood towards John and towards us: this is the aspect of the *finality*. It is that which is ultimate. The first maternity is ordered for the second, and the latter implies the

Mary's role of complementarity is therefore very different in her divine maternity at Christmas and in her divine maternity at the Cross where she achieves a common work with Jesus in order to be the Spouse of His heart, the little servant of love in an extraordinary poverty, who completes Jesus' entire sacerdotal (or priestly) and victimal mystery. She completes it by giving herself entirely up to the end. At Christmas, she allows the Incarnation to go to the end of its exigencies as the Incarnation; it is thanks to her that the Incarnation could have its realism. At the Cross she completes the holocaust of Christ. This completion is at the level of the finality, it is in the order of love wherein everything is accomplished in Mary's heart. The cry of thirst, the piercing of the heart, everything is accomplished in the heart of Mary by the very reason, I would say, of her poverty. Her

first. It is at the Cross where Mary divine maternity towards Jesus takes on its whole meaning and reaches its ultimate blossoming: Jesus came for the Cross and Mary is the Mother of Jesus in order to be able to offer Him at the Cross. This is why Mary's gesture of presenting Infant Jesus at the Temple prefigures or announces the grand "presentation" which Mary realizes through the mystery of Compassion. It is during the mystery of her Compassion that Jesus proclaims her mother of John and from there, mother of the Church.

I am certain that Saint John contemplated Mary's divine maternity in a very special manner. These two maternities are linked in the great vision of the Apocalypse: towards Jesus - motherhood according to flesh and blood and a contemplative motherhood; and a mystical maternity at the Cross - motherhood according to grace.

This brings us to understand why a metaphysics of the substance and the act is necessary. Fr. Dehau used to tell me: "Study metaphysics in order to be able to speak about Mary..." I have progressively seen how this is indeed so. The Incarnation is at the level of *being* and the fruit of the Incarnation is at the level of *life*. Grace is the source of new life and the plenitude of grace in Mary is expressed in the mystery of Divine Maternity. This motherhood ends in a person, like in any motherhood, but in this case in the *divine* person. Life is one with being in its substantial character...

Mary's divine maternity is brought to completion, from the viewpoint of *finality* (and therefore of act), at the Cross. At the Cross, Mary is mother of grace for John and for our life of grace.

Here we can clearly see these two aspects: the *substantial* aspect and the *final* aspect. This brings us to understand how our theology must end in contemplation, a contemplation which leads us to enter into the mystery.

poverty at the level of intelligence: she lives in Faith. Poverty in the affective realm: she lives by Hope like a small child offering everything. She lives in poverty by fact that she keeps nothing for herself so that everything in her heart, in her intelligence, in her sensitivity is burnt up. Everything is to be burned for Jesus so that the fire of Jesus' heart might take total possession of her and complete in her the mystery of the holocaust (of Christ).

This is the moment when Jesus brings about her new maternity towards John. Mary's motherhood towards John implies her divine maternity towards Jesus as its *foundation*. Her motherhood towards John is the *actual* (or on-going) *exercise* of the mystery of Compassion. Jesus makes her maternity towards John explicit at the Cross: she can be his mother because she is living the mystery of Compassion in a unique manner. She lives the mystery of Compassion in a unique manner because she is the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God. The whole mystery of Compassion *reposes* and *is founded* upon her divine maternity, in her Faith, Hope, and her Love. And this spiritual (mystical) maternity towards John, towards the Church, towards us is the *ultimate* moment of her maternity, completely different from the first one and yet its continuation. This means that everything she received from Jesus – the plenitude of grace she received from Jesus and Jesus crucified whom she received from the Father – she gives all these to John. At the Cross, she lives in a unity of love with Jesus, she is “one” with Him – *idem velle*, they have the same will. They share the same love for the full accomplishment of the Father's will – in order to live by that cup which Jesus had asked to be spared from. Jesus and Mary both said their *fiat*, in obedience to the Father's will: together they are “one” in the offering of their entire selves. It is thanks to this unity with Jesus that she could become the mother of John, the mother of his life of grace, mother of his life of Faith, Hope, Charity, and the mother of the *exercise* of his ministerial priesthood. Everything is

taken and assumed in John's mystery at the foot of the Cross. It is thanks to Mary that John could be a witness of the thrusting of the lance and that, in fact, he is. It is through her and in her that he witnesses of the cry of thirst and the thrusting of the lance.

Perhaps this is what will help us to understand the superabundance of love that is brought about through Mary. Compare the Last Supper and the Cross: compare John proximity at the Last Supper and his proximity at the Cross. At the Last Supper, Mary was not yet given; at the Cross Mary is given. This is why the intimacy found at the Cross is, in fact, completely interior. The Last Supper is the preparation, it is the sacrament. It is therefore the sign of something much greater, something much more divine. The Last Supper is a sign of what will come to pass at the Cross.

Let us return to Mary's divine maternity towards Jesus, her motherhood towards the great mystery of the Word "made flesh." There is a grace in order to be able to live by this mystery on the night of Christmas and we must beg the Holy Spirit to let us live by it. Let us not remain contented with what we know. What we know is not the mystery: you must accept this. The mystery is above and beyond what you know. This is the reason why each time we stop at what we know, then we no longer progress in Faith. And very easily, I wouldn't say we regress in our Faith but instead we *no longer contemplate*. Contemplation is beyond what we know since we contemplate *the mystery*; we don't contemplate what we know. In preparing ourselves with Mary, during this night we must divinely understand these words of Saint John in his Prologue: "*The Word became flesh.*" This "*becoming*" in the "*flesh*" takes place in Mary. Its divine milieu is Mary; for there is no other divine milieu. It is a milieu that is totally consecrated for God, which is for God (this is why it is a divine milieu).

In the mystery of the Incarnation, the human nature formed by the Holy Spirit in Mary with Mary's blood, subsists in the Word – what the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon clarified quite well. The union of the human and divine natures in the mystery of Christ is realized in what we call the “hypostatic union,” which is a personal union. We will never be able to comprehend this mystery but we can at least try to avoid falling into heresies! We must avoid them and have a correct and exact adhesion to what is affirmed by the Church since this is not found in Scripture. The only things we find in Scripture are Jesus' extraordinary affirmations, especially in Saint John, for example when Jesus says: “*I Am*,” or “*The Father and I are one*,” and when He says that the Father is greater than Him. This seems to be contradictory but if we fully adhere to these words of Jesus, we see that only in appearance is it contradictory. In fact, there is that very affirmation of this reality whose divine realism escapes our grasp. It is the reality of this mystery of the Word made flesh, of the Word assuming a unique individual human nature, formed by the Holy Spirit in Mary in the mystery of the hypostatic union, in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. It is *this* which is the mystery of the Incarnation. The unity is realized in what is most radical and in what is most “one”: it occurs in the very *person* of the Word. Not only does Christ's human nature exist only in the Word, but its existence is that of the Word. This unity therefore occurs at the level of being. There are not two persons, there are not two hypostases - there is a single person. And so, Christ's being is the being of the Word of God. The *esse* of Christ is the very *esse* of the Word of God assuming, taking upon Himself (to assume means “to take upon oneself”), taking for Himself this human nature formed in Mary under the action of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, in this mystery which is so profound, God associates human nature not only to His *life*, which would already be something astonishing, but into His greatest intimacy, into His

very *being*. One cannot go any further. This is why Saint Augustine says that it is the greatest unity that can exist. A more perfect unity than this cannot be brought about: here we touch something absolute. His human nature is entirely assumed, “*drawn towards*.” It subsists in the Word of God while perfectly remaining a human nature like ours. There is no mixture between the two natures otherwise this would make Him neither God nor man. He would be a man-God as what is found in mythology. The myth of the man-fish, the man-angel, etc., is a confusion. This is not at all an assumption. On the contrary, here in this mystery, human nature remains perfectly itself as it is personally united to the Word. This unity occurs in the Word Himself, in the person of the Word, a perfect unity thanks to which Christ’s human nature is then completely transformed. Although it remains a human nature, it is in a state of absolute perfection. He is *man* in the strongest sense, not only the man of sorrows but *man* in all its (mankind’s) perfection and primarily in reference to the intelligence. Christ’s intelligence is without any “flaw” and this was immediately so from the first moment of His conception. This is why Jesus’ conception in Mary was not only a miraculous conception:⁹⁹ this miracle, this charism is *in view of* the sanctity

⁹⁹ Mary’s divine maternity is miraculous in a very special manner; it is not miraculous like that of Elizabeth’s maternity nor like that of Samson’s mother. All these maternities are miraculous, but they are such due to a *defect* in nature. Mary’s motherhood is miraculous, not due to a defect in nature, but because of a new *finality*. In fact, God can intervene miraculously in various ways. The charism (God’s miraculous intervention) can have two completely different significations: God can intervene charismatically in order to repair a *defectus*, a lack, a defect. Thus, sterility is a defect in nature, consequence of original sin. When God repairs this defect, this charism will be seen in the light of God’s omnipotence, therefore on the side of efficiency. God intervenes in an efficient manner, though according to the order of nature, in order to repair a *defectus*. But there is also a charism which is properly *Christian*, and the first Christian charism is Mary’s miraculous maternity (and the entire theology of charisms must be understood based on this). This charism is in view of the mystery of Incarnation. Mary cooperates in this mystery and for this to be she had to be a virgin. The charism of the miraculous motherhood is in order to respect the

of Christ's humanity. Christ's sacred humanity is holy because it exists in God. Christ's sacred humanity could not sin because it exists in God. It is impeccable by right, in contrast to Mary. Mary actually never sinned but she could have sinned. This explains why the attitude of the devil is different towards Mary and towards Jesus. In regard to, the devil knows that she can sin since she is a creature. This is why he pursues her with such violence. In Christ, the devil is unable to see the Word of God. But in Christ's humanity, in Christ as the devil is able to look at Him with his intelligence, everything is indicative how this humanity is inhabited, assumed by the Word of God. This is where the devil hits the wall, a fortress; he is unable to do anything. The mystery of Jesus totally escapes him. As the mystery of Mary already escapes him, so does the mystery of Jesus also escape

virginal integrity of Mary, of her dignity as a little child totally consecrated to God: this charism is at the service of this total consecration. God's direct intervention was necessary in order for Mary to remain the Virgin and also be the Mother. It is primarily for this reason. It was in order to manifest the Father's gaze of jealous love and of Mary's response of jealous love through her consecration.

But this charism is also *for the mystery of the Incarnation*. This charism is finalized here with the proper exigency of Christian grace and the superabundance of love since the great fittingness (*la grande convenance*) of the mystery of Incarnation is God's sovereign goodness. This charism is ordered to manifest to us this sovereign goodness: this is what is proper to Christian charism. It is not only utilitarian (as in repairing a defect), it is in order to glorify God's sovereign goodness that wants to manifest itself in the superabundance of love – so that we might understand better that which characterizes Christian grace. Christian grace is characterized by the superabundance of love. We cannot live at the level of justice, at the level of rights. This is true for all Christians but *a fortiori* for a religious. If we make the vow of poverty, it is in order not to have rights so as to live by the superabundance of love (which is particularly difficult to do in a consumerist society where everything is geared for immediate efficiency).

Mary's charism of divine maternity is a charism of superabundance that gives us the mystery of the Incarnate Word in a closest possible way to the heart of man, to the heart of the woman, of the mother. It is only the Virgin who is able to receive the mystery of the Word. Only Mary is able to know that proximity between her heart and the heart of her little child: these two hearts are united thanks to the charism of superabundance of Mary's divine maternity.

him in a unique manner. He cannot know anything about Jesus, hence his irritation. We know this well: pride makes us believe that we have rights in those areas where we have none. The devil is convinced that he has rights over Jesus: if Jesus is of the human race, then the devil claims rights over him due to the sin of Adam. The truth of the matter is that the devil has no rights at all: Jesus escapes him totally because his rights repose on God's permission. In reality, it is not really a right; it is but God's permission accorded to the devil.

The mystery of Mary's divine maternity shows us that unity of a human action with God's will and pleasure, with God's love, bringing about a unity of life and operations. This is what we must well understand. The consequence or the property of this union in the order of being, when it pertains to the mystery of hypostatic union, makes Jesus the source of all grace. His humanity remains an instrument; it is not the principal cause of grace. The principal cause of sanctifying grace can only be the Most Holy Trinity wherein the sacred humanity of Christ serves as the instrument of the Most Holy Trinity; it is the instrument of the Word – *organon* – a conjoint instrument. It is the instrument of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, of the three divine persons. It is an instrument with such perfect docility and poverty since the human nature of Christ does not have its own subsistence but subsists in the Word. It is through the very mystery of Jesus that we are to understand the premier origin of poverty for our human nature since in this mystery, Christ's sacred humanity is in a state of ontological poverty: his human nature does not have its own existence; it exists in the Word. It therefore has a much greater existence although it is not its own existence; its existence is that of the Word of God thus giving it its unique feature. Christ's sacred humanity knows the most radical poverty there is, poverty in the order of being. You cannot understand this, nor can I; this is the mystery of the hypostatic union. It is a folly to see God

introducing a human nature and *the* (whole) human nature in Christ and associating it into His Trinitarian mystery and into His personal life. He associates at the same time an individual human nature and *the* human nature since His is a human nature that is perfectly individualized. Jesus is the Son of the woman, the Son of Mary. At the same time, this individual has something that is unique since it is absolutely perfect: nothing can be added to Him in the order of perfection. As He subsists in the Word, His existence is therefore divine. Here we can understand how the radical poverty of this human nature is in view of a divine wealth, for a unique grandeur which is in keeping with the Word.

The mystery of the Incarnation was entrusted to Mary in order for her to cooperate, in order that Mary cooperates maternally in total generosity and total gift of self. A mother's service, that of bearing a child and being source of life, demands total generosity. Biologically speaking, a mother cannot be a mother halfway through only. Motherhood assumes or takes her entire being. There is a general mobilization of her entire being so that she might be source of life substantially. Mary accepted this service freely. In her Son Jesus, there is a divine and personal unity between the human and divine natures, a divine and personal unity surpassing everything. This is what leads us to understand the grandeur of Mary's divine maternity: as mother, she cooperated in the formation of Jesus' sacred humanity. And in this cooperation, she enters into a very great intimacy with the Father, with the Holy Spirit, and with the Word of God, all the while accepting *not to have any rights at all*, by always letting God come first. She accepts to have no rights at all with respect to the person of her Son, since He is God; no rights with respect to His education since He is God. She could only give herself completely as if everything depended upon her. In reality, she is a pure instrument of love. But she gives herself entirely, even much more than any other mother.

This is where we see how God wanted that a lowly human creature be associated into this work of the Incarnation in order that human nature might not be alienated from this mystery. On the contrary, human nature is in a way made an instrumental source, a real source – the mother of this mystery. Mary is the mother of Christ and she is the Mother of God. This expresses God's infinite tenderness:¹⁰⁰ a creature could never aspire to this. Mary never merited becoming Mother of God, and a creature cannot merit being Mother of God. This is all purely gratuitous, yet it is also an infinite tenderness on God's part to allow the human race, in Mary, to cooperate in this mystery, cooperating in it in a radical manner, in a substantial manner by giving her consent, her *fiat*. Even if it is in the midst of struggles, the cooperation is in fullness: Mary is mother of Christ, of Jesus, Mother of God.

This is where we understand how God, who could have saved us without our cooperation, wanted to save us by *obtaining* our cooperation. It is in this mystery wherein this is most manifest. This would help us understand in our lives that the more God gives us gratuitous gifts that completely surpass us, the more God wants our cooperation. Otherwise these gifts are spoiled: let us consider the religious vocation as an example that concerns us. It is clear that the religious vocation is a purely gratuitous gift. We are not more intelligent or more virtuous than others; we have had, and still do have friends much more intelligent and much more virtuous than us. Thus it is pure gratuitousness. We did not merit our vocation just as we have not merited our baptism. We have not merited the grace of God, nor have we merited Faith, Hope and Charity: it is all pure gratuitousness. The more grace leads us to a more intimate and profound cooperation with God, or in other words, the more grace is grace and has a much higher finality, the more will God

¹⁰⁰ Translated from the French: *délicatesse infinie*

want our cooperation. A vocation demands from us a total gift of self. We must cooperate in a way we have never before cooperated. A vocation cannot tolerate half-hearted measures. Moreover, the Book of Revelation says: “*So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit (vomit) you out of my mouth.*”¹⁰¹ This is true of all vocations but *a fortiori* of the religious vocation. This requires of us to go the farthest possible in this cooperation, in this gift giving of ourselves.

The model for this is Mary in her motherhood. Mary was given to her infant, to her little infant during the entire time of Advent. And she was given starting with Christmas, during the entire time for the child Jesus’ education, His time of “*increase in wisdom*” which is revealed to us in Saint Luke’s Gospel.¹⁰² Mary is the one who gave herself the most in comparison to all other mothers. It is marvelous to understand how she gives herself to John because it is a gift that continues on. This will lead us to understand why this maternity goes on as far as the Cross in the mystery of Compassion wherein Mary goes to the end of her gift without looking at herself, and in an absolute poverty. She does not say: “Since I have already given myself so much, I (ought to) have rights.” No! Love goes beyond justice; this is what we must understand. We always tend to reduce everything down to the realm of justice. We acquire rights for doing this or that, because we have been very good one day. Because we have worked hard, we have rights: no!... we do it out of love. And therefore it is tiring because we need to start everything over again. When we have rights, there is no need to start everything over again: since there are rights, there is something that has been acquired. But in the realm of grace, nothing is ever acquired, otherwise, it would no longer be grace; there always needs to be a generosity which must start everything

¹⁰¹ Rev. 3:16.

¹⁰² Lk. 2:52.

anew. This is always exhausting for us since that which is connatural for us according to our human ways is what we have acquired. We rest on what we have acquired; we acquire *habitus*, we acquire qualities and very quickly we rest upon them. We shouldn't do this though even from a human point of view since once we rest on our qualities, we cease to progress. But this is instinctive: we are tired, we rest.

This is never the case in the supernatural order. The more God demands something great from us, the more does He let grace super abound. The more also will this superabundant grace require from us a total gift without claiming any rights, accepting to remain poor, truly poor ones. Receiving the beloved Son from His Father as a gift, and receiving this gift according to the modality that is closest to our human condition – for a woman to receive Him the way how a mother receives her little child – demands total generosity. It means accepting to let all of her biological forces (capacities) be taken up for this reception, profoundly accepting this and living this in total poverty. It is therefore in an attitude of absolute generosity in poverty that requires her, by this very fact, to live this reception of the gift in a contemplative gaze. This would be impossible and contradictory at the moral and human level; therefore, we rebel. Our reason would revolt against this in the name of justice. But in our Faith, Hope and Charity we exult with joy – the *Magnificat*. We exult with joy for the Lord has taken us as an instrument of love in order to realize the greatest work He has accomplished and which He could have accomplished without us: the mystery of the Incarnation. He couldn't have brought about anything greater as a gift of love, and He realizes this gift with His little child. He brings this about in *plenitude*¹⁰³ with His little child. He can ask anything of her and she keeps nothing for herself. She is without any rights during the entire time of Jesus' life on earth all the way

¹⁰³ In fullness.

to the Cross – the Cross being implied in this maternity since it is a contemplative maternity and, therefore, a maternity which is free (or freely received). Mary is the only mother who chose her Son. All other mothers desire to have a child but they do not choose their son. They do not choose who their child would be; whereas Mary chose her Son in a personal, free choice which explains this contemplative bond, a bond of friendship between them. And this bond of friendship has not ceased growing: it is greater at the Cross, than at Bethlehem, than at the Annunciation. Mary is closer to her Son at the Cross. This maternity has not stopped growing in its intensity of love. It has always been more perfect and continually became more itself.¹⁰⁴ This maternity grew because its contemplative poverty allows it to assume everything that Jesus must realize as beloved Son of the Father. Mary assumes it all since she freely accepted to become His mother. Thus this is how the Cross is implied in her maternity. This is the reason why the mystery of Christmas, as lived in the heart of Mary, is open to all of the Father's will and pleasure concerning her Son. And therefore, the mystery of the Cross is undoubtedly – as far as she can know it – implied in her *fiat*.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary to live with her and in her since she is given to us as mother. This mystery (of her divine maternity) should shed light on our entire life, and especially upon our manner of cooperating with God's action over us.

Saint-Jodard, the 24th of
December 1990.

¹⁰⁴ It continually became more perfect. (translator's note).

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