



STANDING AT THE CROSS



THE PREACHING OF SAINT GASPAR DEL BUFALO

BENIAMINO CONTI, C.P.P.S., EDITOR

TRANSLATED BY JEROME STACK, C.P.P.S.

2017
MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD
CINNINNATI PROVINCE
DAYTON, OHIO

Originally published as:
Il sangue di Gesù Cristo:
Schemi di prediche

Cover design: Sarah Mescher
Cover photo: Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S
Printed by the Messenger Press, Carthagena, Ohio

©2017 by the Missionaries of the Precious Blood
Cincinnati Province, Dayton, Ohio

All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-9820516-5-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD	1
TRANSLATOR'S NOTES.	7
INTRODUCTION TO ST. GASPAR AND HIS WORLD	9
QUESTIONS FOR THE READER.	13
 MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS ON THE PRECIOUS BLOOD ..	 15
You Have Been Bought at a Great Price (I)	17
You Have Been Bought at a Great Price (II)	18
On the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.	20
The Divine Blood and the Souls in Purgatory	22
For the Month of the Divine Blood (I)	24
Reflections on the Month of the Divine Blood	27
For the Month of the Divine Blood (II)	32
In All Things You Are Made Rich in Him.	37
 DOCUMENTS ON THE PRECIOUS BLOOD	
SENT TO THREE POPES	53
General Idea of the Congregation Sent to Leo XII	55
Respectful Observations Concerning the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent to to Leo XII	58
Document Sent to Pius VIII	65
Document Sent to Gregory XVI	65
 PREACHING ON THE PASSION	 71
On the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ	72
Sermon on the Passion (I).	82

On the Passion of Jesus Christ (II)	84
On the Passion of Jesus Christ (III)	87
On the Passion of Jesus Christ (IV)	88
The Passion in the Garden (V)	93
The Passion of Jesus Christ (VI)	95
In the Garden	101
For the Blessing of the Cross.	102
Fervorino on the Cross	103
Exhortation on the Cross	105
At the Foot of the Cross.	106
With Mary at the Foot of the Cross	109
 MARY, MOTHER OF SORROWS.	 111
The Sorrows of Most Holy Mary	112
The Seven Sorrows of Mary (I)	118
The Seven Sorrows of Mary (II)	120
The Seven Sorrows of Mary (III).	123
 APPENDIX	 131
“Precious Blood Themes in the Preaching of St. Gaspar” by Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S.	 132
 “How Did St. Gaspar Preach?” by Willi Klein, C.P.P.S.	 139

FOREWORD

Readers of this volume will probably be familiar with St. Gaspar, whom St. John XXIII called “the true and greatest apostle of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood in the world.”¹ He was known as a dynamic and effective preacher of missions and retreats, but sadly, we have very few examples of his preaching on the Precious Blood. This booklet presents Gaspar’s writings on the Blood of Christ as well as the texts of his extant sermons on the Passion and on the Sorrowful Mother.

Don Beniamino Conti, who compiled and edited the original Italian text, has this to say in his introduction:

The word that St. Gaspar offered to the Christians of his day is nothing other than the word of the cross: *Christ crucified, the power of God and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24)*, which finds its most eloquent expression in the sign of the redeeming Blood (cf. Heb 12:24). He writes: *Ah! That reminding people of such an important devotion stir them to rise from the fatal sleep of spiritual death that oppresses them. Thanks to the application of this inestimable price, by which we have been redeemed, let the sinful soul find the sacred and religious motivation to hope for mercy and forgiveness; Let the penitent find in it an exhortation to grow in virtue and holiness. Finally, let the just person find the burning zeal to save souls for the Lord.*²

We are not able to reconstruct the preaching of St. Gaspar on the Blood of Christ. We have attempted this work nevertheless. Here we have limited ourselves to collecting the more important writings of the Saint on this topic. We have not taken into consideration the short occasional phrases contained in the letters or in other discourses. The texts that we include here offer us sufficient material to form a clear idea of the thought of St. Gaspar on the Blood of Christ.

¹ Homily given in St. Peter’s Basilica on January 31, 1960, at the close of the first synod of the Diocese of Rome.

² From “You Have Been Bought at a Great Price” on page 18 of this volume.

Apart from the documents sent to Popes Leo XII, Pius VIII, and Gregory XVI, the writings are mainly outlines for preaching that St. Gaspar prepared for himself or for his missionaries. We have reproduced them as they appear in the original texts, with the spelling of Gaspar's day, without the interpolations of others, without explanatory notes, and without citing the sources. It is not our intention to present a critical edition of these texts, but only to offer to the readers the possibility of acquainting themselves with them as they were dashed off from the pen of St. Gaspar.

In the few cases in which we have added a few words to facilitate reading the text, we have enclosed these in brackets. When the originals did not have a title, we have given them one, as noted.

As an appendix to this volume, I have added a chapter on Gaspar's preaching from the important work on St. Gaspar by Don Beniamino: *St. Gaspar del Bufalo: Apostle of the Blood of Christ*. (The Italian original was first published in 1970 and was reissued in 1978 and 2002). Conti points out that Gaspar thought about composing a text on the Blood of Christ, but never seemed to find the time:

Oh! if I had the time, I would like to set down my thoughts in a small composition which would be so very helpful to the interests of our religion. I have no difficulty in saying this. God supplies me with beautiful ideas, and that is that. However, the devil continues to assault both me and our Institute. But, it has also been written: "they conquered [the dragon] by the Blood of the Lamb" (Rev 12:11)³

We are left, then, with many brief mentions of the Precious Blood in Gaspar's writings, but relatively little extensive and systematic material on the topic. It is our loss that some of the "beautiful ideas" given by God to St. Gaspar are not available to us. At the same time, the more or less complete sermon texts give us an insight into the teaching of the great Apostle of the Blood of Christ.

³ Letter 1644 to Cardinal Bellisario Cristaldi

Also included in this is an essay on Gaspar's preaching by Fr. Willi Klein, C.P.P.S. This was originally an oral presentation given at a C.P.P.S. symposium on preaching held in 2011. He quotes extensively from Gaspar's contemporaries in responding to the question: How did Gaspar preach?

One of the striking features of Gaspar's preaching is the extensive use of Biblical quotations. In the texts, they are nearly always in Latin from the Vulgate. Gaspar apparently quotes them from memory, because from time to time he does not quote passages exactly. His approach to the interpretation of Scripture focuses largely on the *spiritual sense*, that is, "... the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it." ⁴

This approach to interpreting the Bible dates from the earliest days of the Christian era, but is probably less familiar to modern believers. This method of biblical interpretation sees in the text a deeper sense or senses than the literal, historical sense. For example, in the Bible Jerusalem is a city in the literal, historical sense, but it can also be interpreted as the Church of Jesus Christ, as the human soul, or as the heavenly city. For much of Christian history, these "more than literal" senses of Scripture have been considered important for nourishing faith.

For example, Gaspar sees the sea as a metaphor for something more than a body of water:

The sea was the Passion of Jesus Christ: *I came into the depth of the sea, and a tempest has overwhelmed me* (Ps 69:2). The sea was the compassion of the Mother: *O virgin daughter of Sion... great as the sea is thy destruction* (Lam 2:13), that is your tribulation, your affliction, your sorrow, as interpreters explain.

⁴ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, no. 135.

In this regard, Gaspar makes ample use of the Song of Songs, long a book of the Bible beloved and used by Christian preachers and spiritual writers as a treasure of spiritual meaning. This is not surprising. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, preached more than eighty sermons on the Song of Songs.

Gaspar also quotes from Latin hymns from the Divine Office and from various spiritual and theological authors, again, always in Latin. His ability to use these quotations reinforce the view that he had a prodigious memory that served him well. This may explain why there are not more texts of preaching material: Gaspar could preach at length without a text and perhaps even without notes.

Another noteworthy feature of Gaspar's preaching is the emphasis on the spiritual-psychological suffering of Jesus. Gaspar does describe the physical sufferings of Christ, to be sure, but emphasizes that he suffered more profoundly as he contemplated that sinners would not avail themselves of the Divine Mercy made available by the shedding of his Blood. He turns to a verse in Psalm 30: *What profit is there in my blood? (Quae utilitas in sanguine meo?)* In an allegorical interpretation of the psalm, Gaspar sees these words referring to Jesus in his agony. His suffering is more intense because he foresees that his passion will be in vain if sinners do not repent and receive the redemption that the shedding of his Blood makes possible.

His treatment of the Sorrowful Mother is colored by the same emphasis on spiritual suffering. Mary's inner pain as she saw the suffering of her Son was, according to Gaspar, so intense that he calls her the Queen of the martyrs.

In preparing this volume I wish to acknowledge the great debt owed to Don Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., who has devoted so much of his life to the study of St. Gaspar and the spirituality of the Blood of Christ. Much of his work has continued the efforts of the late Don Amilcare Rey, C.P.P.S., the postulator of Gaspar's cause for

canonization in the middle of the last century, as well as that of the late Don Luigi Contegiacomo, C.P.P.S.

The contribution of the late Father Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S., who translated Gaspar's letters into English should also be noted. Eventually that translation was scanned from the paper copy and put into digital form by the late Father Milton Ballor, C.P.P.S.

I wish to offer a special word of gratitude to Father Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S., who reviewed the text and offered many helpful suggestions and corrections, and to Jean Giesige, C.P.P.S. Companion, for her help in guiding this book to publication.

Finally, I offer my thanks to my brother Missionaries of the Precious Blood and to all who have encouraged and supported me in this project.

Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

As Don Beniamino noted in his introduction, many of these texts seem to have been “dashed off from the pen of St. Gaspar.” The reader should be aware that they are not necessarily polished final drafts. Some are no more than outlines with bullet points. Even the sermons on the Passion and the Sorrowful Mother, which are fairly complete texts, sometimes contain single words or phrases that were meant to be expanded during the delivery of the sermon.

Gaspar almost always cites the Bible using the Latin Vulgate. I have added the chapter and verse references in parentheses. These references are not found in the original text.

The biblical quotes in English are generally taken from the Douay-Rheims version, a venerable translation of the Latin Vulgate. Citation of the Psalms follows the more common numbering found in most Bibles today rather than the numbering found in the Vulgate.

Nearly all the footnotes are those of the translator, added to clarify or provide additional information.

The English translation of the letters of St. Gaspar is the work of the late Father Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S. The English translation of *In omnibus divites facti estis in illo* is by Father John Colacino, C.P.P.S.

In translating from Gaspar's Italian, I have tried to preserve the flavor of the Italian text as much as is possible. It is my hope that this offers the reader a more accurate sense of what Gaspar's audience would have heard when he preached.

INTRODUCTION TO ST. GASPAR AND HIS WORLD

What was life like in the Italy that was Gaspar's world? What was it like to be a Roman priest in the first half of the nineteenth century? To whom were Gaspar and his Missionaries ministering? It is worth offering at least some brief comments in response to these questions.

Italy was not the unified country we know today, but was rather a collection of several states, for example, the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, various duchies, and the Papal States. The unified Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861, and it was only ten years later that Italy annexed the territory that more or less constitutes the present-day country. Gaspar spent most of his life within the Papal States, which occupied a swathe of territory across central Italy. The pope was both a civil ruler as well as the spiritual ruler of the Church.

Along with the political diversity, a variety of cultures and dialects of Italian (even distinct languages!) existed then, as now. Given the limitations of transportation, people did not often travel far from home, especially those with limited resources.

Gaspar was born in Rome, near the great basilica of St. Mary Major, and he spent his childhood in servants' quarters in a palace across the street from the famous Jesuit church of the Gesù. The family belonged to the parish of St. Mark on the Piazza Venezia. Later, Gaspar would live, with his widowed sister and his niece, in an apartment in the Teatro Marcello, on the edge of the Jewish ghetto, just a few blocks from where he grew up. This apartment would be the de facto "general house" of the Congregation during his lifetime.

Gaspar was ordained at a time when there was an abundance of priests. For example, when St. Alphonsus became bishop of the

diocese of St. Agatha of the Goths near Naples, there were 35,000 Catholics in the diocese with around 400 diocesan priests to care for them. There were also priests of religious congregations in the diocese.

One of the reasons for this abundance was that the priesthood was a good career at the time, a way out of poverty. Priests were in effect employees of the state, whose head was none other than the pope. The clergy generally received what is called a benefice, that is, a stipend attached to ministry in a certain place. Gaspar, for example, received a stipend for being a canon of St. Mark's, which he later renounced.

As might be expected, not all priests were dedicated and exemplary shepherds of their flocks. Some were more or less bureaucrats who performed their duties without much zeal. People hungered for more, and they found that hunger satisfied in popular devotions and associations. Fr. Francesco Albertini, mentor and spiritual director of St. Gaspar, was a zealous priest who founded the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood in his parish church, San Nicola in Carcere, in 1808. He invited the newly ordained Gaspar del Bufalo to preach at the inauguration of the association.

Gaspar was asked to preach because of his reputation in the pulpit, not because of a great devotion to the Precious Blood. That would develop under the careful tutelage of Albertini as they endured exile together.

The exile (1810-1814) was punishment for their refusal to take an oath of loyalty to Napoleon, who had invaded Italy again, and who wanted to use the Church as an instrument to pacify and unify his empire. Albertini and Gaspar were sent into exile to northern Italy, and it was during the early months of that exile that Albertini inculcated a spirituality of the Blood of Christ in Gaspar. Albertini became Gaspar's spiritual director, a relationship that endured until the time of the former's death in 1819.

The exile ended about a year before Napoleon's final defeat. Pope Pius VII had also been in exile, and on returning, realized that his Papal States were in need of spiritual and political reform. He enlisted Gaspar, who had intentions of joining the Jesuits, to be part of the spiritual reform through the preaching of missions and retreats.

Finally, Gaspar lived his adult life during the flowering of Romanticism in Europe. Romanticism emphasized the value of the individual and of experience, especially of strong emotions. One sees this in the literature, art, and music of the era. It is not surprising that devotion to the Precious Blood should find a flowering in the era, given its potential for stirring deep religious emotions.

Romanticism also encouraged nationalist movements in Europe. In Italy there were many who sought to bring the many political entities of the Italian peninsula together into a unified country, a project that was not realized until 1861. Those who advocated unification were often seen as enemies of the pope, whose territories would be in danger of confiscation with unification. Although some advocated a unified Italy led by the pope, others sought to free Italy from clerical authority. One of the key figures in Italian nationalism, for example, was fiercely anti-clerical and had no use for the pope.

This was the world facing Gaspar as he brought together a few like-minded priests to found the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in August 1815. Until his death in 1837, Gaspar would work tirelessly to bring the message of the Blood of Jesus Christ, a message of mercy and reconciliation, to the people of Italy.

The Missionaries carried out their ministry of renewal through preaching missions and retreats. The former were elaborate and extensive activities, lasting from ten days to two weeks, aimed at both lay people and clergy. Several priests and brothers were involved in these missions, and there would be sermons, processions, home visiting, and the establishment of associations so that the fruits of

the mission would endure. The Missionaries would enlist the help of local clergy, sometimes of the bishop himself, and one of the aims of the Congregation was the renewal of the clergy as well.

This was the world of St. Gaspar: a world that had seen its share of strife and that was disheartened and much in need of healing and renewal. It was to this world that Gaspar and his Missionaries proclaimed the good news of salvation through the Blood of Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR THE READER

Gaspar's world and approach to the spirituality of the Blood of Christ are in some ways foreign to the modern reader. Besides the obvious differences in language and culture, much of the material is fragmentary, making reading even more difficult.

With this in mind, here are some questions that might be helpful prior to or after reading the material:

- What do you imagine would be the composition of Gaspar's audience? What do you imagine their response would be?
- How would an audience today respond to his spirituality and/or his preaching?
- Did you find anything surprising in the material?
- In what ways do you find Gaspar's spirituality of the Precious Blood similar to yours? How is it different?
- What theme or themes in Gaspar's preaching might be relevant for Christians today? What theme or themes do you find engaging or challenging?
- How do you think Gaspar would approach Precious Blood spirituality in the light of the "signs of the times" in our world?
- Gaspar saw his mission of preaching as a way to help reform society and renew the culture. In contemporary times, what is the role of preaching in the Church and society?
- What was your reaction to Gaspar's portrayal of Mary as the Sorrowful Mother?
- What would you like to ask Gaspar if he were present today?

MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS ON THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

YOU HAVE BEEN BOUGHT AT A GREAT PRICE (I)¹

Exhortation to the Faithful On the Importance of Devotion to the Divine Blood

The abuse which the price of our Redemption suffers in these days, and the urgent need to give continued compensation to the Divine Redeemer for the ingratitude of humankind demand that devout lovers of Jesus be involved in promoting perpetual adoration of the Divine Precious Blood of the Savior.

Twelve Churches in different areas would successively observe the month consecrated to the mysteries of our Redemption. They would carry out that holy devotion of compensation that seeks to placate the Lord, who is angered by our sins. Whoever does not have the book for the month [of the Precious Blood] composed by the late bishop of Macerata and Tolentino, [Vincenzo] Strambi,² can also use the Chaplet [of the Precious Blood] composed by the late bishop of Terracina, Sezze, and Piperno, [Francesco] Albertini,³ Propagator of a devotion of such interest.

Whatever is said of the pious practice of a Church in the public realm also applies to private devotional practice.

Finally, the Ecclesiastics with faculties to inscribe the faithful to participate in the Indulgences of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood are asked to divide the Hours of Prayer for devotion in such a way that the perpetual Cult of adoration might occur, which will be rewarded by the Most Loving God with the gentleness and sweetness of his mercy. Amen.

¹ I Cor 6:20

² St. Vincent Strambi (1745–1824), Passionist and bishop of Macerata and Tolentino. The precise title of the work, written in collaboration with Don Gaetano Bonanni, is: *Il mese santificato con divote considerazioni ed affetti sopra il Sangue Preziosissimo di Gesù Cristo per infiammare i cuori dei fedeli all'Amore del Nostro Divin Redentore Crocifisso*, Fabriano, 1820.

³ Bishop Francesco Albertini (1770–1819), founder of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood and spiritual director of St. Gaspar.

YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT AT A GREAT PRICE (II)

O you faithful, to adore the inestimable price of our redemption is the most moving theme that I can propose to you! From that price, the treasures of Wisdom and Sanctification have come to us; from that price, liberation from the pains of hell. Through that price and by the love of Jesus one can, by the power of the Divine Blood, possess the holy glory of Heaven!

Now who would believe it? Instead of observing sentiments of a loving response to Jesus, one sees ingratitude and a lack of awareness that words cannot express in the children he has redeemed! *What profit is there in my blood?* (Ps 30:10) The Lord is already lamenting with his Prophet. It is right, therefore, that we consecrate the present month to the Adoration of the Divine Blood to compensate for human ingratitude, and in doing so we soften our own hearts.

Thanks to the application of this inestimable price by which we are redeemed, let the sinful soul find the sacred and religious motivation with which to hope for mercy and forgiveness. Let the penitent find in it an exhortation to virtue and holiness; and finally, let the just person find the burning zeal to save souls for the Lord.

If it was sin that was always the cause of the internal turmoil of the Savior, today, in the universal human crisis, it has caused unspeakable damage to the interests of the faith. And what does the demon not employ so that souls will not profit by the Divine Blood?

Ah! Reminding people of such an important devotion stirs them to rise from the fatal sleep of spiritual death that oppresses them. *I will take up the chalice of salvation and call on the name of the Lord...My cup that inebriates how good it is* (Ps 116:13; Ps 23:5). Now I understand why in the Old Testament the Lord was pleased with the Blood of the Victims, since it prefigured the Blood of the Lamb shed completely in the fullness of time on the altar of the Cross. *If the blood of goats and Young Bulls sanctifies the defiled, how much*

more will the Blood of Christ cleanse our consciences? (Heb 9:13; the quotation from the Vulgate is not exact.) From this devotion, besides, comes the revival of that goodness which the Divine Blood created in us through the regeneration of Holy Baptism. With respect to the other Sacraments, and especially to the Sacrament of Penance, what occurs is that *justified in [his] Blood, we will be saved from the wrath through him* (Rom 5:9). Let us turn the gaze of our faith to the Month of love, to the Sacrifice of the altar. Oh, how Religion calls us back to the very tender mysteries of Redemption!

Jesus, beloved people, is therefore our beloved, both white and ruddy. White, because of his essential purity, and ruddy because of the Divine Blood: *[My] beloved is white and ruddy* (Song 5:10). Everywhere I turned my attention I saw nothing but Blood...the wounds of the feet, of the hands... the Head crowned with thorns... all arouse us to return the love of the open Divine Heart... Therefore, let us stand—we are using the words of the Church from the Hymn of the Passion of Jesus Christ—*stand there at the Cross, you who grieve, and anoint the holy feet of the Crucified...wash [them] with your tears, dry [them] with your hair, and bathe [them] with your mouth.*⁴

O my Jesus, accept the respect of this holy month, in compensation for such great human iniquity; and while the enemy of the good seeks to dim the remembrance of your love in the minds of the children of Adam, may the devotion to the Divine Blood draw our souls near to your Divine Heart: *you have been brought near by the Blood* (Eph 2:13). May our minds be ever occupied with pondering the mysteries of your charity, our hearts with loving its application, and the sentiments of our bodies in presenting its triumphs for our sanctification and that of the other. Thus, may the memory of the inestimable price of our redemption by which we have been redeemed be indelibly fixed in our memory: *You have been bought at a great price; glorify and bear God in your body* (1 Cor 6:20).

⁴ Taken from the Divine Office for Wednesday after Sexagesima Sunday, commemorating the Passion of Christ.

ON THE MOST PRECIOUS BLOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST⁵

Exhortation:

Motives for this devotion which is being spread enthusiastically.

Let us enter into its intrinsic value.

It is the mystery of faith... Because all of faith is centered in this devotion, because the entire holy faith in its glories derives from this devotion.

1. All of the prophecies are centered in this devotion, etc. *He shall wash his robe in wine and his garment in the blood of the grape (Gn 49, 11) ... You have anointed my head with oil; and my chalice which inebriates me, how goodly is it (Ps 23:5) ... I have believed, therefore [have I spoken] (Ps 116:10) ... The Lamb slain from the creation of the world (cf. Rev 13:8).*

And he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood; and his name is called the Word of God (Rev 19:13). Why then is your apparel red, and your garments like theirs that tread in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone (Is 63:2-23).

(To the Hebrews) Christ, being come a high priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hand, that is, not of this creation: Neither by the blood of goats, or of calves, but by his own Blood, entered once into the holies, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12).

The sacrifices, etc. ...the Images...the doors of the Hebrews colored by the Blood of the Lamb, etc. The mysteries, etc. therefore, etc.

⁵ This an outline sent to Don Michele Palombi, a Missionary. In the manuscript of St. Gaspar there are interpolations made by another person.

2. *In Christ Jesus, you, who some time were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13). Making peace through the Blood (Col 1:20) ...The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn 1:17).*

Triumphs of the faith on account of the Blood, etc. the Sacraments...the preaching...the conversion of evildoers... the progress of penitents... *[You have] not yet resisted unto blood (Heb 12:4).. in loving souls... Christ loved us, and washed us in his Blood (Rev 1:5)...*

Behold the martyrs... *he conquered the world not with iron but with wood.*⁶

And like soldiers, who give their lives, thus...

Glory to God and to the Lamb (cf. Rev 5:13)...

They conquered the dragon through the Blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11)...

These that are clothed in white robes, who are they and from where do they come? (Rev 7:13)

⁶ From the Divine Office for Holy Thursday in the old Roman Breviary

THE DIVINE BLOOD AND THE SOULS IN PURGATORY⁷

The Precious Blood of Jesus Christ is the price by which we have been freed not only from the pains of hell, but from purgatory.

1. In this regard, let there be wonder at the goodness of God in preparing a multitude of means flowing from the Redemption.

2. In this regard, let there be wonder at the goodness of God in accepting these same means in regard to the practice of the faithful.

1. It is proved. *It is written: [there shall not enter into it] anything defiled* (Rev 21:27).

But if souls, even though lightly burdened by their guilt, are defiled, how will they be able to possess the glory of God? Even if they undergo suffering in fire as satisfaction, purgation from venial sin is always connected with Redemption and the blood of the immaculate Lamb. *And he is the propitiation for our sins* (1 Jn 2:2) and he is the Lamb who could *open the book and the seals* (Rev 5:9) and erase its laments and write in it a song of joy and exaltation.

If, however, there is question of making satisfaction for temporal punishment, the good of satisfactory suffering receives its value from Jesus the Redeemer.

But oh, how great is the love of God in its sweetness! You brought to souls detained in purgatory the means of religion so that they may more swiftly depart from the fire. Behold the merits of the saints, behold the prayers, behold the indulgences, behold the Sacrifice of the Mass which is the summation of all that is good ... Who does not admire the sweetness of God in preparing [this] and in preparing a multitude of means? For generally the treasures of

⁷ This is an outline sent to Don Adriano Tarulli, Missionary residing in Sermo-neta, and is part of Letter 581. The original is in Latin and an Italian translation is provided by Conti. There is no title in the original.

the Church are applied as much as possible to Purgatory. How good God is....

2. He promises, however, through these means to free more swiftly the captive souls etc.... and consider the wisest order of Providence.

For each soul the time of merit is the present. When this most miserable life is over there will be no more time. But the soul weighed down with venial sin does not merit the pains of hell, for it has not lost the state of grace, but God requires satisfaction for another reason. How, therefore, will these views be reconciled?

Behold how God gives to pilgrim man or woman the key of Paradise for the benefit of souls in order that they might not suffer for the sake of satisfaction [of their sins] to the last penny, but rather that, because of his love, they be more quickly freed. Behold, he says to the faithful, the promise of my will: just as I did penance for all, so you also are to exercise love for one another. Make satisfaction in yourselves for what is owed in justice. Is grace, and other things of this kind, necessary? It is available to you.

Thus, if an individual is ungrateful toward his own, the Church, the spouse of Christ, will not cease to admonish us with tears and shake us free of the weight of human sloth. That we may be filled with a great heart and a willing spirit, God instills a personal good in us. For if the same measure...and if salutary devotion is necessary in the application of means, let it be strengthened by miracles.

Therefore, O fountain of salvation, it is necessary that I thus explain myself! O Blood that is on the altar, in indulgences... it is the balm and the mystical oil of mercy.

FOR THE MONTH OF THE DIVINE BLOOD (I)

Division of the days into the three ways:

purgative, illuminative, unitive.

INTRODUCTION

Christ loved the Church, he gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25) ... he purchased [her] with his own Blood (Acts 20:28).

We are living in times in which it is necessary to cleanse the entire world anew in the Blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 7:14; 22:14).

PURGATIVE

Laments of Jesus Christ... What profit is there [in my blood]? (Ps 30:10) ... And his sweat [became as drops of blood] (Lk 22:44)... What are these wounds [in the midst of thy hands? And he shall say: With these I was wounded in the house of them that loved me] (Zech 13:6)...

Invitations of Jesus Christ: Now justified by [his] blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him (Rom 5:9). Making peace through the Blood ... (Col 1:20)

Triumphs of the Divine Blood, in the response to the invitations. Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with clean water ... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope (Heb 10:22-23)

[But now in Christ Jesus] you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13).

(The Office and Mass of the Divine Blood are to be read.)

ILLUMINATIVE

Greatness of the price. You have been bought at a great price (1 Cor 6:20). Hence some illustration about having a great esteem for Jesus Christ, whom so many are insulting today.

The tenderness of love in the way in which he sheds the divine Blood. Oh my, everywhere I direct my gaze whether toward the scourging or toward the crowning with thorns, etc., all of this stirs me to affection. And he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with Blood (Rv 19:13) ... Why then is thy apparel red? (Is 63:2-3). Jesus is covered with Blood... What lessons!

The diligence of charity in applying [the Blood] to souls in the Sacraments, in offering it to the Eternal Father in the Divine Sacrifice of the Altar.

(Devotion is that which renews Religion in its principles, in its practices, in its glories, etc.)

UNITIVE

We have not resisted to the point of blood (cf. Heb 12:4; the Vulgate has “you” instead of “we”).

Courage in standing with Jesus on the cross, in defending holiness, virtue... and conquering the infernal dragon with the Divine Blood, making ourselves capable of greater union with Jesus Christ: They have conquered [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11).

Love for Jesus Christ in sufferings, which is an extension of perfection beyond the courage that unites us to the Cross. It begins with courage to suffer, continues with the cheerfulness of love, and is pleased with what is of value (se ne gustano i preggi), etc.

In the end, our glory is to be found in suffering for our most loving devotion... Glory in the prophets who announced his glories and the triumphs, glory in the Apostles, who preached of him to the people ... Glory in the martyrs who resisted with this devotion ... In the Confessors who took courage ... Glory of the Priesthood, prefigured and then fulfilled in Jesus Christ, first in symbols and now in truth. If the Blood of goats (Heb 9:13)... Glory in the sons of Redemption. For by the Blood of Jesus Christ we can have the earth as an inheritance... Glory in the Saints who always sensed the fruit

of redemption ... Glory in eternity ... Blessed Glory to God and to the Lamb (cf. Rev 5:13).

ON THE DAY OF THE FEAST

And this day shall be for a memorial to you: and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord in your generations with an everlasting observance (Ex 12:14) and that [observance will be]:

1. to express gratitude for benefits
2. to seek new benefits
3. to triumph by means of [the benefits] with the
Divine Blood in eternity

REFLECTIONS ON THE MONTH OF THE DIVINE BLOOD

Forget not the kindness of your surety: for he has given his life for you (Sir 29:15).

INTRODUCTION

1. *The motives*, for making the month fruitfully
2. *The way*, to keep [the month] well

Motives

1. for making a cult of compensation
2. for acquiring for ourselves a great hatred for [our] faults
3. for becoming more zealous for the good of our neighbor.

Means: Placing before our eyes the book of the Cross of Jesus, in order to know, love, and imitate Jesus Crucified.

BENEFIT OF THE REDEMPTION

You have been bought at a great price (1 Cor 6:20).

The fact of the liberation of the Hebrew people from the slavery of Egypt. Moses with the staff, a figure of Jesus Christ with the Cross. Passing through the Red Sea ... *Let us sing to the Lord (Ex 15:1)* ... What were we if Jesus? ... The Hebrew people were ungrateful in the desert, oh, how many are ungrateful to Jesus.

WHAT WAS THE CAUSE OF THE REDEMPTION?

Charity: On account of his exceeding charity with which he loved us (Eph 2:4)... he was offered up (Heb 9:28).

1. Eternal love: *I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn you, taking pity on you* (Jer 31:3).

2. Magnanimous love, going beyond *liberation*: he wanted to be an example for the Martyrs ... he wanted to show how he suffered voluntarily, so that we might love him ... he wanted to stir our hearts. Therefore, the Prophet exclaimed that the mercy of the Lord was great. He wanted to open for us the fountains of mercy in his wounds. He wanted to administer that mystical oil to us ... *the lamps thereof are fire and flames* (Song 8:6). *I have come to cast fire on the earth, etc.* (Lk 12:49)

3. Tender love for the way Jesus applies redemption to us. He calls sinners: *Come to me all you* (Mt 11:28)... *I will cast your sins to the bottom of the sea* (cf. Mi 7:19). *You ... were afar off are made near by the Blood* (Eph 2:13). He rouses the penitent: *You have not resisted to the point of Blood* (Heb 12:4). He animates the fervent: *My beloved to me, and I to him [who feeds among the lilies] ... the beloved is white and ruddy* (Song 2:16; 5:10).

4. Suffering love, patient love... *[the Lord] is patient and full of mercy* (Ps 145:8) *He says to the Eternal Divine Father: Look on the face of your Christ* (Ps 84:10).

(This is divided into two days).

TO WHOM LOVE WAS DIRECTED, AND WHY

Idea of the Exhortation: A shepherd who sacrifices for the sheep ... The love that stirs up ... But why?

The soul is the *image* of the Lord. What is it that the Lord loathes in the soul? On the question of offering [the Blood] at Holy Mass, or the communication of Indulgences, St. Thomas (*Opusc.* 50. c. 25) applies the verse from Leviticus: *I have given blood to*

you, that you may make atonement with it upon the altar for your souls (Lv 17:11).

With a loud cry. According to St. Ambrose, this phrase was the shedding of the Blood of the Redeemer, for whose efficacy every gift is shared by the Supreme Giver for the benefit of those redeemed: The shedding of his Holy Blood is a loud cry that is heard by God the Father.⁸ St. Bernard (sermon 9 on the Nativity): *in order that by my wounds he might be healed by the precious balm of his blood.*

More precisely: How displeased is Jesus with the unresponsiveness of the redeemed soul (Divided into three days)

[St. Gaspar added some ideas in the margin of the folio that are incorporated into the text here.]

1) Of the known laments and just complaints (*doglianze*) of Jesus the Redeemer;

2) Of the thirst he has for redeemed souls whom he seeks because his creatures are ungrateful;

3) Of the encouragements he gives to his beloved ones, so that they cooperate with his plans.

I. Begin with the story of the prodigal son. The story of the lepers: one of them came back to the Savior. *Seeing the city he wept* (Lk 19:41) ... *My people [why have you forsaken me]* ... The doors of the Hebrews in Egypt stained with the Blood of the Lamb ... *I led you [out of Egypt]* ... *and you have prepared a Cross [for me].*⁹

II. Burning thirst, incessant, extending to all souls: *Thirst. I thirst* (Jn 19:28)... *Why have you forsaken me?*" (Ps 22:2) ... *Images*, either of the shepherd who watches over the flock, or of the farmer, or of the father ... *I stand at the door and knock* (Rv 3:20). Behold, the open fonts ... *Many waters cannot quench love* (Song 8:7) ... *I have come into deep waters, and the storm sweeps over me* (Ps 69:2).

⁸ A paraphrase from a commentary of St. Anselm on Hebrews that was part of the old Roman Breviary.

⁹ Quotations from the Reproaches sung on Good Friday.

Many waters, *many tribulations*. Even Jesus with a burning thirst ... A thirst signified by the Lord in the times of expectation—on the thirst signified in the times of expectation the text explains: *[Send forth, O Lord, the lamb, the ruler of the earth,] from Petra of the desert to the mount of the daughter of Sion (Is 16:1)*—in the time of Redemption and after the ascension into Heaven, however, he said: *As the Father has sent me, [I also send you]...* (passage to the third point)

III. *I do not wish the death of the sinner* (cf. Ez 33:11) ... *Going [therefore] teach [all nations, baptizing them]...* (Mt 28:19) ... *I have set you this day [over the nations]* (Jer 1:10)... *Go into my vineyard* (Mt 20:4, 7) ... He spurs on the apostles, he reveals to them his sufferings, he animates them. Continue, considering the task given principally to ministers of the Lord ...

GLORIES OF THE PRIESTHOOD

You have redeemed us, Lord, in your Blood, and made us for our God a kingdom and priests (cf. Rv 5:9)

1. The glories of the priesthood prefigured;
2. The glories of the priesthood fulfilled;
3. The glories of the priesthood in the victories that result from it.

Another division to observe when preaching:

1. The elevation of dignity (what love of Jesus...)
2. The efficacy;
3. The means (*modo*).

1. The elevation of dignity ... Oh, the greatest of the wonders that the Lord has performed, and for applying the Divine Blood! (in two days)
2. The efficacy of the ministry in the use of authority...
3. And how is it efficacious? By the Divine Blood of Jesus Christ.

One should explain why the words of consecration read:
The mystery of faith.

1. Because the entire faith is concentrated ...
2. Because the entire faith presents its glories ...

One should explain: *You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech* (Ps 110:4) (One continues explaining the Mystery of Faith).

One should speak of the Mass, which is in a special way a compendium of the objects of faith and releases their glories.

FOR THE MONTH OF THE DIVINE BLOOD¹⁰

Having... a confidence [in entering into the holies] in the Blood of Christ; a new and living way which he has dedicated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh...Let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith (Heb 10:19-20).

Applications: The Blood of Jesus Christ:

1. *animates one to trust, trust in the Blood*
2. *makes trust fruitful in its effects because it has begun for us (fulfilling those things that are lacking in the passion)...*
3. *finally, strengthens trust through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. (The Crucifix is a mirror)*

You are worthy, O Lord, to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; because you were slain, and have redeemed us to God [in your blood,] out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And have made us to our God a kingdom...and we shall reign [on the earth]" (Rv 5:9-10).

I will apply [the quotation] thus: The Cross is the book opened by Jesus Christ for instructing the world anew: *In these last days he has spoken to us in [his] son* (Heb 1:2) (not only by the preaching of a word, but by the holiness of [his] example).

Concupiscence crucifies the Cross three times, and this is the principle of this book. Indulging in the passions is wrong, and repressing them is justified: *always bearing in our body the mortification of Jesus ... so that the life of Jesus be manifest [in our bodies]* (2 Cor 4:10) Observe the concupiscence of the humbled sense ... Jesus satisfies ... and therefore the better to read this book,

¹⁰ This outline does not have a title in the manuscript, but it seems likely that these are thoughts for the conclusion of the month of the Precious Blood. About half of the text is in Latin.

observe the wounds, the Blood: How worthy you are to open its seals because you have been slain. (One alludes to the wounds as signs of love, signs of salvation.)

The concupiscence of *ambition*... humbled by Jesus Christ who is the *lamb ... you were slain* (cf. Rv 5:12; 13:8) ... *he humbled* (cf. Phil 2:8) ... The concupiscence of those interests humbled ... Man is attached to things ... and offends God. And Jesus, observe what generosity Jesus employs in loving us to the last shedding of Blood. And our hearts are so small ... And he died for us ... one can amplify.

(I submit to those who are wiser than I. Correct the errors. See, a warning to the reader.)

Let us run... to the fight proposed to us looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith (Heb 12:1-2).

Seeing Jesus Christ dripping with Blood, *Let us run*:

1. *impeding and cursing the stumbling blocks (impediendo et detestando scandala)*

2. *let us run looking on [Jesus] the author of the faith* (cf. Heb 12:1-2)... For by faith the Saints (by doing good) *have established justice, obtained [promises]*... (by the zeal of redemption) *they have become strong in battle* (Heb 11:34)... *we have not yet resisted to the point of blood* (Heb 12:4) ... but still if it is needed

3. *let us run looking at Jesus, the one who finishes* (cf. Heb 12:2) *who by his own Blood has entered into the holies* (Heb 9:12) ... Therefore even undergoing martyrdom if necessary that God be glorified, and that our soul be safe.

Always living to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25).

He makes intercession for us with the voice of [his] Blood which speaks better than [the blood] of Abel (cf. Heb 12:24). Hence the

Eternal Father is honored by the Son, by him sins are expiated, graces are restored, benefits will be acquired so that *in all things we have been made rich* (1 Cor 1:5) ... *and with him he has given us all things* (the Vulgate has “will give”)... *he did not spare his own son* (Rom 8:32)... but Oh, the ingratitude of humanity, etc. (to be developed).

5. *You have redeemed [us] in your Blood* (Rv 5:9)

Therefore

1. the Blood of Jesus Christ is an inestimable price ... *For you are bought with a great price* (1 Cor 6:20). (Consider the Author, consider the Love in the author, and consider the extent of his love).

2. [the Blood] is a remedy (*medicina*) in all the Sacraments, and in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

3. [the Blood] is the cup by which we are inebriated in the Wine Cellar. This is every wound of the Crucified One; in this refuge of salvation we are given to drink of the *wine of sorrow* (Ps 60:4) and love is directed to our Crucified King; for by the cross he reigned, etc. *[The King] brought me into the [wine] cellar* (Song 2:4) ... *Who will separate us from the love of Christ?* (Rom 8:35).

Come my Dove in the clefts of the rock (Song 2:14)

What are these clefts?...The wounds of Jesus Christ... *for the rock was Christ* (1 Cor 10:4) [a rock] pierced by the chisel of sufferings. Come. *Dove*, for the Blood has made you white; therefore you go to the fountains of salvation from which the price of redemption...therefore *the rock is a refuge of rock-badgers* (Ps 104:18) (or sinners, etc.).

Come, my dove; you have been made white by my Blood; abide in my wounds lest you lose your whiteness by wandering about outside them. (Let the Dove of Noah be for you an image of salvation.) Come, dove. For the Blood by which you have been cleansed will wash you more fully in perfection, etc.

Christ loved the Church (Eph 5:25) ... he purchased it with His Blood (Acts 20:28).

Let it be understood, [O] Hearers, the reason why today ... He purchased by [his] Blood ... Act thus, Christian Soul ...let *devotion to the Blood* be displayed to men and women so that *the Church in its sons and daughters* may find purity of conscience, the splendor of grace, a Temple that gives life to souls.

He purchased with His Blood; therefore in the Blood of Jesus Christ let all find the fountain of all good things, *repose in trials, the security and peace* one can have when hesitation arises ... *the union of love, the foundation of faith* (for it is the mystery of faith), the basis of Christian patience, the cause of rejoicing in Heaven. The Blood of Christ is the glory of martyrs, the strength of Confessors, etc., the purity of Virgins ... The Blood of Jesus Christ opened the gates of paradise, obtained glory, humbled the devil, refreshes the souls in Purgatory ... Behold, the Church in her sons and daughters ... Because if the Church is considered in its Own holiness, the Blood of Christ proves the love of its Head and Spouse, the Blood of Christ gives the strength of salvation to the law, and therefore taking the book [Moses] *sprinkled [all the people] with the blood ... saying* (Heb 9:19)... The Blood of Christ is an infinite treasure in the Sacraments, completes and fulfills the oracles, brings dignity to the Preaching of the Word; the blood red cross makes holy the world, expels demons, overturns the temples of the Gentiles, deprives the demon of his Kingdom. For the Cross fixed in the heart of men and women circumcises them in spirit... Therefore, *all things are cleansed with blood: and without shedding of blood there is no remission* (Heb 9:22)... Behold the Church, in whatever way it may be considered, loved by the Blood, noble in faith, strong in battle, invincible in authority.

For the day of the feast

This day shall be for a memorial to you: and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord in your generations with an everlasting observance (Ex 12:14).

An everlasting observance: for *the Lamb was slain from the beginning of the world* (Rv 13:8); in the decrees, in the expectation of the prophets. In you have our Fathers hoped (Ps 22:4)

An everlasting observance in the state of grace. We were far off... we have been brought near in the Blood of Christ (cf Eph 2:13). (To sum up the month) Blessed are they that wash their robes in the Blood of the Lamb (Rv 22:14).

An everlasting observance. Even in Heaven we will sing to the God of glory and to the Lamb, and in kissing those luminous wounds of glory...

IN ALL THINGS YOU ARE MADE RICH IN HIM¹¹

(*In Omnibus Divites Facti Estis in Illo*)

Jesus Mary Joseph

With what riches devotion to the Most Precious Blood adorns the soul! We can distinguish three states in which the soul may find itself: the state of sin, the state of grace, and the state of perfection (the three ways: *purgative, illuminative, unitive*).

The Purgative Way¹²

Devotion to the Blood of Jesus Christ is the foundation of *hope* in divine mercy.

Ipse est propitiatio 'He is propitiation' (1 Jn 2:22)

1. Because Jesus is our *Advocate* = we have an *Advocate with the Father, [Jesus Christ the righteous one]* (1 Jn 2:1). Look he says, *upon the face of your anointed* (Ps 84:10). For if the prayers of the Patriarchs obtained for the people such singular favors, then we may assume the same for ourselves. [Christ] presents his wounds together with his Blood which *speaks more eloquently than that of Abel*, etc., etc. (Heb 12:24).

Ipse est pastor 'He is the shepherd'

2. Because Jesus, while praying to the Father, calls out to us with *inexpressible groanings* (cf. Rom 8:26) he is also the Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, etc. (Jn 10:11) But in seeking his little flock, how reddened is the path of the good shepherd with blood.

How costly we are to Jesus, oh [you his] faithful ones. He calls out to us with as many mouths as he has wounds. He shows us

¹¹ *Scritti spirituali*, III, pp. 423-442. This document, whose title is taken from 1 Cor 1:5, is the most important writing on the Precious Blood by St. Gaspar. It was sent by St. Gaspar in 1822 to Don Luigi Mosconi (1778-1858), director of the missions in the house of Albano. The address bears the postmark of Terracina. In 1822 St. Gaspar was in Terracina during the first half of June, waiting to depart for the second mission in Benevento. Thus, the document dates from this time. It is divided into four parts, each of which begins with the words: *In omnibus divites facti estis in illo* 'In all things you are made rich in him.'

his opened heart, etc. "Come, my son," he says, "cleanse yourself in this blood, etc." . . . Sin is a leprosy: *Wash and you will be clean* (2 Kgs 5:10).

Ipse est vita 'He is life'

3. Because Jesus, while seeking and praying for us, allows us to know, if we are open, the efficacy of the means of reconciliation, his divine Blood. [This blood] is the power of the sacrament of penance; it is the price of sanctifying grace; it brings about a revival of good works, etc.

Ipse est solatium 'He is comfort'

4. The devil, seeing that a soul wants to return to God, seeks to discourage it with vain fears. But Jesus, our comfort, says to the soul: "How can you doubt that I am unwilling to pardon you, since I call and invite you to, give you room for, repentance, leading you by the hand? Look at me in the garden; I sweat blood from the pain of foreseeing that many would not be saved through their own fault: *What profit is there in my Blood?*" (Ps 30:10). See me upon the cross. *I thirst* (Jn 19:28).

Ipse est quies 'He is repose'

5. [The soul protests]: But not once have I come near to repenting, yet etc. [Jesus responds]: Well now, the purpose of life is one of amendment. It is true you deserved punishment, but just as the lintels of the Hebrews were marked with blood and thus passed over by the Angel, so [you too have been marked]. Jesus said to St. Peter: *No, I tell you, not seven times but seventy-seven times* (Mt 18:22).

Jesus, therefore, is our repose. Observe how he is scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified; notwithstanding even the repetition of so many sins, I tell you, his reply was still, *Father [they] know not [what they are doing]* (Lk 23:34), etc.

How true it is that those in the purgative way must depend on the riches of the Blood of the Lamb, etc. [*How much more then,*

since we are now] justified by his blood, will we be saved through [Christ] from the wrath (Rom 5:9).

Ipse est magister 'He is the teacher'

6. Once converted, Jesus leads the soul to the wounds of his feet so that it might persevere, saying: "Flee, daughter, from the near occasions of sin, lest you reopen these wounds and trample this blood. Your sins would then serve as nails." [The soul responds]: *Lord, make my steps steadfast in your paths...* (Ps 17:5).

My foot has stood on the direct way... (Ps 26:12). Walk while you have the light (Jn 12:35).

Ipse est magister

7. Jesus then leads the soul to the wounds of his hands, and says: "Observe, daughter, how I am wounded for you. The hand is the instrument of the deed. Blessed are you if you strive for Heaven and apply to yourself my divine blood which flows from my hands, enriching the soul with merits, etc." [The soul responds]: *As the eyes of a maid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes on the Lord, our God* (Ps 123:2). In reflecting on [these] "eyes on the hands," [the soul] knows that what it sees with the mind's eye must be acted upon.

[His] hands are turned [and as of gold, full of hyacinths]... (Song 5:14) symbolize in their smoothness the perfection of one's works, full of hyacinths.

But for *grace* to work, *the sacraments* [are needed]. And is not all this but a continuous application of the Blood of Jesus Christ? If you, the faithful, frequent the Sacraments, if you assist at Mass, etc., what else do you do if not, etc.

Ipse est magister

8. To act [well], however, it is necessary to carry the cross. And here Jesus shows us the wound of his shoulder: *Whoever wishes to come [after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me]* (Mt 16:24). [First], suffering is *necessary* for us, especially when

obstinate sinners persecute the good; joining with them is not fitting, however, etc. Second, [suffering] is *useful*, moreover, since by it we detach ourselves from this miserable world. Let us not rely on ourselves. Let us have recourse to prayer. Third, [suffering] is *glorious*, since the cross is the royal ladder to heaven: *Was it not necessary [that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?]* (Lk 24:26). How much should the example of Jesus inspire us! “What are these wounds?” (Zec 13:6)

Ipse est magister

9. Willingly bearing the cross, [the soul] must beware of weariness, and reflect on Jesus who *for the sake of the joy that lay before him... endured the cross, despising its shame* (Heb 12:2). The soul thereby grows in knowledge, noticing how Jesus, though himself innocent, nevertheless did with a flood what he could have done with a drop. *He loved us and has washed away our sins in his own blood* (Rv 1:5). [The soul] thinks of its own sinfulness and *loves its sufferings in peace* (thereby marking an increase in repentance). *It does not complain* in the midst of suffering.

[The soul] loves *the cup* the Father gave [Jesus] (cf. Jn 18:11). It does not complain: *Jesus, however, was silent [and answered nothing]* (Mk 14:61). And behold how the soul already begins to participate in the illuminative life through its imitation of the Savior’s example.

It sees Jesus torn and each moment despises its base vices the more should the soul have been immoral.

It sees Jesus crowned and dripping blood, despising its vanity should the soul have been proud.

It sees Jesus crucified and does not give in to the wiles of the enemy who goes about saying: *Come down from the Cross*, etc (cf. Mt 27:42). Jesus proved he was the Son of God when, despite the darkening Sky, he still did not come down from the Cross, thus making himself our teacher, that we might never abandon the Cross.

The Illuminative Way

In omnibus divites facti estis in illo

Having understood well the teaching explained above, we continue on to the illuminative way seeing how all the riches we possess are ours in the blood of the Lamb.

Here the well-known text comes to mind: *[Christ Jesus] . . . became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption* (1 Cor 1:30).

1. *Sapientia*¹³

In the illuminative way the converted soul begins to notice the greatness of *faith*.

It sees the *unity* [of faith] insofar as the sacrifice of Melchizedek, the blood of Abel (*Abele svenato*), and the sacrifice of Isaac [all] allude to this Victim [who is Christ], etc. The soul meditates at the foot of the cross on how all were saved through faith in the future Messiah: *In you our fathers hoped* (Ps 22:5), etc... *Without shedding of blood there is no remission* (Heb 9:22), etc... *If the blood of goats [and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed], how much more will the blood of Christ* (Heb 9:13). The ancient priesthood, the sacrifices, etc.

Different themes converge marking the harmony of the Old and New Testaments, and the glories of the unity of the faith. For these reasons, Jesus was thus called *the Lamb...slain before the foundation of the world* (Rv 13:8; cf. 1 Pt 1:19).

What a grand thought! Etc. Such a devotion to be revived in [our own] times. Oh faith! Etc., etc.

2. *Sapientia*. The soul proceeds to notice the glory of the faith in the inspiration of the sacred Books of which our devotion reminds us. Were not [the following things] said of Jesus in times long past: *Behold, I am ready for scourges* (Ps 38:18)... *Many bullocks surround*

¹³ In the manuscript of St. Gaspar the enumeration from 1 to 10 in this section is by another hand. We place the numbering here to conform to the other sections.

me (Ps 22:13] ... *My bones all tremble* (Jer 23:9), etc....*There was in him no stately bearing . . . nor appearance [that would attract us to him]* (Is 53:2).

Oh, my Lord, when I see you covered with blood how many religious thoughts I call to mind! Oh great devotion of the Precious Blood! *From the sole of the foot to [the head there is no sound spot]* (Is 1:6)...*What are these wounds?* (Zec 13:6), etc. How one laments the loss of respect for holy things.

3. *Sapientia*. The soul proceeds in the illuminative way to have a stable faith whose glories are seen in the Apostles spreading the gospel. They sanctified the world in the blood of the Lamb, applying it in the sacraments. The soul beholds the marvels of the cross reddened with blood; it sees how souls are regenerated: *You have had yourselves washed* (1 Cor 6:11). . . It sees the prodigies which accompany apostolic undertakings. Truly God has reigned from a tree. And yet how many are the enemies of the cross today.

4. *Sapientia*. The soul proceeds to consider how it possesses the riches it has through the merits of Jesus. While delighting to render worship, the soul knows its own poverty. So it takes the chalice in hand: *The cup of salvation [I will take up]* (Ps 117:13)...*And [my] chalice which inebriates me, how good it is!* (Ps 23:5). In the Old Testament there was the sacrifice of worship, but in the Mass during which, etc. What respect and zeal therefore should everyone strive to attain while being thus nourished?

5. *Sapientia*. The soul sees how in the Blood of the Lamb it gives thanks for favors received. *How shall I make a return [to the Lord]?* (Ps 116:12 (Eucharistic sacrifice). There is nothing more terrible than ingratitude as seen in our own day. *Forgetting the gifts one has received. . .repaying favors with evil*, at the same time abusing these very gifts: [all these things] constitute varying degrees of ingratitude.)

6. *Sapientia*. The soul sees that to obtain grace there is nothing to do but offer the blood: *Look upon the face of your anointed* (Ps 84:10), etc. (Impetratory sacrifice).

Oh love of our divine redeemer! *We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one* (1 Jn 2:1). *Thanks be to God who gives us [the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ]* (1 Cor 15:57). And this is how: *I am with you [always, until the end of the age]* (Mt 20:28).

In the Sacred Ciborium Jesus is there pleading. For this reason the unbloody Sacrifice is renewed every morning. The Church offers no prayer which does not conclude without a reference to Jesus' merits. (Cf. Pinamonti:¹⁴ *Tree of life*). Oh, what need we have of Jesus! It is said in the ancient text that in order to obtain grace it is necessary to call on the God of Abraham: not because God is not the God of all people, but because of the merits of the patriarchs. But the merits of Jesus Christ are, in a special way, the foundation of all the saints' merits.

7. *Sapientia*. For the just expiation of its sins, the soul ponders its affection for heavenly wisdom, and thereby experiences greater sorrow for having sinned. It seeks to make satisfaction, aware that whatever good it does and suffering it endures will be useful for the remission of sins. It knows that goodness, salutary works—indeed everything—stems from the continual application of the treasures of Jesus Christ and that the Blood of the Savior gives comfort. The soul is fond of saying: *No, I will not fear, because 'with you is forgiveness. . .[and] plenteous redemption'* (Ps 130:4, 7).” Behold how the soul is enlivened with another theological virtue, *hope*. *They who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which is immovable, [which stands forever]* (Ps 125:1). Seeing Jesus' wounds opened by sins, the soul

¹⁴ Giampietro Pinamonti (1632-1703), Jesuit, was a companion of Paolo Segneri Senior in the popular missions, in which he carried out the role of catechist and confessor. This parenthetical comment is unclear, and the exact reference is not known.

sighs with compassion; yet from these wounds it draws the mystic waters *welling up [to eternal life]* (Jn 4:14) in which it hopes to be saved. It knows the dangers, yet full of courage, the soul exclaims: *I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me* (Phil 4:13). It makes use, therefore, of the sacraments and sees how in the soul's own sanctification, Jesus has been made our justice (cf. 1 Cor 1:30). In the word "justice" is understood every good work.

8. *Factus est justificatio* 'He has been made justification.' In addition to this, the soul sees how the devil, even if not tempting it to leave all good behind, would nevertheless love to see the soul once again in sin, and thus afflicts it. But the soul, fixing its gaze on its beloved Good, sees what it means to *offend God*, and how much Jesus has suffered to make it holy. Therefore, the soul exclaims: *What will separate me from the love of Christ?* (Cf. Rom 8:35). *For Jesus was offered because it was his own will* (Is 53:7) [and] *by his stripes we were healed* (Is 53:5). Who wishes to crown him anew with thorns? Who seeks to reopen his wounds? All this compels us to return love for love: his bowed head, outstretched hands, and his opened side.

9. *Factus est redemptio* 'He has been made redemption.' In order to establish better [the soul's] attachment to good, it sets itself to thinking, point by point, of the pains suffered by Jesus. It sees him at prayer in the garden, and what pain it feels in seeing him sweat blood! It ponders the scourging, asking who would not pity him? Thinking of Jesus crucified, the soul asks, *What are these wounds?* (Zec 13:6). It visits in spirit the holy places and follows the bloody way to Golgotha. Observing the Mother of Sorrows, [it thinks], *My heart has become like wax melting away within my bosom* (Ps 22:15).

10. *Factus est redemptio*. Finally, the soul comes to behold the opened side. Oh ark of salvation! Oh furnace of charity! *Blood and water flowed out* (Jn 19:4), which recall the gift of the sacraments

and at the same time the tender love of Jesus *who loves us and has washed away our sins in his blood* (Rv 1:5). Jesus has given us his blood to the last drop. Therefore, the soul begins to taste the way of Love, saying: *My beloved is mine and I am his* (Song 2:16). *Man shall come to a deep heart* (Ps 64:7). O Heart of my Lord! *I have come to set fire on the earth* (Lk 12:49). How one should speak out against the coldness of our age.

The Unitive Way

In omnibus divites facti estis in illo

The illumined soul, admirably found at the foot of the Cross, seeks the way in which to unite itself in an intimate relationship of love with its beloved Lord who speaks to the Soul saying = *I am faint with love* (Song 2:5) = The [soul] loves perfection; it studies perfection; it practices the way of perfection.

1. *The [soul] loves perfection* and sees that God alone brings it happiness and merits fidelity: *My God and my all*. It sees that those who do not love God are unhappy: *Vanity of vanities* (Eccl 1:2). It knows that it must repudiate every form of vile mire in order to acquire the love of God: *I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ* (Phil 3:8). It concludes: *The world has been crucified to me and I to the world* (Gal 6:14). The soul grows in repentance for the past, saying: “Late have I loved you, Lord.”¹⁵ It loves God because it sees how he has loved the soul from all eternity: *He first loved us* (1 Jn 4:19). It reconsiders especially the themes concerning redemption and exclaims: *The love of Christ impels us* (2 Cor 5:14). It does so especially when seeing how far that love went when in his capacity as Redeemer, [Christ] shed his blood to the last drop: *He loves us and has washed away our sins in his blood* (Rv 1:5). Faint with love, the soul exclaims: “Oh wounds, oh precious blood of my Lord, that I might praise you in eternity!” What a great thing

¹⁵ Cf. St. Augustine, Confessions, 10

it is that the Blood of Jesus is even our drink in the Eucharist and how, finally, through the merits of the Blood of Jesus Christ we shall arrive in Paradise. *With your blood you purchased for God [those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation]. You made them a kingdom*, etc. (Rv 5:9-10).

All of which brings together in the soul such thoughts of love that it concludes: *What will separate me from the love of Christ?* (Cf. Rom 8:35) Thus does the soul become strong like death = *For strong as death is love* (Song 8:6).

2. [The soul] studies perfection, seeking each day the ways in which to draw from the Crucified new motives for growing in perfection and in holiness. It meditates on the image of the pierced Lamb: *a Lamb [as if it were] slain* (Cf. Rv 5:6). What ingratitude was shown by the Lord's own people, so blessed by God, yet who could still demand his crucifixion? And what meekness was shown by Jesus, especially in the scourging, when he gave his persecutors the most glorious proofs of his charity. *He suffers and is silent; is silent and prays; prays and forgives*. What a great example of unsurpassed constancy!

The soul sees what occurs today as well on the part of sinners, and full of love for Jesus seeks to defend him with an opposing zeal, which is the ardor of charity, so that its Lord might be glorified. And if in doing good to others, one encounters pain or even martyrdom, then it is enough to think, *My beloved is white and ruddy* (Song 5:10). My beloved, though white as a lily is reddened with blood. How then could I not suffer willingly for the truth? *I am overflowing with joy all the more because of all our affliction* (2 Cor 7:4).

Jesus is the *shepherd, the good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep* (Jn 10:11). "Lord," says the soul in the way of union, "if necessary, behold that I ready for any sacrifice: *My heart is ready* (Ps 108:20). Jesus is the *victim*. "Now, my God," the soul exclaims, "Behold, I am ready to be a victim of love too." Oh, what sentiments

are acquired in the study of the Crucified.

3. [The soul] practices perfection and it is given a delicacy of conscience that seeks gradually to wage war against venial sins and imperfections. These are merely displeasing to Jesus (thus distinguishing grave from light matter). “But, my Lord,” [the soul says], “you merit nothing but love.” Therefore it frequents the Sacraments, gains indulgences, promotes works of piety, purifies its intention and is exacting in patience. It recognizes, however, that all this good is due to the efficacy of the redemption, and sees that in all things the mysteries of the shedding of the Blood of Jesus Christ are being applied to it. In fact, should the soul approach the tribunal of penance: “Behold,” it says, “the merits of this Divine Blood are being applied to me.” If assisting at Mass: “Behold, the Blood of Jesus is being offered.” If [the soul] adores the Blessed Sacrament in the Sacred Ciborium: “Behold,” it says, “my beloved Jesus is offering his blood.”

The soul thus climbs the mountain of perfection and says: “Behold, the ways of Calvary are reddened with blood.” It is willingly trained to travel the paths of virtue, neither abandoning the cross nor wearied by suffering: *In everything, everything, you have been enriched in him* (1 Cor 1:5).

What virtues, what surges of love are seen resulting from the practice of good, which is nothing but a continual application of the merits of the divine blood.

4. [The soul], therefore, loves the life of prayer. *[The king] brought me into the cellar of wine* (Song 2:4). The love of God is symbolized by wine. Just as wine when drunk in moderation takes away sadness, so [with prayer]. But as for this wine cellar, happy the person who becomes inebriated!

[The soul] *ardently* seeks God in moments of conversation pondering the extent of his love in becoming our teacher, father and redeemer. How the soul seeks to please him by extending its own

ardent longings. It hears from the cross: *Sitio, I thirst* (Jn 19:28). And what it would not do in response. It weeps for those who do not weep, prays for those who do not pray. It seeks in some way to compensate for the many injustices directed at the Lord, and for his despised honor. It knows too that souls have cost him blood and it meditates on the reasons for divine forbearance. The soul prays for those who labor in the Lord's vineyard, hurrying to do what good it can, never ceasing to pray.

"My people," it hears the Lord say, "what damage has been brought forth in the world due to a lack of prayer." Meanwhile, to appease the Father the soul offers the Blood of Jesus Christ: *Look upon the face of your anointed* (Ps 84:10).

5. The soul seeks God *continually*, and the more it encounters its Lord the greater its thirst to love Him. *I sought him whom my heart loves. . . I took hold of him and would not let him go* [Song 3:1,4]. Temporal things become distasteful. The soul attends only to following the royal way of the Cross in order one day to kiss the radiant wounds of Jesus and sing forever the glories of that Blood which cancels the roster of death: *With your blood you purchased us for God* (Rv 5:9).

[The soul] proceeds with caution and vigilance careful not to lose what has been gained or to stray from the Savior's school. It not only finds earthly things repulsive but detaches itself from every other thing as well. The soul is uniquely ready for that exacting obedience to the Lord who became *obedient to death, even death on a Cross* (Phil 2:8). Thus the soul *continually* seeks the Lord so as to possess him forever in heaven. And we, on the contrary, are so fickle and indecisive.

6. Having come so far in the ways of love, the soul will find itself subject to disturbances by the enemy, or by weariness, excessive fears, or inexpressible dejection. But one glance directed at the Blood of Jesus Christ flowing from his wounds encourages

the soul not to abandon its good resolve. “My daughter, do you not see,” says Jesus, “how greatly my own spirit was troubled in the Garden even to the point of sweating Blood? When you are sad, have hope. Who does not know that the disciple must conform himself to the Master, and the Bride to the Groom? Do you not remember the three hours of terrible agony I endured for you? Is it not precisely here, my daughter, that you must come to imitate such a great example? A new degree of glory results from every act of patience. Do you not see how I am preparing you for the greatest heights of blessed glory? Look at the interior martyrdom which even my own Mother had to endure.”

Behold, O listeners, how resigned to suffering we must be in this life. In this way, we experience purgatory here, for virtue can only be refined and tested in the crucible of tribulation.

8. *My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh* (Song 1:13).¹⁶ The soul tried by love sees that, just as Jesus was *tested in every way* (Heb 4:15), so it too must be tested. The soul realizes that, just as Jesus could say all was consummated, so it too must have reason one day to repeat in like manner, *It is finished* (Jn 19:30). From the grotto of Bethlehem to the consummation of the sacrifice, he was always a victim of suffering. Moreover, since the Cross is the indispensable ladder to Heaven, the soul no longer need fear the word *suffer* but instead suffers *with gladness*. Thus it seeks the God of consolations and not the consolations of God, thereby adoring the divine dispositions. The soul knows that God tries it each time more severely in order to see if there is any obstacle impeding its love: *As gold in the furnace, he proved the elect.* (Wisdom 3:6).

At last the soul comes to suffer *with joy*, just as we read of the savior who *for the sake of the joy that lay before him. . .endured the cross, despising its shame* (Heb 12:2). Thus derision, calumnies, adversities—whatever the disturbance—do not cause [the soul] to

¹⁶No. 7 does not exist in the manuscript of St. Gaspar.

falter. It thinks how, despite Jesus' having given sight to the Blind and healing the lame, *still they crucified him* (Lk 23:33). "How," it asks, "could they have the heart to pierce those hands which dispensed nothing but heavenly favors, those feet which walked the streets of Jerusalem, *doing good and healing all*" (Acts 10:38)? How is it that even the Blood which flowed from those same hands and feet did not move them to pity? They even had the courage to insult him on the cross by saying, *Hail, King of the Jews* (Mt 27:29) and *If you are the Son of God. . . come down from the cross*" (Mt 27:40).

Oh wounded love of my Lord! How far we are from conforming our lives to yours and how much we must still be trained to follow this generous path!

Now I understand how love empowered by faith worked such marvels in the world. The saints *by faith conquered kingdoms... obtained the promises; [they closed the mouths of lions], put out [raging fires]...* (Heb 11:33-34). Oh champions of religion, what made you so generous? The sight of Jesus shedding his Blood for humanity.

Who Are These?

In omnibus divites facti estis in illo.

9. Who are these [wearing white robes] and where did they come from?... These are the ones who have [survived the time of great distress]; they have washed their robes [and made them white] in the Blood of the Lamb (Rv 7:13-14). What comfort we will have one day when in the great valley of Jehosophat, the Elect with palms in hand, will sing the praises of the Divine Blood through which we possess the nuptial garment and the robe of exultation and happiness. *They washed their robes... in the Blood of the Lamb* (Rv 7:14). We shall realize then how baptism, Confirmation, Penance, the Eucharist, and prayer had been nothing but the perennial

springs which applied this Divine Blood. And what blessings there will be especially at the appearance of the Cross, etc. But what will those poor souls say who trampled this Blood with sacrilege and blasphemies, etc.? Oh God! But I wish to speak instead of the just to you; nor do I wish to sadden you this day; this, my people, is my hope.

10. Happy the person who is more and more enriched with the treasures we have in the application of the Blood of Jesus Christ. To the extent that we apply it we shall advance in the ranks of heavenly glory. Observe then the industry of the saints in this heavenly commerce. And what of us? We who perhaps have not yet begun to atone for the past or provide for the future. What shall we resolve? Jesus shows us his precious homeland. "Behold," he says, "at what price I have won it for you: *You have been bought at a great price* (1 Cor 6:20).

Let it therefore be our duty to make known its glories by offering it continually to the Eternal Father. O balm of our souls! O font of every mercy, grant that my tongue reddened with this Blood in the daily celebration of Mass might praise you now and forever. For this purpose I am a Priest: to apply the merits of the divine blood. What a great thought this is for me! What a great incentive to propose its veneration to the people, and on divine authority: *You have redeemed us for God [with your blood]. . .and have made us a kingdom and priests* (Rv 5:9-10).

**DOCUMENTS ON THE PRECIOUS BLOOD
SENT TO THREE POPES**

DOCUMENTS SENT BY ST. GASPAR TO POPE LEO XII

The following two selections are found in the collection of the letters of St. Gaspar, numbered 1214 and 1215. Both letters are dated July 29, 1825.

GENERAL IDEA OF THE SOCIETY

In these times of upheaval, which it has pleased God to reserve for us, there is a great need for a reform of the people. The Lord, *in misericordia dives* 'rich in mercy', (Eph 2:4) wished to provide an effective means for curbing the torrent of iniquity and for restoring order in the hearts of the people by furnishing them with helps that are most suitable for the sanctification of their souls and for their continuous and lasting improvement.

One such means is the establishing of more Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses for the secular clergy, to revive in them a sense of dignity, of good example, as well as an eagerness for study and holiness, all of which is in line with the spirit of that ancient discipline in which community living of ecclesiastics was eagerly fostered. St. Augustine, the Doctor of Grace, treated this matter in a special way . . .

Now, we turn to the question of the title which adorns these foundations, as is evident from various documents, it was the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII who considered it, as a matter of fact, a good idea to take it from the Archconfraternity having the august title of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the most holy Mary, Help of Christians and assigned to it as special protector the glorious apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier.

This title does not present anything novel, since it flows from what we see in the sacred scriptures: *Redemisti nos Domine in*

Sanguine tuo...et fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum et sacerdotes. 'You have redeemed us, O Lord, in your Blood...And made us to our God a kingdom and priests' (Rv 5:9-10). We priests, therefore, are marked with the sacerdotal character in order to apply the divine Blood to souls. It is his Blood that is offered in the divine Sacrifice; it is his Blood that is applied in the sacraments; it is his Blood that is the price of redemption. This is what we can present to the heavenly Father for the reconciliation of sinners. *Te ergo quaesumus tuis famulis subveni quos pretioso Sanguine redemisti 'We, therefore, beseech you help your servants whom you have redeemed by your precious Blood.'* Whereas the devil would like all to be the victims of justice, we ministers of the sanctuary must make known the depths of God's mercy so that *justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi simus ab ira per ipsum 'Justified in his Blood, we will be saved from wrath through it' (Rom 5:9).* In this devotion, we have the treasures of wisdom and holiness; in it we find comfort, peace and salvation.

Indeed, it is an essential devotion in Christianity, venerated by our mother, the Church *quam acquisivit sanguine suo 'which he acquired in his blood' (Acts 20:28).* The Mass and the Office of the Most Precious Blood are already in practical usage in the church militant. Even from most ancient history, for example, we note that God, indeed, prescribed that the Hebrews in Egypt should smear their doorways with blood so as to be freed from the avenging sword, alluding to that means of eternal salvation by which our souls would be liberated from the slavery of hell. Add to this, what the apostle states: *si sanguis hircorum et vitulorum inquinatos santificat, quanto magis Sanguis Christi emundabit conscientiam nostram ab operibus mortuis? 'If the blood of goats and bulls sanctifies those who are defiled, how much more will the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanse our conscience from dead works' (Heb 9:13).*

One should read the precious little booklet entitled *Il mese di Giugno* dedicated to the devotion of the mysteries of the Divine

Blood. It contains the documents supporting this important devotion. Sufficient for now is to conclude with the words of St. Bernard (Ep. 7): *Sanguis Christi ut tuba clamat* 'The blood of Christ calls out like a trumpet' or, the words of St. Thomas (Opusc. 15a): *Sanguis Christi clavis paradisi* 'the Blood of Christ is the key to paradise.'

But, to sum up everything briefly, one must not fail to hear what what St. Paul observes in Col 1: *Pacificans per Sanguinem suum sive quae in terris sive quae in coelis sunt* 'making peace through the Blood [of his cross], both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven' (Col 1:5). Our times demand that we carry out what is proposed in that quotation. It is, therefore, the divine Blood that will placate the divine eternal Father, that will purify our hearts and will inebriate us with love for Jesus who *dilexit nos, et lavit nos in Sanguine suo* 'loved us and washed us in his own Blood' (Rv 1:5).

RESPECTFUL OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE ARCHCONFRATERNITY OF THE MOST PRECIOUS BLOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

(The Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood was founded by St. Gaspar's mentor and spiritual director, Fr. Francesco Albertini. Gaspar preached at the inauguration of the Archconfraternity in 1808. For a number of years the Missionaries operated as members of the Archconfraternity rather than as members of a distinct religious institute.)

It cannot be denied that the Lord, always rich in mercy, has provided powerful means in every age that are capable of drawing souls to a consideration of the Crucified Lord and thus seeing in them the application of the redemption through his Divine Blood.

Moving beyond the first centuries in the Church, the centuries produced martyrs, in the following epochs which history records for us, we note how one or the other dogma was attacked, how sacred things were subjected to scorn in one or the other part of the Catholic world. In our miserable times, the crisis in the people is a general one, with indescribable perversion of basic principles and of proper living so as to hurl an insult at the redemptive act and, through human malice, to frustrate the application of the merits of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us by the price of his Blood. Now, Blessed Father, is it not necessary to rekindle apostolic zeal and follow the inspirations of soul that are so favored by God so that we can revive in the memories of these people the inestimable price of our redemption and attempt to stir them to repentance and to tears?

Is it not also a fact that Sacred Scripture itself gives us the steps to take for a reform? *Pacificans per Sanguinem Crucis eius sive quae in coelis sive quae in terris sunt?* 'making peace through the Blood of his Cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven' (Col 1:20).

Do we ourselves not know that *Christus dilexit ecclesiam tradidit semetipsum pro ea . . . acquisivit sanguine suo*? 'Christ loved the Church . . . he gave himself up for it' (Eph 5:25) 'he purchased [it] with his own blood' (Acts 20:28).

Does not Divine Wisdom tell us that *justificati in Sanguine salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum*? 'justified in Blood, we will be saved from wrath through it' (Rom 5:9). It is not sufficient simply to utter the name of the Lord to be saved: *Non qui dixerit Domine Domine hic salvus erit* 'Not the one who says Lord, Lord, shall be saved,' but *qui fecerit voluntatem Patris mei hic salvus erit* 'He who will do the will of my Father will be saved' (cf. Mt 7:21). [Translator's note: This is something of a paraphrase.] Therefore, there are two things that must necessarily be done nowadays. The first is to find a way of placating the Divine Eternal Father; and that we have in the merits of the Divine Blood: *Calicem salutaris accipiam* 'I will take the chalice of salvation' (Ps 116:13). The other is to try to find a way of effectively applying those merits to souls, and this can be done particularly through holy Missions and Spiritual Retreats, as well as other pious programs that are proportionately salubrious for our times.

In fact, these are the very same reasons that motivated the holy Pontiff Pius VII to erect the Archconfraternity, bearing this most august title of the Divine Blood. Sinners continue to be dreadfully abusive and the Lord, in the transports of his love, keeps crying out: *Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?* 'What profit is there in my Blood?' (Ps 30:10). So, is there not anyone who will, through this sacred, solemn cult, procure adoration in compensation, and preach to the people its glories, bringing to their attention that in this devotion we have a compendium of faith itself; that is why, in the consecration of the chalice, we say: "*mysterium fidei*" 'the mystery of faith' and consequently therein lies the salvation of souls.

In fact, it is to this that the prophetic oracles, the predictions, the symbols, the figures, the sacrifices of the old covenant have

their focus. As we read in Genesis: *Lavabit in vino stolam suam et in sanguine uvae pallium suum* 'He will wash his robe in wine and his mantle in the blood of the grape' (Gn 49:11). The Hebrews were ordered to smear their doorposts with the blood of the lamb in order to be freed from their chastisements in Egypt, a symbol of the liberation of our souls from diabolical servitude . . . Without saying too much further, what did Moses do for his people? *Accipiens librum aspersit Sanguine dicens . . . hic sanguis testamenti quod mandavit ad vos Deus . . . Omnia in sanguine mundantur, et sine sanguinis effusione not fit remissio* 'Taking the book he sprinkled it with blood saying . . . this is the blood of the testament that God mandated for you . . . All things are purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission' (Heb 9:19–22). Hear, now, what the apostle says: *Si sanguis hircorum et vitulorum inquinatos santificat, quanto magis Sanguis Jesu Christi emundabit conscientias nostras* 'If the blood of goats and bulls sanctifies those who are defiled, how much more will the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanse our consciences' [Translator's note: This is not an exact quotation, but is made up of material from Heb 9:11–14].

Without saying everything that could be said, the divine Scriptures are loaded with sacred citations . . . *Quare rubrum est indumentum tuum . . . Vestitus erat veste aspersa sanguine* 'Why is your apparel red? You were clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood' (Rev 19:13–14). One should add only that by means of this devotion the remembrance of our baptism, through which our souls were purged, is revived; we are reminded of penance and the other sacraments. and when asked why, we conclude that it was because: *redemisti in Sanguine fecisti nos Deo nostrum regnum et sacerdotes* 'You have been redeemed with blood; you have made us for our God a kingdom and priests' (Rv 5:9–10).

Other devotions are all means for facilitating Catholic piety, but this devotion is the basis, the sustenance, the essence of

all. Other devotions are the products of their age and from the beginning present us with an era that is ever holy ever praiseworthy, but this devotion of ours is so ancient that it goes back to the very moment when Adam sinned; that is why Jesus was called the *agnus occisus a constitutione mundi* 'the lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rv 13:8). And so we have been given the means of reproducing, through publications, the glories of this inestimable treasure of our souls, along with the noble compositions of the Fathers of the Church for the understanding of the sacred text. This is especially true because in our days, generally speaking, they are not sufficiently known. However, the Lord will regenerate them in the hearts of people! Indeed, St. Thomas says: *Sanguis Christi clavis paradisi* 'The Blood of Christ is the key to paradise . . .' St. John Chrysostom: *Sanguis Christi salus animarum . . . bonum aurum Sanguis Christi* 'The Blood of Christ is the salvation of souls. The Blood of Christ is fine gold.'

One should read the small work composed by the outstanding member of the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity, that is to say, the now deceased bishop Monsignor Strambi, who, in giving his final retreats to all the Roman clergy, had them meditate on this very devotion. One could consult with the present bishop of Assisi, well-known for his theological knowledge, or also the bishop of Nocera, not to mention others, and one will discover the interest that everyone should have in diffusing and spreading the glories of the Archconfraternity of the Divine Blood, glories that already are evident in the establishment of the Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses under the direction of its Missionaries. They make available those means for fulfilling its objective . . . the glories that are evident in the many, many confraternities erected everywhere in the Catholic world, etc., etc., etc.

How could it ever have been possible for the very respectable bishops, among whom we include his Eminence Sevaroli, to give

their consent to spreading this good work if there had been the least disagreement with the principles or the practices of the Church? How could it be that the late Pontiff Pius VII should issue a number of briefs for the erection of that Archconfraternity, and the Congregation of Rites should recognize its title by the granting of privileges, in particular, to the Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses where the clergy have been invited for the apostolate, for the pursuit of studies, and for attaining holiness? The Congregation has also recognized the Chaplet of the Precious Blood for the use of the Archconfraternity. Your Holiness has enlarged these privileges through the Congregation of Rites, and when you were Cardinal Vicar of Rome, you erected a congregation of sisters of charity (directed by Butirroni) under this Most August title.

In these miserable times in which we live, it is helpful to note, to what extent would the procedures of the Roman Curia be mocked? Evildoers would have reason to criticize other titles, creating more enemies, even while they think that they are doing something good by suppressing a title which is the glory of redemption. This is the language of truth, and it is a well-known fact that hell itself trembles at the very mention of "Divine Blood." Furthermore, because of this confusion of mind, error takes hold of good people who then disturb the peace of your Holiness' magnanimous heart.

So, in view of the fact that there is nothing involved here which is contrary to good Catholic interpretation, why, then, now change something that has been canonically established? The Pontiffs Paul III and Paul IV, the Pontiff Gregory XIII and Pope Sixtus V (who confirmed it with a brief of May 8, 1586), were these not all men who, in Santa Maria in Vado, erected and promoted the same good work which is now being done by the confraternity erected there under the title of the Divine Blood and which presently has the most intimate connection with the Archconfraternity?

Most blessed Father, these are the intrinsic reasons as well as arguments from the history of the Church . . . But, some would say, using such a title would be a case of becoming overly familiar! This was the same difficulty proposed when the Company of Jesus emerged. Was it to be given that name, the name of Jesus before which *omne genuflectatur* 'every knee is bent' so that it would be on the lips of everyone and adored by all? And what was the answer given? The religious titles are all very praiseworthy. Any abuse of the name would be due to the person who, through his own malice, would commit the abuse. The Church's intention is a holy one (so says Fr. Suarez in: *De mysteriis vitae Jesu Christi*) insofar as a distinct veneration is shown toward the sacrosanct mysteries of the Savior.

Nor would it be a valid argument for one to say: There will be someone who will abuse this title, so let us get rid of it. . . . Well, there will also be someone who, as a matter of fact, will do the same thing with the name of religion, so therefore . . . Oh my, to what consequences would this not lead? In keeping with the bases and principles explained, we have the establishment of Confraternities of the most holy Trinity, of the most Blessed Sacrament, etc. Finally, it would be good to point out that there is a mandatory decree (*un mandatorio*) that says: Alms for the Confraternity of the most Blessed Sacrament, and so in confraternity there should accordingly be a similar provision.

But, *transeat*, 'let it pass,' with regard to this last remark which was produced only to relax the mind of your Beatitude. We conclude by saying that the adherence to basic principles, the observance of fundamentals, the welfare of our times, the glory given to the Redemption as well as the scorn that hell itself will receive, all demand that your Holiness, rather than derogating and removing this most august title, should exult in it and promote it throughout the entire Catholic World with a solemn decree, extending the use of the Mass and the Office of the Price of our Redemption. May

what happened to Blessed Giacomo di Bevagna¹⁷, with regard to the Divine Blood, encourage your soul to do what, in all humility, has been proposed to you for the pure glory of God.

¹⁷ Giacomo da Bevagna was a thirteenth century Dominican friar who founded a convent in Bevagna (Umbria). According to some sources, just before he died he turned water into wine for his brother Dominicans, and his salvation was guaranteed through a miraculous spray of the Precious Blood.

DOCUMENT SENT BY GASPAR TO POPE PIUS VIII

This is an excerpt from Letter 1946, dated June 1829.

Once his deportation ended in the year 1814, the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII, of happy memory, occupied himself immediately in sending out evangelical preachers for the sanctification of souls and the reform of the people. Already beforehand he had erected the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ in order to promote this sacred cult in compensation for the abuses made by sinners, particularly in our times; likewise, through it, to animate the faithful to offer up this inestimable price of our redemption to the divine eternal Father. Since one of the purposes of the Archconfraternity was that of having our brother priests dedicate themselves to the apostolic ministry of giving holy Missions and Retreats, that beloved Pontiff wished to make use of them for this project for God's greater glory, and through their services to promote also that most important devotion to the Divine Blood.

DOCUMENT SENT BY ST. GASPAR TO POPE GREGORY XVI

This letter, number 2140, does not have an exact date but Conti tentatively places it in March 1831. This is a rough draft of the memorandum presented to the pope; the memorandum as finally presented has not been found.

*Justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum
'Justified in his Blood we shall be saved from the wrath by it'*

SUMMARY

Of everything that pertains to the pious Institute of Mission and Retreat Houses under the direction of the Missionaries enrolled in the venerable Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, canonically erected by Pope Pius VII.

PREFACE

In the upheaval of our times, times which God has been pleased to reserve for us, and in the need for reform of the people, the Lord, rich in mercy, has willed to bring forth a powerful means to be used in setting up a rampart against the torrent of iniquities and to provide us, at the same time, with means that are salutary for attaining eternal salvation through the sanctification and the spiritual cultivation of souls. Therefore, in his Providence, he presented to the Roman Pontiff, Pius VII, of holy memory, the plan for instituting Mission and Retreat Houses in order that through these two weapons of apostolic ministry, a war could be waged against sin, as well as to lead back to the Heart of Jesus all those who had strayed.

The Holy Father then selected as his norm the one set down by Benedict XIV for promoting the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine which served then, as it still does, to encourage the clergy and the people to a revival of giving instructions, something most necessary for knowledge and observance of the holy laws of God.

We are, presently, living in times in which there is urgent need for stimulating the clergy and the people to the yearned-for reform. The freethinkers, not at all in love with the Catholic religion, are waging a most decisive type of warfare against Jesus Crucified (*al Crocifisso*); and, they would like to see everyone become victims of justice through a multiplication of vices and sins. Consequently, it

is urgent that zeal for the glory of God, like a spreading fire, must burn in a holy fashion within every soul, and, by calling attention to the glories of the Crucified One, to open the fountains of mercy, thanks to the application of the merits of the Divine Blood which is the thing that will fully placate the justice of the divine, eternal Father: *Pacificans per Sanguinem Crucis ejus, sive quae in caelis sive quae in terris sunt . . . Ipsi vicerunt draconem propter Sanguinem Agni* 'Making peace through the Blood of his Cross whether for what is in heaven or on earth . . . They overcame the dragon by the Blood of the Lamb' (Cf. Rv 12:11).

Having these basic principles in mind, his Holiness was pleased to erect the Archconfraternity under the august title of the Divine Blood, together with the invocation to most holy Mary, Help of Christians; and, as its special protector, he selected the apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, so as to provide an exemplar who would stir one from any feelings of languor, who would urge one to the doing of good work, who would encourage one in the face of difficulties and point out, furthermore, the quickest way of promoting the greater glory of God and the sanctification of souls.

Therefore, one can easily note what his plans for the future were and how very well directed they were for the verification of the apostle's words: *Justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum . . . 'Justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him'* (Rom 5:9).

Finally, adding just a few more things in this preface, it is to be noted that in carrying out these apostolic works of the ministry, we seek to give a cult of compensation to the mysteries of our redemption, so greatly abused by sinners. We wish to awaken in their souls the great idea of the inestimable price of our eternal salvation. . . . *Redemisti in Sanguine . . . Empti enim estis praetio magno* 'you have redeemed [us] in [your] Blood (Rv 5:9-10) . . . 'you were bought at a great price' (1 Cor 6:20). Those who have gone astray

are encouraged to have hope or the pardon of the faults that they have committed, since *Christus dilexit nos, et lavit nos in Sanguine suo . . . Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?* ‘Christ loved us and washed us in his Blood. . . . ‘what profit is there in my Blood?’ (Ps 30:10) and, finally, this is an opportunity for helping them take notice of the motives which caused St. Bernard (Ep. 7) to exclaim: *Sanguis Christi ut tuba clamat* ‘the Blood of Christ calls out like a trumpet’; and St. Thomas (Opusc. 158) to say: *Sanguis Christi Clavis Paradisi* ‘the Blood of Christ is the Key to Paradise.’¹⁸

St. Catherine of Siena, during the schism of her time, received the inspiration from the Lord that on this devotion depended peace within the Church.

Though overlooking many other things . . . there are the documents pertinent to the Office and the Mass of the Divine Blood which urge us to cherish it deeply within our hearts, but at the same time indicate how much our holy Mother Church is concerned about the special cult addressed to the price of our redemption: *Christus dilexit ecclesiam, tradidit semetipsum pro ea, acquisivit Sanguine Suo* ‘Christ loved the church, he gave himself up for it and acquired it with his Blood.’ [Translator’s note: There are two quotations from the New Testament that are joined here: cf. Eph 5:25 and Acts 20:28.] One should read the little work written by the now-deceased Monsignor Strambi¹⁹, outstanding supporter of our Institute and our devotion, so humbly presented in these pages. Likewise, one should check the catalog of indulgences granted by Pope Gregory XIII, confirmed and augmented by Pope Sixtus V on behalf of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord

¹⁸ The phrase is also found in St. Jerome’s letter to Dardanus (no. 129): *Sanguis Christi, clavis paradisi est, dicentis ad latronem: Hodie mecum eris in paradiso* (Lk 23:42).

¹⁹ This is probably a reference to Strambi’s *Il mese di giugno, consacrato al Preziosissimo Sangue* ‘The month of June, consecrated to the Most Precious Blood.’ Strambi was a Passionist priest and friend of St. Gaspar. He eventually became the bishop of Macerata.

Jesus Christ, erected in the church of the Canons Regular of S. Maria del Vado in Ferrara . . .

Then, Pope Leo XII, in addition to what he expresses in his Brief on the occasion of the installation of the Jesuit Fathers in Spoleto, speaking incidentally of our House in San Felice in Giano, and aware of the various confraternities erected under our title, granted through the Sacred Congregation of Rites the faculty of a solemn Mass of the Divine Blood on the first Sunday in July. Already when he was the Cardinal Vicar he had canonically erected in the church of *Beata Vergine Maria del Buon Consiglio* in Rome, the pious union of sisters visitors of the sick under the title of the Divine Blood.

As a final reflection, note how Vincenzo IV, Duke of Mantova, erected as an equestrian order in the year 1608, the union of Knights under the title of the Divine Blood. That order was later approved by Paul V as can be seen in the work *Catalogus ordinum equestrium in imaginibus expositus a P. Philipno Bonanni Societatis Jesu oblatus Clementi XI*.

PREACHING ON THE PASSION

On the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ (I)

The passion and death of Jesus Christ! What noble words these are, my friends!²⁰ *The Passion of the Lord is celebrated*, writes St. Augustine, *it is a time for lamentation*. Thus there are more tears than words on this day in which Jesus gives us noble lessons of great love. I see that holy mother Church presents herself to me, melancholy and grieving. There are no joyful hymns of exultation, and the altars are bare. With sad and painful ceremonies, she recalls the adorable Savior. O most beloved Cross (*the cross enters*) of my Savior, I bless and adore you. I love to pour out a long sigh for you: *Beautiful and shining tree, adorned with the purple of the king*.²¹

You are the ladder to Paradise, the defensive shield against our enemies, you recall for us the triumphs of religion: *He conquered the world, not by the sword* (literally, “by the iron”) *but by the wood*.²² You are our consolation here below and the motive for our joy in heaven. *Hail, O Cross, our only hope*.²³

1. Maintaining, my friends, the historic order of the Gospel regarding the passion and death of Jesus Christ, we will use the following division pointed out to us by St. Bonaventure: *Christ suffered in a most bitter passion, a shameful passion, a deadly passion*.²⁴

Jesus encountered bitter spiritual suffering in the prayer in the garden, and he sacrificed the consolations of his spirit to the inner harshness of his agonies and love. *First point*.

Jesus underwent a shameful passion in the tribunals, and sacrificed the honor rightfully due his person to the scorn and mistreatment of his torturers. *Second point*.

²⁰ Literally “hearers” (*ascoltatori*)

²¹ This is a quotation from the Latin hymn “Vexilla regis,” traditionally sung during Holy Week.

²² A quotation from the Latin from a reading from Matins of Holy Thursday

²³ The Latin quotation is a paraphrase of a line in the “Vexilla regis.”

²⁴ *Breviloquium*, part 4, chapter 9.

Finally, Jesus met a cruel death and sacrificed his life out of love for us: *Christ suffered...*

Follow me attentively.

I will not remind you of the great event that took place in the last supper when [Jesus] instituted the divine Sacrament. This reflection would be too great a diversion and it is not the subject of our discourse. I will, however, speak of what happened after the Lord showed his love in the institution of the divine Sacrament when he retired to the Mount of Olives to pray. Three thoughts come to mind.

First, he suffered in his sacred humanity. [*si fu una natural compassione alla sua sacratissima umanità.*] He shuddered to think that in a short time he would be crowned with thorns. His holy body shuddered when he thought about the wound that would take place. I have become a wound from the sole of the foot to the head; there is no soundness in it (Cf. Is 5:6).

Finally, he was saddened as he looked with compassion on the affliction of his Mother and oh, who could know how great was his sadness!

The second reflection is on his vision of the iniquity of humankind: [*The Lord*] *laid on him the iniquity of us all* (cf. Is 53:6) and for these iniquities he implored a general pardon for us from the Father, and *your sorrow [is] vast as the sea* (Lam 2:13).

I thank you, my Jesus, who also prayed for me and, oh, how I am blessed, for I will continue to benefit from the merits of the passion and death you suffered for me.

But the third reflection is that in a special way the Savior was saddened to know that so many would, through their own fault, not benefit from his Redemption and his divine Blood.

Oh, this was the principal cause of your horrible agonies, and in the exchange between soul and body *his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground* (Lk 22:44).

Oh, precious blood of my Lord shed from the most sacred body of the Savior, I bless you and adore you.

That fortunate earth represents my soul: *my soul is as earth [without water]* (Ps 143:6), watered by the divine Blood in the Sacraments and in the participation in the most holy mysteries.

Now I understand why the apostle said: *he has loved us, and washed us [from our sins] in his own blood* (Rev 1:5).

Love, love has caused the vivid sweat of blood when inner consolations were taken away and the soul of Jesus Christ was abandoned to a sea of grief: *he began to be distressed and troubled* (Mk 14:33).

O Father of love, who grieves out of love for humankind, grant that I may grieve at your feet because the pain of my faults!

Ah, Lord, when will my heart melt like wax (by the exercise of love) near the hearth and I can repeat: *my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast* (Ps 22:15). My Lord, may my eyes become two fountains of tears, so that I may mix my weeping with your blessed blood and present it to the Father.

Meanwhile, who comforts Jesus? An angel, my friends, and this is to let us know that if he is truly God he is also truly human, and his sufferings are genuine. He says to the Father: *if it is possible let this cup pass from me* (Mt 26:39). But notice that the scriptures speak of two cups. One is the cup of suffering, the other the cup of Babylon²⁵ presented to him by sinners. It is of this second cup and not of the first that Jesus says: *if it is possible let this cup pass from me*. O love! I do not tire of repeating it! Reflect together with Jesus how he could say unceasingly to his children: *What more could I have done that I did not do?* (cf. Is 5:4).

Destruction is your own, O Israel, [your help is only in me] (Hos 13:9): and he rises from prayer and goes out of the garden and sees his sleeping disciples, an image of lukewarm and negligent souls.

²⁵ *Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine, and so the nations went mad* (Jer 51:7).

He admonishes them with love, and with divine teaching exhorts them not to interrupt the practice of prayer: *Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation* (Mark 14:38).

But who can recount every single passage in the story of the Gospels?

Judas comes up—and alas!—a disciple, an apostle. He feigns friendship and betrays my beloved Good; and I see my Lord arrested and the hands that offered abundant graces and favors now in chains: *[His] hands are turned and [as of gold,] full of hyacinths* (Song 5:14). My God, and are you not the omnipotent one, since you are the only begotten of the Father and consubstantial with the Father, *by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made* (cf. Jn 1:3)? Are you not the one who gave sight to the blind, who cleansed the lepers, healed the lame, and raised from the dead: *who went about doing good, and healing all* (Acts 10:38)? Yes, Jesus replies, but I go to be immolated for you. I suffer for you, O my children. Nevertheless, to shake those executioners with a new miracle, he says: *Whom do you seek?* (Jn 18:4, 7). And they respond: *Jesus of Nazareth. I am he*, Jesus replies (Jn 18:7). At these words, they fall to the ground, stunned, a sign that the divine Master is truly human and also truly God.

And now this, he exclaims, that you would have no authority over me, *unless given [to you] from above* (Jn 19:11), *but this is your hour and the power of darkness* (Lk 22:53) ... *Arise, let us go* (Jn 14:31) and here begins the second sacrifice of which we will speak shortly.

Now tell me, O lawless ones (*libertini*), who mistreat Jesus every day, when will you recognize the supreme dignity of the one to whom is given power over heaven and earth? *All power is given to me in heaven and in earth* (Mt 23:18). If at the words, *I am he*, as Jesus maintains his character as Redeemer, the executioners fall stunned when will he be in the valley of Jehoshaphat (cf. Joel 3:11-12: the place of the judgment of the dead) and say to you, O unworthy

sinners: *I am he?* I am the one who is blasphemed, held in contempt and offended by you: *I am he*. Oh, tremble, tremble, do not rush to meet the threats to yourselves. Anticipate them and distance yourselves from them with penance and weeping.

Ah, one glance, O Lord, at this people, at this audience, and, by the merits of the Blood shed in the Garden, use all your clemency. I know that sinners have betrayed you, but now they are repentant and change their ways.

Therefore do not reject those humble hearts that beseech you: *A contrite and humbled heart you will not despise* (Ps 51:19). Let us rest.

2. My divine Master has been taken captive, as was predicted by so many oracles and prophesied under so many figures.

Another Abel is handed over by wicked and evil men, and they lead him to the tribunals. They make fun of him, joke at his expense, and strike him ... and Jesus ... and Jesus remains silent. Oh, he is a patient victim, my friends! Learn, you vindictive ones, to bear with virtue the trials of this miserable exile. Finally presented to Pilate, that incompetent judge, and now: *I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to the sons of my mother* (Ps 69:9). Pilate recognizes that Jesus Christ is innocent, but out of human respect, after he compares him to Barabbas, he condemns him to be scourged. Observe how God knows how to bring from evil the confirmation of his divine oracles.

Jesus is personally innocent, but he is burdened with our sins that merit the whips, the humiliations, the sufferings: *I find no cause [in him]* (Cf. Jn 18:38), but at the same time he has him scourged. I, however, do not have the heart nor do I know how to offer you the details of that horrible execution.

I will do this: I will use the language of the prophets, which, while recalling the apologetics of religion, details and describes sufficiently what took place then. *Behold [sic], I am ready for the*

whip (Ps 37:18 in the Vulgate.) Behold me, O eternal Father, ready for the whips and the sorrow which I experience, I present to you in expiation of the debts of the sons of Adam. *My sorrow is continually before me* (Ps 38:17). You know, O Father, the confusion that I experience in this state: *You know ... my confusion, and my shame* (Ps 69:19). Behold my body: I offer it as the victim to be immolated on the Altar of the Cross, and my humanity, because the work of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary Most Holy who is the most adequate to feel in her delicate nature the most exquisite of sorrows: *A body you have fitted to me* (Heb 10:7). I do not withdraw myself from the contempt and insults. *I have not turned away my face from those that rebuked me, and spit upon me* (Is 50:6) ... and already I see ... the executioners in the guise of invincible bulls, *fat bulls have besieged me* (Ps 22:12), they seek the life of the Savior ... already the flesh grows weak. They open the veins, scourges are bathed and soaked in blood. The tormentors are tired, but they are not satisfied, and they continue to wound their victim, fulfilling the oracle: *they have added to the grief of my wounds* (Ps 69:27). My people, who can hold back the tears? Jesus' blood drips from every part of his body. Ah! In spirit, gather the blood, and with many tears present it to the divine Father, bless it, and adore it: *With grieving eyes*, the church cries out in its hymn of the passion of Jesus Christ, *shed tears*,²⁶ O faithful ones. Jesus suffers for us. Oh, the hard heart of some sinner which is not softened and moved! Ah, Lord, have mercy on the stubborn soul that has not yet been converted. Your wounds are so many mouths that cry out for conversion.²⁷ Come, yes come, you people, and in this evening holy to the memory of the terrible pains of Jesus Christ apply the merits of his divine blood:

²⁶ The phrases in italics are quotations from a Latin hymn of the Roman Breviary, *Saevo dolorum*, for Tuesday after Sexagesima Sunday .

²⁷ This is apparently a reference to a quotation from St. Francis De Sales: *All the wounds of the Redeemer are, as it were, so many mouths which teach us how we ought to suffer for him*. This is quoted in St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, chapter 1

*Stand weeping at the cross, anoint the blessed feet, bathe them with tears, dry them with your hair, and kiss them with your mouth.*²⁸ Oh my, that I may never resist the sad story! I would willingly occupy myself with crying in silence than with preaching. But let us unite, yes, let us unite, and comfort one another in conformity with the spirit of the Church which in its misery and mourning preaches compunction and conversion, along with tears and sorrow.

*O you men, you little ones, wives, and girls, weep.*²⁹

Tears, tears, dear people, while Jesus *is tossed by a storm of pain*...these are the voices of the church in the hymn of the passion that has been pointed out. But perhaps this sad story now comes to an end? Oh, my, already a horrible crown of thorns is prepared, and with a strong hand is placed on the Savior's head.

My God! ...a thorn that gets stuck in the paw of a lion is enough to make him roar in pain. Imagine, O faithful ones, what sort of pain Jesus now endures. They drive the thorns into his temples and they protrude everywhere; they penetrate the head. And Jesus? Jesus is silent and suffers, he prays and is patient, and his Blood is the price of his love. This was torture, my friends, never again used in the history of barbarians. It was a torture of the most awful pain and at the same time of noble mysteries ... Ah! We who are members of a head crowned with thorns, I do not know how we can nurture thoughts of vanity and of the world. Behold the man! Hear what I would say to you, O beloved people. Behold the man (*with black stole and candles bring in the Crucifix*), behold Jesus, my people. Observe him, he has become a wound: *His whole figure breathes love and urges us to love him in return*³⁰... These wounds cry out love, the thorns cry out love, the Blood he sheds cries out love ...O Jesus, our most abject Redeemer, here we are at your feet,

²⁸ *Saevo dolorum.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ A quotation in Latin from a response in the Office of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin.

humbled and repentant. Oh! Pardon us, O Father, for having so many times reopened your adorable wounds with our sins.³¹ *That sin may have an end, and iniquity may be abolished* (Dn 9:24). And because we want to grow in reflecting on our faults, in the last part of this sermon may your mercies on us be increased.

3. Who will be able to deplore sufficiently the ignorance of the Hebrews who do not suffer the consequences and are happy to have scourged Jesus, who has already presented us with the second sacrifice of honor due his person? His honor is sacrificed to scorn, to blows; they hysterically shout for him to be crucified. Let an innocent man be crucified, the sinless one, set apart by sinners. Let him be crucified. And now we come to the third sacrifice that Jesus makes of his life. Accompany me, O friends, with the new Isaac who is going to shed his divine Blood to the last drop because of the evil deeds of us sinners. Accompany him, that docile lamb who is going to consummate the sacrifice of love. He is also the priest who will breathe his last on the altar of the Cross. *My people*, he says, *what have I done to you, or how have I offended you? Answer me.*³² I am your liberator; I am you father, your most merciful mediator, *and you have prepared a Cross for your Savior ...* Observe: Jesus who was crowned with thorns and wounded all over now goes with the cross on his shoulders to the summit of Mount Calvary.

When he arrives there, they throw him with great force on the cross, they stretch ... I am horrified to have to repeat it ... the nerves of his hands and of his feet, and with sharp nails and rough hands they crucify him: *They have pierced my hands and feet* (Ps 22:16-17) ... Oh! Who can recount the bitter pain that Jesus endured? The Cross is raised as the sign of victory and ah, what a heart-rending sight! They place Jesus' head on it, and the thorns are driven in further.

³¹ It seems that Gaspar addresses the prayer to the Father, but meant that it be addressed to the Son.

³² This and the next quote are from the Latin of the *Improperia* or Reproaches, sung during the adoration of the Cross on Good Friday.

If he bends his head forward he encounters the sorrowing Mary ... and Oh, the loving glances of his Mother! Oh, the glances of the son! The body is fixed by three nails; his humanity is a wound, the divine Father has abandoned him to suffering for us: *He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all* (Rom 8:32). The executioners insult him; nature cries and is moved. The sky darkens, the earth shakes, the dead arise: *There was darkness from the third hour [sic] until the ninth hour, the earth quaked ...those who had fallen asleep rose up* (Cf. Mt 27:45-51; this quote contains phrases from several verses).

Oh, agony of my Lord! O time of special remembrance for the children he has redeemed, Oh, what lessons of love the dying Jesus leaves us! *He was wounded on account of our iniquities ...by his bruises we are healed* (Is 53:5). O Mary, sorrowful one, may I mourn the death of my Savior with you (*the image of the Sorrowful Mother comes in if it is available*). *Ah, mother, fount of love, let me feel the force of grief, that I may grieve with you.*³³ O Mary, if the rod of Moses made water flow from the rock for the benefit of the thirsty Hebrews, may the rod of the Holy Cross shake every heart to penance.

To you, O Mother, I entrust this great cause of the eternal salvation of so many souls that you have entrusted to me in this Lenten series. To you I also entrust my soul.

May you show us what we are to do in this last moment at the feet of Jesus who is already breathing his last most holy breath: *I desire to stand with you by the cross, and to unite myself with you in mourning.* ³⁴ O Mary, kidnapper of hearts, bring our hearts to the love of Jesus Christ. He has given his life for me: *[He is] beloved to me and I to him* (Song 2:16).

Ah, my Jesus (*now the Cross enters*) dead for me on the Cross ...
Let me place kisses of love on these sorrowful wounds ...

³³ The quotation is from the hymn *Stabat Mater*.

³⁴ Ibid.

My friends! A lively act of sorrow (*act of contrition*). My people, behold Jesus who embraces you from the Cross and blesses you. But if the same executioners *returned, striking their breasts* (Lk 23:48), what must we do with the Christian fervor conceived in us?

Let us return to our houses, but deploring our faults and exclaiming: Long live the Blood of Jesus Christ, by which we have been saved! The Blood of Jesus was my life, blessed, yes let us say it together, blessed is his infinite goodness. Amen.

SERMON ON THE PASSION (I)

On a day of shared sorrow I must speak of death! On a day in which my heart is so terribly grieved, sad and sorrowful, I must speak of sufferings! On a day in which all of the sacred functions are like sermons, preaching to us of the death of Jesus and the very surroundings bring to mind the Redeemer, must I speak of Golgotha? Does this church building not speak of this sufficiently? ...this church? ... O my God! And who does not weep? ... (Cross...).

Jesus suffers and dies as the beloved son of God; because he suffers and dies as the beloved son of God, the divinity of the Catholic Church remains completely proven.

The first part will show the desire that Jesus had to suffer as can be deduced from the way he reasoned with his Apostles before his passion (Let them be observed; let the passion be read).

Let the one among you who has something to do, do it quickly, Jesus said to Judas. But is it possible that a man in the order of nature would wish for his death in advance? ... Christ already knew of his sufferings, and with that knowledge, he longed for them, he aspired to them ...

But what does it mean, you will say, that in the Garden he sweats Blood and does not accept this Chalice? ... But, I ask of you, did he not know of his sufferings before going to the Garden? Certainly he did! Therefore, he sweats Blood now because he wishes to, because he is the beloved son of God, because he wishes to suffer as the beloved son of God. He does not accept [the Chalice] because he sees that this Chalice will be of no use ...because he would wish ...

(In this second part, the story of the Sufferings) Pilate says: *I find no cause [in him]* (Jn 18:38) ... and you know what the consequence is, my friends? *Therefore let him be crucified* (Cf. Mt 27:23). In the cause of an innocent man, [Pilate] can say nothing but this. Caiphas wishes that Jesus would respond so that he can accuse him of blasphemy.

Death: *the earth trembled*.³⁵ The graves were opened; the Jews themselves cry out: *Indeed this was the Son of God* (Mt 27:54). And behold, Christ suffers and dies as the Beloved Son of God, because otherwise he would not have the nature ...

³⁵ The first words of the Latin offertory verse for Easter Sunday.

ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST (II)

(The oracles are fulfilled.)

This is an evening of mourning, an evening of compunction ... There are days of joy ... but not these. Let us leave joy behind at the wedding feast of Cana ...

We are the ones who put him on the Cross, who crucified him, for whom he sweats blood ... (Here one shows that this is not a day of joy but of mourning; examples of ingratitude are given.)

Here I will treat this topic anew ... :

1. (God) that is Jesus Christ suffers and dies as God.
2. As Father.
3. As Savior (Prior to a *fervorino* to the Cross).

1. He dies as God. You know what St. Paul says: that is, that the Hebrews wanted miracles and great signs in order to believe that he was God. The Greeks, says Paul, want reasons to believe in him and they use subtleties to investigate, with the power of reason the how, the why ... But the Apostle says: *We preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God* (cf. 1 Cor 1:23-24). To demonstrate this, follow my line of reasoning, observing what he did before and after his death.

When he says that Peter would deny him, and to the Apostles at the last Supper, when he instituted the Eucharist, that one of them would betray him ... when he prophesied to his [disciples] who went to Jerusalem that it would be destroyed ... O Jerusalem, if you had profited by his arrival, I would not see you ruined and destroyed ... If ... [Is] he not therefore God? If he only uttered the words *I am he* (Jn 18:5) those thugs who came to seize him fell to the ground; if in the Garden he showed what had to happen, he sweat

blood; the ingratitude ... If to the good Thief ... *today you will be with me in Paradise* (Lk 23:43). Where do so many miracles come from? The mountains crumble, because the good Jesus dies; the sun is darkened, because the Author of light dies and the darkness covers the earth; the dead rise, the tombs are opened For this reason the Centurion exclaimed: *You are truly God* (Lk 23:47), and so many returning from that mount [of Calvary] were converted.

We exclaim with St. Paul: *We preach Jesus Christ and him Crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God* (cf. 1 Cor 1:23-24).

But more: how many were converted, how many miracles [took place]! O death, that renders ever more glorious his Name, and there is no Nation that darkens it. Behold now all are competing to have such precious tokens [of the passion], even those who did not believe, who mocked him. Yes, friends, he died because he willed it, not because the Hebrews These were those relics that converted so many peoples, that were spread throughout Greece, Africa, Europe, Ethiopia, China ... So Many Apostles ... and in Japan ... Turin knows how precious are the relics preserved in the Holy Shroud. Milan, which preserves a nail [of the cross] knows, as does Perugia that keeps the thorns, and you, O Rome, who have part of the Holy wood hidden in so many Pyramids and people ask you for such treasures.

Yes, friends, he dies as God because of what takes place before his death, what takes place surrounding his death, and what takes place afterward: truly the work of God.

But now you will say: We know that he died as God; what are you telling us? You people know this! But how, if there are so many sins ... and you regard it as dirt in the streets ³⁶ ... prophetic phrases ... (a prayer). He is to be lamented.

2. Every father, when he dies, leaves what he has to his children.

³⁶ Gaspar uses a Latin phrase that appears in several contexts in the Old Testament.

As he neared death, Jacob called his sons, and he predicted to whom his fortunes ... (naming a name). And finally he blessed them all. What is the testament that Jesus leaves to us? Much greater things. He leaves himself as the very victim in the Sacrament of the Altar. All of himself. O love that ... At the end of their lives men and women cannot leave their bodies, but Jesus, Oh yes, Jesus leaves [his body] to us ... *Come to me all [you who labor and are burdened]* (Mt 11:38) ... *I will not leave you orphans* (Jn 14:18). In addition: behold your Mother Mary, I leave her to you. I will send the Holy Spirit ... and having made and finished the Sacrifice after so many sufferings ... *he gave up his spirit* (Mt 27:50)

He is Father because he redeems beyond being one with the Father ... (*Egli è Padre con ragione per redenzione oltre l'esserlo ...*)

3. Did you ever see, says St. Bernard, the Son of a King? See him, crowned with a diadem, with scepter in hand, clothed in a royal robe leaving the palace. When he arrives at a point he sees a platform and on it a servant bound: here there are swords, here sufferings, here chains, here the devices ... Who has compassion on the Royal Lord? He unbinds and liberates and thus he wishes to undergo the pain. If you have seen, you would be astonished. And who is the Royal Son if not Jesus, the servant of sinners?

Fervorino.

I set before you a blessing, I set before you a curse (St. Paul). ³⁷

³⁷ The reference is actually to Dt 11:26.

ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST (III)

Christ therefore having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought (I Pt 4:1).

St. Prosper of Aquitaine says that as Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac, he was inspired to courage as he saw with prophetic eye the Sacrifice of the Cross.

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people by his own blood, suffered outside the gate. Let us go forth therefore to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach (Heb 13:13-14). Outside the gates of Jerusalem Jesus sheds the last [drop] of his Blood ... the shame (of the cross). Taking up the Cross Jesus also takes up all of its shame. Now for us ...

The Cross has four extremities, to show, as St. Basil says, that Jesus would gather followers from all four quarters of the world who would triumph over the infernal enemies.

I thirst (Jn 19:28) He thirsts everywhere: and drunk with sadness, he desires to undergo harsher things (St. Lawrence Justinian).

My God, why? Not because of the torments that he suffered, but because of the torments that he did not suffer (St. Bernard), longing to live longer to suffer longer.

Many waters cannot extinguish love (Song 8:7).

A son is born to us, on whose shoulders is the kingdom (Cf. Is 9:6; this is not an exact quotation).

Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun has altered my color (Song 1:5), discolored, of course, because of his torments.

And my spirit is in anguish within me: my heart within me is troubled (Ps 143:4).

In Egypt we see that it rains hail and fire. Fire that burns, hail that chills (cf. Ex 9:24) Now in Jesus Christ ...

My beloved is a bundle of myrrh (Song 1:12).

ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST (IV)

There were three principal reasons for the bloody sweat in the Garden.

The first was the compassion that Christ brings to his sufferings (*mali*). On the one hand, he recognized fully the immense dignity of his most holy Humanity and how worthy it was of every honor among men and women. He fully recognized the value of his divine life, a single moment of which was worth more than the lives of all possible creatures. On the other hand, he saw all of the abuse, all the torments, all the instruments of his sorrowful Passion and scourging very distinctly and vividly. ...

But who can ever understand what conflict that the Heart of the Redeemer experienced, when his lower nature (*appetito inferiore*) was deprived for a time of all consolation, not allowing Christ to experience this so that his sufferings would be accomplished, and not allowing him to reflect on those reasons that could have softened his sufferings. In this way the joy that was hidden in the highest part of his soul was hidden from him. As St. Ambrose says, that divine pleasure did not offer anything to the lower parts of his soul. Thus, in the combat that took place in the Heart of Jesus, he suffered all of the torments of his passion in anticipation, and he suffered them all together, whereas in the Passion he had to suffer them bit by bit, and finally, he suffered those torments that were not to be suffered during the Passion proper, for example, having to leave his Most Holy Mother, after his death, and the cruel wound that opened his Side. The horror of so much evil, having driven all the blood toward the Heart of Jesus, found there a secure fortress of love for the Father and for us. From there, once again impelled by the greatest generosity, the blood flowed from his veins and from every pore of that most holy body and ran onto the ground ...

The second reason was the contrition that Christ had for our sins. He saw them with his divine eyes, one by one, and his Heart was assaulted by them at the same time, as by so many serpents. The horror and sorrow that he felt was greater than anything that he had experienced before on this earth. Every sin was as a painful lance into his Heart and made a wound more raw than those that his body awaited. As the blows of our sins were more intolerable than death, so he chose death to destroy them and to banish the great monster, sin, from the earth.

The third reason was that he foresaw our ingratitude. If all men and women would have reciprocated wholeheartedly the love and sufferings of the Redeemer, how could one doubt that He would have had a strong reason to be consoled in his suffering? Thus the sea of his Passion could have been a sea of milk, but what bitterness would be added to his suffering when he foresaw the great multitude of those who would render his Passion useless!

There are three notable injuries that Jesus received in the tribunals. The first was that which he received in the tribunal of Anna, a slap. This offense was exceptionally cruel because the slap was given to Christ with an armored hand, as was customary with the soldiers of the time and it bruised his holy face. It was shameful because it was given in the presence of all the elders who governed the Synagogue in matters of religion. It was unjust because the blow delivered to Christ was a reply spoken from heavenly wisdom. The virginal face of the Savior was offended, that face that the Angels desire to gaze upon in Paradise. The offender was Malchus, who just before was healed of his wound by the hands of Christ.³⁸ Here the Saints are as amazed that the sun did not darken ...

The second injury was received in the tribunal of Herod where Christ was bound like a criminal with head bowed and was considered to be a crazy person by that arrogant king. The Savior

³⁸ This may have its origin in an ancient Italian legend. There is no basis for this in the Gospels.

could have worked a miracle to remove himself from this ignominy, but instead he chose to perform miracles to increase the Passion, not to lessen it.

The third injury was received in the tribunal of Pilate, where he was placed in confrontation with Barabbas.

Scourging

The body of the Savior, miraculously formed and for the exalted purpose of serving as an instrument of the soul of Christ, was delicate and sensitive in the extreme, even more in the extreme weakness caused by the sweat of Blood suffered in the Garden. The executioners were not only cruel by nature but were egged on to greater cruelty for the benefit of the Jews ...

Thorns

Consider: 1) the torment they caused to the Head of Jesus. A single thorn in the foot of a lion was enough to make him roar with pain.... Continue the argument ...

Consider: 2) the novelty of this torture never before practiced with any other person. The anger of the demon had to bring this torture from hell to the earth, and the infinite charity of the Savior was content to allow this to happen, proving that *from the sole of the foot [unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores: they are not bound up, nor dressed, nor fomented with oil]* (Is 1:6) ...

Consider the Mystery, and it is because you, my friends, understand that only those souls who follow Christ on the path of penitence are worthy of this Head crowned with thorns. Oh, the thorns that will pierce, not the head, but the heart of Jesus at the moment of his death!...

Jesus on the Cross

One glance at the most holy Body, which is completely lacerated ... Christ is raised up in the sight of all, as he said, like the bronze serpent raised up in the desert to heal the wounds of poison, not of serpents, but of sins.

An intimate gaze at his pierced Heart, a gaze that penetrates that immense furnace of love, reveals that, rather than spending itself amid such suffering, it instead blazes even hotter. That word that he speaks, *Sitio*, I thirst, does not mean only that he is thirsty because he has shed nearly all his blood, but rather that he thirsts to suffer more for our souls....

A glance at his most holy Soul, which is drowned in a sea of pain because of the great inner pains he suffers... The external pains suffered by the Redeemer were caused by the hatred of his enemies, but the internal pains were caused by Christ's love for us, and as much as that love surpassed the anger of his executioners, all the greater was the passion of the Soul than that of the Body. This inner bitterness was therefore so much greater, that alone among all his suffering he tenderly asked his divine Father: *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). This showed that the Father stood by Christ in his humanity as if he had abandoned him, supporting him only so that He would not die so quickly, but would endure longer in his torments. Here he does not call him Father, but only God, to signify that the Father stood by him at that hour as if a stranger, even as an adversary, not giving him any comfort but increasing the pain.

What a miracle this is: Jesus could soften his sufferings as he softened those of so many martyrs, but he wanted to drink the chalice so completely deprived of any comfort in heaven or on earth, that he would find so many ways to immerse himself in an abyss of pain. All this took place so that you understand more vividly the love that you should have for God and the hatred you should have

for sin. It was as if Christ was destroying his very self in order to destroy sin, and out of love of the Father was giving a life of infinite value, immersed in a deeply incomprehensible suffering. All should understand all that the divine will must be placed ahead of any other good, and that offending that infinite majesty is an evil even greater than the most sorrowful death of Jesus, which was chosen by the Father as a remedy for so great an evil.

PASSION IN THE GARDEN

1. *The Lord was sad when he saw so many deprived of the glory of paradise, and damned to the pains of hell* (Ambrose). Observe: he does not say: *Father, if it be possible let all cups pass from me, but rather this cup* (Mt 26:39). A cup was presented to him by the Father that was full of torments and intense pain, and he did not refuse this: *The chalice which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?* (Jn 18:11). The other cup was offered to him by us. I presented him with the disgusting cup of my sins, and he was horrified by it. This was the cup Jesus referred to when he prayed that it pass from him. And because the request was not granted him, he drank from that cup and entered into the final struggle (*agonia*): and *being in an agony, [he prayed the longer]* (Lk 22:43). Oh, who comforts the languishing Redeemer? The crowds that have been nourished, the disciples that have been taught, the dead that have been brought to life – where are they? No one is there. Let us go to comfort Jesus. We are angels, we are sinners. Precisely for this reason we will be more able to comfort him. If our faults form the sum total of his pains, our repentance will form the sum total of his comforts. But the Angel comes before we do. It is fitting that the Creator receive voluntary comfort from one of his creatures, and thus comforted he goes to comfort his disciples. While they are speaking, behold the noise of arms and armed men. The enemies, the people, the betrayer...

2. They make fun of his kingdom and salute him as King in that scene. They make fun of him by asking him to prophesy, asking who hit him. They make fun of his holiness and treat him with haughtiness, with lying, with sacrilege. They make fun of the union of the Eternal Word and attempt to provoke him to performing miracles so that he would be recognized as the Beloved Son of God. He has a scepter in his hand, but it is a reed. There is purple on his shoulders, but it is an old rag. He has a crown on his head, but it is of hard, sharp points.

3. *O God, my God, why have you abandoned me?* (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). The holy Fathers and the commentators commonly assert that this abandonment was the removal of every inner comfort by which that Soul arrived at the highest point of his suffering and said: *O God...* and not *Father*, because with all inner sensible comfort gone, God with that humanity clothed by our sins, was more Judge than Father. When with his last breath he says *Father*, he has finished taking the form of a sinner. God as Judge receives him and treats him as would a Father. For that reason God gave to that tormented humanity this added affliction as is expounded by the Holy Fathers. St. Cyprian says that Jesus was abandoned so that we would not be abandoned. He was abandoned to show us his love and his justice, his mercy, and that we would be moved to return that love to him.

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

Today is indeed a day to lament, as St. Augustine said: *the passion of the Lord is celebrated, it is time to lament* (Commentary on Psalm 21). Today we recall the sorrowful Passion of the Savior... Although I imagine that Jesus would turn to each of us on this day and repeat what he said to that group of women who sorrowfully accompanied him to Calvary: *Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves* (Lk 23:28). He cares little for our tears when these arise only from a natural compassion for his pains and not from a higher and lively contrition for our failings, which are the reason for his suffering. *He was wounded for our iniquities* (Is 53:5)...

1. A victim of his love for men and women in the Garden.
2. A victim of the furor of his enemies in his sufferings.
3. A victim of the more awesome justice of his divine Father on Calvary.

The division that I attempted in this meditation was taken from this text of St. Bonaventure (*Meditation on the Life of Christ*): *Christ suffered through a most bitter passion, a most shameful passion, a deadly passion.*

1. The *most bitter* passion: the garden and the signs of the desolation of his spirit
2. The *most shameful* passion in the tribunals where he sacrificed the dignity and honor of his person.
3. The *deadly* passion on Calvary where he sacrificed his life.

See him there in the Garden: he falls prey to very vivid images (*apprensioni*) of his torments. He is disturbed: *he began to fear and be heavy* (Mk 14:33). Not that this would have been the first time in which such a bloody tragedy presented itself to him. From the first moment of his life and in every moment of that life he was aware of the long and horrible series of his pains. For Christ, his sadness was neither a weakness nor the property of a spoiled and frail nature, but was rather something freely willed. He would look on his coming passion with joy, even revealing to his disciples an ardent desire: *I have a baptism with which I am to be baptized, and how I am constrained until it is accomplished* (Lk 12:50).

With the same joyful spirit he could encounter that passion in Gethsemane, but encountering it thus would have been a triumph of the just man that he was, rather than suffering for a crime which caused our liberation. For that liberation he is suspended and so to speak restricted in the superior part of [his] Soul, and his native courage leaves his sensitive [soul] at the mercy of fear. Sensing that fear has removed restraint with such fury that it pierces his heart, and presently throws him to the ground with great apprehension and forces him to pray for mercy: *Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me* (Lk 26:39).

Ah, Father, you know how bitter is this chalice that you offer me, a chalice filled to the brim to squeeze the life from our fury (*calice colmo a spremere vita dal furor nostro*). My humanity recoils from so unpleasant a beverage: remove this chalice from me (Mk 14:36). His forehead trembled as he saw the thorns... His face trembled as he saw the blows... *All my bones tremble* (Jer 23:9) *and his sweat became as [drops] of blood, trickling down upon the ground* (Lk 22:44).

He knows well where such horrible pains come from... from the love of Jesus for us, Jesus who is a victim for us. All human wickedness is gathered in the mind of Jesus. There the thefts... there... see the bloody vendettas of so many Cains, the effeminate

pleasures of so many Solomons, the terrible sacrileges of so many Ahabs...[the Lord] has laid on him all our iniquities and he has borne our sins. (cf Is 53:5; Mt 8:17). See what afflicted him and to what extent in the whole course of his life sinners had drawn near to his bosom. At the end of his days such love increased beyond all belief: *having loved his own [who were in the world], he loved them unto the end* (Jn 13:1). As he took on the image of all there in the Garden, so he gathered all within his heart so that he could give them a new birth to grace amid the bitterest sufferings of his death.

But the closer the moment of this birth approached, the clearer he sensed that he had within his womb two warring peoples: docile souls and those with rebellious spirits. He sensed the cruel persecutions as a great inner torture: *Of what use is my blood* (Ps 30:10)...*I roared with the groaning of my heart* (Ps 38:9)... *My friends and my neighbors [have drawn near] and stood against me* (Ps 38:12). Ah, behold he cried out: *let this chalice pass from me* (Lk 26:39): it was all the result of love, says St. Ambrose: *Not because he feared death, but because he did not wish even the evil to perish*. See, then, that we are as new Absaloms... and therefore he cried out to his eternal Father: *Save me the boy Absalom* (2 Sam 8:5)... *Absalom, my son* (2 Sam 18:33)... Despite this consider the eternal decree...: the freedom of humanity inasmuch as he seeks the salvation of all, and as victim of his Love he becomes the victim of the furor of the barbarians, as he cries out always: *Absalom, my son*...as David did as the army passed by...

2. Behold Judas who betrays the divine Master with a kiss. Jesus is first led to the tribunal of Annas. Annas sends him to Caiphas. The secret meeting of the Priests, the Scribes and the Pharisees is agitated, and all are against him, spurred on by a cruel mortal hatred. The scene is full of bloody looks, threats, accusations, calumnies, evil interrogations... But Jesus is silent, and his silence is interpreted as a confession of the charges leveled against him.

If he speaks, blows rain down on his face. If he implores the high priest, using the name of God, the Savior, in order to at last reveal that he is the son of the living God, his reply becomes the greatest of his crimes. Caiphas at that point tears the garments on his breast: And have you not heard, he exclaims, the blasphemer, the sacrilege? Why do we need witnesses? He has condemned himself, and is punishable by death.

With this the soldiers and their henchmen are given the freedom to beat him, to mark his face with their slaps, while others brutalize him with their foul spitting, others punch him with heavy blows. Some blindfold him, and while delivering their blows, ask him to prophesy who had struck him. Oh my, the son of God is treated as a fool, like the criminal, Barabbas. The incestuous Herod and his whole evil court make fun of him as if he were a fool, and Herod places the white garment on him as a joke and they drag him through the crowded streets of the City and insult him... Pilate now presents Jesus and Barabbas... Off with Jesus, the people cry... Let him be crucified (cf. Jn 19:15) Yes, to the Cross ...

My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? I have brought you salvation from Heaven, I have healed your numberless illnesses, and your countries are witnesses of this... the dead raised up, he glimpsed your streets consoling, pasturing, and benefiting all; you have at last seen me weep over your misfortunes, an you without...how have I saddened you?³⁹

Meanwhile Pilate condemns him to be scourged because of his perverse worldly politics, and they strip him, bind him, and strike him. But who can... and what can I say? *We saw him and there is no sightliness [in him] (Is 53:2)... From the sole of the foot to the top of the head there is no soundness (Is 1:6)... We have thought him as it were a leper (Is 53:4).* In the storm of those furious blows he becomes bruised, and his scourged limbs swell. His flesh is raw

³⁹ The first part of this paragraph alludes to the Reproaches of Good Friday.

and mutilated and his body wounded, and from his wounds flows a great deal of blood. Behold, how blows are again directed at him: new wounds are formed and new blood flows from the new wounds.

Such butchery should be enough even for their stony hearts... But they are tired and not yet satisfied, and others come in for that pitiless work... They are scourging the wounds and not the flesh; sores develop upon sores. Already there is a portent of the bones and the sides stripped of the flesh. Pieces of the torn flesh are flying and become attached to the rods that beat him. The whips, the pillar, the executioners, and the pavement are thoroughly soaked in blood.

But that horrible destruction is not satisfaction enough for the executioners, since the head is not wounded like the rest of the body. They weave a crown of thorns and place it on his head, pressing it down and they penetrate the head. See the warm blood that flows from it; some of those thorns reach the eyes; others pass through the skull and exit through the temples; others are buried in the head.

A victim of justice... It is not that all the features of the passion were not the fearful justice of the divine Father. But he is precisely victim, I say, because that justice is so fearful: for the excess it accomplished on Calvary. [It is] the paternal justice because in so many torments suffered for so many satisfactions it is firm and inexorable, and it is not placated, and it desires the holocaust of his death. Jesus is the guarantor for all of us, he is weighed down by the very heavy cross, torn and exhausted; he goes on, and he marks his steps with the blood that pours from his wounds. The cross continues to rip into his back... Now those scoundrels rush at him; impatiently they rip the bloody clothing from his back like barbarians... and the intense pain of the wounds is renewed. Stop, you unworthy ones... Behold the meek Lamb is placed on the wood; he gives his hand to the nails and hammers and as the blows

are repeated, they pierce hands and feet, mutilating the veins, the arteries, and the blood flows freely.

The Cross is raised, it is dropped into the hole prepared, and at the shock the entire holy body breaks down: *all my bones cry out* ⁴⁰ [exact reference of this Latin phrase unknown]. Darken, O Heavens, so as not to see more of the barbarities, the cruelty... Ah, my God, cries Jesus, why have you abandoned me? Jesus was not complaining about a true abandonment by the Father that had separated him from the Father. Such a thing was never possible, because the bonds of his humanity with his divinity were indissoluble, eternal, and could not be weakened. The painful abandonment that he suffered, *you have forsaken me* (Ps 22:1) was the removal of sensible support, a suspension of any rescue, the absence of consolation that was so harsh and painful, as to cast him into the deepest abysses of desolation and, because of his tremendous anguish, cause him to break out with that frightful cry: *he cried out with a loud voice eloi eloi lama sabactani, which is translated, My God, why have you forsaken me* (Mk 15:34)... Imagine the scene... Ah, let us place ourselves at the foot of that Cross and after having heard... he exclaimed: *It is finished* (Jn 19:30).

⁴⁰ Cf. Ps 22:18. The Vulgate translation has *dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea* 'they have numbered all my bones,' but an ancient Syriac version can be translated *ululaverunt omnia ossa mea* 'all my bones cried out.'

IN THE GARDEN

What happened to our Lord is what often happens to someone who habitually tries to hold back a furious person. He gives the person trying to hold him back a serious shove, throws him to the ground and then proceeds to run wherever his blind passion takes him.

We did the same with Jesus. We threw him down and stepped on him. Jesus opposes [us] with a command, with example, with threats. He wanted the heat of passion to pass. It shoves Jesus, throws him to the ground, and passes. *Bow down that I may go over* (cf. Is 51:23) See him spread face down on the ground: *He fell upon his face* [praying] (Mt 26:39).

But be consoled, O my Redeemer. If ungrateful men will insult you, they will yet be punished. Already the gates of the eternal prison scream as they open for their eternal damnation. Ah, no! Even this increases the pain of the sorrowful Lord: *The sorrows of hell encompassed me* (Ps 17:6). The Canaanite woman begs Christ: *Have mercy on me* (Mt 15:22)... *my daughter is grievously troubled by the devil* (Mt 15:22). Lord, have mercy on me, my daughter is badly troubled by the demon.

Good woman, what are you saying? If it is your daughter who is troubled, ask mercy for her. Say: *Have mercy on my daughter*. How would you loving mothers respond to this? You will say that the poor woman prays well, because the pain of the daughter is the passion of the mother. (Make an application).

As Jesus glances toward Jerusalem and seeing that in a short time they must dismantle its walls, batter its towers, bring down its buildings, he weeps with bitter tears: *Seeing the city, he wept over it* (Lk 19:41). Let the one who can deduce that his sorrow was over not just one but over so many cities that are eternally damned and not temporarily destroyed.

FOR THE BLESSING OF THE CROSS

Bless your inheritance (Ps 28:9)

When Joshua reaches the goal of his desires he made the soldiers promise that they always be faithful to God. Not content with this, he made [them] raise an altar and there made all swear an oath, and he wanted that this altar be located there forever, so that they would remember the promise, and if they did not carry this out it would be a reprimand. Thus...

FERVORINO ON THE CROSS⁴¹

*God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our
Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14).*

Dear people, O how much do we owe to the Cross of Jesus Christ! It is the banner of our glory; it is the standard of our salvation, the mysterious tree of life. Blessed is the one who eats of the fruits of this plant! Let us glory in the Cross, therefore, the ladder of paradise, the armament of Christianity, the miraculous staff against the demon. If people are accustomed to leave a memorial of the most famous deeds to posterity, how much more should this be done in religious matters.

Ah, yes, if they should ask you about the reason for this function today, tell them that the Holy Mission has presented [you] with an opportunity. How many [are] the tears at the foot of the Cross during these days; how many the sighs, how many the resolutions! Here the repentant sinner has comfort, here the troubled soul has courage, here the holy soul has tender love. Here, at this throne (*cattedra*) the angry learned gentleness, the proud learned humility, the dishonest, mortification. *God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross!* (Gal 6:14) Seeing this sacred monument, O faithful ones, you will remember the mercy of this day, you will take courage in sufferings, and with [the Cross] you will conquer the tyrannical empire.

Moreover let us call to mind that the Cross will appear at the universal judgment: *This sign of the Cross shall be in heaven*⁴² O my God, what a great thought this is! Will these souls all be part of the Saints? And I who am preaching, where will I find myself? Ah, my Lord, *through the bowels of mercy in which you have visited us* (Cf. Lk 1:78), have mercy on us!... But Jesus says: It depends on you, my

⁴¹ This sermon was written for Don Vincenzo Fontana, who was preaching the mission in Itri in January 1824.

⁴² From the Latin breviary, Matins of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross.

children. The Cross reminds you that I shed my Blood to the last drop. *What more could I do that I did not do?* (Cf. Is 5:4: What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it?) Therefore the Cross will appear in judgment to recall what I did for humankind.

People of Itri⁴³, please love Jesus, but from the heart, bless him, exalt him. Remain at the foot of the Cross, and pray for me who must hold up in a special way the glory of the Cross, my life, my hope, my exultation. Long live the Cross... Long live the Cross... Long live the Cross.

⁴³ A city in the region of Lazio, Province of Latina

EXHORTATION ON THE CROSS

The Hebrew people were fortunate because Moses freed them from the slavery of Pharaoh. But you, the faithful, are more fortunate, because today you have been invited to free your souls from Lucifer. The mystical staff is the Cross. Oh, how much we owe the Cross! This Cross, yes, this Cross has closed the gates of hell for us and has reopened the gates of paradise.

But a thought bothers me: who knows if there is some enemy of the Cross among us: *I tell you weeping [that they are] enemies of the Cross of Christ* (Phil 3:18). Ah, yes, a stubborn person who might be found here would be this enemy of the Cross. O my God, would that you save one soul with blood! My brothers, let us save ourselves for eternity! No more sins, no more.

Padre da Ponte⁴⁴ was traveling through the city of Valladolid and was called to meet with a dying woman. Just as he arrived the dying woman expired, an evil person who had lived a bad life. See what such stubbornness is, O my brothers! In a moment one sins, but in a moment one dies, and in a moment one is damned. Courage, therefore, let us give ourselves to internal penance, and then let us be united in the external, and let us cry out: my Jesus!

⁴⁴ This is apparently a reference to Venerable Ludovico da Ponte, a Spanish Jesuit of the sixteenth century, who authored a book of meditations.

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

Oh, how the vision of the Cross stirs us to weep for our faults! A God offended, a God insulted, a God despised! What a great crime this is! My friends, who will give my eyes two fountains of tears to deplore the failures committed continually against the Lord? One sins, and why? For no reason, for miserable reasons contrary to the human good... *Why has the wicked provoked God?* (Ps 10:13) On account of filthy interests, for filthy and ugly pleasure. People rebel against God on account of desires so repugnant to reason and to the faith!

Why has the wicked one provoked God? A creature of God offends God by abusing the gifts he has received: graces, time, the means for a pious life, and the Catholic faith. A creature redeemed at the price of Blood offends God, a creature who inasmuch as he or she is from God, is called to the most blessed reign of glory. Ah, how my heart breaks with sorrow! O wounds, O Cross, O divine Blood, ah, have mercy on poor sinners! Eternal Father, look at your Son humiliated on this Cross and pardon us.

I would like to have the zeal of Moses when he encountered the famous idol as he came down from the mountain, along with those lazy Hebrews. Moses, armed with holy zeal, threw it to the ground and reduced it to pieces, as he abhorred the horrible vice of idolatry. Sinners, if you are ever in this situation, destroy the idols of your faults; let piety seize your souls, your welfare. What profit has there been from your faults?

Tribulations and distress! Let the dishonest, intemperate, vindictive and whoever else harbors vice in the heart, tell us. In sum, it is healthy that we be shaken by the punishments for sin that are sent to us. Recall the story of the worldwide flood, of the sad cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the plagues in many epochs, hunger, war, earthquakes. Here is the cause of present punishments, not yet

at an end... What is to be done, therefore? We should not despair, but rather weep, be converted, detest our faults, flee the proximate occasions of sin so that (our sins be far from us). Let God be the only delight of our hearts, our peace, our consolation. Let us therefore exclaim as we pray together: My Jesus, mercy!

When I think of that epoch in which the first Christians gave witness to our most holy faith in Jesus Christ, Oh, how my heart is filled with the joy and consolation of God! *The just by faith conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises* (cf. Heb 11:33). Oh, the times, I repeat, of grateful remembrance for the true children of God! But when I think of our miserable days, Oh, how we must now weep at the foot of the Cross, as Jeremiah of the Old Testament condemned the unhappy Jerusalem: *Jerusalem, return to the Lord your God!* (Translator's note: The quotation is actually from Hosea, 14:2: *Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God...*)

You already understand that I deplore the licentiousness of today. I deplore so many who, closing their eyes to the more resplendent light of Catholic doctrine, find themselves surrounded by the thick darkness of sins, of vices, of lack of respect for religion. The modern method of thinking tells us to think and act against God and the Church. Oh, how human pride attacks the sanctuary, the temple, the tenderest objects of the human heart! They must recall that holy religion in itself is the only force controlling human beings. All the rest must serve the interests of the faith. They must recall that the mystical stone of the edifice is Jesus Christ: The rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:4), and that it is not possible that the gates of hell would prevail: *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Mt 16:18). In the manner of a ship battered on the sea, the Church presents herself to me as triumphant over every violent storm. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the word of God is infallible.

One would have to be blind for the light of miracles and striking occurrences to alienate the heart from a religion which alone brings

salvation. Oh, pray for those souls about whom I plan to enlighten [you]; and at the same time observe yourselves. Are you strong in professing the faith? Does your faith bear fruit by its works and is it glorious in you? Ah, how many times is religion betrayed by base human respect. What should be revered in a person is ridiculed, and that which in human beings forms the sole object of true and lasting consolations is neglected!

Ah, Lord, increase the vigor of faith in all, so that men and women respond by doing your will. Let religion be our teacher, our guide in faithful response to graces. If the Hebrew people found faithful direction in the column of cloud and column of fire on their journey in the desert, let this column also be an example of how to know the precise will of God that men and women should fulfill. Meanwhile, tears of penitence for all that our conscience recalls; tears at the foot of the Crucifix, to encounter the mercy of a Father who, offended and insulted by us, offers us loving pardon. Have mercy, my Jesus, have mercy. Embrace us on your Cross, unite us in your heart in the desire we have for eternal union in Heaven. Amen.

WITH MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

I sat down in the shadow of him whom I desired (Song 2:3)

Behold, the mystical plant of eternal life under which we should refresh ourselves, our souls eating spiritually of its fruits! Oh, happy are we if we establish our dwelling place near the Cross of Jesus with Mary the Sorrowful and the beloved disciple St. John. Oh, how we will taste the sweetness of the mystical fruits. While miserable affairs here below embitter us, they always rouse us to a new spiritual hunger for justice and holiness: *Blessed are they who hunger for justice* (Mt 5:6).

Oh, my Jesus, how many in this world do I see who love the forbidden foods of Egypt instead of nourishing themselves with these fruits, and the state of sin presents them with bitter fruit! O Lord, they do not like the many fruits of this plant, because their palate is ruined, as happens after sickness, by the corruption of disordered passions. We, on the other hand, my Jesus, want only to taste those heavenly things, *seek the things that are above... mind the things that are above* (Col 3:1-2), and therefore we are truly repentant of our past life, steadfast in wanting to remain in the holy intentions and to enjoy the shadow of this plant we say to you with devotion...

How beautiful to stand with Mary at the foot of the Cross! *To stand near the cross with you* (from the hymn *Stabat mater*) We stand there with the Mother of God and our mother, with the Advocate for sinners, with the sovereign Mediatrix of the universe, with the Teacher of truth.

Near the Throne of the Cross the dearest Mother teaches us to love Jesus Christ, to imitate him in those virtues the Cross teaches, and finally enkindles the zeal to quell the thirst of the Savior who thirsts for souls. See how valuable the patronage of Mary is! In her we have the center of all that is good, the fountain of all joy, the

motive for all comfort. We invoke Mary if afflicted, we turn to Mary if in doubt, we call on Mary in every event. In a special way, after Christ we place our trust in her to obtain pardon for our faults, while we say...

MARY, MOTHER OF SORROWS

THE SORROWS OF MOST HOLY MARY (1)

[A sword] reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit (Heb 4: 12)

Today let your gaze turn to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of incense (cf. Song 4:6), on the mountain of lovers. See the tender Mother, about whom had been prophesied that *your own soul a sword shall pierce* (Luke 2:35). The sword, I repeat, is piercing... O Mother, truly your sorrow has become as great as the sea (cf. Lam 2:13)... A twofold love afflicts and saddens the heart of Mary: the love of her innocent, crucified Son results in a martyrdom without equal. Like a ship in a storm, caught in opposing winds and pushed from two directions, she is held immobile; thus...

1) Mary disconsolate

2) Mary moved to pity (*pietosa*); Oh, it is the same, the twofold suffering for Jesus and for us is truly that sword... and this makes her the Queen of Martyrs.

1. I will not stand here calling to mind (to prove the pains suffered by a Mother) that when the great God chose her to be his Mother, she, in bowing her head obediently to the divine will, emptied herself forever of all that was dearest to her tender heart. In that moment she sacrifices her own protection (*riparo*), her private life (*ritiro*), and even her humility. She takes under her care and custody a Son who is the liberator of Judah, the Messiah promised by the prophets, the one awaited by the world and prefigured in the sacrifice of Abel, of Isaac, and in the selling of Joseph.

I will not recall to you the pains suffered in the flight into Egypt... But let us use the expressions of Jeremiah in speaking of Jerusalem, which are more fitting here⁴⁵... The city of Judah is

⁴⁵ It is not clear what specific references are meant, but Jeremiah was prophesying after the Babylonian conquest of the city. There are some 99 references to Jerusalem in Jeremiah.

abandoned to affliction and anguish; her gates are ruined, she is overcome with bitterness. The Lord has harvested her, as at the time of harvest bunches of sweet grapes are cut off, and the Lord has squeezed her in a wine press. How many turn their glance to her out of compassion, how many out of scorn! No longer will she have peaceful and clear days... Thus spoke the Prophet of Jerusalem, and so I speak of the Virgin.

No wonder that such sad and shocking events would produce that passion in Mary that, when the martyrs meditated on it, would cause them to be joyful. To the martyrs this seemed like some enchanting melody (*un aria che invaghiva*). The wounds did not drip blood, but were surrounded by rays. The Cross did not appear to be a gallows but a throne. To Mary, however, it presented a horrifying appearance. His members were wounded and bloodied (Is 53); there was no color in her Son, no appearance, no human form, but he appeared to the eyes like a leper, so livid and bruised was the flesh...

Perhaps such deep sorrow moved David to break out in those mysterious words: *In a flood of many waters, they shall not come near him* (Ps 32:6). They appeared to the prophet under the image of an immense flood of waters, bitter and cloudy waters. On the one hand the cruel beat him, just as tyrants would torture the bodies of the martyrs, and on the other, there is the apprehension of Mary at the foot of the Cross. See his torn limbs. In her tormented spirit, see the deep sea of sorrow. But just as those little streams which wind through the valleys are inferior to the vast ocean... so the sensation of sorrow under the whips appears to her less... compared with the intense inner pain as she stood by the Cross.

Thus even if all of the pains of the martyrs were gathered together, they would not come near to the suffering of the Virgin: *In a flood of many waters, they shall not come near him* (Ps 32:6). You will be persuaded of this if you reflect that just as the sword,

which John saw in the mouth of the Lamb (Rv 1:16.),⁴⁶ wounded with its two edges, thus the cruel steel, predicted by Simeon, pierced Mary. Besides piercing her spirit with acute sorrow as she pondered the pains of Jesus, it pierced her tender heart to look at him. After she followed the traces of his Blood along the way, a way through the crowd of his enemies opens up, and she goes to take her place by him. In the cruel scene she is both spectator and spectacle: *she was standing...*⁴⁷

O divine providence, how admirable you are! Mary might take herself away from the Cross:

1. In order not to suffer the great pain. So the old Hagar, although she was traveling through the fields of Beersheba and saw that her baby was dying, placed him on a stone, and, separated from him, began sighing and saying: No, I do not trust myself to watch my son die: I will not see a dying son.⁴⁸ 2. Because her virginal modesty must persuade her not to stand and watch those cursed Jews, who in crucifying the Son cursed and scorned his Mother as well... 3. Because she could justly believe that her presence would increase the pains of her Son.

Yes, she could do this, but she does not, because the love she bore her Son obliged her to be present at his death. The Apostles and all those Jews who benefited from Jesus fled from Calvary, because their love was not ardent: *the disciples all leaving him, fled* (Mt 26:56). But Mary who loved Jesus did not want to do this... but courageous ... Meanwhile, she knew well that if she did not feel grief, she would show herself to be cruel and in the encounter with him would increase his suffering. Thus she grieves ... *She was standing.*

After she followed the trail of Jesus' Blood from a distance, her mind full of the sorrowful thoughts of his torments, a way

⁴⁶ The sword actually comes from the mouth "one like a son of man," and not from the Lamb.

⁴⁷ An allusion to the hymn *Stabat Mater* 'The mother was standing.'

⁴⁸ Cf. Gn 21:13-15. Hagar actually places Ishmael under a tree.

through the crowd of his enemies opens... Mary ... A bundle of thorns pierced her mind. Ah, how many times then she saw his pierced hands and feet.

It was revealed to St. Brigid, that as Adam and Eve together had ruined the world, so Jesus and Mary ... With this difference, adds the Psalmist, that the ruin of the world began with Eve, whereas the restoration of the world began with Christ, who having tasted the bitter wood of the Cross, also offers it for Mary to taste. She stands there, more than a Mother, as if a Priest, sharing in the sacrifice for humanity with her intense pains.

Nicephorus⁴⁹ recounts that in the horrible butchery that took place in Thessalonica by order of the Emperor Theodosius, they were leading away two sons of a sorrowful father. He cried so much and offered so much money to the soldiers that finally they said to him: We are not permitted to free both of them. We will free the one of your choice. Ah! Here ... No, I do not trust myself, said the father, to choose between two whom I love equally. Then the soldiers led them to their death (Siniscalchi)⁵⁰. But Mary ... Rachel had two sons: Joseph and Benjamin, who was called the son of my sorrow. Thus Mary has two sons: The man God and humankind... She gave birth to the first... the second she gave birth to spiritually through grace. She gave birth to the first without sorrow, but the second with sorrow... It is true that Jesus alone sufficed for redemption, but nevertheless he wanted Mary, says St. Ambrose, to show humankind his love.

In the letters of the Jesuits one reads that a young man in India had a little statue of the Sorrowful Mother with a dagger through her breast. But he, overcome one day by youthful passion, was resolved to give in to this passion despite his conscience ... and while blind with love he goes to the door of his room to carry out his wicked design, behold, suddenly he hears a loud voice: Stop,

⁴⁹ Apparently a reference to Nicephorus I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and author of a universal history.

⁵⁰ Reference obscure.

where are you going? He turns and sees the image of the Sorrowful Mother, who takes her arm from her side and takes the dagger from her breast, then turns to him: Go on, rather that you wound me, but not my Son! With these words the young man was stunned, threw himself on the ground, and with tears begged pardon for his sin and promised to live a holy life.

The wound in the side of Christ was opened without his feeling pain, but the heart of Mary ...

Ah, Mother, my sin is the knife predicted by Simeon: *your own [heart]* (Lk 2:35)... I pierce two hearts when I sin: your soul, great Lady, and the soul of your Son. The law of Leviticus forbade killing a lamb with its mother (Lv 22:28); let this law be observed by us as well. Oh my, St. Augustine called the famous mother of the Maccabees a martyr seven times, because she looked with compassionate eyes on the martyrdom of her own sons seven times! Mary, forced by her love to watch the martyrdom of a Son who is beyond price (*che valea per mille*), certainly can be called a martyr ... In looking at the agonies of Jesus, Mary, one must say that properly speaking, her suffering was even greater than her pity (*che pativa piuttosto che compativa*). Thus according to the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor (2-2, q. 30 a. 1), that compassion for another's pains, as when one has compassion for the sufferings of a son or a father, who is as if another self, is not merely compassion but suffering as well: *in the case of those who are so closely united to us, as to be part of ourselves, such as our children or our parents, we do not pity their distress, but suffer as for our own wounds*.⁵¹

These [sufferings] increased as she was not able to offer any relief to Jesus.

The peak of the sorrows, however, came when Jesus had been in anguish for hours and came to his final agony. When she saw that Jesus' chest was swelling, that his lips were becoming pallid, and his

⁵¹ This is a Latin quotation from one of four articles on mercy in the *Summa*.

head bowed ...

2. And how her constancy brings me to call to mind the valiant woman: *Who shall find a valiant woman* (Prv 31:10)? One thinks that valor is a quality of men only. But of Mary ... It would be difficult for us to find in men, courageous in various human situations, examples equal to those this given by this great woman. When David heard of the death of his son Absalom, he allowed himself to fall into emotional states because of his fatherly tenderness. He filled the palace with his shouts, the air resounded with his weeping, and he was seen running through halls like a delirious person, sighing "Absalom!"

With greater strength, Mary stands unmoving at the foot of the Cross. Weep, you angels of peace; she courageously endures the vision of the Son. Hers were eyes full of pity, but also majestic. Her brow was furrowed in sorrow, but without tears, in order that the immensity of her pains, which were pure sorrow, might correspond to the enormity of our faults, which are pure evil. Thus at the point when tiny drops appeared in her eyes, revealing her weeping, her love for redeemed humanity quickly intervened so that they did not flow from her pupils. The love of Jesus softened her heart; the love of humanity prevented the weeping. She did that so that she would suffer, she who did not care to unburden herself of a sorrow that redeems beloved humanity: She stands without weeping (Ambrose).

The eternal Father gave his Son to us with an abundance of love; Mary gives her own beloved Son for us with an impulse of tender spiritual love (*dilezione*). Here you are, it seems to me that She would say, here you are, O eternal Father... Remember Abraham ... Remember Mary ... But Abraham can have another son, and the life of Ishmael, born of Hagar, could temper his grief. Abraham does not know if in the divine plan the death of Isaac would be decreed, but the Virgin ...

THE SEVEN SORROWS OF MARY (I) (1)

Near the Cross of Jesus stood his mother (Jn 19:25)

Why, O glorious athletes of Jesus Christ, did you merit the title of Martyrs, if not because you suffered? ... *Here* ... Why? ... But why do we not call Mary, who suffered the most intense sorrows, a Martyr? ... (Here one can make some paraphrases of one or the other verse of the *Stabat Mater*.)

The triumph of Mary in suffering is shown (only point).

From eternity it was already established that the Virgin would be the Mother of the Only-Begotten; thus in time an angel was sent to her to announce this decree. The Angel of God entered Mary's poor house, and saluted her with the divine words *Ave* (Lk 1:28) ... He waits, by our mode of thinking, for the response from Mary to render her faithful to her Lord. And Mary, after which ... finally says: *let it be done to me* (Lk 1:38) ... O wonderful fiat by which begins the martyrdom of the Virgin She foresees the bitter sufferings that the Only-Begotten of the Father must endure. She foresees ... *and yet let it be done to me* ...

O triumph of Mary ... But more! When her beloved squeezes her womb in the cave of Bethlehem, the only pledge ... and when, moved by maternal love she places affectionate kisses on that lovely face, Oh, how eagerly she says: Oh how you will be mistreated, my son ... The baby grows in age and Mary's love grows, but in the growth of her child, but in the growth of her love, the stings in the Heart of the Virgin grow ... She sees him wounded by the Pharisees, she sees him cursed by a diabolic man. She ... But in the end she sees him pierced by the harsh crown of thorns, by the harsh scourging ... and at last nailed to the Cross.

Imagine the intense pain Mary suffers; imagine her sorrow. I have yet to see her cry, not yet ... and for this reason I call her a triumphant Martyr of a new martyrdom.

And for this reason I call her a triumphant Martyr of a new of martyrdom, because I know that she is the Mother, the loving Mother of Jesus ...This love is what makes the sorrows of Mary so excessive. This is that love that breaks her heart ... When the dying Jesus turned to Mary and said to her: *Woman, behold your son* (Jn 19:26), indicating John, who can express the inner anguish of the Mother. *It is finished* (Jn 19:30) ...

(This should be an apologetic panegyric since one should outline the life of Mary.)

ON THE SEVEN SORROWS OF MARY (II)

It is demonstrated that the predictions, prophecies have come true; it has come true, etc. ... It has come true at last, etc. And just as by the command of God there need to be two altars for sacrifices, one for the victim and the other for the fire, we also see this coming true in Mary. Mary is the fire, Jesus the Victim. Her heart is the altar of fire, the Cross the Altar for the Victim. A beautiful image.

1) The sorrows;

2) The courage.

1. (Here one speaks of the sorrows) The Son poured out Blood on the Cross, and St. Bonaventure says that it flowed into the Heart of Mary. Cross, thorns, and nails tormented the Son; cross and thorns and nails tormented her, says St. Lawrence Justinian, etc.

And why, O Simeon, did you announce such news? Why did you bring such sorrows and pains to her Heart? Etc. Ah, no, my dear people, not only Simeon, but Mary already knew the sorrowful story. Jesus was born, and seeing him suffer, she says to herself: Oh, how many greater sorrows await you! The boy grew in age, and Mary grew more sorrowful knowing the destiny of her Son. She would think of this always, not finding inner peace, and repeating to herself: [He is] my beloved and he [is] my affliction. But see, now the time for satisfying the Eternal Father for the sins of the human race has arrived. And what does Mary do? What do you do, O Mother?

She sees him accused, cursed, trampled, derided ... she sees him tortured before the tribunals, crowned with thorns, led to his death ...

Ah, my dear people, consider what is to be said of the Mother, the love of a son. Mary loved Jesus intensely. Jesus was loved passionately by Mary. Mary ... Jesus ... nor is there a greater love to

be born of an earthly Mother. Mary considered that her pledge, that which had chosen her to be Mother ... O the sorrows, the unheard torments! Love of a Mother, love of a son ...

And here do not force me to recall that bitter encounter of Jesus carrying the cross with his his stricken Mother on the ascent of the mountain, and then on its top. Do not force me to say this again ... But let us imagine that she is standing in her room, thinking only of her Son, and the beloved John would bring her the news of the loss of the Son. What would Mary have said? ... But more, my beloved, I am in awe ...

2. With what courage she stands at the foot of the Cross and watches her Son suffer. Let us transport ourselves to the mount [of Calvary]. See the Cross planted, with Jesus hanging on it. He has become one wound and has no place to rest his head ... with Mary at the foot. See her: I do not see a tear, a sigh, a lament to reveal that above all she submitted to the divine will for our sake. I see in her face an inner affliction. That pallid appearance ... are indications ... And what a stormy sea that raises up the whiteheads on the waves, and transports them to the sandy shore, and others follow more forcefully... but just as the waves that arrive at the shore are forced to return to their bed by divine will, so with Mary the sorrow follows sorrow, and even ... O courage and perseverance.

But more: in her presence they prepare the drink and she observes her Son... in her presence they open the Side and add wound upon wound ... And the Mother perseveres and does not even sigh because she loves our wellbeing. Oh, for good reason one can say that there are two victims in the one sacrifice!

Her eyes look away, but what ... violently shaken by love and forced to focus upon her only Treasure. She rallies, pallid and emaciated; she fixes them on her beloved one (*le fissa nelle sue dilette*), but she is forced ... Again ... O intense sorrow!

But even more (I have no more breath, no spirit): the sorrowful Son is dying, but before dying, he turns to her: *woman*, he says, *[here is] your son*; (Jn 19:26) (and he turns to John). Woman, yes, he called her woman for her perseverance... and dying, if the earth shook, the tombs opened, the dead were raised... if there were great miracles, there was also a greater miracle: the courage of Mary.

Now they give the body of her dear treasure (*pegno*) to the Sorrowful Mother. And Mary, without so much as a sigh, but keeping them within in her heart, places tender kisses, gazes at the wounds, adores them, and reflects on the grand mysteries, the predictions fulfilled, the salvation of the world... She again turns to kiss him and there grows within in an inexpressible sorrow, intense ...

O woman, O Mother truly courageous! O perseverance! O sorrowing Mary! (This is the end.)

(At the end, one shows that all has been done for us and one ends with a prayer.)

THE SEVEN SORROWS OF MARY (III)

In Lamentations, Jeremiah said this about Jerusalem: *There is none to comfort her among all them that were dear to her* (Lam 1:2).

He gave him a heart as wide as the sand on the shore of the sea. This is said of Solomon.

The sea was the Passion of Jesus Christ: *I came into the depth of the sea, and a tempest has overwhelmed me* (Ps 69:2). The sea was the compassion of the Mother: *O virgin daughter of Sion ... great as the sea is thy destruction* (Lam 2:13), that is your tribulation, your affliction, your sorrow, as interpreters explain.

Attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow (Lam 1:12).

St. Lutgard, the Virgin of Brabant, meditated on the *pains of Jesus* and appeared with hair wet with blood.

St. Liduina, the Dutch virgin, produced tears of real blood from her eyes, which she called her roses. Such was the impression she received while meditating on the Crucifix.

St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi fell into a swoon just gazing at Jesus crucified. Let us imagine how it was with Holy Mary.

Holy Mary lamented with St. Brigid (4 Revel., c. 24), that there were few who remembered her sorrows: *I find very few who think about my tribulation and sorrow and have compassion on me.*

The saintly old Tobit, among the reminders he left with his son, left this: *you shall honor your mother ... be mindful what and how great [perils] she suffered for you [in her womb]* (Tob 4:4). A feeling of compassion, of gratitude, of interest to us.

1. The sorrow of Mary Most Holy: Simeon predicts the persecutions that her son will encounter.

Behold I send my angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face. And presently the Lord, whom you seek, and the angel of the testament, whom you desire [shall come to his temple] (Mal 3:1). The Baptist is the forerunner of the Messiah ...

Forty days after he is born, they go to the Temple for their purification as the law commanded. When she and the holy Child are presented to the Priest, he predicts persecutions for the Son and sorrows and pain for her.

The pitiful Esther on hearing the condemnation of her Nation fainted twice.

St. Brigid recounts (Rivel., c. 14, 1.6) that the Blessed Virgin revealed to her that when She would embrace her Divine Infant and give him tender kisses, then she would recall the betraying kiss that the treacherous Judas would give him. When she would wrap him in the swaddling clothes, they would remind her of the ropes ... when she would see him with head bowed in her lap and would see the golden curls of his hair, as she expressed it, she began thinking of the Crown of thorns ... *my sorrow is continually before me* (Ps 38:18). Consider Mary as Jesus goes up Golgotha like Isaac ... like the innocent Joseph handed over..

Mysterious was the ritual of the two sparrows, one of which by command of the Priest was killed as the victim of expiation, and the other was dipped in the blood of his companion and allowed to roam free through the country. In the bloodless bird (*nel passero svenato*) ... Jesus; in the other, Mary, intoxicated by love ...

2. Sorrow: Flight into Egypt

Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt (Mt 2:13).

Behold the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud, and will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence (Is 19:1). The journey was more than 360 miles. Later *he came into the land of Israel* (Mt 2:21). Jesus was little more than seven years old.

Joseph was warned to return to Galilee.

Reflections

What passion in the heart of the man! Herod ...

1. Mary flees to Egypt.
2. She lives in a foreign land.

3. She lives in poverty.

2. She loses her divine Son and searches for him for three days

During the Exodus, God commanded the Hebrews that their males be presented to the Lord in the Temple three times a year: *Three times in a year all your males shall appear in the sight of the [Almighty] Lord [the God of Israel]* (Ex 34:23). St. Joseph obeyed this precept and when the Passover of unleavened bread drew near, he went to Jerusalem with the Virgin and her divine Son, a boy of twelve years. After having carried out what was required in the Temple, they left to return to Nazareth, but Jesus remained in Jerusalem without them knowing this. Because there was a large crowd traveling for the celebration of the Passover and the men and women were traveling separately, the Virgin believed that Jesus was with St. Joseph and St. Joseph believed that he was with his Mother, since boys were not prohibited from traveling with either the mother or the father. They did not become aware that he was missing until the evening when they did not find him in the inn.

Anna, mother of Tobit, sent her only son into Medea to recover a certain debt and when she saw that he was late in returning, *wept and was disconsolate*, says the sacred text (Tob 10:4). She went many times to the head of the road and to the highest windows of the house to see if he was coming.

Having passed that night in sighs and tears, as soon as the sun rises, she returns with St. Joseph to Jerusalem to seek him: *Have you seen him, whom my soul loves?* (Song 3:3) *What manner of one is your beloved of the beloved, O you most beautiful among women?* (Song 5:9) *My beloved is ... chosen out of thousands* (Song 5:10). The sorrowing Mary finally reaches Jerusalem. She passed the night suffering. All day is given to going around with St. Joseph asking this person and that. She went to the Temple and found him disputing with the Doctors.

Practical teaching (Moralità). Show your face to me (Song 2:14) ... *Restore unto me the joy of your salvation* (Ps 51:14)

3. He takes leave of his Mother before undergoing his passion.

Jesus was in Bethany the morning of the Thursday preceding his death, when with tender countenance he presented himself to his Mother and took leave of her ...

The Scriptures say of the two great friends Jonathan and David, that when they had to separate because of Saul's anger, both wept. *They wept together* (1 Sam 20:41). St. Paul recounts in the Acts of the Apostles that when he took leave of the faithful of Ephesus, they wept greatly, because they would see him no more. *Being grieved [most of all for the word which he had said,] that they should see his face no more* (Acts 20:38). *Whither is your beloved gone, O you most beautiful among women? Whither is your beloved turned aside, and we will seek him with you?* (Song 5:17)

4. She meets Jesus with the Cross.

How sorrowful was that Thursday night for the Holy Virgin after the departure of her son. At dawn on Friday she especially turned to prayer when St. John the beloved disciple gave her the bitter news, more by his tears than by his words, that Jesus was condemned to death.

She leaves with St. John, with the Magdalene and other devoted women to see ...

5. Holy Mary near the Cross

Like Adam and Eve ... so Jesus and Mary. The mother of the Maccabees. The sorrow of Mary was a sea. Just as all rivers flow to the sea, so in her there flowed together all reasons for sorrowing... But as the sea, full as it is, does not pass beyond the shore, thus the Virgin ordered her sorrow to be contained within her soul. *I read that she stood, I do not read that she wept* (St. Ambrose).

Sorrow without measure.

Strength without equal.

Other saints suffered in the flesh, Mary in her soul, so that she is not undeserving that we preach that she is more than a martyr (St. Jerome).

Mary would have wanted to help Jesus, says St. Bernard, but *she was unable to help ... she was not able to bind the wounds, to hold up the hanging head, nor console the weeping, nor kiss him as he gives up his spirit*. When Hagar saw the boy Ishmael suffering with thirst in her lap, Oh, she said, my heart does not bear to see the boy dying.

By command of God Moses erected two altars in the tabernacle, one for holocausts and the other the altar of incense (*dei timiani*). In the former God wanted the sacrifice of flesh, in the latter it pleased God to receive the oblation of aromas. From the former there dripped the blood of the unblemished lambs, and from the latter arose the odor of perfumes... One resounded with the blows that killed the animals, the other was perceived by nothing else than a beautiful and living flame which quietly rises to heaven. Make an application (*si applichi*).

6. She receives the Body in her arms

Then Longinus opened the side of Jesus Christ, which was not painful for him, because where there is no life there is no pain. But Mary ...

You are beautiful [above the sons of men] (Ps 45:3)... Oh, how...

A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, he shall abide between my breasts (Song 1:12). In his infancy, he could be called a little bundle, but now, Oh, what a great bundle of myrrh!...

Your altars, Lord of hosts (the Wounds as mystical altars).

The lamps thereof are fire and flames (the Wounds as mystical lamps).

Deliver, O God, my soul from the sword (Ps 22:21). David prays in the person of the promised Savior that his soul be freed from the lance. However, how is it that Jesus has already died? Some respond that *my soul* refers to Holy Mary.

The angelic St. Thomas [Aquinas], in *Opusc.* 68, c. 31, attests that in her times it was customary to paint the Virgin on the right

side of the Crucified with a golden cup in her hand in which she would collect the Blood that came from the Side.

7. She accompanies the remains to the grave.

As the evening of that Friday that was most sorrowful for the Virgin, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus asked her to give them the Body for burial. She did this as a sacrifice ... *We saw him and there was no sightliness [in him]* (Is 53:2), so that he could be the object of love ... Mary accompanied him with St. John, the penitent Mary Magdalen, and other devoted women.

The Prophet said: *The angels of peace shall weep bitterly* (Is 33:7), not because these blessed spirits can truly weep, but because so great was the sorrow of their Queen, that they were enough to awaken feelings of compassion in them who were incapable of weeping.

The widow of Naim ...

Mary returned, following the same paths of Calvary and when she reached sight of the Cross, she was overcome and adored it ...

The widow turtledove that loses its mate fills the forest with its cries, and so She who saw herself deprived of her son.

Mary Queen of Martyrs

1. Because she is the most lively image of Jesus.

2. The martyrs suffered bodily, but their souls were filled with that joy ... *they went rejoicing [from the presence of the council, [because] they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus]* (Acts 5:41), but Mary had a sorrowing soul ... It is great to suffer in the body; but the pains of the spirit ...

The sentence of martyrdom is undoubtedly enough to cause sorrow sufficient to bring on death, even if sometimes death does not follow.

St. John the Evangelist is revered as a Martyr, even though the vat of boiling oil did not kill him.

St. Thomas says that it is enough that one be obedient in offering oneself even to the point of death to have the glory of Martyrdom.

My life is wasted with grief: and my years in sighs (Ps 31:11)

The Martyrdom of Mary was of long duration: my life [is wasted] in grief.

To whom shall I compare you, or to whom shall I liken you, daughter of Jerusalem?

The Martyrs sacrificed their own lives; Mary that of her Son, of Jesus; besides ... Jesus loved her more than his own life.

APPENDIXES

Appendix I

PRECIOUS BLOOD THEMES IN THE PREACHING OF ST. GASPAR

Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S.

Before outlining the themes of his preaching, it is necessary to say a few words about the sources I have used for this reconstruction.

The sources

Regrettably, one must recognize that the thought and preaching of St. Gaspar about his beloved devotion are not sufficiently known. The principal reason for this is that much of Gaspar's thought was to be found only in manuscripts in the general archives of the Congregation that were accessible only to a few. Now, with the publication of nearly all the writings of St. Gaspar⁵² it will be easier to undertake systematic studies on the theological, spiritual, pastoral, and historical levels.

The biographies of St. Gaspar offer us a summary presentation of his activity in spreading the devotion to the Blood of Christ, but, except for brief citations from some of his letters, do not offer us a more comprehensive picture of his thought on this devotion.

Don Amilcare Rey (1893-1950) gathered all the passages regarding the Blood of Christ from the writings of St. Gaspar and compiled an anthology of texts arranged schematically. This collection was published in 1981.⁵³

⁵² At the time this volume was written, the following had been published in Italian: the 12 volumes of the *Letters* (1985-2000), 4 volumes of the *Spiritual Writings* (*Scritti spirituali*, 1995-1996), 3 volumes of the *Rules* (*Regolamenti*, 1998-1999, and a volume of *Miscellaneous Writings* (*Scritti vari*, 1999). Only the 4 volumes of Gaspar's scholastic manuscripts remain to be published. The *Letters* have been translated into English by Fr. Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S., and are available in digital format and in photocopied form. Only a few sections of the *Spiritual Writings* have been translated into English and the other volumes have not yet been translated.

⁵³ Amilcare Rey, *Il Divin Sangue negli scritti del Romano Beato Gaspare Del Bufalo*,

The only study of this topic of some length available up until now on this topic is an article by Don Luigi Contegiacomo (1913–2000) in 1958 and later edited in a small volume in 1968.⁵⁴

There has been a desire to have a better knowledge of the thought of St. Gaspar as apostle of the Precious Blood. We are ready to respond to this desire but not without a certain trepidation in our heart when we look at the research done by Rey and Contegiacomo. Above all we have dedicated ourselves to the careful study of the writings of St. Gaspar regarding the Blood of Christ.

To be sure, these writings are not many, as one can see in the four volumes in which are collected the spiritual writings of St. Gaspar. For example, even Rey writes: “in looking through the very dense volumes of manuscripts of St. Gaspar, I search many times in vain for abundant material and for discourses on the devotion which was so close to his heart.”⁵⁵ There are frequent references to the Precious Blood in Gaspar’s letters, a genuine mine of spirituality. There are some brief but important passages in some memoranda to the ecclesiastical authorities and a few outlines for preaching, written mostly for the use of one or the other Missionary and which, therefore, have fortunately come down to us.⁵⁶ Finally, there are various prescriptions in the rules of the Congregation regarding the practice of the devotion to the Precious Blood.⁵⁷

Albano Laziale, 1981. It is my intention to prepare another collection of texts of St. Gaspar on the Precious Blood. This will be larger than the work of Rey and will include selections from the letters, from sermons and from the rules, arranged in chronological order where possible. [Translator’s note: This collection was published in 2006 as *Testi sul Sangue di Cristo negli scritti di San Gaspare del Bufalo*, Centro Studi Sanguis Cristi, Rome.]

⁵⁴ L. Contegiacomo, “San Gaspare Del Bufalo apostolo del Preziosissimo Sangue,” in *Il Sangue Prezioso della Redenzione*, 12 (1958), pp. 3–18. This article was republished by the Pious Union of the Precious Blood in the collection “Il Sangue dell’Alleanza,” with the title: *Il Sangue di Cristo in San Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Rome, 1968. Since the publication of the present study (first edition, 1970), little has been written about St. Gaspar and the Blood of Christ.

⁵⁵ A. Rey, op. cit., II, p. 577.

⁵⁶ These writings have been published by Conti in four volumes: Gaspar del Bufalo, *Scritti spirituali*, I–IV, Roma, 1995–1996.

⁵⁷ Cf. G. Del Bufalo, *Regolamenti*, I–III, Roma 1998–1999.

St. Gaspar never composed an extensive work on the Divine Blood, although as we have noted he had wished others to do this and sent them material for the purpose. This can be surprising, even more so when we consider that St. Gaspar was aware of having received from God the mandate to spread the devotion to the Blood of Christ. As he writes in a letter to Innocenzo Betti: “God wanted me out in the field to propagate the great devotion to the Divine Blood.”⁵⁸ Gaspar’s time, however, was consumed by his ministries:

If I had the time, I would like to set down my thoughts in a small composition which would be so very helpful to the interests of our religion. I have no difficulty in saying this. God supplies me with beautiful ideas, and that is that. However, the devil continues to assault both me and our Institute. But, it has also been written: *ipsi vicerunt draconem propter Sanguinem Agni* ‘they overcame the dragon through the Blood of the Lamb’ (Rev 12:11).⁵⁹

For the rest of his life, however, he simply did not have enough time.

Gaspar inscribed the ideas that he did not have time to put down on paper on the hearts of his hearers in conversation and in preaching. Thus, when his Missionaries received outlines for preaching they were easily able to develop them more fully, faithful to all the nuances of his thought. For us, however, this is a difficult task.

For this reason, any attempt to reconstruct the preaching of St. Gaspar on the Blood of Christ will always be lacking. Only a prolonged study of all his writings will gradually be able to fill in the lacunae.

With this introduction to the sources we have also clearly revealed the limits of the present work and we place this under the judgment of all who will have the patience to follow the

⁵⁸ Letter 1810

⁵⁹ Letter 1644

reading. We also note that this work reproduces the text of the first edition of 1972.

An overview of the theme in the preaching of St. Gaspar

In a preaching outline written out for Don Michele Palombi, Gaspar writes the following exhortation: “Reasons for this devotion whose propagation is taking place with zeal today.”⁶⁰ In various other writings, especially in the document sent to Popes Leo XII, Pius VIII, and Gregory XVI, Gaspar also expresses the main reasons for which the devotion to the Blood of Christ is being spread in his time.

St. Gaspar held that the devotion to the Precious Blood was “the mystical weapon of the times,”⁶¹ given by God to the Church to “build a dam against the torrent of iniquity,”⁶² for reawakening religious fervor among the faithful. Devotion to the Precious Blood was thus a special saving intervention of God in favor of his people at an opportune moment. Hence preaching was an *opportunity for devotion to the Blood of Christ as the mystical weapon of the times*.

In preaching the devotion to the Precious Blood, Gaspar had three ends in mind. They were: reparation to the Redeemer, propitiation of the Eternal Father, and the sanctification of souls. This is how he expresses it:

For three purposes the devotion of the divine Blood is promoted. First, to pay a cult of compensation for the abuse that sinners offer it. Second, to present to the Eternal Divine Father an offering of the price of our redemption and to implore peace for our times. Third, to point out to the people that *justificati in Sanguine salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum* ‘justified in [his] Blood we shall be saved from wrath through him’ (Rev 5:9).⁶³

⁶⁰ G. del Bufalo, *Scritti Spirituali*, p.196.

⁶¹ See, for example, *Letter 1479* and *Letter 2159*.

⁶² *Letter 1214*.

⁶³ *Letter 2487, March 6, 1833*.

We shall see that in realizing these ends, St. Gaspar in his preaching would come back to the *substance* as well as the object of the devotion, as well as its *ends*.

Very closely connected to this theme was his preaching on the acts of *devotion or practices of piety in honor of the Blood of Christ* which, on the one hand formed the faithful in this devotion, and on the other enabled them to live according to its spirit.

The above-mentioned fundamental points on the preaching on the Precious Blood—opportunities for the devotion, its ends and cult—are brought together in harmony in the introduction to a question that St. Gaspar posed to the secretary for apostolic briefs in 1818 to obtain certain faculties for his Missionaries. There he writes:

The aim of spreading the devotion of the Most Precious Blood is to rouse up the fervor of the people. In every age the Lord has raised up devotions suitable for building a dam against the torrent of iniquity. If, however, in the history of the Church we see her fighting against one or the other [false] dogmas, in our times the war is for Religion in the totality of its objects and for the Crucified Lord. Therefore it is advisable to present the glories of the Cross and of the Crucified One, our Redeemer, and to open the fountains of mercy, even as the demon would like victims of justice. Now it is necessary to tell the people again the price of their redemption: *Empti sumus* ‘we have been bought...’ It is fitting to acquaint them with the ways in which the Blood of Jesus cleanses and sanctifies souls, principally by means of the Sacraments. To shake the present day lack of awareness it is fitting to recall that this Blood is offered daily on the altar and in opposition to the blasphemies and sacrileges we must adore and bless [that Blood]...⁶⁴

This passage points out the intimate connection between the *suitability* of the devotion to the Precious Blood as an antidote to the “torrent of iniquity” that was sweeping over the Church at that time, *the aim* of the devotion as a message of mercy and of

⁶⁴ Regolamenti, III, 125.

salvation for souls, and the *invitation to the cult* of adoration and of reparation to the Divine Blood.

These themes, however, do not constitute the entirety of St. Gaspar's preaching on the Blood of Christ. If one keeps in mind that with the apostolate of our saint the devotion to the Precious Blood was in a certain way a novelty in the Church, because it was not widely propagated among the faithful,⁶⁵ and if one also keeps in mind that he had to defend his beloved devotion from attacks by those of a Jansenist bent who would smear him, one discovers another aspect of this preaching, namely the demonstration of *the excellence and legitimacy of devotion to the Blood of Christ in the Church*.⁶⁶

With this final argument we believe that we have delineated, in a panoramic view, all of the fundamental points of the preaching of St. Gaspar on the Blood of Christ. To summarize:

1. Suitability of the devotion to the Precious Blood, mystical weapon of the times.
2. The aim of devotion to the Precious Blood:
 - a. Reparation to Jesus the Redeemer
 - b. Propitiation of God
 - c. Sanctification of souls
3. Devotions in honor of the Precious Blood
4. Excellence and legitimacy of the devotion to the Precious Blood

⁶⁵ St. Pier Giuliano Eymard (1811–1868), founder of the Priests of the Most Blessed Sacrament, testifies clearly in one of his letters that “so beautiful and salutary a devotion...was unknown and dormant” in France (Lettre adressé à Mademoiselle Modave de Bruxelles, Belgique. Autograph A-3, 517: Archive of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in Rome). Don Ferdinando Angelici in his testimony for the canonical processes for the canonization of St. Gaspar, says, speaking of the situation in the Marches: “I know...that...the infinite price of our redemption was venerated and invoked in generic fashion in our parts, but...after the preaching of the Venerable [Gaspar] it was venerated and invoked in a very special way” (Positio super virtutibus, § 169, 248).

⁶⁶ See especially Gaspar's defense of the Congregation before Popes Pius VIII, Leo XII, and Gregory XVI.

These are the four pillars on which, in Gaspar's line of thought, it seems possible to reconstruct adequately his preaching on the Blood of Christ.

Appendix II

HOW DID ST. GASPAR PREACH?

Willi Klein, C.P.P.S.

To discover how our founder had preached, I focused on four of the most important witnesses to that preaching: Biagio Valentini, Giovanni Merlini, Francesco Amici, and Bartolomeo Panzini. The first two were among Gaspar's earliest companions, and they became superiors general of the congregation after his death. Amici was a famous homilist, and Panzini was a brother who accompanied Gaspar for seventeen years. They all had often listened to his sermons during the missions he preached.

Normally, Gaspar's sermons were delivered during a village or town mission of one or two weeks, or in the course of spiritual exercises, a triduum, a novena, or during some special time of the liturgical year. His favorite way of preaching was the so-called "popular mission." His great models were the Jesuits Segneri, Pinamonti, Baldinucci, and Francesco di Girolamo, as well as Sts. Alphonsus Liguori, Leonardo di Porto Maurizio, Filippo Neri, and Giovanni Battista de Rossi. For Gaspar, the mission was:

... an exceptional grace of God. It was to be, by means of its ministers and preachers, a very special gift offered by the Lord to believers, a powerful summons, a privileged occasion to take one's own life in hand and imprint a new direction on it, to be converted. On account of this, following the path of traditional missionary spirituality, del Bufalo thought of the mission as a struggle, a military campaign, a hard battle fought to snatch souls from evil and to set them firmly on the way to salvation, sanctification and a truly lived Christianity.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Mario Spinelli, *No Turning Back: The Life of St. Gaspar del Bufalo*, The Messenger Press, Carthage, Ohio, 2003, p. 113. (Translation from the Italian by John Klopke, C.P.P.S., and edited by Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S., and Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.)

Gaspar was untiring in this ministry, preaching one mission after another, so that none of the missionaries could keep up with him, as Merlini remarked. However, he admonished his confreres to be attentive to their health: “How is your health: Please do not over exert yourself preaching; have somebody read out of the book of Can. Calamita. God accepts our good intentions. To tell the truth, I am very concerned about your health;”⁶⁸ and “Take care of yourself, put on a bit of weight, and do not preach with *so much effort*.”⁶⁹

A complete change of heart and a new beginning was the aim of all his activity. To reach the hearts of his audience he needed more than words: he used symbols, impressive ceremonies, processions, dramatic elements, and surprises calculated for their effect. The listeners should be able to grasp this experience of Providence with both hands. Gaspar had inherited the lively imagination and the temperament of his father, but at the same time, he modified the traditional mission that had sometimes deteriorated to a spectacle or pious entertainment, and he structured it to be more sober and effective.

Conversion, meaning turning back to God, a good confession, and a new beginning, was the aim of his sermons, the core of his evangelization. Mario Spinelli writes:

With the beginning of his missionary activity, then, the oratorical prowess of Gaspar displayed itself fully. It was strengthened and honed by maturity and experience, by culture and interior progress, by apostolic labors and by a thousand stimuli offered, every day, by pastoral labors and encounters with people.... he emphasized a greater sobriety and essentiality. He emphasized a denser doctrinal layer and a stronger cohesion with real life as a sign of simplicity, relevance and an affective warmth... In sum, more than an orator, there on the platform or in the pulpit, he was a witness, an apostle who spent himself for his brethren, even preaching ten or fifteen times a day be it under the blazing

⁶⁸ Letter 1413, to Fr. Beniamino Romani.

⁶⁹ Letter 581, to Fr. Adriano M. Tarulli.

sun or in pelting rain and, sometimes, going out without a voice, with his clothing soaked with sweat! ⁷⁰

How, then, did St. Gaspar preach? This essay consists of three main parts: First, a simple sketch of his way of preaching. Second, I will offer a few words about preparation for the service, and finally, some of Gaspar's contemporaries will offer their testimony.

I.

I have identified ten distinctive features in the preaching of St. Gaspar: two of them are extraordinary, and the other eight more ordinary.

The first extraordinary characteristic was called "the gift of the word," meaning a special gift of the Holy Spirit. By this gift, Gaspar was generally presented with new inspiration while preaching and his audience noticed that he taught new thoughts in a creative way.

The other exceptional feature was his memory. Like Mozart in music, Gaspar was able to reproduce a sermon word for word after a single hearing. He was able to quote by heart the Old and New Testament, the psalms, texts of the Early Fathers and other spiritual writers.

These are the additional, more "normal" characteristics of his preaching:

1. He often uses quotations from the Bible or the Fathers of the Church as a starting point and explains the topic or he confirms the theme with such a quotation. That was a new way of preaching, for many preachers of his time cultivated a more allegorical and descriptive style.
2. He stresses the importance of a lucid, philosophically and theologically founded argumentation. In this way, he refutes the widely known errors of sectarians and enemies

⁷⁰ Op. cit., pp. 134-5.

of the church. He discriminates clearly between demand and advice and avoids topics that are controversial in the Church.

3. Gaspar often illustrates his topics with examples taken from the daily life of his audience or from the lives of the saints, but his illustrations are never dull or superficial.
4. He avoids harsh, frightening speeches, and when he notices that his listeners are frightened, he usually adds: "We have always to think well of God."
5. Gaspar does not hesitate to show his personal feelings—not in an artificial way, but as the true expression of his own feelings. Thus, the hearts of his listeners are moved.
6. He impresses his listeners more with his gestures and the objects that he shows them, especially the Crucifix, than with his voice, which was rather weak. Even illiterate persons could understand him. Nothing, however, was exaggerated, and his demeanor was dignified and genuine.
7. He adapts his eloquence to the ability of his audience—whether it is the population of a mountain village, a group of lawyers, or the clergy of a town.
8. The listeners are always aware of the respect with which he talks to them. The tone of his voice and his gestures or expressions never give offense.

II.

How did Gaspar prepare his sermons? First, all his life he read, meditated and studied the Bible, spiritual writers, and famous preachers. Second, he spent time in prayer. Normally he would jot down some keywords, then pray and afterwards complete his sentences. In the general archive of our Congregation there are 514 sketches for sermons on about 300 different topics. He wrote sketches for himself or for a missionary or dictated them. Without doubt, many other such sketches have been lost.

According to Beniamino Conti⁷¹, Gaspar's preaching on the Precious Blood can be summarized as follows:

1. The Blood of Christ is the "mystical weapon of the time."
2. The aim of the veneration of Christ's Blood is
 - a. reparation to Jesus, the Redeemer;
 - b. propitiation of God the Father;
 - c. sanctification of souls.
1. The importance of devotions in honor of the Blood of Christ.
2. The excellence and justification of devotion to the Precious Blood.

In a letter, Gaspar writes: "Our practice of giving Missions and Retreats makes it clear that whoever does not wish to apply himself to the study of preaching should not consider joining this institute, nor would the Institute admit him."⁷² To Cardinal Belisario Cristaldi, the promoter and benefactor of the congregation, he writes: "Then, too, there is always the continuous task of working on so-called preaching materials, plus everything else that you, in your wisdom, can realize well."⁷³ To the missionary Mattia Cardillo: "I am holding on to the list of preachable topics which we like so much. Sending these pages to you will have to wait for the opportune occasion, as well as a bit of time for making a copy of them."⁷⁴ He admonishes Fr. Marcellino Brandimarte: "Above all, prepare well everything that you preach, since the most lovable God merits being served with fidelity and exactitude. Give there an edifying example, as I have no doubt you will do."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., *St. Gaspar, Apostle of the Blood of Christ*, Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Dayton Ohio, 2010, vol. 2, p. 6. (Translation from the Italian by Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.)

⁷² Letter 619.

⁷³ Letter 1499.

⁷⁴ Letter 2869.

⁷⁵ Letter 3891.

Gaspar attached great importance on the study of preaching by the candidates in formation. Full of joy he writes to the archbishop of Camerino, Msgr. Nicola Mattei: "The Holy Father is quite pleased with the idea of a Boarding School at S. Felice di Giano, for those who, having already completed their Seminary studies, will now prepare themselves for the preaching ministry."⁷⁶ To Pope Gregory XVI: "In the field of oratory, the young men are given training in the basics of preaching, following the pattern that is so laudably practiced by other sacred Institutes and especially by the Fathers of the Company of Jesus."⁷⁷

Gaspar writes to the newly ordained Missionary, Fr. Orazio Bracaglia, whom he had directed when Bracaglia was a student:

In obedience, you are called to travel to S. Felice di Giano where I am assigning you as a Missionary in residence there. However, I would be pleased if you would not preach until the time of Lent so that if there were requests for Lenten preaching, I would like to know whether you have properly prepared yourself through study to be able to preach easily three times per week. *After writing this*, however, I feel that the situation may be a bit hurried; so let us allow this to be set aside for this year and you just be on hand taking your turn in preaching with the other Missionaries. I hope that I have made myself clear. In your quiet retirement there, in silence and in prayer as well as in study, you will derive great profit.⁷⁸

In a later letter to Bracaglia:

With regard to preaching, let me know whether your voice is up to preaching; or whether, because of reasons of health, you should abstain. In the meantime, however, it would be good for you to apply yourself to catechetical instructions which will provide you with reasons for re-cultivating, so to speak, matters dealing with morals. In addition, prepare things in alphabetical

⁷⁶ Letter 1342.

⁷⁷ Letter 2140.

⁷⁸ Letter 2624.

order so as to keep a note of everything that is worthy of preaching. Very profitable, too, would be a careful reading of the writings of Father Segneri, skipping over the mythological facts which are no longer in use in our times. In Segneri you will discover very beautiful material, and as you continue your letter-correspondence and having your compositions reviewed, you will form for yourself some programs conducive to the glory of God. Here is one, for example: you wish to give a catechetical instruction on charity. First read Segneri; next, check the index found in the “Manna” by the same author. There you will find other points beyond what you have discovered in his Cristiano istruito. Then arrange your thoughts and proofs in successive order, supported then with opportune examples, avoiding in your preaching questionable matters and thus producing only certain doctrine. You will be richly blessed by God.

See that your preaching is simple, dignified, clear and tending toward getting results. Avoid being monotonous and learn how to distinguish the fervor of your instruction with the various inflections of your voice. These are basic things. The rest will follow... In the matter of preaching, the ministry is facilitated by presenting examples from the life of the most holy Mary. Pep talks etc. after acquiring a certain facility, it will be easier to make use of the platform, and a beginning can be made by giving fervorinos for general communions. Above all, have trust in God and you will be victorious. Become accustomed to being brief, and you will be doing a greater good.⁷⁹

Again and again the founder reminds himself and his Missionaries that the best prepared sermon cannot bear fruit unless the personal conviction of the preacher backs it:

Everybody knows what two means were used in the defeating of idolatry: preaching and miracles. God willed that these two means be placed at the disposal of persons who were not only good in their personal lives, but most exemplary, as though without this they would not have had sufficient power to move anyone with their preaching nor convince anyone by their miracles.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Letter 2674.

⁸⁰ Letter 42.

“Above all, offer prayers *sine intermissione* so that in preaching to others, I myself do not become worse.”⁸¹ “Keep up your kind prayers for me so that while preaching to others I know how to preach to myself.”⁸² “If the apostle St. Paul was fearful that after preaching to others he might become more reprehensible than all of them, what ought we to say, if the Apostle felt that way? Keep well in mind that since we are to communicate a spirit of fervor to others, it is necessary that we be well supplied and filled in a special way ourselves.”⁸³ “They [the Missionaries] will inculcate a salutary fear of divine judgment with which the one who preaches should also be imbued. They will preach to the heart from the heart.”⁸⁴

III.

Gaspar’s preaching was extraordinarily effective, according to the testimony of eyewitnesses. This testimony can be found in the record of depositions given during the process of Gaspar’s beatification. The following are some of the more important statements on the matter by four of those eyewitnesses.

DON GIOVANNI MERLINI

Merlini offers this assessment of Gaspar in his deposition: “It is certainly true that one could see the spirit of the Lord in him; otherwise, he could never have spoken with such readiness, persuasive power, strength and decisiveness in such a manner, that one could never repeat, unless a much higher spirit dwelt in him.”⁸⁵

Merlini was convinced that Gaspar owned among other intellectual talents the gift of the word:

⁸¹ Letter 145.

⁸² Letter 154.

⁸³ *Method for the Spiritual Exercises in Gaspare del Bufalo, Chi è il Missionario?* Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, Roma, 1985, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Circular letter 4.

⁸⁵ Giovanni Merlini, *Gaspare del Bufalo: Un santo scruta un santo*, ed. Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., Roma, 1984, p. 66

From Fr. Valentini and from others, I learned that the Servant of God was an extraordinary man, endowed by God with special gifts among which, as I have been told, was the gift of preaching. I hold this to be exactly true...It is quite true that he studied continuously and occupied himself in writing. But, what he accomplished in deed was proportionately greater... Above all, I am of the opinion that the Servant of God possessed the gift which the Apostle called *sermo sapientiae*, particularly because in his apologetical talks, as we have seen, he was notably effective and even converted non-believers, namely, the sectarians, along with sinners, as I related before and as is well-known. I would further add that the Servant of God used to say to me that whenever he gave those apologetical talks, God would give him that gift. This same gift can be noted likewise in the things that he wrote, particularly when he treated the topic of the title of the most Precious Blood, which I spoke of already.⁸⁶

As far as the contents and the method of his preaching is concerned: "He handled the Scriptures and the Fathers with utter ease and especially paraphrased the Psalms in a marvelous manner. He would select only those themes that were substantial and he would avoid topics that were not completely clear. He was particularly careful to observe rigorously the correct theological terminology, which he also insisted that we do by setting down rules for exactness in expression."⁸⁷

His advice was "to preach to the people only what was certain and also to distinguish between commandment and counsel, in order not to confuse."⁸⁸

Merlini remarks:

Obligations were, indeed, for him something noble and extensive; he escaped the cut and dry categories, and he warned me about such things. He preached of God, of the

⁸⁶ Giovanni Merlini, *Un santo scruta un santo*, ed. Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., Roma, 1984, p. 66.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

soul, of eternity with a fullness of heart. He was thoroughly distressed with any stifling of spirit. His manner of developing the exposition of even the most difficult truths of our religion was such that it drew every soul to the love of God. When he noticed a certain hardness of heart in his listeners during his sermon, he would say: *Sentite de Domino in bonitate*.⁸⁹

He used a straightforward language, showed self-control, he was moderate and preferred the concrete. As Merlini notes:

Through his own proper gift of weaving things together, the unlettered also could have their hunger sated. Many times, they were moved to compunction by his gestures, by the tone of his voice, by his very comportment... Especially stunning were his digressions which came to him spontaneously and, although prolonged occasionally, he skillfully worked his way back to the thread of his thought without anyone scarcely realizing it. During these digressions, he would get down to the practical level and, in as far as he was able, he would adapt himself to the level of his audience, selecting pertinent comparisons but at the same time not detracting from the dignity of the holy word of God. This was something that he advised all of us to be careful about.⁹⁰

Merlini reports that Nicola Palma, a Canon in the Abruzzo, wrote a summary of the Missions given in the city of Teramo in 1822 and 1823. Palma offered the following description of Gaspar's preaching:

I observed these things: First, del Bufalo's digressions, always very appropriate, to which his enthusiasm so often led him, did not cause him to stray far from his main points. Second, without stopping, without repeating, without making errors, he avoided presenting anything that would disgust his audience. Neither did he assume airs either in his gestures, his voice or the expression on his face, whatever the topic may have been that he was treating. Third, that in the outpouring of his feelings, which could be produced by nothing other than his purity of intention and his inner conviction of what was being explained,

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Op. cit., p. 67.

he found the secret to moving people, especially when he would take into his hands the large, beautiful Crucifix that he always carried with him on his Missions. From that point on, he was no longer the orator who was presenting an argument, but a heart burning with love for God and enthusiasm for his neighbor so that it is no wonder that even the most stolid person was moved to tenderness and tears; fourth, with a robust eloquence, supported by an attractive Roman accent and a very neat, regular, composed outward appearance, he would sometimes go on for a good two hours. Yet, no one in the listening audience felt the least bit bored.⁹¹

Merlini also says, that Gaspar displayed a very profound knowledge of theology and canon law:

He did so, on the one hand, in his public remonstrances and, on the other hand, in his contacts with individual groups separately, offering them the purest doctrine and the basic principles of our holy religion, and doing so with a spirit of piety and zeal, balanced always with freedom and prudence. A man of extraordinary genius, a man without officiousness in his words, a man whose very face manifestly reflects his deep-felt consciousness of his mission.⁹²

And:

I am of the opinion that, although he did not move people by the tonality of his voice, he did possess all the other talents for preaching. In substitution for that lack, however, he supplied sentiments that were passionate, formed in his heart out of love for God. To that, he also added his affection for devotions and ceremonies, as I related previously, which deeply impressed his listeners, as I myself witnessed. From all of this, many conversions resulted... However, I will say that although the mere tonality of his voice did not manage to touch someone's heart, neither was it irritating, even though, at times, it became somewhat raucous or even lost completely for a short period of time, especially when he had to force his voice in order to be heard. Indeed, when that happened, he aroused pity and then joy in his listeners when, all of a sudden, it would come back strong and sonorous.⁹³

⁹¹ Op. cit., pp. 70-71.

⁹² Op. cit., p. 72.

⁹³ Ibid.

Generally Gaspar gave spiritual exercises for the clergy of the town during his mission. Merlini tells us:

“His talks to the clergy and to the higher class of people were distinguished. In giving them, he spoke with evangelical freedom, but at the same time with respect, thus winning over the esteem and veneration of all....”

And he did not mince words:

If anyone else had said to them all the things that del Bufalo preached they would have been displeased. But, since it was he who said them, they listened willingly. This was his usual manner, namely, to speak with the freedom of the Gospel but always respectful of his audience. He would season his discourses by saying, for example, “while we intend to do good, we fail through ignorance, through inadvertence, through thoughtlessness, and that is, indeed, the fact.”⁹⁴

FRANCESCO AMICI

Amici, an Olivetan monk, offers additional eyewitness testimony. He wrote an account of the mission directed by Gaspar in Ascoli Piceno in 1821. Among other things, he calls our attention to the “careful handling of the Sacred Scriptures” on Gaspar’s part and the “inexhaustible multiplicity of all sacred learning” in his sermons. He also speaks of other personal gifts such as his voice, his gestures, and his demeanor, all of which contribute greater vigor to the content of the preaching “which does not stay in the ear but goes straight to the heart of the hearers.”

Among other things, in speaking of the talks given to the clergy, he offers the following observation:

In those conferences, which might better be entitled a public schooling in religion, the highly-esteemed Missionary (he is speaking of the Servant of God) was the source of constant amazement because of his gentle and winning manner, his interweaving of ideas as he poured out his exposition with

⁹⁴ Op. cit., p. 67.

surprising naturalness and dignity, and because of his skillful handling of the Sacred Scriptures, along with his inexhaustible storehouse of sacred erudition. They were seasoned and delivered with his unique style, unhesitating as the flow of a river, and holding his audiences spellbound. At that moment when the intellect is illumined by the irresistible light of truth, supported by reason and revelation, he would lead one on, or, should I say rather that he drew one almost insensibly along with him by a secret, wonderful enchantment which one could not possibly imagine, unless one actually heard him. With assurance, it can be asserted that in this type of quiet, yet discursive, eloquence, it would be quite difficult to find his equal.⁹⁵

Then, speaking of his sermons:

With the crucifix and the image of St. Francis Xavier being carried before him as an escort, and, reciting devout prayers in a low voice, he would ascend the platform. After the usual preparations and the customary greeting with the ejaculatory prayer to the Blood of Jesus Christ, he would begin by first instructing the people in the various functions that would be included in the daily program during the Mission. Having, then, given as a usual thing a brief resume of what the sermon would contain, he would cite his text and state his theme again, which he always divided into its component parts, identifying the steps that he would follow throughout the presentation. In this outline, the main points would allow him, during the course of the sermon, the possibility of bringing in and using the many gifts that adorned his fertile imagination. If, in the ardor of his zeal, he was carried away with apostolic freedom, *since verbum Dei non est alligatum*, sometimes he gave the impression of having strayed from his theme, while giving practical examples in useful digressions; yet, he did that so pleasantly and with such dexterity that instead of losing the attention of his listeners, he captured it wondrously and opened it up to the enjoyment of a vast field of pertinent, sacred erudition which he had accumulated.

That type of freedom, not really in keeping with the strict rules of sacred eloquence, was in him a unique merit. Without

⁹⁵ Op cit., p. 68.

prejudicing his main theme, he would extemporaneously proceed to discussing the lack of morality in his time and, in doing so, would allow himself to become emotional, but with moderation, never losing his composure. Rather, more correctly stated, he allowed himself to be moved by the spirit of the Lord who, *ubi vult spirat*, urging him on in those precious moments...⁹⁶

And Amici asks:

How could he, with such a variety of material and thoughts, often punctuated by gasps of embarrassment from the teeming crowds, always adhere to his original outline as well as to its development, without ever reproducing the same ideas, yet maintaining from beginning to end, the same presence of mind, the same strength of voice, the same cheerful look on his face. In truth, these were talents or extraordinary gifts and all of them were his... I proceed now to refer quickly to something about the sermons themselves that he gave during the Mission. On the first two days, he took as his subject: the truth of the Catholic religion as opposed to philosophical unbelief. It is not my purpose to analyze the natural reasoning nor the philosophical teaching that he detailed in his first sermon on the existence of God, the authenticity of the Holy Book, the variety of theological doctrines, accompanied with a profusion of scriptural texts, that he poured out, nor even the various examples that he used with a masterful stroke in his second sermon. All that I want to say, and everyone asserts the same thing, is that in those two sermons, both as an accomplished philosopher and a profound theologian, he summarized the most convincing power of Christian apologetics and brought out clearly the invincible triumph of the Crucified Lord. In the subsequent sermons, treating the last things, far from causing a feeling of gloom with tedious threatening words to a very large audience, he used his enthusiasm to lead them to renew their lives and repent wholeheartedly.⁹⁷

Amici was also struck by the incredible energy of the director

⁹⁶ Op cit., pp. 68-69.

⁹⁷ Op. cit., pp. 69-70.

of the missionaries. No one can understand how he can “with just three hours of sleep at night, always have ... enough strength and a voice, manly and resounding, in a continuous exercise of preaching ... almost always in the open air.” He speaks “without ever making a pause ... never coughing or spluttering, *sit venia verbo*, content only with rather rarely wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.”⁹⁸

Gaspar was an apostle who moved the hearts of his audience: he convinced and converted the people because he was the first to believe his words. What he preached he lived without any exceptions. And that was felt by the people.

BARTOLOMEO PANZINI

This layman served Gaspar for many years, and had this to say about the Founder’s preaching:

With regard to the gift for preaching with which the Servant of God was endowed, it seems to me that God had given him a special gift. He was able, on the spot, to deliver sermons on varied topics, to do so with clarity and persuasiveness for anyone who would be in his audience. He would move hearts to the point of tears. Everyone said that his sermons were well-prepared and were comprehended by both the learned and the ignorant. They were imbued with knowledge to such a degree that even I was convinced that, humanly speaking, he just couldn’t do that without a special gift since, in his preaching, he sustained extraordinary labor, together with that of hearing confessions, writing letters of direction for the needs of his mission houses and handling all the matters relative to the works of the ministry. It is my opinion that he was lacking in nothing for being, as he in fact was, a great, zealous and learned preacher of the word of God.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Op. cit., p. 69.

⁹⁹ “Vincenzo Severini, Giovanni Menicucci, Bartolomeo Panzini,” in *Gaspare del Bufalo, conosciuto da vicino*, ed. Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., 1992, pp. 94f.

DON BIAGIO VALENTINI

Gaspar was accused by some of plagiarizing the material of a famous preacher, Monsignor Baccolo. In this regard, Valentini said in his testimony for the process:

I know that, unfortunately, this very same rumor was spread about even during the mission in Camerino, that is, that what was preached was also plagiarized. The fact is that in his writings, not even in copies of them, did I myself ever see the sermons written out completely, but just a few notes jotted down, or brief snatches, or short ideas that were to be developed by some vastly capable mind. This was the conclusion reached also by the famous Amici... He asserted that it was not possible that the sermons given by the Servant of God were written by anyone or even by him, but was really the word of God developed right there in the very act of preaching.¹⁰⁰

It cannot be denied that the Servant of God was endowed with a great memory and power of recall... As regards his preaching, he surely followed and imitated the great orators, not in a material sense or mechanically, as is usually the case. He would take the theme or the proofs and present them in an entirely new way. This was noticeable in the sermons or reform talks that he spoke or dictated to others, selecting the themes from varied authors and then masterfully developing them with his own manner to bear the greatest amount of fruit. ... I must testify that... he was accustomed to first make an outline or set up succinctly the complete order of presenting the material and then offer a prayer at the foot of the crucifix so that he could continue to improve the work. Every once in a while, he was constrained to do it all over again and even better, with God's help, than what he had originally contemplated. ... With reference to theology, I... noted how well-instructed he was himself and how effective he was in instructing others... Very educated people in various cities of Italy along with highly enlightened and learned clergy heard him on several occasions treat the same topics and have admired his ever new presentation of clear doctrines, avoiding uncertain and unproved positions. ... we had on many occasions

¹⁰⁰ Biagio Valentini, *Gaspare del Bufalo, quasi un oracolo divino*, ed. Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., 1990, p. 96.

heard him being very exact in his teaching and very strict with regard to it, so much so that he did not want the least inexactness in expressing oneself with equivocation or uncertainly.¹⁰¹

Where there was a mixed audience with the ordinary people more numerous than the educated, he would give his apologetical conferences to the leaders among those citizens in some small chapel or little out-of-the-way church. In the small towns, he would work hard to make his sermons understandable even to the simplest old lady, quoting examples from the scripture that were popular.¹⁰²

Some very learned people, who listened to him, had to confess that he would not have been able to say what he was saying unless he had had the gift of the Word, since it contained more than just words. Monsignor Strambi, now Venerable, wanted to hear the sermons given by the Canon during the mission in Camerino, at which he wished to be a companion. He conceived such a profound concept of the preaching that he had to say: "It is God who is preaching through the Canon." The Servant of God, himself, used to say to me in reference to his preaching that, once he had mounted the preaching platform, he was overwhelmed with such an influx of ideas that he scarcely had time to make a selection from them, and they were things that he had not previously prepared at all by reading or thought.¹⁰³

So, how did Gaspar preach? Catechesis, instruction in the basic doctrines of faith, and love of the Church were most important for him. His sermon was like a strong wind or a flowing river: He invited his audience to embark in the boat of the preacher, and he took them on a journey whose destination was Christ and the beginning of a new life.

¹⁰¹ Op. cit., pp. 97-98.

¹⁰² Op. cit, p. 99.

¹⁰³ Op. cit, p. 267.

