

SAINT PETER JULIAN EYMARD

“God is merciful”

**“You can plunge
into that ocean of mercy
and compassionate love!”**

Selected texts



Year of Mercy 2015-2016

Centre de spiritualité « Eymard »
67, rue du Breuil - La Mure
France

Rome, 25 March 2016
Good Friday

To the whole “Eymardian Family”

Provinces and Regions of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament
Provinces and Regions of the Congregation of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Members of the Secular Institute Servitium Christi
Communities and groups of lay persons of the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament
SSS lay persons

“Misericordias Domini, in aeternum cantabo”

Dear confreres, and all members of the great Eymardian Family,

In this Year of Mercy, while presenting you this collection of Father Eymard’s texts on Mercy, I wish first of all to draw your attention to his words that refer to the context of the Paschal Mystery, which we celebrate every year, having before us what he wrote in the following text:

«Hæc dies quam fecit Dominus, exultemus et lætamur in ea. “This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it” (Ps 117: 24). These words that the Holy Spirit places on the lips of the Church on the triumphal day of the Savior, on the day of his **resurrection** after he had left Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Calvary, he entered into his eternal triumph and took possession of his kingdom. We understand that the Church uses them to encourage the faithful to rejoice, since it is the entrance day of the Savior into his glory.

My brothers, we can say the same thing on this day that the Lord has made in his **mercy** and love, we are allowed to add: Let us exalt in joy. What is this day? It is the day of days, the day of the Church, the day of our Lord in us, it is truly the day of the Lord in us, because today triumphs over death in us, as he triumphed from his tomb over the death of the world.»

“The canonical vows”
Paris, Sunday 23 August 1863
Eymard PR 54,1 (OC, XIV, 212)

Precisely apropos the purpose of the above mentioned collection, we offer you an excellent work done by Father Manuel Barbiero, who has selected and chosen some texts taken from the *Opera Completa* of Father Eymard’s writings for whoever wishes to meditate on them.

We hope that all of you, our confreres and all members of the great “Eymardian Family,” may be able to appreciate and benefit from this contribution through deep reflection and awareness of the power of Mercy in your personal and communal life, sharing likewise what Pope Francis has already reminded us of: “Forgiveness is a force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 10)

In the Lord’s Pasch of this year of Mercy,

Fraternally,



Fr Eugênio BARBOSA MARTINS, SSS
Superior general



SAINT PETER JULIAN EYMARD

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INTRODUCTION

In this Year of Mercy we present a collection, which does not pretend to be exhaustive, of texts selected from the edition of St Peter-Julian Eymard’s “Complete Works” (to which references are given).

May Father Eymard accompany us during this year and help us to understand the depth and immensity of God’s Mercy.

He said: “Jesus has a healing power in him. Jesus is full of mercy. He is virtue in action. - Mercy is behind his gaze, his thoughts, and all his actions, so that poor sinners might approach him” (PR 106,1)¹.

He draws his convictions mainly from biblical sources. Indeed, there are some texts that are almost entirely quotations from several passages of Scripture. He invites us to plunge into the ocean of God’s Mercy.

La Mure, 16th December 2015

Fr. Manuel BARBIERO, sss

¹ *Retraite de Paris: La miséricorde de Jésus, 10 août 1867*, PR 106,1 (XIV,357) - Retreat of Paris : the mercy of Jesus, 10 August 1867.

I - THE MERCY OF GOD

Trusting in the mercy of God

I sinned, seriously; I have a huge debt with divine justice; I'm afraid of his anger, of hell ... Where can I hide? Under the mantle of divine mercy: Jesus extends it over me; in the heart of Jesus, that is open towards me. But how can I really pay my debts? With the merits of my Jesus, with his love for me, with my love for him. Jesus told me, as he told Magdalene: My daughter, have trust, all your sins have been forgiven. Oh! what consoling words! Divine mercy has placed his seal of ownership on my life; may my soul never break it! Jesus has spread the mantle of his mercy over all your past miseries; do not lift it to see and disturb those ancient quagmires of sin! Base your trust, then, on the infinite mercy of Jesus; in your fears, hope in Jesus: he loved you when you were not loving him. In your worries, rely on Jesus, he is your Savior. In your perplexities, rest on Jesus, that's your best homage to his goodness; and never forget that filial trust in the mercy of God is the surest grace and the most perfect grace for your justification.

Retraite aux vierges du Tiers-Ordre, 4^e jour: Force dans la confiance en Dieu, PT 100,17 (XI,259) - Retreat to the virgins of the Third Order, 4th day: Strength in trusting in God.

Examples of the mercy of God

How many striking examples I could quote here, my brothers, concerning the mercy of God. Manasseh, king of Judah, had afflicted himself with all kinds of abominations; the sacred temple had been profaned, the worship of the most infamous idol had been reestablished, all the faithful people had become perverted or put to death, and their own children had been immolated to the idol of Moloch: and those were only some of his crimes. Manasseh began to reflect, humbled himself, and asked pardon from God. God pardoned him, and even reestablished him on the throne from which he had been removed because of his crimes [cf. 2Ch 33:1-20].

David was guilty of adultery and homicide. His sin became public. Good Lord, what a scandal for the people, but no one dared to remind him of his fault. A year went by in disorder, and David did not even think of putting order in things. However, a prophet, Nathan, would heal his wound; he will tell him: *You are that man!* [2S 12:7]. "O king, you are guilty and seriously guilty... is that the price you pay for the benefits that God has given you?" David sighs, and admits his guilt: "I have sinned." His repentance is sincere and the prophet immediately adds: "Well, the Lord has forgiven you" [2S 12:13]. Notice, my brothers, whether we can say that God wants the death of the sinner, and would we not have the right to believe that the Lord takes greater pleasure in forgiving, than the sinner has in offending him.

But if God was so merciful under a law of severity and revenge, says St Cyprian, like that of the Jews, what then would he do under the law of love? What has Jesus Christ not done to give us proofs of this!

A public sinner, Magdalene, who scandalized the entire city of Jerusalem by her aberrations, came one day to kneel at the feet of Jesus; her tears flowed on his feet and she wiped them with her hair; but Simon, the Savior's host, is a Pharisee, and he condemns already the patience of Jesus who allows this infamous woman at his feet. In his pride, he never realized that the repentant sinner always found the welcome of a Father: "Go, my daughter, said the Savior, go in peace, your sins have been forgiven." [cf. Lk 7:48.50].

Zachaeus is a public usurer, but he has resolved to restore ill-gotten wealth even before he is condemned; his injustices are forgiven, and salvation enters his house along with Jesus Christ [cf. Lk 19:9].

An adulterous woman is caught in her crime; she is brought to Jesus to decide her fate. The law condemns her to be stoned to death, but she sheds tears over her fault. (What will be the decision of the Savior? “Well, let her be stoned, but the one who has no sin will throw the first stone.” At these words, each one reflects and they all go away, accused by their own conscience. Jesus remains alone with the guilty woman who is left trembling. “Has anyone condemned you? he asks her. – No one, she answers, melting in her tears. – Well then, I will not condemn you either. Stand up, my daughter, go, and sin no more.”) Jesus consoles her, lifts her up and says with kindness: “Go, go and sin no more.” [Jn 8:11].

Judas the traitor refused the pardon offered to him by the Savior, and if he did not have the heart of a devil, how could he have resisted the gentleness of these words: “My friend, what plans have brought you here?” [Mt 26:50].

Peter denies his master; in front of the tribunal Jesus saw his fault and turned toward him... his eyes search out those of the guilty. Peter looks at the Savior, their eyes meet. Ah! What love in this encounter. Peter understands. Immediately he leaves this fatal palace, and goes to pour out tears over his sin that is already forgiven [cf. Mt 26:69-75].

A thief is crucified next to Jesus Christ. He is dying. He recognizes Jesus as a Redeeming God, he confesses his sins to him, then the hope of forgiveness makes him ask to be remembered by Jesus in heaven. What was the Savior’s response? This day you will be with me in Paradise. No, he doesn’t promise a mere remembrance, that’s too little for his love, but rather, a place, a crown, and on this very day. And Jesus confirms this with an oath: *Amen, I say to you, this day you will be with me in Paradise* [Lk 23:43].

Sermons et instructions paroissiales - La miséricorde de Dieu, avril 1840, PG 157,10 (X,170)
- Sermons and parochial instructions - The mercy of God, April 1840.

God is merciful

1° God assures us that he is infinitely merciful

He assures us of this through Moses: Dieu miséricordieux [Ex 34:6].

Through David:

– Mercy is present in all that he does, and it motivates them [Ps 144:9].

– It fills the entire world [Ps 118:64].

– It is the link of his relationships with men [cf. Ps 24:10].

Heaven is its dwelling place [Ps 35:6]. It is higher than the heavens [Ps 107:5], the first of the divine attributes, above his justice [Jas 2:13], and it extinguishes the lightning in his hands [cf. Hb 3:2].

But, let us allow the Lord to speak.

Universal mercy. *On whom shall I cast my eyes?* [Is 66:2]. The number and gravity of our sins might frighten us. Even if they are red, [they will become white as snow] [Is 1:18]. The number of sins can be counted but ... [the mercy of God is infinite.] But I have relapsed so often. *I do not want the death of the sinner* [Ez 33:11]. His love is eternal: *With an eternal love* [Jr 31:3]. He spurs his guilty people: *Come, let us set things right* [Is 1:18]. He suffers in waiting for their return.

Gentle mercy: *The Lord is gentle* [Ps 33:9]; it is the mercy of a father. The goodness of a tender father. More than that, the tenderness of the God of all goodness: *No one is as paternal, no one is as benevolent* [Tertullian].

Mercy makes him glorious: *He is expectant* [Is 30:18]. Ah! sinner, come...; dying, be hopeful [?]: *Your mercy is preferable [to all life]* [Ps 62:4].

Prompt mercy: *Your tears will finally stop; he will certainly give you mercy; when you cry out to him, he will hardly have heard your voice when he will answer you* [Is 30:19].

But you want some concrete proofs:

Adam and Eve [cf. Gn 2-3]. Sodom and Gomorrah [cf. Gn 18:32]. The Deluge [cf. Gn 6:8; Gn 7:6]. Ninivites [cf. Jon 4:10-11].

The Jews: *They invoked the Lord and he answered them* [Ps 98:6].

Ex 6:5: *I heard the groaning of the children of Israel.*

Ps 11:6: *I will rise up now, says the Lord, [because] of the groaning of the poor.*

Ps. 9: *The Lord has granted the desire of the poor; your ear, O my God, has heard the preparation of their heart* [Ps 10:17].

Ps. 10: *His eyes are always on the poor* [Ps 10:5].

Sermons et instructions paroissiales - Notes de prédication: La miséricorde de Dieu, PG 159,2 (X,176) - Sermons and parochial instructions - Preaching notes: The mercy of God.

God is merciful. Moses, Ex. 44: *God is full of compassion and clemency, patient and rich in mercy* [Ex 34:6]. David: *The Lord is clement and merciful; he is patient and full of mercy. His mercy extends over all his works* [Ps 144:8-9]. *Lord, the earth is full of your mercy* [Ps 118:64]. This is the whole purpose of his relations with humankind: *All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth* [Ps 24:10]. Heaven is the throne of his mercy: *Lord, your mercy is in the heavens* [Ps 35:6]. It is higher than the heavens: *Your mercy is higher than the heavens* [Ps 107:5]. At the head of his divine attributes, *mercy laughs at judgment* [Jc 2:13], it puts a stop to his anger: *When you will be angry, you will remember your mercy* [Ha 3:2].

But let us allow the Lord himself to speak. He complains at the misfortune of the Israelites, that they remain in the oppression of their sins. *Come and present your case to me, says the Lord; when your sins are like scarlet, they shall become as white as snow; and when they are crimson red, they will become white as wool* [Is 1:18].

O no, I do not want the death of the impious (Ezekiel 33): *I do not want the death of the sinner, but that the sinner be converted, that he stops his evil life, and live* [Ez 33:11]. Jeremiah 37: *I have loved you with an eternal love, that is why I attracted you to myself in my compassion* [Jr 31:3]. He is a Father: *As a father has a compassion full of tenderness for his children, so the Lord is touched with compassion for those who fear him* [Ps 102:13]. What a touching picture of a good father.

He is a mother. Isaiah 48:14: *Zion said: "The Lord has abandoned me, the Lord has forgotten me." Can a mother forget her child, and be without compassion for the child that she carried in her womb? But even if she would forget, I will never forget you. I carry you engraved on my hand* [Is 49:14-16]. (This is a touching picture of the goodness of a mother.) Tertullian: *No one is as paternal, no one is as benevolent.*

But God suffers when he cannot show mercy quickly. Jeremiah 31: Ephraim is guilty: *My heart stirs for him, I must show him mercy, says the Lord* [Jr 31:20]. *The Lord is waiting to show you his mercy; and he will express his glory in pardoning you* [Is 30:18].

It seems that his glory has need of it:

– Their sin can be counted, but the mercy of God is infinite.

– *Your mercy is preferable to all kinds of life* (a beautiful thought) [Ps 62:4].

Ps. 108: *Your mercy is full of tenderness* [Ps 108:21]. It is the mercy of a father, of a mother. So often [?]: *his love is eternal* [Ps 135:1-26 etc.]. Is 66:2: *On whom shall I cast my eyes, if not on the poor man whose heart is broken and humiliated.*

Those are the names and commitments of God. See how he has shown his mercy to his people.

Sermons et instructions paroissiales - Notes de prédication: La miséricorde de Dieu, PG 160,2 (X,180) - Sermons and parochial instructions - Preaching notes : The mercy of God.

Mercy of God

God has pardoned me, but with such great love that I would always weep for gratitude.

1° God has pardoned me immediately and unconditionally when he saw me at his feet; he left me, like the prodigal son, confused about telling him my faults; this good Father had more gladness to pardon me than being patient in leaving me to ask him for forgiveness. He bestowed on me the grace of Magdalene: scarcely is she at his feet than Jesus pardons her and takes her under his protection [cf. Lk 7:36-50].

Oh! How God has been good towards me! He did not make me wait to be pardoned, like awaiting his kindness. He did not place any condition on his grace, except that of loving him and no longer sinning, as to Peter [cf. Jn 21:15-17].

And yet what a huge debt I owed to his justice! What a wide and deep wound my ingratitude had to be repaid to his heart!

Oh! Indeed, if God has pardoned me so divinely and generously, I ought not to excuse myself for having been able to offend such a good Father! And like St Peter, I want to weep for love for having caused my good Jesus to cry because of pain and sadness [cf. Mt 26:75].

2° God forgave me so kindly and treated me with much honour. Is it possible that God's goodness could forget at this point my faults and ingratitude insofar as he treats me now and always as if I had never offended him – like those pure souls who have kept their garment of innocence, like those brides of his heart who have lived only because of him and for him!

Jesus relates me to the whole of his court. He associates me with the apostolate of his Church, with the zeal of his friends, with the virtue of his virgins, with the love of his saints – although I am unworthy of being the servant of the lowliest of his servants; although I would be too glad to have the place of the publican at the back of the temple, or of the Canaanite woman content to live from the crumbs left by the children.

Yet despite my present unworthiness and past guilt, I have the joy of being admitted to the grace of devotion, to prayer, this nourishment of chosen souls, to the tranquil and solitary life of Nazareth – and above all to Holy Communion, to everything that is good there, holy, great, divine on earth.

Oh my God! But you are mistaken, you are forgetting thus what I have been and what I still am. Ah! I see here the strength of love, you want to win my heart; by dint of gifts, you want to draw forth the gift of my heart! Alas! I should be ashamed of myself, seeing that I am so miserable as not to be aware even of the cost of your gifts, the excellence of your love.

Oh my God! Put the finishing touch to your graces, forgive me for loving you so little, allow me to weep over my ingratitude towards you! I would die of shame for having thus treated my father, my mother, a friend! But, it is none other than you, O good Jesus, towards whom I am ungrateful. No, no, I will act like Magdalene at your feet, at Calvary, in the desert. Just tell me that you are satisfied with my love.

Retraite eucharistique, 1858-1859; 2^e jour, 3^e méditation: Miséricorde de Dieu, PD 19,9 (XIII,687) - Eucharistic Retreat, 1858-1859; 2nd day, 3rd meditation : Mercy of God.

The love of forgiveness

God loves us personally since he has loved us from the moment he created us. Yet there is a greater proof of love than creation: redemption, which is the power to be forgiven by God. And it is the goodness of God that forgives us. His love. How has God loved us? This is insofar as he has forgiven me and wants to forgive me. St Paul can truly say that God has loved him [cf. Gal 2:20], he who has been forgiven so much. And St Augustine could draw from God's mercy his ardent love for God. God is good, he loves me, he forgives me.

God's love is more merciful than benevolent because we need it more. The mercy is infinite in its application upon earth. The other attributes are limited. *Mercy triumphs over judgment* [Jas 2:13], *above the heavens* [Ps 107:5]. Only, mercy has to reign in this world. It is the environment of sinners, in such a manner that it halts justice and the other attributes, because after every sin justice should be exercised. Mercy delays justice until after death. Ah! It is without limit, accompanying us without end, following us even after death to purgatory, and even purgatory is only the last endeavour of God's mercy. *Through God's mercy*, this is written over purgatory. We shall never exhaust it, nor stifle it. We do not despair of it. *Father, forgive them* [Lk 23:34]. Always and in all circumstances, it forgives the greatest crimes, Calvary, Judas – *It is by a kiss that you betray the Son of Man* [Lk 22:48]. Thus, never will our sins be as great as God's mercy. There is only one sin that is unpardonable, supernatural pride that rejects God's goodness and brings about self destruction.

The Scriptures are full of God's mercy, and this is because after every fall we despair. Always the second effect of sin is despair. Adam and Eve despair of having been unfaithful. Cain: *My sin is too great* [Gn 4:13]. And most sinners who are not converted are held back by despair. And on the day when they weep they will be converted. And why do acts of piety fail? Decline? It is because of despair, discouragement at having been somewhat unfaithful. The devil's secret is to enter by insinuating lack of trust. May this feeling never take hold of you. You would doubt God's mercy! No, no. When you fall, rise up by trust. And humility that remains in the mud is nothing other than humiliation. Humility flies towards God on wings of trust. *The prayer of the humble penetrates the clouds* [Sir 35:21].

The more virtuous or pious you are, the more you will be tempted to discouragement. A person always relies on himself. He is afraid of casting himself into the arms of God. You have made acts of faith in God's mercy; instead of seeking to avoid hell by a good act of contrition, make an act of faith in God's mercy. You grasp God's weakness, his bowels, his heart. Do not reach for his grandeur. When a person's sensitive side is touch he gives his wallet. Even more, God must be made to exercise his mercy. His glory delivers us from the devil. So reach God through his heart.

I used to think that in approaching God a soul no longer ended up being tempted to despair. And St Liguori says that the four temptations of saints are against faith, despair, chastity, the confessor. And these storms are horrible in testing their virtue to the highest degree of confidence.

The prophet says: *Better than life is the love of the Lord* [Ps 62:4]. At the end of life all virtues accuse, sins grow. A person only sees his actions as defects. I have seen the holiest person in despair for not having loved enough. We are afraid of the graces that we did not avail ourselves of. The only way to raise him up was to accept this state of affairs and to tell him: "Go to hell, but come with me, you who are my God." This heals him.

As regards temptations of pride, chastity, speak about them; but especially those against trust in God. Speak about them to the Superior, do not keep them to yourself even for a second. This attacks the sources of the spiritual and even bodily life.

God does not forgive like people do. They forgive, but are ashamed. One despairs rather than asks for forgiveness. The good God always forgives with so much goodness and grace. And in forgiving, people become more severe. God is better to the extent that he forgives more. Great sinners are his great friends. He came for the sick. For one sinner he left the angels! So, [we are] always sure of being accepted, provided there is humility and trust.

And God forgives without return, he casts the sins into the sea, he makes scarlet white. And as regards judgment, which will not be known any more, you go forward according to this principle that what God has forgiven is truly forgiven. *I will not remember any more* [Heb 10:17]. Whatever penitence has washed is clean forever. Only, obtain true forgiveness, do not consider the queues.

In the world you are made to pay for forgiveness. You are made ashamed. The good God restores to you even the honour, even the grace as you had before. Look at St Peter. – One is tempted to feel ashamed, ashamed indeed, and yet God would not wish to humiliate us. He only wants to forgive and restore everything. He restored Peter as head of the Church; one becomes greater through forgiveness.

The Magdalene was ennobled: *she had greatly loved* [Lk 7:47]. And he made a sinner into a prince of his mercy and his love.

The adulteress – *I no more condemn you, go and sin no more* [Jn 8:11]. And we would despair! Our Lord needs to forgive. His heart weeps and expands through mercy. And if Our Lord could suffer, this would be in seeing that we do not seek to be forgiven. If after every sin we were graded, there would not be any more priests on earth to forgive. Our Lord is better for us because we need forgiveness more than others. And what makes priests merciful is that they are also sinners in need of forgiveness.

Retraite aux Frères de Saint-Vincent de Paul, 4-9 mai 1868; 3^e jour, 3^e instruction: L'amour du pardon, PA 10,12 (XIII,228) - Retreat to the Brothers of St Vincent de Paul, 4-9 May 1868; 3rd day, 3rd instruction: The love of forgiveness.

II – JESUS CHRIST, THE MERCIFUL ONE

Jesus Christ, the merciful one

Have pity on me, according to your great mercy [Ps 50:3]

The object of his mission: sinners. And he came with great love to work out this mission of salvation! How did he fulfill his mission? In a divine way.

He declares it in a positive way: *I have not come to call [the just, but sinners]* [Lk 5:32].

He declares himself the friend of sinners: he distinguishes them from the others to the point of exciting jealousy. He goes to stay with them: Zachaeus [cf. Lk 19:5], Magdalene [cf. Lk 7:38]. He chooses them to be his disciples: Matthew, the publican [cf. Mt 9:9].

He calls them all to himself: *Come to me all of you who are weary* [Mt 11:28] and they all come.

He takes the initiative, reaching out to them. He will wait for the Samaritan woman [cf. Jn 4:6], and for a long time; he reaches out to Judas [cf. Mt 26:50], to St Peter [cf. Lk 22:61; Jn 21:15].

He goes and gets them: Matthew, he will tell him: *Come, follow me* [cf. Mt 9:9], the Apostles: *Come after me* [Mt 4:19].

He goes searching for them like a good Shepherd goes searching for the lost and rebellious sheep [cf. Lk 15:4].

How does he receive them? With goodness, like the father of the prodigal son [cf. Lk 15:20], personally: Magdalene [cf. Lk 7:48-50].

What penance [?] does he impose on them? On the adulterous woman: *Go, and sin no more* [cf. Jn 8:11]; to the paralytic for his fault: *Take up your mat and walk* [Jn 5:8]. To the sinful woman: *Go, your faith has saved you* [cf. Mt 9:22].

What does he give them? Immediately. He adds earlier privileges; besides a great feast [cf. Lk 15:22-24]; there is great rejoicing in heaven [?] [cf. Lk 15:7]. On the same day for the thief: Paradise: *Today you will be with me in Paradise* [Lk 23:43]. A surprise: he even pardons those who are not asking for pardon, who insult and blaspheme him: *Father, forgive them* [Lk 23:34]. Later, the remembrance of his goodness to pardon them will touch them, they will ask grace, given to them in advance [?]. *Truly, this was the son of God; and they returned home striking their breast* [cf. Mt 27:54; Lk 23:48].

He offers Judas his pardon, but Judas refuses it. That was the greatest suffering [unreadable] of Jesus Christ: *My friend, why have you come here?* [Mt 26:50]

If we have sinned: *Let us go to the throne of mercy* [cf. He 4:16], *We have a kind of advocate with the Father* [1Jn 2:1], who will forgive 77 times 7 times [cf. Mt 18:22].

Sermons et instructions paroissiales - Notes de prédication : Jésus-Christ miséricordieux, PG 162 (X,183) - Sermons and parochial instructions - Preaching notes: Jesus Christ, the merciful one.

Jesus shows his mercy

II. How he exercises his mission of mercy

1. Honourable forgiveness.

Jesus Christ respects whoever humbles himself at his feet. Zachaeus: he goes to stay at his house [cf. Lk 19:1-10]. Magdalene: He defends her, praises her love, will honour her with his friendship [cf. Lk 7:36-50]. The adulteress: does he humiliate her? No [cf. Jn 8:1-11].

Matthew the publican: Apostle [cf. Mt 9:9]. (A parallel could be established with forgiveness of the world.)

2. Prompt forgiveness.

No sooner [that he has said] *I have sinned*; to the paralytic: *Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven* [Mt 9:2]; to the Magdalene: *[her many sins] are forgiven her* [Lk 7:47]; to the good thief [cf. Lk 23:39-42].

3. Absolute forgiveness.

He forgives unconditionally, forever, never with blame; after the return, there will no longer be anything said.

4. Generous forgiveness

He bestows all his favours in advance as if he had not been offended, thus to Peter, head of the Church, he places him at the head of the apostles [cf. Mt 16:18], showing him the greatest signs of friendship; he appeared [to] Simon [cf. Lk 24:34]; similarly to Magdalene, he also appeared first to her after [?] his resurrection [cf. Jn 20:14]. To St Paul.

Precious forgiveness.

He offers forgiveness to those who have not asked him, to his executioners: *they know not what they are doing* [Lk 23:34], he wants to prevent their despair and convert them to remember his mercy. To Judas, who wants nothing of this. Ever generous forgiveness is what he always offers. The tribunal of mercy is ever available; he always welcomes with the same kindness, forgives with the same tenderness.

Sujets de retraite religieuse: Comment Jésus exerce sa mission de miséricorde, PA 1,62 (XIII,150) - Topics of a religious retreat: Jesus exercises his mission of mercy.

The words of Jesus on the cross

There are other ways to sympathize with the sufferings of our Lord and to intercede with him for sinners. One that I like very much is to use the words of our Lord on the Cross, making reparation to God the father, and to Jesus Christ by means of his own merciful words.

The first word: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do* [Lk 23:34]. They do not recognize you in the Blessed Sacrament, for they are blind. As our Lord prayed for the executioners, the gravity of their sins is diminished. We must ask mercy, using these words for each one: My God, grant pardon for these sinful priests; they are our leaders, your members, your crown. We must give him reasons; although he knows them already, he wants us to express them. We must then reason out, argue, quarrel, and beg for mercy. There are so many people who do not know you; they do not realize that you died for them. Admittedly there are some who do know, but let your goodness then be greater than their wickedness, your grace stronger than their temptations; pardon them. After that, you can speak to Jesus Christ: If they knew your goodness and mercy, perhaps they would surrender; if only they experienced the joy of loving you.

Then, repeat it again, since love always repeats itself. Always with the same goal, one repeats the same prayer, even if it seems to be always the same, that's the right thing to do. One must employ one's imagination, seeing our Lord on Calvary, admiring his goodness, addressing him with his own words. The imagination, the heart, the body, the will – everything is focused on him without distractions.

Retraites et instructions aux Servantes du Saint-Sacrement - La réparation. Les paroles de Notre Seigneur sur la croix, PS 172,4 (XV,352) - Instructions to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament - Reparation. The words of Our Lord on the cross.

The Spirit of love

Jesus is divine humanized love, made visible and sensible.

1° The love of Jesus is full of sweetness and mercy: *Behold your king, coming to you in modesty* [Mt 21:5]. *Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart* [Mt 11:29].

O how gentle and patient this love of Jesus has been towards me! Even when I was offending him! When I did not love him! How compassionate and charitable he was when I was miserable through my own fault by moving away from him! How paternal and even honorable was my forgiveness!

That's what I must do for others; I will simply return what Jesus gave me first of all, and what he asks me to do as an expression of gratitude.

2° The love of Jesus is generous, he gives me everything he has: his truth, his grace, his glory, his life, and his death. He gives me everything he is in the most Blessed Sacrament of the altar; he holds back nothing.

What love! Who can love in this way? Who can love me as Jesus has loved me? And what will I do for him? I will give him everything I have, I will give him my very self, *My beloved is mine, and I am his* [Ct 2:16].

3° The love of Jesus is as strong as death [cf. Ct 8:6]. To prove this to me, he accepted to suffer hunger, thirst, poverty, contempt, and humiliation. He was willing to suffer pain, to give me all his blood, to die on a cross in the midst of pain, abandonment, contempt, and curse from all his people. That was the principle of his love: *He loved me, and gave himself up for me* [Ga 2:20].

I must then also suffer for the love of Jesus, if I want to prove that my love is true and disinterested. Therefore I must embrace the cross of Jesus, I must crucify myself there, and be willing to be crucified there by God and by men, and die there for his love.

Who can separate me from the love of Christ? But in this we are the main victors through him who has loved us [Rm 8:35.37].

Retraite de vocation eucharistique, 12^e méditation: Esprit d'amour de Jésus, PR 150,9 (XIV,479) - Eucharistic Vocation Retreat, 12th meditation: the Spirit of love of Jesus.

III – EUCHARIST AND MERCY

Letter to Antoinette de Grandville

Now about you, dear daughter. If I were at Nantes, or if you were here, I would scold you often, even daily. It isn't wise for you to think of giving up daily Communion. That's all you need! Where would you find your food? your center? your grace? even your virtue? Please, a very bad idea! You're becoming feverish again. Worry is taking over and your good confessor should chase you out of the confessional to receive you there only once a week.

Dear daughter, you must absolutely correct that servile fear [that resides] in your conscience. There may also be a physical cause, and then you let the cloud of past worries enter in.

Trust me. Never examine whether you should receive Communion or not, in between your ordinary confessions. Consider Holy Communion as a merciful invitation from our good Master. You shouldn't leave an empty place at Jesus' table.

Lettre à Antoinette de Grandville, 20 mars 1861, Paris, CO 1022 (III,461).

The triumph of the Eucharist

Mary had followed that conflict before the Last Supper, she had witnessed Jesus' love grapple with all those sacrifices, she shared them, she longed for them to be overcome.

Oh! How blessed Mary was! When before the Last Supper, Jesus told her that hour of triumph of his love had come, that he was going to institute his adorable Sacrament through which he would survive, would continue on earth, and that through the Eucharist every believer would share the happiness of his holy mother, would somehow see his Saviour, and in his sacramental state would enjoy all the graces and all the virtues of the mysteries of his mortal life; that after the divine Eucharist, God could bestow nothing more except heaven; that the Eucharist would be the heaven of love.

On hearing this joy-bringing announcement of Jesus, Mary prostrated herself at his feet, adored him and thanked him for so much love towards humankind and his unworthy servant; she offered herself to serve him in his adorable Sacrament, agreeing to delay the hour of heaven in order to remain an adorer on earth, keeping it, loving it, then dying in front of his divine Tabernacle.

[To appreciate the gift of the Eucharist, an adorer must go with Mary to its source, to the sacrifices of love, in order to recognize the rights of his heart and to make it the rule and end of his life. If love is beautiful at Calvary, it is even more beautiful in the Cenacle. It is always sacrificial love,

Oh! How hard the human heart is if it is not softened at the sight of this adorable host; how criminal it is if it is not grateful! Oh! Indeed, there must be a hell particularly for anyone who despises the God of the Eucharist. Alas! Jesus still calls such a person, like Judas, his friend [cf. Mt 26:50]. He even asks for grace for him. He has consecrated for him his love of mercy, his heart is even open to welcome him. Oh! God my Saviour! Your love will not thus be stopped except at the gate of hell.]

4° [Eucharistic contemplation a fruit of love; fire enkindles fire.]

To appreciate the gift of the adorable Eucharist, an adorer must meditate often of its sacrifices. Viewing the struggle of love and its victory will tell an adorer about the gratitude due to a God so good.

An adorer will praise, bless, exalt his greatness, goodness, triumph of the love that instituted the most holy Eucharist as the perpetual living memorial of his love, as the gift ever being renewed by him; and then, with Mary his divine mother he will offer himself with his whole heart to Jesus to adore him, love him and serve him in return for so much love. He will consecrate himself to Jesus-Hostia to honour him in his sacramental states, through the virtues that he continues there and glorifies in an admirable way; he will honour this most profound humility that goes unto the annihilation of himself, this abnegation of his freedom, his glory in order to be the prisoner of love for humankind, this obedience that makes him the servant of all to draw all to the tabernacle of his love.

He will honour also Mary as the Queen of the Cenacle and mother of adorers, a title that is most dear to his heart and most glorifies Jesus.

L'Agrégation du Saint-Sacrement - Directoire: Marie au Cénacle, RA 25,5 (VIII,526) - The Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament - Directory: Mary in the Cenacle.

Communion

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, you will not have life in you (6) [Jn 6:53].

Holy Communion is the great means of holiness that Jesus Christ gives us in his love. It is necessary for weak souls to sustain them, for souls of those who are holy in order to advance and persevere.

1. Communion necessary for weak and imperfect souls

It is a temptation and a mistake to be overcome in the Christian world: communion only for the righteous [and] perfect. And the exaggerated morality of the enemies of trust and charity, that is, of the Jansenists, has left a mark of fear. The devil increases this, because, as the *Imitation* states: *and he keeps away from it by every means possible* [Imit. of Christ IV, 10:2]. Listen to the Church's teaching. A Christian who is being converted needs communion. Communion is the powerful and effective medicine of the soul's three illnesses.

1st [illness]

It purifies from venial sin, destroys the sufferings from mortal sin, of moral sin accidentally.

The holy Council of Trent: *[The Eucharist is like] an antidote that frees us from daily faults and preserves us from mortal [sins]* [sess. 13, c.2]. *The Eucharist is a fire that consumes*, consumes all the rust of our imperfections and our daily faults.

[...]

St Bonaventure: *[You can go forward] even with lukewarmness [but ever trusting in God's mercy]*. 2. Hugues.

Retraite de Saint-Chamond, 18 février-26 mars 1856: Femmes - Rameaux, Communion, PD 14,22 (XIII,650) - Retreat at Saint-Chamond, 18 February-26 March 1856: Women - Palm Sunday, Communion.

IV – MARY, MOTHER OF MERCY

Mary, mother of mercy

How does Mary exercise on earth her role of mother, and in heaven – How the title of mother of mercy fits her, and what sentiments she experiences when we invoke her under this title.

1° Jesus Christ had not yet taken his last breath on the cross when Mary began to fulfill her functions as the tender mother of the Church, solemnly entrusted to her as a daughter. See Cornelius. C.

2° Mary, in order to conform herself to the mind of Jesus Christ, does not forget, from heaven, the faithful who compose the Church and for whom on earth she had such concern of tenderness and love. For Jesus Christ did not set her as mother only for time, but also for eternity. See C.

In heaven, she does for us in relation to Jesus Christ, what Jesus Christ does for us with his Father. See C. – Raymond.

And what is so surprising, since she is mother, and that word explains everything, and as Isaiah says, *Can a woman forget her little child, is she without pity for the son of her womb? Even if she might forget, I will never forget you* [Is 49:15]. *Mary, mother of mothers. – I am the mother of beautiful love, and of holy hope* [Si 24:24 Vulg.; Si 24:18].

And the reason for this is, according to the devout Gilbert, that Mary is not a mother like other mothers, she is the mother par excellence. She is a mother given to us by Jesus Christ precisely to love us, to console us, and to defend us – a mother who gives herself the sweet name of beautiful love and of holy hope, a mother who gives herself and finds glory, says one of the holy Fathers, in showing that she is only love and tenderness for us, whom she received and to whom she gave birth at the foot of the cross.

And that is why, whatever kind of life we are living, whatever the state of our heart, from the very moment that we are from the Church and in the Church, we are also her children and we are assured that her merciful heart is open, and her hand is always ready to assist us.

And isn't she trying to help us understand that she is always, yes always tender for us, whatever be our state, and that the Scriptures give her different names. Innocent III. *Maria Luna* – etc.

Sermons et instructions paroissiales - Conditions pour être enfants de Marie: Comment Marie exerce sur la terre sa charge de mère, et dans le ciel, PG 184,6 (X,293) - Sermons and parochial instructions - Conditions to be children of Mary: How does Mary exercise on earth her role of mother, and in heaven.

If she seems to have preference for some of her children, they are, of course, the most miserable and the most unfortunate, those in greatest despair, in other words, the greatest sinners, who attract her merciful eyes and to whom she reveals all her tenderness. In fact, she was set up as our mother at the very time when God himself was giving his greatest proof of his mercy for sinners, at the time that he was dying for them. She was then named to be our mother at the time of mercy, on the altar of mercy and forgiveness. And the Church praises and invokes her under this beautiful title: Mother of mercy.

This title of mercy (*miseriæ cor datum - The heart given to those in misery*) indicates its functions. And as Richard of Saint-Laurent says, if Mary did not consecrate all her concern and care to help the most miserable of her children, how could we give her the title of mother of mercy, since she would no longer be mother, nor merciful? She would not be a mother, because a mother does not become hardened against the miseries and weaknesses of her children, she does not turn away from them, but all the more does she show concern when they are in greater trouble and in greater need. She would not be merciful, because misery is the field in which mercy works most, manifests itself and triumphs, and where there is no misery, there is need for mercy, just as there is no need for clemency and pardon where there is no offence.

And what misery could we ever compare to that of a sinner mentioned in Sacred Scripture and called poor and miserable par excellence [cf. Ap 3:17]. Mary then cannot reject the sinner without renouncing her titles, without failing in her character and her dignity.

According to the mind of Richard, we cannot present ourselves to Mary and invoke her under the sweet title of mother, without her mind going back involuntarily to the time, place, goal, and person from whom she received it for the first time.

And what woman, upon hearing her child call her mother, does not feel her heart and her inner feelings move with tenderness? But for Mary, there is an attraction, a force, and a particular charm. The name reminds her of Calvary, the extreme charity of Jesus Christ for sinners. She remembers how her dying son, gathers on his lips – ready to take his last breath – all his remaining strength and, in a voice coming from the bottom of his heart, entrusts all the faithful to her as her children. These tender recollections turn over in her heart and revive the feelings of special tenderness and generous love that she felt at that time. She experiences feelings for us like for the children that she acquired at the mysterious moment of her suffering.

And when she sees us united around her, invoking her name with great devotion, “alas! she says to herself in a flood of emotion and mercy, here are my children. They are the children that my son and my Lord have me before dying on the cross. I recognize them as Christians, by the mark of Baptism, by the traces of divine blood with which they have been washed. Yes, that’s who they are, and I cannot refuse them that love and tenderness desired by Jesus when he gave them to me and that became of sign of glory for myself in accepting them”.

Sermons et instructions paroissiales - Conditions pour être enfants de Marie: Comment le titre de mère de miséricorde lui convient, PG 184,7 (X,293) - Sermons and parochial instructions - Conditions to be children of Mary: How the title of mother of mercy fits her.

V – MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

Letter to Jenny Guillot

Mademoiselle,

I received your letter so full of woes and I truly felt compassion for you, because I see that it crushed you and perhaps even made you sick, since you already were very weak. Courage! If harm was done, don't increase it. Bear it very humbly at the feet of our Lord and offer him your faults, just as the sick offer their sufferings.

Yes, I approve your trip to Chasselay. You needed it. Rest there a little while, and especially, get well soon from your indisposition and put your soul at peace right away by not going back over the past. Leave the past where it is, in God's mercy, and turn towards your good Father, saying to him: You see my weakness, love me again as your little girl. And he will give you back his choicest graces. I am praying to our good Mother to help you and give you her motherly hand and blessing.

And I give you mine wholeheartedly. Eymard

Lettre à Jenny Guillot, 3 octobre 1847, Lyon, CO 88 (II,137).

Letter to Marguerite Guillot

On leaving this world, my only regret would be if I had not served our good Master well, for being so lazy and so negligent. Then, I could see one thing clearly, that at such time strength lies totally in trusting in the mercy of God and surrendering to his divine goodness.

Oh! how ugly our virtues seem then and how shabby our good works!

Place yourself safely under the wings of divine mercy, of compassionate love, of tender charity, and your peace will grow with your trust. Oh yes! no doubt we must work, pray, perform every Christian work because God commands it and wants it. But that being done, we must do like a child returning to his parents after school; enjoy their goodness and love which is greater than anything he can accomplish.

Lettre à Marguerite Guillot, 14 mars 1866, Bruxelles, CO 1758 (IV,364).

Letter to Mme Chanuet, sister Camille

Dear Sr. Camille, surrender to his love for you; it is great and all merciful. Everything he has done through your lifetime, especially in recent years, certainly gives you the most consoling and constant proof of his love.

Good sister, struggle against the fears which are afflicting you, by holy surrender into the hands of the mercy of Jesus, your good Master.

You are his servant, you have given him everything, you are entirely his. He has accepted you into his service and has even crucified you with him. How would you not rest in his arms like a beloved child! You will go to heaven, good Sister Camille.

As for me, I only ask that you work a while longer. However, it is more perfect to say: “May your kingdom come, may your will be done!” [Mt 6:10]

Lettre à Mme Chanuet, 21 août 1867, Paris, CO 2006 (IV,555).

The goodness of God in the forgiveness of our sins

My sisters,

Today, I want to show you our trust in God under its most beautiful aspect, in its magnificent triumph... in the forgiveness of our sins. We should have trust without limit in the mercy of God, because it is infinite. We should abandon ourselves to this tender mercy in the forgiveness of our past and present sins. We will examine these two ideas.

1° We should have trust without limit in the mercy of God.

And why? Because God is good – goodness itself – that never gets tired. Oh! my dear sisters, God has to be good, in order to bear with us, and constantly forgive us; what am I saying? He even takes the initiative to invite us, to pressure us, to force us to go to ask his grace. We might even say that at the sight of the tenderness and initiatives of this good God for us, that he has some personal interest in forgiving us and that he could never be happy without doing it. Oh yes! What a good God we have, my sisters, and how ungrateful and terrible we are towards him ... Ah! if men realized the goodness of God, they would never despair, and hell would be only for the proud. The time in this life is the all-powerful reign of mercy, and that is why the prophets and the apostles are only the preachers of divine mercy.

All the divine attributes are dependent on this life of sovereign mercy. The power of God acts only in view of his mercy, the wisdom of God disposes its means, his immensity extends it everywhere, his holiness guides it, even his justice is subject to it, as the Prophet says [cf. Ez 33,14-16; Jas 2,13]. Oh! let us then exalt over all this loveable mercy: it is all our consolation and hope, and heaven will only be the eternal triumph of the mercy of God over us. One of the greatest joys that we will experience in heaven, we be to know the details of the merciful goodness of God for us. How happy we will be to sing with the prophet the eternal mercies of God! [Ps 88:2]

La confiance dans le pardon de Dieu, conférence du 11 septembre 1850, PT 159,1 (XI,390) - Confidence in the forgiveness of God, conference on 11 September 1850.

The forgiveness of our sins

We should abandon ourselves to the mercy of God in the forgiveness of our past and present sins.

The greatest suffering of a soul that has offended God, but who is now converted, is to remember its past sins and with the fear of not having been completely forgiven. I believe this is one of the greatest sufferings that one can experience; that we would find happy relief if Our Lord would tell us, as he did to Magdalene: “All your sins have been forgiven!” [Lk 7:48] Well! My sisters, this fear over our forgiveness can still be salvific for us; security might make us lazy and presumptuous, while this fear keeps us repentant and makes us continue to groan and shed tears.

Besides, the mysterious darkness over the assurance of our forgiveness, becomes for us a motive for greater trust in the mercy of God; then, we no longer rest on ourselves, on our feelings, on our own justice, but entirely on the goodness of God. It is in trust in His infinite mercy that we place our hope and our peace.

Yes, my sisters, it is only in this trust that you will bring calm to your troubled and agitated soul. Set aside then all those reasonings, all those examinations of the past, all those desires to start all over again, and do everything anew. You will only succeed in giving yourselves greater troubles... and that's all.

“But if I did not say everything properly, if it's my fault that I did not follow the necessary conditions for my forgiveness?” – But then I would ask you: “Are you sure of this?” – “I'm doubtful, and I have strong doubts.” – Listen, believe me, extend the mantle of the mercy of God over the quagmire of all your miseries, and hide them forever, for, if you keep digging into this mud, you will get dizzy and become suffocated. By acting in this way, you will have no doubts: if there was something defective, your trust in God's mercy is the surest and most effective means for you to obtain forgiveness.

Do not be surprised at the power of trust; it's because it is really only the exercise of the love of God, and when this trust is very great, we can call it an act of perfect love that can justify us on the spot.

Go ahead, experience this trust, my sisters, and God will tell you through peace in your heart: All your sins have been forgiven.

La confiance dans le pardon de Dieu, conférence du 11 septembre 1850, PT 159,2 (XI,391) - Confidence in the forgiveness of God, conference on 11 September 1850.

Let us meditate on the goodness of our Lord who pardons us.

We have often offended him, and the days of our life are less numerous than our sins. We can offend him by our thoughts, and even by our good actions. And if God were not infinitely good, we should come to despair, since we are so culpable. And what is worse is that we are not satisfied with offending him by ourselves, but we offend him through himself, through his graces, through his goodness, I mean: when we are proud of our priesthood, and our vocation. And these sins are doubly painful to him, because our malice is greater with our more abundant graces.

The cold indifference of a friend is more painful than the blow of an enemy. The pain is so great that most of those who, after having lived a good life, were touched and remain in despair, not because they love sin, but because they understand how great was their offense.

A sinful man needs to consider God only under the aspect of his mercy. If he considers God's other attributes, he feels crushed. But who can be afraid of looking at Jesus who is so merciful and so good?

On earth, sinners were not afraid to look at Jesus; a simple expression of regret was sufficient to be pardoned. But we are afraid, we are shamed by a saint because he is our condemnation, since we could have become like him. But we can look at Jesus because we sense that he has a healing power in him. Jesus is full of mercy. He is virtue in action. St. Paul had every reason to say: the goodness and humanity of God became visible in Jesus Christ [cf. Tit 3:4]. Mercy is behind his gaze, his thoughts, and all his actions, so that poor sinners might approach him. We fear a man who has an austere and severe appearance – we flee from him. Our Lord, as represented in the catacomb, is the divine Orpheus who charms with the strokes of his lyre the wild beasts who are held at his feet. Besides, our Lord used to say: “I have come for sinners” [Mt 9:13], to bring them back to the fold. And when the sons of Zebedee want to rain down thunder on a city that refused to receive them, Jesus reprimand

them severely [cf. Lk 9:53-55]. And when the Pharisees complain that to live with sinners and publican was a dishonor, he responds that he has not come for the just, but for sinners [Mt 9:13]. Such was his mission. If you remove mercy from the character of Jesus Christ, he no longer exists. In the institution of the Church and priesthood, he wants only mercy; and priests are not meant to give out certificates of justice, but to forgive and console the poor sinners.

Retraite de Paris: La miséricorde de Jésus, 10 août 1867, PR 106,1 (XIV,357) - Retreat of Paris: The mercy of Jesus, 10 August 1867.

And what goodness God shows when he receives us? Truly the mercy of God is too great. If he scolded us, if he imposed penances on us like the Church does, he would surely still be too good in pardoning us. But he has no reproaches, he doesn't speak to us of our ingratitude, nor of our cruelty. He veils his justice, in order to show us only his heart. He draws us to his heart like the father of the prodigal son, and he doesn't respond to our expressions of fear of being humiliated – he is waiting for just one thing: our admission of guilt! In the world, we know how to make beggars wait. Not for Jesus. He gives us hope, and renews us to life. And in the life of a sinner, the sweetest moment, the most moving is the moment of conversion. He finds greater joy at the moment of his pardon than at the moment of the following Communion. He emerges from his agony. No doubt, the admission was painful, but once expressed, there were only the joys of a mother who has brought a man into the world. God wants only one thing: that we kneel down and shed tears, and say: *Lord, I am not worthy* [Mt 8:8], and he forgets everything. Oh see how Jesus knew how to forgive! The adulterous woman is there. He doesn't reproach her, he confronts the accusers, and sends her way forgiven [cf. Jn 8:1-11]. And Magdalene: he doesn't speak to her of his sin; she has loved much, and he praises her for this! And the priest confessor, imitating his divine Master, has only one thing to say: *Go in peace* [Lk 7:50], you are pardoned absolutely!

God said: "If you return to me, I shall take your sins and throw them behind me." [cf. Is 38:17] He is not satisfied with forgetting them, he destroys them. They will not come back to life at the last judgment. God said: "I will throw them to the bottom of the sea!" [Mi 7:19] He will never remember them. Why would you like God to humble the just at the last judgment? He annihilates those sins! What a consolation! And God also said: "Even if they are scarlet red, I will make them white a snow." [Is 1:18]

Some have suggested that the forgiven sins will reappear at the judgment. That's not true. But [they argue] that will make the virtues acquired later, appear all the greater! Forget it! St. Paul said that the body of sin had been destroyed with the redemption [cf. Rm 6:6]. That's the glory of the mercy of God, to the point that, even if a converted sinner returned to his sins, he would be judged only on the sins committed after his conversion. God doesn't pardon and punish at the same time. But this sinner who returns [to his sin] is more ungrateful, and more culpable! And so, he will be punished according to the degree of his ingratitude, but not for the sins that were erased in the past!

What more could God do for sinners? We might even think that he is conniving with them. He hides them in his wounds, under his mantle; he removes them from his justice. Mothers hide their guilty children from human justice, especially if their lives were at stake, because, after all, they are mothers. So it is with Jesus! When he pardons us, we might say that he is spoiling us. He removes the memory of our sins. He should place in us a feeling of constant shedding of tears. But no! He even removes the sorrow of having offended him so much, to the point that the one who confessed in sorrow and tears, now finds himself so happy after absolution that he is completely astonished. Ah, in the world, the one who comes out of prison will always remain dishonored! But Jesus rehabilitates us, and treats us as

though we never even offended him; and oftentimes the greatest sinners become the greatest saints. St. Paul is one example; and he would often repeat with gratitude: *It is by the grace of God that I am what I am* [1Co 15:10]. And didn't St. Peter replace his three denials by a triple crown that composed his tiara? You can see that God knows how to pardon as God!

And did he not honor us with the priesthood, and the religious life? Doesn't he crown us with love and glory? He forgets our miseries, he even forgets that we are still offending him. He is full of mercy. Let those be damned who depend on that in order to offend him even more! Let's remember that the life of a Christian is a constant warfare. Place yourself in the mercy of God and not in your virtues; say with faith and truth: *If we have not been completely lost, it was because of the mercy of the Lord* [Lm 3:22].

Retraite de Paris: La miséricorde de Jésus, 10 août 1867, PR 106,3 (XIV,359) - Retreat of Paris: The mercy of Jesus, 10 August 1867.

An ocean of mercy

I have said that you should be happier than us men, since God gave you a more sensitive heart. We are more impressed by reason than by the heart and love. I know very well that every person is before God, and that grace perfects our dispositions. Still it seems to me that you should be totally permeated with the mercy of God, in tears before the mercy of God. I am cold, a sister might say. How strange, don't you have a heart? How do you react? If you consider our Lord on his throne, you will feel nothing, since his glory is so great. If you consider him on his throne, in his glory, he will be too lofty, confronting you. What then should you consider? See his mercy, his great kindness, having exhausted all his tenderness of the past. If you want to maintain a sensitive and deeply responsive heart, you must place yourself in that mercy of love at the present moment. How could you not feel something? Often, it's our own fault. We don't live in the present, and so we don't empathize. But if we place ourselves in the present, everything is different. Put yourself in the fire, and you will certainly feel it... unless you are already dead.

When our Lord fills you with a flood of grace and love, what should you do? My poor Daughters, once in heaven we will certainly bless him, but the more merciful he has been, the more we should be grateful. Our Lord loved us, lavished his mercy and love on us, when we did not even merit a glance from him, and not even a place in purgatory. We can understand him then and say, without any exaggeration, that our kindness will never compare with his. We can never, never give back as much as we have received. You can plunge into that ocean of mercy and compassionate love! Without expressing it in words, I understand why that mercy might begin reproaching us for being so insensitive, as he shows us his gifts, our miseries and hell, like on Calvary. But now, out of fear of hurting me, his mercy does not even mention anything to me, but encourages me. I can say that he loves me as much as the most privileged of souls. On the other hand, I can say, Lord, are you knocking at the wrong door? – No, my good Daughter. So what should we do? Like the spouse in the Cantic of Canticles, say: *My soul melted when I heard the voice of my Beloved* [cf. Sgs 5:6]. What for? For love.

Retraites et instructions aux Servantes du Saint-Sacrement, 17 septembre 1862, Paris, 3^e jour, 2^e méditation: La miséricorde d'amour, PS 443,5 (XVI,466) - Instructions to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, 17 September 1862, Paris, 3rd day, 2nd meditation: The mercy of love.

VI – MERCY AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

Charity consists in loving our neighbor out of love for God. Before Jesus Christ, we loved our neighbor as much as ourselves; but since Jesus Christ, we must love him, in some circumstances, even more than ourselves. We must place his spiritual welfare ahead of our temporal gain. Our Lord, who is worth more than us, did this for us. St. John says: *Love one another, as Jesus Christ has loved you* [cf. 1Jn 4:11].

Charity consists in seeing our neighbor in the gifts, in the love, and in the mercy of God, as his creature, to see him, to support him, to work for his salvation, to pardon him as Jesus Christ does, and to treat him as Jesus treats him. We must see the graces, while the defects, the bad qualities are not our concern: leave that to [God's] justice. What we must have is compassion – self-love is the enemy of charity for our neighbor. The love of charity is very easy when we serve God perfectly; with love, we look to the conversion of our neighbor because we love God. We see poor people enticed by the devil and dragged as innocent [lambs] to be slaughtered. We want to save them, not to obtain esteem, but because they are God's creatures – to please him, since he asks for this.

Retraites et instructions aux Servantes du Saint-Sacrement, 28 juillet 1859, Paris, 4^e jour, 1^e méditation: L'amour propre, PS 148,2 (XV,282) - Instructions to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, 28 July 1859, Paris, 4th day, 1st meditation: Self-love.

Let us live of the love and mercy of Our Lord

The prophet composed a song, the most beautiful of all the songs inspired by his heart, the song of God's mercy. More than fifty times in the psalm *Benedictus* he says: *Sing the mercy of God* [cf. Ps 135]. The prophet repeats God's titles, his grace, ending every verse with the words: *his love is everlasting*. My Sisters, the prophet David was right to bless that mercy, that ocean of mercy, and to praise him, because he had sinned against the Good Lord. Yet, in spite of his penance, he would never forget God's mercy. It is when we have offended God that we have great need of his mercy! The heart never forgives itself for having offended God, for having hurt him, and feels the need to say: How could I have offended you, since you are so good, so lovable. Then the heart experiences relief by returning thousands of times to repentance.

My Sisters, I don't want to scandalize you. Some saints became holy only by the homage of mercy. They became greater saints by diving into mercy than by purity, the perfect love of God, in a word, rather than by virginity. Why? Certainly there are saints in heaven who became purer and more saintly by appealing to God's mercy, than through other states. Is that state better? No, truly it is worth less, but they became less self-important, more humble and their love became greater at the sight of so much mercy. It is even possible to say that God allows certain chosen souls to fall, even if he could stop them. He lets them fall into great sins so that they may have a better understanding of his love and mercy. He sees that they will become greater saints after their sin.

For example, Saint Peter became a greater apostle after his sin than he was when still faithful. He was always crying, not because of contrition, but out of love. The more a soul exalts the power and mercy of God, the greater glory it gives to God. That's what St. Peter did. And St. Magdalene, good God! How she cried, but how she loved. Saint Paul, the great

persecutor of the Church, was more humble after his conversion. He had a better understanding of mercy and a greater love. What is love's food? If you are an angel, feed on God's majesty. If you are human and a sinner, feed on the love, the goodness, and the mercy of God towards us. Therefore, foster a love of homage and gratitude. Our spiritual condition determines our love.

Poor sinners returning to God never forget their sins. What makes them cry is not the grace of contrition, but clearly their love. As Saint Paul said: *I was a wretch and Jesus Christ forgave me, he saved me, loved me and came to me* [cf. 1Cor 15:8]. We are all in this condition. Who is the person who owes nothing to God's mercy? If you owe nothing you should enter right away into paradise. But all of us owe a great deal. What then should we do? Exalt our Lord in his mercy. Tell him, You were so good to me, such a great sinner! This idea doesn't make one unhappy; it centers not on sin, but on God's goodness. Then we become attached to him; if we cry, the heart expands in sweet tears of repentance and love. These are tears of joy.

Retraites et instructions aux Servantes du Saint-Sacrement, 7 novembre 1866, Nemours, 3^e jour, méditation du soir: Il faut vivre de l'amour et de la miséricorde de Notre Seigneur, PS 610,1 (XVII,429) - Instructions to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, 7 November 1866, Nemours, 3rd day, evening meditation: Let us live of the love and mercy of Our Lord.

Supernatural charity of the heart, of respect, affection and action

We must build our perfection on charity, for this is the Lord's commandment. He based all holiness on the love of God, and charity towards our neighbor as its expression. This is the greatest and first commandment: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself for the love of God* [cf. Mt 22:37-39]. Our Lord also told his apostles: *Keep my precept, my new commandment* – notice, he calls it his new commandment – *Love one another, as I have loved you* [cf. Jn 13:34]. This is the characteristic of charity. He does not say: You will be known as my disciples by your acts of penance, or by your poverty; only, if you love.

St. John says: *One who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen* [1Jn 4:20]. St. John kept repeating this famous expression to his disciples: Love one another. Tired of always hearing these words, they told him: Master, you're always repeating yourself. St. John replied: *If you do this, you will fulfill the law* [God's love will be brought to perfection in us.] [cf. 1 Jn 4:12]. Therefore, base your perfection on charity for your neighbor, which is the proof of your love for God. Our Lord gives charity the first place, as he himself says: *If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift* [cf. Mt 5:23-24). Notice that he does not say: After your sacrifice, go and be reconciled; rather, leave your sacrifice at the altar.

Charity is a necessity. God does not forgive hatred for others, since such a one remains in death and in sin. Our Lord again says in the Gospel: *Whoever uses abusive language will be condemned* [cf. Mt 5:22]. *The same measure that you use against others will be used against you* [cf. Mt 7:2]. If we want mercy for ourselves, we must show mercy [cf. Mt 5:7].

Our Lord told his apostles, Be patient with one another. He gives them two guidelines: *When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say: We are useless servants* [Lk 17:10]. Practice charity and fight against pride. See what our Lord says about himself: *Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart* [Mt 11:29]. Understand that these are the two principal virtues that he wants us to practice. The Blessed Virgin also gives us the example in her song of thanksgiving when she says: *My spirit finds joy in God my savior. The Lord has done great things for me, because he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness* [cf. Lk 1:47-49]. She does not say: Because he has looked at my virginity, but my lowliness, as though this quality were more important. The proof of humility is charity, which motivates all the virtues. We can always practice love of God and love of neighbor.

Build on charity but even more, live in charity which is the strongest foundation. Your vocation rests entirely on your charity for God, overflowing onto creatures. Since the Holy Eucharist is the sun of the love of God, you must be daughters of charity. Each plant produces its own flower and fruit. The flowers and fruits of the Eucharist are charity. The sap is the love of God. If you don't live in charity, you are strangers.

Retraites et instructions aux Servantes du Saint-Sacrement - Méditation, 3 novembre 1858, Paris: La charité surnaturelle de cœur, d'estime, d'affection, d'action, PS 90,1 (XV,164) - Instructions to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament - Meditation, 3 November 1858, Paris: Supernatural charity of the heart, of respect, affection and action.

Charity toward our neighbor

However let us see only the good in our neighbor, not what is wrong. Let us give him first place, for this is humility. What if he is a sinner? Of course, sin is despicable, but what is he as a human being? He is the image of God, his living image, the object of his patience, his kindness and his mercy. God loves him as a human being, calls him to conversion, to penance and, by that very act, calls him to celestial glory. Therefore I should love him. His sin is different. I should hate it, even as God hates it.

Retraites et instructions aux Servantes du Saint-Sacrement - Méditation, 9 juillet 1860, Paris: La charité envers le prochain, PS 222,1 (XV,492) - Instructions to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament - Meditation, 9 July 1860, Paris: Charity toward our neighbor.

CONCLUSION

The mercy of love

My dear Sisters, we spoke about the love that our Lord gives us; now let us see how he forgives us. We need his forgiveness more than his gifts; we have more guilt than virtue; we do more harm than good. My poor Daughters, we miss out on many graces! We render so many graces barely effective, if not sterile, by our own fault! What touches me more deeply about the love of God for us is his mercy; it touches me more than his gifts. When he gives, he is so good that he cannot help but give; and when he gives himself in Communion, I understand that our Lord, being so good, goes to the point of giving himself. What I cannot understand is his loving mercy.

Let me explain what I mean by the mercy of love. There is mercy of salvation, allowing us to pass from sin to the state of grace. I understand that very well. God is great when our Lord takes a sinner and converts him. But there is another mercy, the mercy that springs from love that I don't really understand. I don't understand that, serving our Lord – in the way we do, with so much stinginess, laziness, spiritual cowardice, selfishness – excuse me for saying so - that our Lord still has the same love for us, as if our love had continued to be fervent in his service. That's what I don't understand. This is contrary to all other loves.

Retraites et instructions aux Servantes du Saint-Sacrement, 17 septembre 1862, Paris, 3e jour, 2e méditation: La miséricorde d'amour, PS 443,1 (XVI,463) - Instructions to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, 17 September 1862, Paris, 3rd day, 2nd meditation: The mercy of love.

But his mercy did not stop there.

Like the father of the prodigal son, didn't he clothe me with the robe of my original dignity, didn't he return to me the ring of my divine nobility, didn't he return to me all my rights, all my goods, while introducing me into his house, admitting me to table of his festive love [cf. Lk 15,22-24]! And the angels celebrate my return with joy. Ah! how good God is! too good! Infinitely good! After all that, how could I ever despair over my pardon? Over my salvation?

Instructions aux maristes - La miséricorde de Dieu, PM 21,2 (XI,548) - Instructions to the Marists - The mercy of God

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AD USUM PRIVATUM

CONGREGATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

