San Juan de Ávila
Marian Preacher

A Thesis
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INTRODUCTION

All that is in her is gentleness not only for the just who walk in the light, but as a perfect and beautiful moon, full of mercy, who was born to be an advocate of good people; she shines for those who walk at night so that they may not become lost and may little by little come to the light of the sun.¹

San Juan de Ávila, who preached in Andalucía from 1526-1551, possessed a deep love for the Virgin Mary and expressed it beautifully in his fourteen Marian sermons known as the Book of the Virgin.² In these sermons, he not only saw the Virgin Mary as a companion, but as a spiritual mother, advocate, protector and guide and encouraged the people through his preaching to have a strong devotion to her. His ultimate goal was to help them know that their love

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¹ "Mas todo lo que en ella hay es blandura, no sólo para los justos que andan en lumbre, mas como luna perfeta y hermosa, llena de misericordia, que nació para ser abogada de buenos, luce a los que andan de noche para que no se pierdan y poco a poco vengan a la lumbre del sol." Luis Salabaldust y Francisco Martin Hernandez, eds. "Sermon 60: “El Alba es Maria, medianera entre la noche y el sol” from San Juan de Ávila: Obras Completas: Nueva Edición Critica, Volume Three: Sermones (BAC (72): Madrid, 2000), 809, ¶ 18. Future references to the Obras Completas will be noted as "OC" with the volume number and page number.

and devotion to the Mother of God would produce in them a deeper love and devotion to Jesus Christ.

This study of these Marian sermons will focus on his homiletic method and his theology in light of sixteenth-century preaching. His homiletic method will be examined through his writings as well as Luis de Granada's biography, in which Ávila is portrayed as the model of apostolic preaching. His message will be examined by means of his treatment of the Marian doctrines of the Divine Motherhood, Perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption. His Marian piety will also be studied.

A. THE COLLECTED WORKS OF SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA

Several publications of the complete works of San Juan de Ávila include 1) *Obras del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila, predicador en el Andalusia. Aora del nueva añadida la Vida del Autor, y las partes que ha de tener un predicador del Evangelio por el padre fray Luys de Granada de la Orden de Santo Domingo, y unas reglas de bien vivir del Autor...,* published in Spain in 1588 and 2) *Primera y Segunda partes de las Obras de Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila, predicador in Andalysia (1595); Tercera parte de las Obras del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila, predicador in Andalysia (1596),* published by Juan Díaz, a relative who had inherited his writings.

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3 Fray Luis de Granada, *Vida del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila y las partes que ha de tener un predicador del Evangelio,* (Edibesa: Madrid, 2000).
4 Sala-Balust, OC I, XLVII. This title is the actual sixteenth century title and spelling.
5 Sala-Balust, OC I, XLVII.
In the twentieth century, three editions of the *Obras Completas del Juan de Ávila* have been published in the years that corresponded to events celebrated in his honor. The first was compiled, edited and published in two volumes in 1952 by Luis Sala-Balust, in honor of Ávila being proclaimed the patron of the Spanish diocesan clergy by Pope Pius XII in 1946. A new critical edition of six volumes was begun by Luis Sala-Balust and completed by Francisco Martín Hernández for his canonization in 1970, and in 2000, the third edition was published to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of his birth (1999) as well as the Jubilee year (2000). The collection, completed in 2004, encompasses four volumes.

Ávila's writings included eighty-three sermons, sixteen conferences to priests, Jesuits, religious men and women, a *Tratado sobre el Sacerdocio*, his *Tratado del Amor de Dios*, a work on Christian Doctrine, and lectures on the First and Second Letters of John (1546) and on the Letter to the Galatians (1537), later written down in commentary form. He wrote two "Memorials" on the need to reform the clergy. The first work, entitled *Reformación del estado eclesiástico* was taken by don Pedro Guerrero, Archbishop of Granada, to the second session of the Council of Trent. His second, entitled *Causas y Remedios de las Herejías* (1561), was written for the Council's third session. Ávila's best known spiritual work, *Audi Filia*, composed for his "spiritual daughter" doña Sancha Cárrillo, was published in 1556 without his permission. It was later republished with his corrections in 1574. The largest collections of his writings are letters, 260 of

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6 The 1970 and 2000 editions of his *Obras Completas* were critical editions.
7 In 1927, as a way of encouraging efforts for his canonization, a collected works of Maestro Ávila were published, but it was not a critical edition. Cf. Sala-Balust, OC I, 345.
which are considered authentic. Ávila corresponded with all types of persons: bishops, Superior Generals of the Society of Jesus, including St. Ignatius himself, nobles, priests, religious brothers and sisters, married persons, young people and preachers. While Marian themes are scattered throughout his corpus of writings, this study will focus solely on his fourteen Marian sermons.

B. CURRENT SCHOLARLY STUDIES OF SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA

The study of the life and works of Ávila has increased in the last seven years. Manuel Ruiz Jurado, in his article, “Situación de los estudios avilistas y líneas de investigación,” pointed out that writings on Ávila increased in the years in which he was given special honors: in 1894, his beatification by Pope Leo XIII; in 1946, the declaration of his being named as the principal patron of the Spanish diocesan clergy; in May 1970, his canonization by Pope Paul VI; and the five-hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1999, when the Spanish bishops petitioned Rome to have him declared a doctor of the Church. As Manuel Ruiz Jurado says, “Each of these events, especially the beatification, canonization and the five-hundredth anniversary of his birth were occasions to stimulate the enthusiasm of scholars and editors to prepare new editions of his life, works, spirituality and teachings; during this period interest and devotion to him were renewed and initiatives were multiplied.”

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8 Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, (BAC, Madrid 1988), 164.
9 Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, 165.
The largest single collection of writings on avilist theology and thought was produced at a four-day International Congress in Madrid from November 27-30, 2000, sponsored by the Spanish Episcopal Council “Pro Doctorado de San Juan de Ávila.” It produced thirty-seven papers divided among three categories: his times, his theology and his pastoral care. The article by Jurado, cited above, was presented at this congress. A paper presented by Juan José Gallego Palomera entitled “El Ministerio de la Predicación de San Juan de Ávila,” will be helpful in this study’s treatment of Ávila’s theology of preaching. No article at the congress specifically addressed Ávila’s Mariology, nor his preaching on the Mother of God.

Other treatments of avilist theology are found in the writings of Fr. Juan Esquerda Bifet, Fr. Pedro Jesús LaSanta, and Andrés Molina Prieto. In 1961, Bifet published an article, “Síntesis mariológica de los escritos de Juan de Ávila,” which he updated in 2001, with an article, “La doctrina mariológica del Maestro San Juan de Ávila,” and also wrote sections on Mariology and avilist preaching in his *Introducción a la doctrina de San Juan de Ávila,* and in his *Diccionario de San Juan de Ávila.* Fr. Pedro Jesús LaSanta published an anthology of avilist writings entitled *Diccionario Teológico – Espiritualidad de San Juan of Ávila.* There is also a detailed treatment of his sermons on the Assumption.

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14 Juan Esquerda Bifet, *Introducción a la doctrina de San Juan de Ávila,* (BAC: Madrid, 2000).
15 Juan Esquerda Bifet, *Diccionario de San Juan de Ávila,* (Monte Carmelo: Burgos, 1999).
16 Pedro Jesús La Santa, *Diccionario Teológico-Espiritual de San Juan de Ávila,* (Edibesa: Madrid, 2000).
entitled “Los Tres Sermones Asuncionistas de San Juan de Ávila”\textsuperscript{17} by Andres Molina Prieto. Several books and articles on Ávila’s theology, published over the last seven years have aided in the understanding of both his Marian theology and his theology of preaching.

C. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study will consist of seven chapters. Chapter one will present the boundaries and limitations of this study as well as a background of Ávila’s complete works and the current state of avilist studies; Chapter two, a chronology of his life, education and mission; Chapter three, a brief introduction to the key theological principles underlying his Marian theology; Chapter four, a survey of the theology of preaching in the sixteenth century, as well as Ávila’s theology and style of preaching;\textsuperscript{18} and Chapter five, an overview of Ávila’s \textit{Book of the Virgin}. Chapter six will address the doctrinal content of his Marian preaching by examining his sermons in light of the dogmas of Mary’s Divine Motherhood, Perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception, Assumption, and an examination of the relationship between his preaching and the popular piety of the time and Chapter seven will present my conclusions on Ávila’s teachings on Mary as seen in his \textit{Book of the Virgin}.


\textsuperscript{18} The preaching overview comes from a summary of 16\textsuperscript{th} century preaching presented by Felix Olmedo SJ in the prologue of the book, \textit{Instrucción de Predicadores}, by Francisco Terrones del Caño, (España Calpe, SA: Madrid, 1960).
CHAPTER TWO
THE LIFE OF SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA

INTRODUCTION

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Spain underwent significant changes in politics, culture and religion. Politically, with the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, Spain became a united country.\textsuperscript{19} The Inquisition was begun under Ferdinand and Isabella's reign to root out heretical persons and teachings in 1478.\textsuperscript{20} The Catholic king and queen conquered the kingdom of Granada, bringing an end to the seven hundred years of Moorish rule in Andalucía,\textsuperscript{21} and expelled the Moors and the Jews from the country in 1492.\textsuperscript{22} Ferdinand and Isabella financially backed Christopher Columbus, whose voyage and discovery of the new world brought Spain immense wealth and colonial territories. Culturally, the Renaissance brought about a revival in all things

\textsuperscript{20} Elliot, p. 107
\textsuperscript{21} Elliot, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{22} Elliot, p. 109.
classical: the arts, literature, and philosophy,23 and Cardinal Cisneros established
the University of Alcalá in 1499 to promote studies in the humanities.24

Religiously, the Catholic Church in Spain suffered from serious corruption.
Many bishops were more interested in being secular nobles rather than
shepherds of their people.25 The priests and those seeking the priesthood were
uneducated and many "took the tonsure only to have the security of being free
from civil prosecution in case they committed a crime."26 The Catholic faithful
were largely ignorant of their faith, rarely confessed their sins and were
susceptible to persons who promoted superstitious beliefs.27 With the reforms of
the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Church in Spain underwent a renewal.

The political, cultural and religious currents of the time shaped the life and
priestly ministry of Juan de Ávila, and he, in turn, exercised a considerable role in
the renewal of the Church after the Council of Trent. He was recognized as a fiery
preacher, educator, founder of schools, model for both diocesan and religious
priests as well as spiritual adviser for bishops and members of the nobility. An
overview of his early life will throw some light on the character of this remarkable
man.

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23 The Spanish Renaissance was influenced by Italian Renaissance writers Lucio Marineo Siculo
and Pedro Martín. It also influenced by Erasmus to varying degrees. In 1529 Elio Antonio Nebrija
translated Erasmus Ciceronianus. Prominent Spanish Renaissance writers and thinkers included
Alonso de Madrigal (El Tostado), Juan de Sobrarias, Arias Barbosa (Portuguese), Miguel de
Cervantes, Diego de Siloe and Juan Bautista de Toledo. (Melquíades Andrés, La Teología
Española en el Siglo XVI, Tomo II, BAC: Madrid, pp. 42-62.).

24 Elliot, p. 105.

25 José Sánchez Herrero, “Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” taken from El Maestro
Ávila: Actas del Congreso Internacional, Madrid, noviembre 27-30, 2000 (Madrid: Conferencia
Episcopal Española 2000), 135.

26 “Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p. 136-137).

A. EARLY LIFE OF MAESTRO ÁVILA (1499-1526)

Juan de Ávila was born on January 6, 1499, in the town of Almodóvar del Campo (Cuidad Real) in the diocese of Toledo.\(^\text{28}\) His parents, Alonso de Ávila and Catalina Xixón were "the most honored and wealthy of this place, and what is more, they were God-fearers."\(^\text{29}\) His mother was from the noble class and his father was a "New Christian," who had a Jewish heritage.\(^\text{30}\) Since Ávila's family lived in Extremadura, far from the town of Ávila, "De Ávila" or "Davila" seems to be a surname rather than an indication of his place of birth. Alonso de Ávila provided for his family through the silver mine that he owned with a relative.

Little is known about Ávila's early life, but his life with his parents was described by Granada as "sincerely pious."\(^\text{31}\) In 1513, Alonso de Ávila sent his son to the University of Salamanca to study law. He left Salamanca in 1517, although it is not certain that he graduated.\(^\text{32}\) While Ávila was in Salamanca, he underwent a conversion experience. Granada wrote that "Our Lord gave him a very particular calling."\(^\text{33}\) A. Garcia Morales describes Ávila's conversion experience:

It was on an occasion when it was least expected, because finding

\(^{28}\) Duque, p. 23.
\(^{29}\) "Sus padres eran de los mas honrados y ricos de este lugar y lo que mas es, temerosos de Dios. . . " Luis de Granada, *Vida del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila y las partes que ha de tener un predicador del Evangelio*, (Madrid: Edibesa, 2000), 32.
\(^{30}\) There is some question as to Ávila's ancestral heritage. His mother was from the nobility and his father could have been from descendants who were New Christians. The biographies by de Granada and Muñoz do not mention his New Christian heritage. Also, all the testimonies from Ávila's process of beatification, including from his hometown of Almodóvar del Campo, refer to his parents as "old Christians without race or stain or descendants from the Moors, Jews, nor penitents from the Holy Office of the Inquisition . . ." (Proceso del beatificación del Maestro Juan de Ávila., p. 69). While Duque admits to the ambiguity of Ávila's heritage, (p. 25-27), he based his biography on the premise that Ávila has a New Christian heritage, and uses it to explain some of the difficulties Ávila encountered in the church.
\(^{31}\) De Granada, *Vida del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila*, p.32.
\(^{32}\) Duque, p. 28.
\(^{33}\) " . . .le hizo Nuestro Señor merced de llamarle con un muy particular llamamiento." De Granada *Vida del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila*, p. 32.
himself at the parties of the “bulls and beers” in that city, that the Lord vividly revealed to him the miseries of the world, and his forgetfulness of death and of the path to salvation. Ávila was so disgusted with how intoxicated he, along with the other students, had become with this reckless life as well as his great neglect of God and of his responsibility, that he left Salamanca with a different spirit than he had come with. He went home and spent a long time thinking about his base, vile life. He left there, determined to give up the study of law and attend only to the things of God in a solitary and holy life, serving Him alone. He came home, asking his parents to allow him to live in a more secluded part of the house, truly serving God.

Granada continued the story once Ávila had returned home:

... and so it was done, because the love they had for him was rare. He had a very small and poor cell in this part of the house where he began to do penance and live an austere life for about three years, wearing a hair shirt, sleeping on a board covered with vines and frequently fasting. He confessed often and began a devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament, spending many hours before the Holy Eucharist. The clergy and townspeople were very edified seeing this as well as the reverence with which he received communion.

Around 1520, a Franciscan friar came to Almodóvar del Campo and spoke with the young Ávila, suggesting to him that he consider a vocation to the priesthood and study at the University of Alcalá so that he could better serve the

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34 This phrase refers to the boisterous lives of college students at the time.
35 “… y fue en la ocasión de donde menos se esperaba, porque hallándose en unos fiestas de toros y cañas en aquella ciudad, le representó el Señor tan vivamente las miserias del mundo, el descuido de su muerte y el olvido del camino de su salvación que reprehendiéndose a sí de cuán embebido estaba en aquella vanidad con todos los demás, y gran descuido de Dios y de su cuenta, se salió dallas con otros espíritus de los que entró en ellas. Fuese a su casa, gastó grandes ratos en la consideración de las cosas del mundo de su bajeza y vileza. Salio tan dalla que se determinó de dejar el estudio de las leyes y atender sólo a los de Dios y en una vida recogidísima y santa servirle de veras. Dejó a Salamanca; vino a casa de sus padres, pidiéndoles le dejasen estar en un aposento a partado de la casa en vida más que solitaria y sirviendo de veras a Dios.” Sala-Balust, y Francisco Martín Hernández. *San Juan de Ávila: Obras Completas: Nueva Edición Crítica, Vol. One: Audi Filia, Platicas, Tratados,* (Madrid: BAC, 64, 2000), pp. 24-25.
36 “… y así se hizo, porque era extraño el amor que le tenían. En este aposento tenía una celda muy pequeña y muy pobre donde comenzó a hacer penitencia y vida muy áspera. Su cama era sobre unos sarmientos y la comida era de mucha penitencia, añadiendo a esto cílicio y disciplinas. Perseveró en este modo de vida casi tres años, Confesábase muy a menudo y su devoción comenzó por el Santísimo Sacramento, y así estaba muchas horas delante de él; y de ver esta y la reverencia con que comulgaba, fueron muy edificados así los clérigos como la gente del lugar.” De Granada, *Vida del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila,* p. 32.
church. Following the Franciscan's advice, Ávila began his studies in 1520 in philosophy and the arts. After studying scripture, the philosophy of St. Thomas, the Nominalists, and the writings of Erasmus, he passed his exams and earned the title of Bachiller in 1523. He then began his theological studies in 1524 at Alcalá but motivated by a desire to become a missionary in the "Indies," he left Alcalá in 1526 and was ordained in the same year. It is known that he celebrated his first mass in Almodóvar del Campo for his parents, who were already deceased. Granada points out that after his first mass, "in place of the banquets and parties that usually accompanied a first Mass . . . Ávila served a meal to twelve poor people and prayed with them."  

B. ANDALUCÍA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY  

Southern Spain, called Andalucía, has a rich and diverse history that goes back to Roman times. The territory is bordered to the north by the Sierra Moreno mountain range, east and south by the Mediterranean Sea, the southwest by the Atlantic Ocean and the west by Portugal. The region received its name during the Moorish occupation of Spain. Abd ar-Rahman, a prince from the Umayyad dynasty from Damascus won a military victory in Córdoba in May, 756 and

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38 Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, p. 35.
39 There is no doubt that Ávila had read the writings of Erasmus and that he had some point of agreement with him. Duque believed that Ávila was also critical of Erasmus, and was quick to ignore him when he went against traditional interpretations given by the Fathers of the church, especially in regard to scriptural exegesis, as Ávila noted in his commentary on Galatians. (OC II, pp. 36-37).
40 Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, p.35.
41 Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, p. 49.
42 "...en lugar de los banquetes y fiestas que en estos casos se suelen hacer. . .dio de comer a doce pobres y les sirvió a la mesa y visitó y hizo con ellos otras obras de piedad." De Granada, Vida del Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila, p. 33.
proclaimed himself emir of the independent emirate of al-Andalus. The largest cities in the land at that time were Seville, Córdoba, Jaén and Málaga.

Slowly, the Christian Reconquista defeated these Moorish cities, claiming them for the kingdom of New Castile. During the time of Ávila’s ministry, the total population of Andalucía was about 355,000 inhabitants. Herrero cites three central religious and cultural movements present in sixteenth-century Andalucía: “El savonarolismo,” “El erasmismo,” and “Los alumbrados.” The "savanarolans" were Dominican friars who dedicated themselves to prayer, study, preaching and who also manifested ecstatic behavior and pronounced prophecies and private revelations. Herrero cites Luis de Granada as being influenced by this movement. The “erasmists,” followers of Erasmus of Rotterdam made their

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44 Córdoba was conquered in 1236, Jaén in 1246, Seville in 1248, Málaga in 1487 and Granada in 1492. Encyclopedia Británica, “Spain,” p. 34.
45 “Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p. 108).
46 “Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p. 123).
presence strongly felt in Seville. Following the dictates of the *Enchiridion militis christiani*, they sought to “grow in the virtues of simplicity, meditation, humility, charity by turning toward the spirit of the Gospel and rejecting all that is opposed to it.”47 The “alumbrados” were seen as a group that aspire to holiness and practiced the evangelical counsels and mental prayer and dedicate themselves to the study of sacred scripture. They trust the Holy Spirit more than the hierarchy of the church. Some want to believe the origins of their practices were in Judaism. Women were very attracted to the practices of the alumbrados. Around 1529, the common definition of an alumbrado was a person who was more recollected in spirit than an ordinary person who abstained from speaking and engaging in vices and who was occupied with good works.48

While these movements were readily accepted in Seville by 1523, they were not so well accepted farther east into Andalucía, such as in Córdoba and Granada, where the movements were viewed with suspicion because the Moorish roots of the culture.49 Ávila faced these different currents when he began his preaching and teaching journey through Andalucía, from Seville to Córdoba to Granada and the many small towns around these cities.

C. ÁVILA’S MINISTRY IN SEVILLE AND IMPRISONMENT BY THE INQUISITION (1526-1534)

After his ordination to the priesthood, Ávila set out for Seville to prepare to go to the New World as a missionary. Seville was the destination and starting point for many travelers since the roads through the city led south to the port city

47 “Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p. 124).
48 “...que aspiran a la santidad y practican los consejos evangélicos, la oración mental y se dedican al estudio de la Sagrada Escritura. Son más carismáticos que jerárquicos. Algunos quieren ver sus orígenes en el judaísmo. ... El alumbradismo atrae de manera especial a las mujeres. Hacia 1529 el pueblo llamaba ‘alumbrados’ a cualquier persona que andaba más recogida que el común de la gente, que se abstenia de conversar y entretenese con viciosos y se ocupaba de buenas obras.” “Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p. 124-125).
49 “Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p. 162).
of Cádiz. In 1526, Seville, the largest city in western Andalucía, had a population around 60,000 people that consisted of nobles, merchants and artisans.\textsuperscript{50} Over half of the population was poor. Seville was a very cosmopolitan, diverse city, and its inhabitants possessed different moral, religious\textsuperscript{51} and cultural\textsuperscript{52} attitudes.

In Seville, Ávila met Fernando de Contreras, a noted preacher, a promoter of Eucharistic devotion, confessor and teacher.\textsuperscript{53} Contreras was moved by one of Ávila’s talks and by his devotion at Mass.\textsuperscript{54} When the two men met, Ávila shared with Contreras his desire to go to Cádiz and sail from there to the New World. Contreras, not concurring with this idea, went to don Alonso Manrique, Archbishop of Seville and convinced him that Ávila would do more good in Spain than in the New World.\textsuperscript{55} The Archbishop ordered Ávila to stay in Seville.\textsuperscript{56} Ávila’s education in humanism at the University of Alcalá proved useful for the new challenges he faced in Seville and the rest of Andalucía.

Ávila preached throughout Seville, ministered to the sick and taught catechism to the young. Some young men, attracted to his way of life and his preaching, became his students. He left Seville to begin preaching in the surrounding towns of Écija,\textsuperscript{57} Alcalá de Guadaira,\textsuperscript{58} and Lebrija.\textsuperscript{59} Fernández de Córdoba, who accompanied him on his travels, had a sister, doña Sanche Carillo who, at age fourteen, was to become an assistant to Empress Isabel, the wife of

\textsuperscript{50}“Andalucía, campo apostólico de Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p. 161).
\textsuperscript{51} This group would include Alumbrados, Jews, Moors and esoteric religions (pagans).
\textsuperscript{52} Eg. Followers of Erasmus
\textsuperscript{53}“En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 30).
\textsuperscript{54}“En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 31).
\textsuperscript{55}“En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 32).
\textsuperscript{56}“En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 32).
\textsuperscript{57}Northeast of Seville, 4 leagues from Córdoba
\textsuperscript{58}12 kilometers from Seville
\textsuperscript{59}South of Seville halfway to Cádiz
Charles V. In 1527, doña Sancha Carillo, after hearing Ávila preach, spoke with him and told him of her desire to enter the convent of Santa María de Gracia in Seville. When she entered the community, Ávila corresponded with her regularly in regard to the spiritual life.

Ávila had an extended stay in Écija and was very popular as a preacher and teacher in both churches and town squares. Instead of taking money for himself, he organized collections for the poor and for students studying for the priesthood. His troubles began in Écija when a preacher of papal indulgences arrived at the church there to preach a sermon. When Ávila walked out of the church, the people followed him because they did not want to hear the papal preacher; and when they begged him to preach outside of the city, he did. The preacher of the papal bulls came out, attacked him, and called him a “fake, hypocrite, deceiver and trouble maker of the town”. Ávila humbled himself before the man and asked for his forgiveness, but the preacher struck him and then left town.

In 1531, Maestro Ávila was accused by the Inquisition in Seville of preaching erroneous propositions of the faith in Écija. There were six witnesses, several of whom were enemies of Ávila. From the autumn of 1531-1532, he was imprisoned in the Castillo de Triana de la Inquisición in Seville while the evidence was gathered. The inquisitors brought twenty-two charges of heresy.

60 “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 34).
61 “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 34).
62 “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 35).
63 “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 35).
64 “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 36).
against him, but allowed him to provide a written response to each of the charges. Four of the twenty-two charges were as follows: 1) Ávila was alleged to have said that “those condemned by the Inquisition were martyrs.” Ávila responded by writing that he meant that if those who were condemned by the church to death were to repent and return to the church, their punishment would be a type of martyrdom so that from the suffering of the gallows they could fly to glory. 2) He allegedly preached that “Christ is in the sacrament (of the Eucharist) like a man with a covered face.” He wrote this prayer in response to the charge: “O Lord, when we see your face clearly, and when this veil by which we see you sacramentally by faith has been lifted, so we will see you in heaven.”

3) He was accused of preaching that “heaven is for the poor and the peasants and that it is impossible for the rich to be saved.” He wrote in response that he was referring to the rich who could have helped the poor but refused to because of their selfishness and greed.

4) Ávila was heard to have preached “that the Most Holy Virgin, before conceiving her Divine Son, sinned venially since no one, not

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65 The listing of all 22 charges can be found on pp 35-45 of Obras Completas, Volume One.
66 “... se decía que el bachiller Ávila había afirmado que los condenados por la Inquisición eran mártires.” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 36).
67 “... sin embargo, para inducir a los condenados a tener paciencia y no odiar a sus jueces, les ha dicho que si morían con fe y en gracia, podía serles aquella pena como una especie de martirio, y que podía ser la pena tan grande y sufrida con tal contrición, que del patíbulo volasen a la gloria.” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 41).
68 “... que Cristo está en el sacramento como un hombre con el rostro cubierto.” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 36).
69 “¡Oh Señor, cuándo hemos de ver vuestra faz claramente y cuándo se ha de levantar este velo por el que os vemos agora sacramentalmente por la fe y no facie ad faciem como os veremos en el cielo!” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 41).
70 “... que el cielo es para los pobres y labriegos y que es imposible que los ricos se salven...” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 40).
71 “... Ávila advierte que no dijo que ningún rico pudiese salvarse, sino aquellos que, pudiendo hacerlo, no quieren remediar a los necesitados, porque estos tales son malos y asesinos de los pobres.” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 41).
even she, was free of venial sin.”72 He responded by writing that he “did not say that Mary had sinned venially, but, following St. Thomas, explained how the inclination to original sin was not removed until the Word became Incarnate, and that before that time, she could have sinned venially because she was not preserved by the abundance of grace bestowed on her by the merits of Christ.”73

As a result of his responses to the charges and the testimony of the forty witnesses who argued that his words were taken out of context or not even said, Ávila was exonerated and absolved from all wrong-doing on July 5, 1533. He was ordered to moderate the speech in his sermons, to return to Écija, Alcalá de Guadaira and Lebrija and to preach and correct whatever misunderstandings there had been among his listeners.74

D. APOSTLE OF ANDALUCÍA AND FOUNDER OF SCHOOLS
(1535-1546)

At the beginning of 1535, Maestro Ávila arrived in Córdoba with his disciple Pedro Fernández de Córdoba. A Dominican friar, Juan Álvarez de Toledo, was the bishop who accepted Ávila and let him serve there as a priest for the rest of his life. He was given as a benefice a church in the village of Santaella.75 While there, he met three priests who would help him in his ministry: Luis de Granada, who became his biographer, Juan de Villarás, who became his

72 “...que la Santísima Virgen antes de concebir a su divino Hijo, eco venialmente pues nadie, ni siquiera ella, ha sido libre de pecado venial...” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 40).
73 “...siguiendo Santo Tomás, expuso cómo la inclinación de pecado original no le fue quitada hasta la encarnación del Verbo y que hasta entonces cuanto de sí era, hubiese pecado venialmente de no haber sido preservada por una abundante gracia concedida a ella por los méritos de Cristo.” “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 42).
74 “En La Inquisición De Sevilla,” (OC I, p. 46).
75 “También por ahora debió de tener lugar la toma posesión, por parte de Juan de Ávila, de un beneficio en la villa de Santaella, que le vinculó para lo restante de su vida a la diócesis cordobesa.” “Los Colegios Del P. Mtro. Juan de Ávila,” (OC I, p. 61).
secretary, and Alonso de Molina, who helped him raise funds for new schools as well as provide funds to educate young men to become priests.

In 1536, the bishop of Granada, don Gaspar de Ávalos, asked Ávila to help him reform his diocese. Ávila's missionary plan for each town was simple: He would preach in the churches and town squares, hear confessions, teach children the catechism by creating little songs, instruct the clergy and religious on sacred scripture and the spiritual life, and organize or reorganize schools at the request of the bishop.76

From 1536-1539, Ávila stayed in Granada at the bishop's house and set out on his journeys from there. In this period, he played a role in the conversions of John of God and Francis Borgia.77 In 1538, he began to be called "Maestro" Ávila. It is believed, but not confirmed, that he earned his Licenciado in theology from the University of Granada.78

In 1539, Maestro Ávila accepted the invitation to establish what would become the school and the university in the town Baeza, between the cities of Jaén and Ubeda. He sought to convince the townspeople of the need for the university and to raise the necessary money. He even donated his benefice from Santaella to help pay for the school.79

76 "Los Colegios Del P. Mtro. Juan De Ávila," (OC I, p. 69).
77 He played a role in the conversion of John of God in 1537 and Francis Borgia in 1539. "Los Colegios Del P. Mtro. Juan de Ávila," (OC I, 66, 72).
78 "Nos fundamos en que, al concluir el negocio de la Inquisición, Juan de Ávila no era más que bachiller, y en marzo de 1538 le hemos visto ostentando ya por vez primera su título de Maestro; título que, por otra parte parece que no pudo haber obtenido más que en la Universidad de Sevilla después de su encierro, lo cual no nos parece probable o en la Universidad de Granada en estos días de su estancia." "Los Colegios Del P. Mtro. Juan De Ávila," (OC I, p. 68).
79 "Los Colegios Del P. Mtro. Juan De Ávila," (OC I, p. 73).
From 1540-1541, he continued his missionary journey through the towns around Granada preaching, teaching, and starting schools. During this time, Ávila also preached and gave spiritual direction to religious men and women, rich and poor, nobles and peasants. His zeal for souls brought many people back to the faith and attracted followers to his priestly way of life.

E. MAESTRO ÁVILA'S PRIESTLY SCHOOL AND THE SOCIETY OF JESUS (1546-1556)

While Maestro Ávila continued his apostolic preaching throughout Andalucía, a group of students who wished to learn his way of life formed around him. In the summer of 1546, the town of Córdoba gave him part of an old fortress which he made into a type of "headquarters" where he lived with twenty disciples, referred to as his "priestly school," or, as the Jesuit historian Santiváñez called it, "una Congregación de sacerdotes operarios y santos". These priests and the men who wanted to be priests admired Ávila's approach to the spiritual life and the priesthood so greatly that they promised obedience "to him as the leader of a reform movement of priests." His priest followers were expected to lead apostolic lives similar to his, and the students, who were to study at Salamanca, were to conform to the following spiritual and intellectual disciplines:

Before all else, you are to strengthen your interior spirit by the practice of recollection, confession and frequent communion; you

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80 "Los Colegios Del P. Mtro. Juan De Ávila," (OC I, p. 73).
81 "Los Colegios Del P. Mtro. Juan De Ávila," (OC I, p. 74).
82 "La Escuela Sacerdotal Del P. Ávila," (OC I, p. 102).
83 "La admiración por el Maestro se había trocado en sumisión y <dar la obediencia> al director de un movimiento sacerdotal de tipo reformador." "La Escuela Sacerdotal Del P. Ávila," (OC I, p. 102).
are never to fail, if possible, to have two hours of prayer on the Passion and the Last Things every morning and evening. You were not to neglect the study of the New Testament and to seek to understand the texts with the help of St. John Chrysostom and Erasmus...; you are to read John Cassian, St. Gregory, St. Augustine, St. Bernard and readings from books of poetry.84

The religious community that Ávila envisioned was not to consist of intellectual priests who would be engaged in speculative theology only and thereby separate themselves from the daily lives of the people. He impressed upon his followers the dynamic nature of the apostolic life and the need to preach, teach, and work with the poor and the sick.

Maestro Ávila’s ministry throughout Andalucía coincided with the establishment of the Society of Jesus by Ignatius Loyola, Peter Faber and Francis Xavier in 1540. Both he and the Jesuits possessed similar missionary goals: the establishment of schools and the education of men to be zealous ministers of the Gospel. His disciples, Diego de Guzman and Gaspar Loarte, met the Jesuits for the first time in Salamanca in 1545, when Peter Faber and Antonio de Araoz, the nephew of Ignatius, were passing through.85 In 1546, when the Jesuits founded their first school in the town of Gandia, in the region of Valencia,86 some of Ávila’s followers took an interest in the Jesuits’ missionary endeavors. The first one of to enter the Society of Jesus was Cristóbal de Mendoza, admitted by...
Ignatius in Rome in 1546. and the second one, Gaspar López, a professor at Jerez de la Frontera, followed in 1549.87

Maestro Ávila was in no way disturbed over the desire of his followers to enter the Society of Jesus. In fact, he encouraged his more gifted students to do so. In September 1550, Ignatius wrote Francisco Villanueva, asking him to “personally encourage Ávila to enter the Society, because he would bring much to it.”88 However, Ávila declined because of the sickness that was beginning to overtake him and, in a letter to Fr. Araoz, the Jesuit provincial in Spain, wrote that because of his illness, he wanted to leave the fifteen schools he had established, including the University of Baeza, to the care of the Society.89 The Jesuits soon began the negotiations with him about staffing and administering the schools.

In 1552, when a persecution against the “New Christians” arose, some of Ávila’s students and possibly even Ávila himself felt its effects. For a while, it was difficult for the Society to accept Maestro Ávila’s disciples. Even though invitations for Ávila to join the Society continued to be offered by Ignatius and later by his secretary, Fr. Nadal, he chose not to enter because of failing health.

**F. RETIREMENT AND LAST YEARS IN MONTILLA (1556-1569)**

When poor health forced him to retire to Montilla in 1554, Ávila continued to work as a preacher, spiritual director and writer. He lived with his secretary

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87 “La Escuela Sacerdotal Del P. Ávila,” (OC I, p. 111).
88 “Inigo se había dado cuenta del valer personal del Mtro. Ávila y había reparado en lo semejante de las empresas que ambos tenían entre manos. Convenía inclinarle a que entrase en la Compañía, porque <traería tras sí mucha cosa el Ávila>.” “La Escuela Sacerdotal Del P. Ávila,” (OC I, p. 122).
89 “La Escuela Sacerdotal Del P. Ávila,” (OC I, p.133).
and friend, Juan Villarás, and two others who copied his writings, kept house and delivered his letters. His daily schedule consisted of morning prayers for two hours and Mass, followed by visits with those who sought spiritual direction in the afternoon. He would write letters and talks in the evening, and then conclude with two more hours of prayer before going to bed.

Maestro Ávila was greatly respected in Spanish ecclesiastical circles because of his reputation as a preacher and a trusted adviser to some members of the nobility. His beatification testimonies state that the Holy Roman Emperor proposed that Ávila be appointed as Bishop of Segóvia or Granada, but he humbly declined the offer. Even so, he was very interested in the reform of the Spanish clergy along with his friend and former classmate from Alcalá, don Pedro Guerrero, Archbishop of Granada.

During the Protestant Reformation when hierarchy was under attack, Ávila defended and explained the proper roles of the pope, bishops and priests for the building up of the church. These men were the instruments that God would use to sustain the life of the church through word and sacrament. Archbishop Guerrero, who attended the second and third sessions of the Council of Trent, wished to have Ávila accompany him as an adviser, but poor health prevented Ávila. Instead, Ávila sent his papers to the council with the Archbishop: “Reformación del Estado Eclesiástico,” to the second session in 1551 and “Causas y Remedios de las Herejías,” to the third session in 1561. His

90 “Últimos Años Del P. Ávila,” (OC I, p. 201).
91 “Últimos Años Del P. Ávila,” (OC I, p. 209).
92 Proceso de beatificación del Maestro Juan de Ávila, (Madrid: BAC, no. 75, 2004), pp. 253,316. Duque, on the other hand, states that Ávila did not receive the appointment because of his suspected New Christian status. Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, p. 144.
93 Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, p.144.
Memoriales and other works connected with the reform of the clergy\textsuperscript{94} dealt with the proper role of the pope, bishops and priests. First and foremost, he knew that the clear and manifest sign of church unity was the pope.

It is the pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth, who carries in his hand the pitcher of water that contains the sacred scriptures and the sacraments; He puts each thing in its place and gives believers the water that God gave him. Well, it was said to him: “Feed my sheep.” How will he feed them if they don’t authorize him to proclaim authoritatively sacred scripture and the sacraments on which the sheep are fed? The pope is given power to bind and to loose, to declare and interpret, and on this the church is founded.\textsuperscript{95}

Ávila seemed to suggest that the pope should focus less on the temporal aspects of the Papal States and provide more for the spiritual needs of all Catholics by the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. In his Second Memorial, he described bishops as men who must possess a great zeal for souls as well as defend Church teaching:

Let him (the bishop) be aware that from now on, a man will not be chosen for episcopal dignity who is not capable of being a leader of the army of God, brandishing his sword against errors and vices. Let him engender spiritual sons for God since he is the Bridegroom of the church, and to mark this he wears a ring on his finger. Let the leaders who are bishops grab their weapons and rouse the people with their own voice and encourage them with their own example and sanction the word and ways of God, since the evil that has come upon the church has been for lack of this (leadership).\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{94} Other works on the reformation of the clergy include Tratado del Sacerdocio, Advertencias al Conclio de Toledo (1565-66), Algunas Advertencias Al Sinodo De Toledo.

\textsuperscript{95} “Este es el Papa Vicario de Cristo en la tierra que llevan en su mano el cántaro de agua que es la divina Escritura y los sacramentos; y poner cada cosa en su lugar y dar a beber el agua que Dios dio. Pues le está dicho: Apacienta mis ovejas (Jn 21:17), cómo les apacentará, si no le dan que pueda declarar la Escritura y los sacramentos en que las ovejas se apacientan? Díósele este poder para saltar y ligar, para declarar y interpretar y sobre él está fundada la Iglesia.” Sermon 39, (OC III, I, 15, 412-413).

\textsuperscript{96} “Tenga cuenta que de aquí adelante no será elegido a dignidad obispal persona que no sea suficiente para ser capitán del ejército de Dios, meneando la espada de su palabra contra los errores y contra los vicios y que pueda engendrar hijos espirituales a Dios, pues es esposo de su Iglesia, y en señal de ello traen anillos en sus manos . . . a las armas sus capitanes que son los prelados y esfuercen al pueblo con su propia voz y anímen con su propio ejemplo y autoricen la palabra y los caminos de Dios pues por falta de esto ha venido el mal que ha venido.” Second Memorial, (OC II, I, 42, 43, p.568-9).
Ávila continued his description of the duties of the bishops by saying that their primary duty was to preach to the flock.⁹⁷ A bishop also needed to provide for the “poor, widows, prisoners, and orphans because all were placed in his care and he must carry them on his shoulders as a true father.”⁹⁸ The third duty was to train good priests:

Let the bishop carefully consider the way curates and confessors are chosen. Priests’ errors are scandalous and even more so when they are hidden. Let future priests be given a rule of life and instruction in what they ought to know and do, since each one is blind because of his own sins . . . and they have to be trained from the beginning with such an education that they will become better ecclesiastics than those who were in times past.⁹⁹

In addition, he presented his position that bishops should lead only one diocese and reside within its boundaries.

Maestro Ávila also wrote extensively on the reform of the priesthood in his First and Second Memorial as well as his Tratado sobre el Sacerdocio. Four points consistently stressed for all priests were: personal holiness, devout celebration of the Mass, care and zeal for souls, and preaching. In regard to the desire of priests for personal holiness, he wrote:

If the priest wants to know what wealth of virtue is necessary to carry out the obligations of such a lofty and holy dignity, let him listen to the holy church, which in the offertory of the Mass says: ‘Priests of the Lord offer incense and bread to God: therefore they will be holy for their God.’ The holy church took the words which the Lord said to the priests under the Old Law: ‘Be holy, for I,
your God, am holy. Those words ... cause distress because holiness is not greatly sought by us, and we do not possess even a mediocre goodness. And God grant that we might at least have understanding and that we may make up with tears what we lack in the holiness that is demanded of us.100

In regard to priests and the celebration of the Mass, Ávila wrote that

the priest in the Mass represents Jesus Christ, our Lord, principal priest and font of the priesthood; and there is much reason that one who imitates him in this role may imitate him in groans, prayers and tears since in the Mass which he celebrated on Good Friday on the cross on Calvary, he shed his blood for the sins of the world.101

In speaking on the priests’ pastoral care of the people, Maestro Ávila referred to the Pastoral Care of Pope Gregory the Great:

The Lord commands the shepherds to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind the broken, who weaken good example and seek the lost ... because not in vain did St. Gregory say, “The art of arts is the guidance of souls.” There is a need for much prudence to know how to lead such a diverse group of people and give to each one the medicine that is suitable for him; there is also a need for great patience to endure the demands of the wise and the simple.102

Maestro Ávila, emphasizing that priests must strive to preach well, wrote:

The true preacher has to treat the Word of God and its concerns in such a way that he mainly seeks the glory of God. If he works to

100 “Y si el sacerdote quiere saber qué caudal de virtud ha menester para cumplir bien las obligaciones de dignidad tan alta y tan santa, oiga a la santa Iglesia, que en el ofertorio de la misa dice así: Sacerdotes Domini incensum et panes offerunt Deo; et idea sancti erunt Deo suo. Las cuales palabras tomó la Santa Iglesia de lo que el Señor dijo a los sacerdotes de la vieja ley: Sancti eritis, quia ego, Deus vester, sanctus sum. Las cuales palabras... causarnos han gran confusión viendo que nos es pedida santidad y por ventura aún no tenemos mediana bondad. ¿Y plega a Dios que siquiera tengamos comprensión y suplamos con lágrimas lo que faltamos en la santidad que nos piden!” Tratado sobre el Sacerdocio, (OC 1, 5, p.911).
101 “El sacerdote en el altar representa en la misa a Jesucristo nuestro Señor, principal sacerdote y fuente de nuestro sacerdocio; y es mucha razón que quien le imita en el oficio lo imite en los gemidos oración y lágrimas que en la misa que celebró el viernes santo en la cruz en el monte Calvario derramó por los pecados del mundo.” Tratado sobre el Sacerdocio, (OC 1, 10, p.915).
102 “Y así el Señor manda a los pastores de las ovejas racionales que esfuercen lo flaco que sanen lo enfermo que aten lo quebrado que reduzcan lo dechado y busquen lo perdido... porque no en balde dijo San Gregorio: 'Ars artium, regimen animarum.' Menester es mucha prudencia para saber llevar a tanta diversidad de gentes y aplicar a cada uno su medicina según a cada uno conviene; menester es mucha paciencia para sufrir importunidades de ovejas sabias y no sabias...” Tratado sobre el Sacerdocio, (OC 1, 37, p.940).
please men, he will change each passage of the Gospel and give it an interpretation contrary to its proper meaning or he will teach contrary to the will of God: he will say that God says what He did not want to say.\footnote{El verdadero predicador de tal manera tiene de tratar su palabra de Dios y sus negocios que principalmente pretenda la gloria de Dios. Porque si anda a contentar los hombres no acabará; sino que a cada paso trocará el Evangelio y le dará contrarios sentidos o enseñara doctrina contraria a la voluntad de Dios: hará que diga Dios lo que no quiso decir, etc.” $Lecciones$ sobre la Epístola a Los Galatas, (OC II, ¶ 8, p. 33).}

He reinforced the need for preachers to always speak the truth:

> God wishes that in the sacrifice that each preacher makes, drawing out sinful souls with the Word of God, he should not use sweet words; let him not work oiling them up by deceiving them with flattery and flowery words. Salt is a bitter thing; let him put bitterness, fear, abhorrence of sin and anger at their own flesh in the hearts of men.\footnote{“Quiere Dios que en el sacrificio que la hace el predicador sacando animas de pecado con la palabra de Dios no use de miel de palabras melosas: no ande untando el casco, engañado con lisonjas y dulzuras. Sal que es cosa amarga eso si: que ponga amargura en el corazón del hombre, temor, aborrecimiento del pecado enojo contra su propia carne...” $Sala-Balust$, OC II, Lecciones sobre le Epístola a los Galatas, (OC II, ¶ 8, p.34).}

Duque reports that the council Fathers received both “Memorials” with great applause and that Archbishop Guerrero publicly acknowledged Ávila as the author of both.\footnote{Duque, $El Maestro Juan de Ávila$, 145. Some of the sections from the First Memorial were used almost verbatim in the Council decrees on the formation of seminaries and the education of priests.}

$Audi Filia$, a book composed during Ávila’s imprisonment in Seville by the Inquisition, was published in 1556 without his knowledge. He had written the book for his spiritual daughter, doña Sancha Cárillo, and had also given it to others to read. The purpose for writing the book was to give some instruction and Christian guidance so that those who are beginning to serve God would come to know his will through his grace. I wanted these rules to be more safe than lofty because, according to the wisdom of our time, there appeared to be a great need for this instruction on prayer. First, there are some warnings in the book, with which we defend ourselves against our enemies (the Alumbrados). The rest of the book is spent on explaining the
way to train ourselves in the awareness of our unhappiness and smallness and in the knowledge of our goodness and health that is in Jesus Christ.  

When Ávila discovered that the book had been published, he was concerned because he knew the work needed further correction and clarification, especially in regard to the practice of meditation. He knew that because of doctrinal questions regarding the Alumbrados and the writings of Erasmus and Martin Luther, the leaders of the Inquisition would be wary of any spiritual book that might espouse controversial ideas in regard to prayer. *Audi Filia* fell into this category, and in 1559 it was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. After revision, it was approved by the Bishop of Córdoba, but in June of 1565 the Holy Office of the Inquisition intervened and refused to allow its publication. Ávila's definitive work was not published until 1574, five years after his death.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), correspondent of Maestro Ávila, had written her *Spiritual Autobiography* in obedience to her spiritual director. Since she was very concerned about the accuracy of what she had written concerning the spiritual life, she consulted the Bishop of Salamanca and the Grand Inquisitor of the Holy Office, both of whom suggested that she send the manuscript to Maestro Ávila. He responded to the Teresa's request to examine the text with a

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106 “El intento del libro es dar algunas enseñanzas y reglas cristianos, para que las personas que comienzan a servir a Dios, por su gracia sepan ejercitar su deseo. Y estas reglas quise más que fuesen seguras que altas porque según la soberbia de nuestro tiempo de esto me pareció haber más necesidad. Danse primero algunas avisos, con que nos defendamos de nuestros especiales enemigos, y después gastase lo demás en dar camino para ejercitar nos en el conocimiento de nuestra miseria y poquedad y en el conocimiento de nuestra bien y remedio que está en Jesucristo.” Duque, *El Maestro Juan de Ávila*, p. 131.

107 Ávila's focus on meditation as a form of prayer could be misunderstood by some as a form of Alumbrado Spirituality.


letter dated April 2, 1568, and wrote that he probably would not add anything that others had not already said.\textsuperscript{110} Nevertheless, she sent him the manuscript and he commented favorably upon it. In a letter dated September 12, 1568, he wrote:

\begin{quote}
The teaching on prayer is good for the most part and you can trust and follow it. I find that the signs that you describe in the ecstasies are true. The way of teaching God to the soul without imagination nor interior or exterior words is very certain. I do not find in it anything to stumble on. St. Augustine speaks well of this type of prayer.\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

His response was sufficient for Teresa to finally permit the publication of her \textit{Spiritual Autobiography}.

As the end of Maestro Ávila’s life approached, his priestly confraternity began to disintegrate. Thirty of his disciples had joined the Society of Jesus and carried Ávila’s teachings with them. Others served in small towns throughout Andalucía and Extremadura as well as at the Cathedral and University of Baeza.\textsuperscript{112} He continued to correspond with them up to his death. Juan Villarás, his secretary, and Juan Díaz, his nephew, continued to keep his message and work alive. He died on May 10, 1569. The biographers reported that before his death, this prayer to the Virgin Mary was on his lips: \textit{“Recordare, Virgo Mater, dum steteris in conspectus Dei, ut loquaris pro nobis bona.”}\textsuperscript{113} He was buried in the Jesuit church in Montilla.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Carta} 185, (OC IV, p. 627).
\textsuperscript{111} “La doctrina de la oración está buena por la mayor parte, y muy bien puede vuestra merced fiarse de ella y seguirla; y en los raptos hallo las señas que tienen los que son verdaderos. El modo de enseñar Dios al ánima, sin imaginación y sin palabras internos ni exteriors, es muy seguro, y no hallo en él qué tropezar y San Agustín habla bien de él.” \textit{Carta} 158, (OC IV, p.544)
\textsuperscript{112} “Últimos Años Del P. Ávila,” (OC I, p. 275-276).
\textsuperscript{113} “Remember Virgin Mother, while you stand in the presence of God, may you say good things on our behalf.” \textit{Ultimos Años Del P. Ávila,”} (OC I, p. 297).
Maestro Ávila accomplished much in his lifetime: he was a spiritual adviser to nobility, religious and simple peasants; he taught the catechism to young children throughout southern Spain, and he aided in the education of young men for the priesthood by letters, talks and biblical commentaries. He had a role in the reformation of the clergy at the Council of Trent. In spite of all these accomplishments, he will always be first remembered as the apostolic preacher of Andalucia.

G. BEATIFICATION ANDCanonization

The first stage of the process of beatification for Maestro Ávila began in 1623 and lasted until 1731. The “Congregación de San Pedro Apóstol,” the native priests of Madrid began the information-gathering process, which lasted until 1625. The cause fell dormant until the Archbishop of Toledo opened a second information-gathering process in 1731. In 1759, Pope Clement XIII declared Ávila “Venerable.” Cardinal Infante don Luis Antonio de Borbón, who encouraged the king to spare no expense, opened the third stage from 1791-1894. Pope Leo XIII beatified Ávila on April 6, 1894. By this time the postulators for the cause were the “Trinitarios Descalzos”. The resumption of the cause began in 1924, at the “Semana y Congreso Aséticos de Valladolid” and the “Congreso

118 This Italian religious community was entrusted with Ávila’s cause since the Congregation of St. Peter the Apostle and the Royal Sacramental Archfraternity of Almodóvar del Campo were unable to bring the cause to completion. “La causa de canonización,” (OC I, p. 321.345)
Catequístico de Granada." This congress succeeded in producing the collected works of Maestro Ávila in 1927 and a new biography in 1928.119

On July 2, 1946, on the fiftieth anniversary of his beatification and because of the intervention of Cardinal Parrado, the Archbishop of Granada, Pope Pius XII declared Ávila to be the Apostle of Andalucía and the principal patron of the Spanish diocesan clergy. Pius XII also extended the decree resuming the cause of canonization in 1952.120 With the help of several postulators, Pope Paul VI canonized San Juan de Ávila on May 31, 1970.121 Since that time, there has been an ongoing movement to have him declared a "Doctor of the Church." In the forward of the 1970 critical edition of the Obras Completas de San Juan de Ávila, Laureano Castán Lacoma, Bishop of Sigüenza, wrote in support of Ávila’s proclamation as a doctor of the Church: "Maestro Ávila not only has the proper merits to be declared a doctor of the church, but he should be considered the Doctor of the Doctors, which he was."122 Lacoma went on to indicate that several doctors of the church had extensively used Ávila’s writings, including St. Teresa of Ávila, St. John of the Cross, St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Francis de Sales.

**CONCLUSION**

Maestro Ávila contributed much to the church in Spain through the establishment of schools, the education of priests, the reform of the clergy and

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120 "La causa de canonización," (OC I, p 346).

121 "La causa de canonización," (OC I, p 347).

the renewal of the spiritual life of simple believers. His love for God and the desire to make that divine love manifest motivated him to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of Andalucía at all times, both in his words and in his deeds. In this examination of his life, it is evident that his one goal was to lead as many people as he could to turn away from the road of sin that leads to hell and instead join him on the road that leads to the joys of heaven.
CHAPTER THREE
THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR
SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA’S
BOOK OF THE VIRGIN

INTRODUCTION

The Marian teaching of Maestro Ávila does not stand alone. It flows from and leads to a deeper understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, the mystery of the church and the role of the Holy Spirit revealed in Scripture and Apostolic Tradition. As a preacher throughout Andalucía, Ávila was a missionary. His teaching dealt with the practical matters of the Creed, the moral life, Scripture, devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the saints and avoided areas that were abstract or speculative in nature. At the same time, it was also mystical. If one wished to be united with Christ, he could only do so through an interior spiritual union, beyond the practice of exterior devotion, to a life of spiritual recollection and meditation, centered on the love of Jesus Christ. In his writings, he explains that intimacy with Jesus Christ can only be accomplished by entering into Christ’s heart.

Ávila’s theology was influenced not only by his prayer and devotional life but also by his classical training. He was educated in the humanities, sacred
scripture, patristic theology, Thomism and, to a certain degree, the teaching of Erasmus at the University of Alcalá. However, it is agreed by all who have studied Ávila that the theologian who exercised the greatest influence over his theology was St. Paul. Bifet writes:

He (Ávila) was a reflection of the apostolic figure of St. Paul in his life and preaching. From the beginning of his preaching, Ávila explained the Pauline writings in Écija before 1531. The lectures on Paul's letter to the Galatians were given in Córdoba before 1537. Our preacher was very devoted to the apostle St. Paul and tried to imitate him in preaching and in the simplicity and great love that he had for his neighbors. He knew Paul's letters by heart... and one can see that when there was an opportunity for him to share some insight from this saint, he did it with a great spirit and teaching that is seen in all his sermons and writings.

In this chapter, I will present the teaching of Maestro Ávila beginning with his approach to Scripture, Apostolic Tradition and the Magisterium. I will then

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123 The work of Erasmus that Maestro Ávila quoted most often was the Paraphrasis of the New Testament. Ávila quoted Erasmus in his commentaries on Galatians and the Letters of John, but was always critical of him when he strayed from the interpretations of the Fathers of the church. In spite of this, he encouraged his students to use this work of Erasmus with caution. (cf Carta 225, OC IV, lines 17-20, p. 724.) It is certain that Erasmus may have exercised some influence over Ávila in his Pauline theology, particularly in the areas of the church as the mystical body as well as the idea of justification. In her introduction to her translation of Audi filia, Joan Gormley writes the following. “Ávila shared many of Erasmus’ interests and emphases. However, the two were actually poles apart in their approach to Christ, the spiritual life and the reform of the church. The teacher from Rotterdam saw Christ as the embodiment of the virtues and consequently mainly as an ethical model. His call for a simple interior life and private reading of the Bible included a downplaying of the sacramental and ecclesial life. His written calls for reform were not clearly mirrored in his own life as a priest. Fr. Ávila, on the other hand, preached and practiced a way centered in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, especially in Christ’s passion. His instructions on prayer are accompanied by emphasis on sharing in the sacramental life of the church and on submitting to the church’s authority. Finally his life as a priest is the most powerful proclamation of his call for the reform of the church, head and members.” John of Ávila, Audi Filia, trans. Joan Frances Gormley, (Mahwah, Paulist Press, 2006), p. 9-10.

124 “Era un trasunto de la figura apostólica de Pablo, en su vida y en su predicación. Desde los comienzos de su predicación, el Maestro explicaba los escritos paulinos; en Écija, y antes de 1531. Las lecciones sobre la carta paulina a las Galatas fueron impartidas en Córdoba antes del año 1537. ‘Fue nuestro predicador muy devoto del apóstol San Pablo y procuró imitarlo mucho en la predicación y en la desnudez y en el gran amor que a los próximos tuvo. Supo sus epístolas de coro... Y es de ver que todas las veces que se la ofrecía declarar alguna autoridad de este santo Apóstol lo hacía con grande espíritu y maravillosa doctrina, como consta de todos sus sermones y escritos.’” Bifet, Doctrina, p. 52.
present his teachings concerning Jesus Christ, the church, and the Holy Spirit which serve as the basis for understanding his Marian theology in the *Book of the Virgin*.

**A. ÁVILA AND DIVINE REVELATION**

1. Sacred Scripture

An explanation of Ávila’s exegesis of sacred scripture must be seen in light of his understanding of the following: the meaning of inspiration and inerrancy, its literal and spiritual senses, and the use of the Old Testament in interpreting the New Testament.

First of all, Ávila believed that sacred scripture was inspired and without error as a means to salvation. He wrote in regard to inspiration:

> With faith we believe that it is scripture and the divine Word that the church declares to us as such; and although it is spoken through the mouths of men we believe it as the Word of God... because faith does not look at human testimony that depends on human means, but on what God inspires such a prophet or evangelist in order to write the truth, and whom God assisted in order that he could not be deceived as to what he wrote. ¹²⁵

He added: "sacred scripture is the house of God; it is the chair of God. God’s words manifest his heart and how he is the simplest truth; His Word is transferred from his heart."¹²⁶ Scripture leads the person who possesses faith into the life of God. Because God speaks the truth to his people through scripture, his

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¹²⁵ "Con esta fe creemos que es Escritura y palabra divina la que la Iglesia nos declara portal; y aunque es hablada por boca de hombres, la tenemos por palabra de Dios... porque no mira esta fe al testimonio humano, que estriba en medios humanas mas en que Dios inspira al tal profeta o evangelista para escribir la verdad, y que asiste Dios con él para que no pueda ser engañado en lo que así escribe." *Audi Filia*, Chapter 43, (OC I, ¶ 8, p. 628).

¹²⁶ "La Sagrada Escritura casa de Dios es, silla de Dios es. Sus palabras manifiestan su corazón y cómo Dios sea simplísima verdad; su palabra es traslado de su corazón." *Lecciones Sobre La Primera Canónica De San Juan (I), Lección 6*, (OC II, lines 200-204, p. 147).
Word is without error in the things that pertain to salvation: “The Word of God cannot be lacking, but rather it is true . . . . It is worth more to believe the Word than to see it.”\(^{127}\) While scripture is a sure means of God’s revelation of his will to his people, prayer and study are needed to plumb its depths.

Secondly, Ávila’s exegesis relied on both the literal and spiritual senses\(^{128}\) of the scriptural text. He explained these two senses of sacred scripture in sermon 20, when he said:

In order that Scripture may be better understood, you have to know that what is called the literal sense of Scripture describes the passage as it is written; and it is to say “the letter;” it is the outer meaning of the text or its “crust.” While the literal sense is the principal one on which the other senses are founded, it is the moral (spiritual) sense through which one knows the principal intention of God and what the Holy Spirit intends for the passage to mean.\(^{129}\)

Ávila’s preference of the spiritual sense for the interpretation of scripture came from his education and study of the Fathers of the Church, who used this method extensively. Using the spiritual sense, Ávila described connections between Mary and Joseph, the Son of Jacob, as well as Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, and other Old Testament persons.\(^{130}\)

Thirdly, Ávila believed that the Old Testament must be understood in light of the New Testament. Inspired by God, both contain revelation. He said in an Advent sermon that, “all things of the Old Testament foreshadowed the Law of

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\(^{127}\) “. . . la palabra de Dios no pueda faltar sino que es verdadera . . . porque más vale creer que ver (cf. Jn 20:29).” Sermon 41, (OC III, ¶ 17 and 24, p. 550 and 553).

\(^{128}\) These spiritual senses include the allegorical, moral and anagogical. Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, ¶116-117.

\(^{129}\) “Y para que mayor se entienda, habéis de saber que en la Sagrada Escritura aquel se llama sentido literal el que suenan las palabras de fuera; y esto quiere decir ‘letra’: lo de fuera, lo que es corteza del Espíritu. Y puesto que el sentido literal sea el principal sobre que se fundanlos otros, mas el que principalmente pretende el Espíritu Santo, el principal intento de Dios, es el sentido moral.” Sermon 20, (OC III, ¶ 2, p. 252).

\(^{130}\) Cf. Sermons 60, 65 [1], 65 [2] and 71.
He followed the interpretative principle of Augustine, who wrote that
"the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in
the New." Ávila quoted the Old Testament in his writings, especially Genesis
(99 times), Isaiah (166 times) and the Psalms (340 times). When he dealt with
the relationship between Christ and the church and between Christ and Mary, he
quoted frequently from the Canticle of Canticles (44 times).

2. Apostolic Tradition and the Magisterium

Ávila understood the complementary relationship between scripture and
Apostolic Tradition, since the Holy Spirit is the source of both. He wrote:

You will find in Holy Mother church traditions that are not written
by the Evangelists . . . Therefore our Lord says to us: "I give you
my Holy Spirit;" and where the Holy Spirit is infused and the
practice that proceeds from the Holy Spirit, God speaks and it is the
tradition of God. 133

He believed that the saints and the Fathers of the church were responsible for
passing on the Apostolic Tradition. In a letter to a preacher, he wrote:

Therefore the Lord who gave us his Word, gave us holy men in
whom he dwelt in order that they might declare Scripture in the
same spirit in which it was written; for a subtle wit is not enough,
nor a settled judgment, nor many ascetical disciplines, nor
continuous study, but the true light of the Lord which we are certain
dwelt more in the holy teachers of the past than men of the
present. 134

131 “. . . Que así como las cosas de la Vieja Ley eran figurales de la ley de gracia (cf. 1 Cor 10:11).”
Sermon 1, (OC III, ¶ 22, p. 17).
132 Augustine, Quest. In Hept. 2, 73; PL 34, 623.
133 “Que hallaréis en la Santa Madre Iglesia de tradiciones que no están escriptas (sic) en los
Evangelistas . . . Por eso nos dijo nuestro Señor: ‘Allá os doy mi Espíritu Santo;’ y donde se
infunde este Espíritu Santo y la practica que procede del Espíritu Santo, habla Dios y es tradición
de Dios.” Sala-Balust, OC II, Lecciones Sobre La Primera Canonica De San Juan (I), Leccion 24,
(OC II, p 333-334).
134 “Por esto el Señor, que nos dio su palabra, nos dio varones santos en quien Él moró, para que
nos declarasen la Escritura con el mismo espíritu que fue escrita; para lo cual ni es bastante el
ingenio sutil, ni juicio asentado, ni las muchas disciplinas, ni el continuo estudio, sino la
Some of the theologians whom Ávila quoted frequently included Augustine (242 times), Bernard (91 times), Bonaventure (11 times), and Thomas (74 times).

With the onset of the Protestant Reformation, Ávila recognized the need for a strong teaching authority that would properly interpret scripture and guard Apostolic Tradition in the light of Christ. He taught and believed that "teachings that differed from the common sense of the doctors or the use of the church" were not valid. In another letter he wrote that all teaching on the faith had to be in agreement with the Roman Church. He believed that when one was teaching Jesus Christ, it should be the Jesus Christ proclaimed by the councils of the church and the popes through the ages. He wrote in his commentary on Galatians 4:13-14:

[It is] as if Jesus Christ preached to them and they received his word and he praised them. If the Galatians received one apostle and minister of God and accepted his doctrine as if it was given by Christ himself, how could the Christian not accept a teaching that the congregation of ministers taught, whether it is an (Ecumenical) council, or the one who is the head of the ministers, who is the Vicar of Christ?

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verdadera lumbre del Señor, la cual, cierto estamos más ciertas haber morado en los santos enseñadores pasados que en los no santos de agora." Carta 9, (OC IV, lines 31-37, p. 52).

135 “Y de éstas sean los principales Jerónimo y Crisóstomo; y también puede mirar las Paraphrasis de Erasmo, con condición que se lean en algunas partes con cautela; en las cuales será, luego cuando discrepa del sentido común de los otros doctores o del uso de la Iglesia.” Carta 225, (OC IV, line 16-20, p. 724).

136 “La doctrina que no va conforme a la enseñanza de la Iglesia romana, la cual quiso Dios que fuese cabeza y maestra de todas, cierto perecerá con sus autores, aunque sean más que tiene la mar gotas de agua y más altos que las estrellas del cielo; no es planta de la mano de Dios el sentido o palabra que a este crisol no está subyeto y a este dechado conforme, y por esto, tandem eradicabitur (cf. Mt 15:13).” Carta 9, (OC IV, lines 4-10, p. 34).

137 “Como si el mismo Jesucristo les predicara lo recibieron, y por esto los alaba. Pues, si a un solo apóstol y ministro de Dios reciben y admiten su doctrina, teniéndola por la de el mismo Dios, cómo no debe el cristiano admitir la doctrina que le enseña la congregación de los ministros de Dios que es el Concilio o la que le enseña el príncipe de los ministros que es el Vicario de Cristo?” Lecciones Sobre La Epístola a Los Gálatas, (OC II, ¶ 16, p. 42).
It follows that definitive church teaching was not determined by personal preference. After the Council of Trent, Ávila stressed the knowledge and implementation of its conciliar norms for the renewal of the church.

B. AVILA’S CHRISTOLOGY

Maestro Ávila focused his teaching on Jesus Christ around three themes: The heart of Christ, Christ the Bridegroom, and the saving effects of His life. All of these themes were connected to each other and formed an organic whole.

1. The Heart of Christ

For Maestro Ávila, one must be immersed in the love of God to know the heart of Christ. The mystery of Christ will never be grasped unless it is from within Christ’s heart.138 The preeminence of the love of Christ was most clearly expressed in Ávila’s work, Tratado del Amor de Dios:

Oh divine love, how much greater you are than how you appear exteriorly! Christ suffers greatly on the outside since his many wounds and lashes without a doubt preach to us such a great love. But the wounds do not tell all the greatness that he possesses because the divine love inside his heart is greater than his suffering. Our taste of this love is like a spark that leaves a fire, a branch that grows from a beautiful tree, a stream born from that ocean of immense love.139

138 “No se captará nunca el misterio de Cristo, si no es desde su interioridad: ‘No se contentó con padecer en lo de fuera, sino amando de Corazón...’ Bifet, Doctrina, p. 193.
139 “O Amor divino, cuánto mayor eres de lo que parece por acá defuera! Porque tantas llagas y tantos azotes y heridas, sin duda nos predicen amor grande; mas no dicen toda la grandezza que tiene, porque mayor es por de dentro de lo que por de fuera parece. Centella es ésta que sale de fuego, rama es ésa que procede de ese árbol, arroyo que nace de ese piélago de inmenso amor.” Tratado del Amor de Dios, (OC I, lines 255-261, pp. 962-963).
Meditation on the Incarnation gave the person a taste of the love that God has for the human race. When a person entered into the heart of Christ, the divine plan to restore the human race to God’s grace became clear. Ávila continued:

It has been said that God’s desire to save the human race was so great that it was the reason the blessed Son became incarnate and took to his heart this glorious undertaking and did not rest until he completed it.140

God’s love made humanity a participant in the life of Christ. Ávila alluded to St. Paul when he wrote about humanity’s fall from grace:

The first earthly man was the beginning of your fall and the second heavenly man is the beginning and end of your cure. Work to be one with the latter by faith and love, just as you are with the former by the ties of kinship. If you, by natural kinship, participate in the fault of the transgressor, so, by spiritual kinship, you will partake in the grace of the Just One. If you have been united with Christ in this way, it is certain that what is Christ’s is yours; and what belongs to the Father will belong to the sons and what belongs to the head belongs to the members, and wherever the body is, there will the eagles gather.141

By entering into the redemptive heart of Christ through prayer and recollection, one is transformed into being a child of God.

2. Jesus Christ as Bridegroom

A second Christological theme of Maestro Ávila was Jesus Christ as Bridegroom. The nuptial image of the Incarnation referred to the marriage of humanity and divinity in the divine person of the Word.

140 “... le fuese dicho que la voluntad de Dios era querer salvar al género humano... y que deste negocio se encargase el Hijo Bendito... y que tomase a pechos esta impresa... y que no descansase hasta salir al cabo con ella.” Tratado del Amor de Dios, (OC I, p. 959).
141 “El primer hombre terreno fue principio de tu caída; el Segundo y celestial, principio y fin de tu remedio. Trabaja de estar unido, con éste por fe y amor, así como lo estás con el otro por vínculo de parentesco; porque si lo estuvieras así como el deudo natural, participas la culpa de transgressor; así por el deudo espiritual, comunicarás las gracias de Justo. Si con el estuvieras de esta manera unido cree cierto que lo de Él fuere será de ti, lo que fuere del Padre será de los hijos, lo que fuere de la Cabeza será de los miembros y donde estuvieres el cuerpo, allí se juntarán las águilas.” Tratado del Amor de Dios, (OC I, p. 973; cf Romans 5:12-21).
He became man and did not cease being God: two natures and one person so that one can say God-Man and Man-God, and that what is said of the one can be said of the other and that the blessings of the Word (Jesus Christ) are communicated to man and the works of the man to the Word. Humanity and divinity were married: O marvel of God even to the emptiness of man! O marvel of man even to the exaltation of God! Today the Word is married with that holy soul and body.\textsuperscript{142}

The nuptial understanding of the Incarnation stressed the role of Christ as mediator between God and humanity, as well as his relationship to the church as Bridegroom to Bride. In writing about Christ's sanctification of the church, Maestro Ávila expressed in his own words St. Paul's theology in Ephesians 5:25-27:

Christ is the new man because he is without sin and because he is the God-man. He is married to us who are poor, ugly and full of evil not in order to leave us in that state, but to destroy our evil and give us his goodness. For he pays for us what is suitable according to the divine ordinance, taking our place and our likeness so that with the likeness of a debtor, while not being one, and enduring harsh punishment, which he did not deserve, he removed our ugliness and gave us his beauty and riches.\textsuperscript{143}

\section*{3. The Saving Effects of the Life of Christ}

The third Christological theme was the emphasis on the importance of the salvific action of the life of Christ: every action of Jesus Christ was viewed in the

\textsuperscript{142} “Hácese hombre y no deja de ser Dios; dos naturalezas y una persona, de manera que se diga Dios es hombre, y el hombre es Dios, y lo que se dice del uno se diga del otro, y que se comuniquen los bienes del Verbo al hombre y los trabajos del hombre al Verbo. Casados están: O mira Dei usque ad hominem exinanitio! O mira hominis usque ad Deum exaltation! Casado está hoy el Verbo con aquella santa ánima y cuerpo.” \textit{Sermon 65 [1]}, (OC III, ¶19-20, p. 871-872).

\textsuperscript{143} “Cristo es hombre nuevo porque es sin pecado y porque es Dios y hombre. Y despóside con nosotros, feos, pobres, y llenos de males; no para dejarnos en ellos, mas para matar nuestros males y darnos sus bienes. Por lo cual convenía, según la ordenanza divina, que pagase él por nosotros, tomando nuestro lugar y semejanza para que con aquella semejanza de deudor sin serlo y con aquel duro castigo sin haber hecho porque, quitase nuestra fealdad y nos diese su hermosura y riquezas.” \textit{Audi Filia}, (OC I, Chapter 69, p.685).
light of salvation history in which humanity is reconciled to God. Jesus Christ takes on every part of being human except sin:

Because God was such an immense Being and because his greatness was the reason men were frightened of him, he arranged to become man so that seeing him as man, seeing him humble, seeing him speaking and talking with them, men had him always in their memory and loved him. He does not fall from their heart. And God was not content with becoming man; but coming to the world, he was tired, hungry, thirsty and worked for the love of men. And besides this, Christ loved humanity so much that he wanted to die, nailed to a cross, the most humiliating and dishonorable death that could be suffered; all so that man would not forget God.144

Moreover, daily reflection upon the life of Christ brings comfort to all who are filled with the concerns of the world:

Jesus Christ has done so much for us that it is not necessary to move us to say more except that we remember his deeds, his justice, and what he suffered; since even though we may be stones and iron, our memory of him has so much power that it melts our hearts. And so in every heart of man, the memory of Jesus is sweeter than honey. If your sins disturb you, if your flesh afflicts you, if your soul is discouraged, take this medicine that smells so good, that gives salvation, removes sorrow and gives sweetness to every heart.145

144 “Viendo que ser Él inmenso, y ten grande que su grandeza les era causa que los hombres se extrañassen de Él, acordó Dios de hacerse hombre para que viéndolo hecho hombre, viéndolo humilde, viéndolo acá hablar y conversar con ellos, lo tuviesen siempre en la memoria y lo amasen y no se les cayese del corazón. Y no sólo se contentó con esto; pero, viendo al mundo, cansóse, hubo hambre y sed y trabajó por amor de los hombres. Y de más de esto, quiso tanto a los hombres, que quiso morir, puesto en cruz la más abatida y deshonrada muerte que se pudo padecer; todo porque el hombre no olvidase a Dios.” Sermon 38, (OC III, ¶ 5, p. 514)
145 “Es tanto lo que Jesucristo ha hecho por nosotros que no es menester para movernos decir más, sino que nos acordamos de sus obras, de su justicia, de lo que padeció; porque aunque seamos piedras y hierros, su memoria tiene tanta fuerza que con ella se derretirá nuestro corazón. Y así en cualquier corazón de hombre es más dulce que la miel la memoria de Jesús. Si tus pecados te desmayan, si tu carne te aflige, si tu alma está desmayada toma esta medicina que huele tan bien que de salud y quita dolor y de dulzura a todo corazón.” Sermon 46, (OC III, ¶ 26, p. 611).
Knowledge of the saving deeds of Christ brings comfort to all who are filled with the concerns of the world. Ávila also related the life of Christ antithetically to the story of David fleeing Saul (1 Samuel 21):

David responded to Abimelech that King Saul commanded him to go quickly and secretly, because he would not have a place to get arms or take people with him, nor was it appropriate since the mission was secret. The truth was that David was fleeing King Saul who wanted to kill him. David would not respond to anyone who questioned him about this matter because he was fleeing from his father-in-law who intended to put him to death. But Jesus would say that he comes alone and without arms because the Son of the Virgin came not to be served but to serve, and for this deed it was appropriate to come alone and poor rather than rich and in the company of others. He also does not bring a sword because he does not come to judge the world but to save it. He does not come fleeing death, but looking for it and to give his life, as he says, for the ransom of many. Who does not admire such a love that does not seek its own comfort but our benefit? He desired to save mankind so much that he did not hesitate to give his life and destroy in himself the enmity between God and us, as St. Paul says. If you want to know the reason why the Lord walks alone, why he loses his life on the cross, it is to make peace between God and men.146

The three Christological themes of Maestro Ávila, the Heart of Christ, Christ as Bridegroom, and the reflection on the Paschal mystery are interrelated. They are also related to the love of God the Father who loved humanity so much as to give us his Son, Jesus Christ and whose love is made visible in the

146 "David respondió a Abimelec que el rey le mandaba ir de tanta prisa y con tanto secreto que ni hubo lugar para tomar armas ni para llevar gente consigo ni convino porque el camino fue muy secreto. Mas la verdad era que él iba huyendo del rey Saul porque le quería matar. No responderá nuestro David a quien le preguntare esto porque va huyendo de la muerte que su suegro le quería dar; mas dirá que él viene sólo y sin armas porque el Hijo de la Virgen vino a servir y no a ser servido y para este oficio más conviene venir sólo y pobre que rico y acompañado. Tampoco trae espada porque ni viene a juzgar el mundo sino a salvarlo; ni viene huyendo de la muerte sino a buscarla y dar su ánima como Él lo dice por rescate de muchos. Quién no se admira de tal caridad que no mira a su descanso sino a nuestro provecho; y lo desea tanto que no dudó de perder su vida par darnos vida y matar en sí mismo las enemistades que estaban entre Dios y nosotros como dice San Pablo? Su queréis saber porqué el Señor anda sólo, porqué pierda su vida en la cruz es por hacer paces entre Dios y los hombres..." Sermon 51, (OC III, ¶ 2, p. 655).
Incarnation. Delving into these themes, Christ’s followers would be led to sharing in Christ’s life in deeper humility.

C. ÁVILA’S ECCLESIOLOGY

Maestro Ávila saw the church as the dynamic, living presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Álvaro Huerga described his ecclesiology in this way:

The ecclesiological thought of Maestro Ávila can be reduced to a simple formula: the mystery of the church is a prolongation of the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ, the mystery of the church: two sides of one reality.\textsuperscript{147}

Ávila did not develop a systematic theology of the church. Instead, in his sermons and writings, he used concrete images to present the reality of the church to the people. Huerga listed his five predominant images: mother, bride, community (compañía), Mystical Body, and House of the Last Supper. It will become clear that some of Ávila’s images were greatly influenced by the writings of St. Paul.

1. Church as Mother

The image of the Church as mother was easiest for teaching young people, because they could connect it to their own experience with their mothers. Ávila used it also throughout his sermons and other spiritual writings. In his work \textit{Audi Filia}, he wrote:

Since our mother the church knows that we need Christ in our prayers, she usually says at the end of her prayers to the heavenly Father: ”Grant this through Jesus Christ our Lord.” She learned this from her husband and teacher, who said, “Anything

\textsuperscript{147} “Se puede reducir el pensamiento eclesiológico del maestro san Juan de Ávila a una formula simple: el misterio de la Iglesia es una prolongación del misterio de Cristo. Misterio de Cristo, misterio de la Iglesia; dos caras de una realidad.” Álvaro Huerga, ”El Magisterio de San Juan de Ávila,” (ACI, p.514).
you ask the Father in my name he will give you.” 148

As a mother, the church teaches and feeds her children through the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist: “Holy Mother Church, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, always reminds you of the death of Jesus Christ and the institution of the most Blessed Sacrament (the Eucharist).”149 The church was the teacher of the celebration of the Eucharist: “As one who has the Spirit of God, the church, our mother, knows our ignorance and teaches us in the prayer of the Mass . . . the proper way to celebrate [the feast of the Assumption.]”150 Maestro Ávila brought together the image of a mother who teaches, nurtures, protects and guides her children with Mother Church, who has done the same for all the baptized.

2. The Church as Bride

The church as the Bride of Christ is a thoroughly Pauline image.151 The image of the Bridegroom is presented in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ which is described as a union of divinity (Bridegroom) with humanity (Bride). It also signified the relationship of Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom of the church for whom he poured out his life that she might have life. Ávila wrote about this double sense of Bride and Bridegroom in Audi Filia:

If you remember well, Bride of Christ, the reason you never forget

148 “Y conociendo nuestra madre la santa Iglesia esta necesidad que de Cristo en nuestras oraciones tenemos suele decir en fin de las suyas al celestial Padre: Concédenos esto, ‘por Jesucristo nuestro Señor.’ Lo cual aprendió de su esposo y maestro que dijo: Cualquier cosa que pidiéredes al Padre en mi nombre dárosla ha (Jn 16:23).” Audi Filia, (OC I, Chapter 84, ¶ 6, p. 720).
149 “Y también la santa madre Iglesia alumbrada por Espíritu Santo procura traer siempre a la memoria la muerte de Jesucristo y la institución del Santísimo Sacramento.” Sermon 38, (OC III, ¶20, p. 519).
150 “...como quien tiene el espíritu de Dios conoce nuestra ignorancia enseñanos en la oración secreta de la misa... para celebrar esta fiesta con disposición semejante a la dicha fiesta...” Sermon 71, (OC III, ¶2, p. 974).
151 Cf. Ephesians 5:21-32
the mother of this true Solomon, who was and is the Blessed Virgin Mary, you will find her crowned with a beautiful garland, giving him (the Word) flesh without any sin on the day of the Incarnation, which was the wedding day of the divine Word with holy humanity, and of the Word made flesh with the church, who we are. From that sacred womb Christ came out as a Bridegroom who comes out of his bridal chamber and like a strong man runs his course, taking to heart the work of redemption that was the most difficult task that could be undertaken. At the end of the course, on Good Friday, he married . . . his church for whom he had worked, as Jacob for Rachel (Gn 29:22). Then she (the church) was taken from his side as he slept in death, similar to Eve, who was taken from Adam while he slept.152

He combined the two senses of the Bridegroom image again when he stated:

Lord, you are married to another woman. There is even another marriage. God married to a human nature, true God and true man, agreed to marry and take another Bride, certainly quite different from himself in lineage and goodness and she is the Christian church, so that we, the whole congregation of the faithful we call ourselves, his Bride.153

This spousal relationship is an ongoing one since Christ continues to pour out his love on the church through the Holy Spirit.

3. The Church as Community (Compañía)

152 “Pues, si bien os acordáis esposa de Cristo de lo que es razón que nunca os olvidéis la Madre de este Salomón verdadero, que fue y es la bendita Virgen María hallaréis haberla coronada con guirnalda hermosa dándole carne sin ningún pecado en el día de la Encarnación, que fue día de ayuntamiento y desposorio del Verbo divino con aquella santa humanidad y del Verbo hecho hombre con su Iglesia que somos nosotros. De aquel sagrado vientre salió Cristo como esposo que sale del Tálamo y comenzó a correr su carrera como fuerte gigante tomando a pechos la obra de nuestra redención que fue la más dificultosa cosa que se podía emprender. Y al fin de la carrera en el día del Viernes Santo casó por palabras de presente con esta su Iglesia por quien había trabajado como Jacob por Raquel. Porque entonces le fue sacada de su costado estando él durmiendo el sueño de muerte a semejanza de Eva, sacada de Adán que dormía (cf. Gen 2:21) Audi Filia, (OC I, Chapter 68, p. 682).

153 “Señor, sois casado con otra mujer. Aún hay otro casamiento. Este mismo Dios casado con aquella naturaleza humana Dios y hombre, verdadero acordó de se casar otra vez y tomar una esposa cierto bien diferente de sí en linaje y en bondad y es la Iglesia cristiana que nos llamamos esposa suya toda la congregación de los fieles.” Sermon 6, (OC III, ¶ 5, p. 97-98).
The image of the church as community (compañía) or society was important for Maestro Ávila because it stressed that in the church community charity was learned and practiced, especially by the sharing of goods:

There is a society which we call the church, in which all the goods are held in common. Such is the strength of their friendship in which each one's possessions and talents are shared by all. The good Christian does not seek a particular thing for himself, rather, all things are for all people.154

The growth of the Christian believers in the community was measured by their growth in charity:

In agreement with the Head, who is Christ, I said that the church never grows except in charity and that no one grows by prophecy, nor by the gift of tongues or by any other grace. Just as no one can enter to serve God except through Jesus Christ, so no one can increase in love except through Jesus Christ.155

A third passage described the church as community and Mystical Body and connects these images to the Holy Eucharist:

What is this society (compañía)? –when you receive communion, you are received into this society. You are a member of the Body of Christ, joined to him through an eternal society that will never falter on his part. God, who calls you into this society of the Body of Christ, which is the mystical Body of the church, is faithful and we are members of this Body. Just as the hand is part of the body, and lives and is sustained in it, so you are part of Christ and . . . you are incorporated through communion in Christ as a member of the Body. This is what it means to receive communion; to be a participant in Jesus Christ, to become one with him.156

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154 "...porque hay una compañía, la cual llamamos Iglesia en la cual todos los bienes son comunes. Tal es la virtud de la amistad de ellas que tuviendo cada uno su bien es común para todos. El buen cristiano no pide cosa particular para sí sino todas las cosas para todas." Lecciones sobre 1 San Juan (II), (OC II, Lección 1:3, p. 350).

155 "Conforme a la cabeza que es Cristo dije que nunca crece la Iglesia sino en caridad y que nadie ni por profecías ni por don de lenguas ni por otra gracia ha de crecer. Como ninguno puede entrar a servir a Dios sino por Jesucristo, así nadie puede crecer más sino por Jesucristo." Lecciones sobre 1 San Juan (II), (OC II, Lección 1:3, p. 351).

156 "–Que compañía es esta? –Cuando comulgas eres recibido en esta compañía, eres hecho miembro del cuerpo de Cristo asido a Él por compañía eterna que nunca de su parte faltará. Fiel es Dios que os llama en compañía del cuerpo de Cristo el cual es el Cuerpo místico de la Iglesia y todos somos miembros de este cuerpo. Así como la mano es parte del cuerpo y vive y se sustenta..."
This society, founded in Jesus Christ, emphasized the obligation of unity and charity of the individual believers to each other. Ávila’s description of this image of the church calls to mind the passage from Acts:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.¹⁵⁷

### 4. The Church as the Mystical Body

Maestro Ávila developed the image of the Mystical Body from his study of St. Paul.¹⁵⁸ As the above passage on the Holy Eucharist from Sermon 58 demonstrated, Ávila taught that the reception of the Sacrament united the members of the Mystical Body to Christ and to each other. The horizontal union of believers flowed from the vertical union of love that Christ, the Head, had established with his Body, the church.

We eat the Body of the Lord and as it has been said, Christ takes us to himself, as one who is strong to one who is weak, and he incorporates us into himself making us his members; or if we have already become members, he joins himself to us more closely, making us more perfectly part of his Holy Mystical Body.¹⁵⁹

In *Audi Filia*, he described the intimacy of this union:

... but the Blessed Lord being the Head placed himself before the

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¹⁵⁷ Acts 2:44-47.
¹⁵⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-31.
¹⁵⁹ “Comemos al Señor, y según se ha dicho, comemos él a nosotros como la fuerte a lo flaco, e incorporamos en sí, haciéndonos miembros suyos; o si ya lo estamos hechas juntanos más consigo haciéndonos más perfectamente partes de su Sagrado Cuerpo místico.” Sermon 40. (OC III, ¶10, p. 537).
blows of divine justice and died on the cross to give life to the body, which we are. And after having given the body life through penance and the sacraments, he gives us gifts, defends and sustains us as some one so much his own that he is not content with calling us slaves, friends, brothers or sons, but to more freely show his love and give us more honor, Christ places his name on us. Because of the ineffable union of Christ the Head with the church his Body, we are called one Christ.\textsuperscript{160}

The image of the church as the Mystical Body was rooted in Ávila’s Christology especially concerning the love of Christ and his teaching on the Holy Eucharist. He taught that through the reception of the Eucharist and prayer, believers were to be more deeply drawn into the love of Christ and united with him in a mystical way.

5. The Church as the House of the Last Supper

The image of the church as the House of the Last Supper was actually the title of Ávila’s Holy Thursday sermon: “La Iglesia Romana es la casa donde celebra Cristo la cena.”\textsuperscript{161} The image clearly signifies that it is the Eucharist that makes the church. Without the sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, there would be nothing to hold it together. Referring to the Cenacle of the Last Supper, Ávila preached:

Let us not pass by this house because it signifies the church. And woe to the one who does not know this house and dwell in it because it is impossible to be saved outside of her. There is no salvation outside of the Holy Roman Catholic Church . . . . Look to

\textsuperscript{160} “... mas este bendito Senor, siendo cabeza se puso delante del golpe de la justicia divina y murió en la cruz por dar vida a su cuerpo que somos nosotros. Y después de habernos vivificado mediante le penitencia y los sacramentos nos regala defiende y mantiene como a cosa tan suya que no se contenta con llamarnos siervos amigos, hermanos o hijos sino para enseñar mas su amor y darnos más honra nos pone su nombre. Porque por esta ineffable unión de Cristo cabeza con la Iglesia su cuerpo él y nosotros somos llamados un Cristo.” \textit{Audi Filia}, (OC I, Chapter84,\textsuperscript{18}, p.721).

the house where the Lord celebrates the Last Supper, where he consecrates, where he makes priests, where he preaches to his disciples, where afterwards he sends the Holy Spirit.¹⁶²

Ávila used these five images of the Church: mother, bride, compañía, Mystical Body, and House of the Last Supper, to teach his listeners that the mystery of the church is best explained by looking at the different facets that compose it, realizing that the whole mystery is greater than one particular image. Each image invites the person to enter the mystery more deeply.

**D. ÁVILA’S PNEUMATOLOGY**

Maestro Ávila’s teaching on the Holy Spirit reflected the thought of both St. Paul and St. John. The six sermons he wrote on the Holy Spirit dealt with the prominent and transformative role that the Holy Spirit played in the church and the lives of individual believers.¹⁶³ The Holy Spirit was the thread that connected all things to Christ. Four points of avilist pneumatology will be treated: the equality of the Spirit within the Trinity, and the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ, to the church, and to the human person seen as the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶² "No se nos pase por alto ésta casa porque ésta significa la Iglesia. Y ¡ay de quien no supiere esta casa y morare en ella, porque tan imposible es salvarse fuera de ella cuan imposible fue no ahogarse hombre que en el tiempo del diluvio no entrase en el arca, y aun más imposible! No hay fuera de la Santa Iglesia Romana... Siete ojos, hermanos, siete ojos a la casa donde el Señor celebra su fiesta, donde consagra donde hace sacerdotes donde predica a sus discípulos donde envió después al Espíritu Santo." *Sermon 33*, (OC III, ¶9, p. 410-411).

These sermons are numbered 27-32 in *Obras Completas Volume III*.
1. Equality of the Spirit within the Holy Trinity

In his Trinitarian theology within a Thomistic framework,164 Ávila highlights the equality of the persons as well as the Son and the Spirit having their source in the Father:

The Father is an infinite power who ... begot a Son equal and similar to himself; he is the fullness of Goodness who gave all his essence to his Son by way of generation and the Holy Spirit by way of love; finally the Father is an ocean of infinite perfection ... whom all the angels worship, the dominations adore, and the powers tremble, and the Son and Holy Spirit know the Father who is their source and that while there is among the three Persons total equality, it is more than equality since it is a unity of the same nature. The authority of the Father bestows on the Son and Holy Spirit what they have and the Father does not receive it from them nor from any other.165

2. The Relationship of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

When Ávila examined the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, he saw the Holy Spirit as the continuation of the mystery of Christ. "We pass through Christ to the Holy Spirit,"166 the other "Advocate"167 whose mission is to make Christ known:

Just as Jesus preached, so now the Holy Spirit preaches; just as he taught, the Holy Spirit teaches; just as Christ consoled, so the Holy Spirit consoles and rejoices ... May you possess inside of yourself a counselor, guide, administrator who accompanies you in everything. Finally, if you do not lose his grace, he will walk at your side and you can do nothing and say nothing that does not pass through his holy counsel. He will be your faithful and true

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164 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Question 27, Article, 1.
165 "Es un Poder infinito que llegó a poder engendrar un Hijo igual y semejable a sí mismo; es una Bondad tanta, que llegó a dar toda su esencia a su Hijo por vía de generación y al Espíritu Santo por vía de amor; finalmente es un pielago de infinitas perfecciones... al cual los ángeles revercian y las dominaciones adoran los poderes tiemblan y las dos divinas Personas conocen que es su principio y que, aunque haya entre ellos suma igualdad y más que igualdad pues es unidad en la misma naturaleza mas con esto está la autoridad del Padre del cual las doce Personas divinas reciben lo que tienen y el Padre no de ellas ni de otro ninguno." *Sermon 34*, (OC III, ¶3, p.418).
166 "Por Cristo pasamos al Espíritu Santo." *Sermon 29*, (OC III, ¶14, 357).
167 John 14:16
friend; he will never leave you if you do not leave him.  

3. The Relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Church

Working from the image in Revelation 22, Ávila described the Holy Spirit as a river of God’s grace:

This beautiful river is the grace of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son as from one principle; this river waters the great city, which is the church to the one in heaven, as to the one on earth; while the heavenly city rejoices and the earthly city works, there are not two cities; one city is the chosen one of God and his Bride, because the church in heaven and on earth adore, draw near to, and serve one God each in its own way. The Holy Spirit waters this city, giving glory in heaven and grace on earth.  

The Holy Spirit also unites Christ the Head with his Body the church:

Vine and branches are nourished with the same sap: Head and Body are sustained by the same holiness: the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of those incorporated in him are all one. Christ is the vine and his members are the branches.  

Thus, the Holy Spirit serves as the church’s source of unity and transforming grace manifested in Word and sacrament, especially the Holy Eucharist.

4. The Holy Spirit and the Individual Believer

Ávila referred to St. Paul’s image of the human person as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. 

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168 “Así como Jesucristo predicaba así ahora el Espíritu Santo predica; así como enseñaba así el Espíritu Santo enseña; así como Cristo consolaba así el Espíritu Santo consuela y alegra. Qué pides? Qué buscas? Qué quiere más? Qué tengas tú dentro de ti un consejero, un ayo, un administrador, uno que te guíe que te aconseje, que te esfuerce, que te encamine que te acompañe en todo y por todo! Finalmente si no pierdas la gracia andará tan a tu lado que nada puedas hacer decir ni pensar que no pase por su mano y santo consejo. Será te amigo fiel y verdadero jamás te dejará si tú no le dejas.” Sermon 30. (OC III, ¶ 19, 369).

169 “Este río tan hermoso es la gracia del Espíritu Santo, el cual procede del Padre y del hijo como de un principio; éste riega la gran cuidad que es la Iglesia, así a la que está en el cielo como a la que está en la tierra; porque aunque la una goza y la otra trabaja no son dos ciudades: una es la escogida de Dios, una su Esposa; porque la de allá y la de acá a un Dios adora en un Dios se arrima a un Dios ama y sirve según su manera. A esta cuidad riega el Espíritu Santo, allá dando gloria, acá dando gracia.” Sermon 45. (OC III, ¶ 15, 598).

170 “Vid y sarmientos con un jugo se mantienen; cabeza y cuerpo con una virtud se sustentan; el Espíritu de Cristo y de los que en Él están incorporados todo es uno. Él es la Vid y sus miembros son los sarmientos.” Sermon 29, (OC III, ¶ 13, 356).
Man is called a temple because the Lord dwells in him, not only in the soul, but in the body. St. Paul says this about the soul, “You are the holy temple of God.” St. Paul says this about the body, “Do you not know that your bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit?” He dwells in the soul and infuses it with the virtues; and he dwells in the body, mortifying the passions. God uses the body as he wishes since it is his house. It has many rooms for different uses, like a bedroom for sleeping and a kitchen for cooking. Just as in the Temple of Solomon there was a place of incense and a place to sacrifice animals, so in the temple of each person God dwells in the soul infusing virtues as incense and, in the body, mortifying the passions that are the animals sacrificed to him.\textsuperscript{172}

Of all the human temples on earth, the one that was most favored by the Holy Spirit was the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit’s overshadowing made her the Mother of God and later came upon her and Jesus’ disciples as they prayed in the Cenacle.

The Holy Spirit knows very well the depths of the Virgin, he knows very well that most pure heart of hers, he knows very well the palace where he worked so many great mysteries. The Virgin did not speak, do or think anything that in a single point displeased the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{173}

In a similar way, the Holy Spirit works to transform the minds and hearts of all believers and configures them to Jesus Christ. It would not be possible for the church to exist without the presence of the Holy Spirit. For Ávila, the Virgin Mary was the model of a life lived in His grace.

\textsuperscript{171}1 Cor 6:19.
\textsuperscript{172}“Llamase templo porque en cada uno de ellos more el Señor no solamente en el ánima mas también en el cuerpo. Del ánima San Pablo lo dice: Templum sanctum Dei quod estis vos. Del cuerpo el mismo San Pablo: An nescitis quia corpora vestra templum sunt Spiritus Sancti? Mora en el ánima, infundiendo virtudes; y vive en el cuerpo mortificando las pasiones y usa Dios como quiere del aquel cuerpo como tú de tu casa. Tiene muchas piezas para diversos usos como sala para dormir cocina para cocer. Y como en el templo de Salomón había lugar para ofrecer incienso y lugar para sacrificar animales ansi en el templo de cada uno mors Dios en el ánima, infundiendo virtudes como que incienso y el cuerpo mortificando las pasiones que son las animales que se le sacrifican.” \textit{Lecciones sobre I San Juan (II),} (OC II, Lección 2, 350-351).
\textsuperscript{173}“Conoce muy bien el Espíritu Santo las entrañas de la Virgen; conoce muy bien aquel su corazón tan limpio, conoce muy bien aquel palacio donde tantos y tan grandes misterios obró. No hizo la Virgen, ni pensó, ni habló cosa que en un sólo punto desagradas al Espíritu Santo...” \textit{Sermon 30,} (OC III, ¶4, 364).
CONCLUSION

The theology of Maestro Ávila was missionary in style, in that it was simple, practical, based on the creed, the virtues and sacred scripture. It stressed both the interior spiritual life and the exterior actions of the person. The simple message, like that of St. Paul, was proclaimed with fiery zeal: Jesus Christ has poured out the fullness of his divine love on his Body the church from the cross. He is the Bridegroom who offered his life for his Bride. The church, the continuation of Christ’s saving mission, manifests itself as mother, bride, compañía, Mystical Body and House of the Last Supper. Since the Virgin Mary is Mother of God and the church as well as the one possessing the Holy Spirit in his fullness, Ávila’s Mariology will flow from these basic truths and images.
CHAPTER FOUR
SIXTEENTH-CENTURY PREACHING
AND SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA

INTRODUCTION

Spain was blessed with a period of renewal and development of preaching during Maestro Ávila's lifetime. During this period, several bishops and priests published manuals on the "Ars Predicandi," hoping that these manuals would bring an end to abuses in preaching as well as provide a suitable guide for the study and preparation of new preachers. The content of some of these manuals attempted to reintroduce such classical masters of rhetoric as Cicero, Horace, Quintilian and others.

Maestro Ávila is described in three of these manuals as the model of a good preacher. In this chapter, I will examine sixteenth-century preaching in Spain in four parts; part one will focus on the crises in preaching that led to the sixteenth-century renewal; part two will be a presentation of nine preaching manuals written during this period; part three, a presentation of the preaching style and theology of Maestro Ávila; part four, a summary of the key points of sixteenth-century preaching.
A. CRISIS IN LATE MEDIEVAL PREACHING

Elizabeth Torrance, in her doctoral dissertation, entitled Style, Themes and Ideas in the Works of San Juan de Ávila, provided an introduction to preaching from the later middle ages to the time of Maestro Ávila. She wrote that for the first 1200 years in Spain “Preaching was essentially an informal matter and sermons had no particular structure.”174 For the most part, “the sermon was a brief explanation of a biblical passage – an informal discourse or conversation.”175 “The scarcity of Spanish medieval preaching and its lack of distinction might have been the result of the disintegration of theological learning in medieval Spain and because priests, lacking176 the proper education in theology and biblical studies, did not know how to preach.

The thirteenth century, with the rise of the universities and the mendicant orders, saw a renewed emphasis on preaching. For the most part, public preaching was done by bishops, university professors and mendicant friars. “In contrast to the earlier monastic stability, thousands of mendicant friars became itinerant preachers while professors took turns in the university pulpits and required trial sermons of candidates for degrees.”177 In the university setting, the study of rhetoric assumed greater importance in regard to the scholastic method of theological argumentation. University sermons expressed a strong academic theology. On the other hand, mendicant preachers178 were zealous and direct in preaching and focused more on the moral exhortation to practice virtue and

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174 Elizabeth M. Torrance, "Themes, Styles and Ideas in the Works of San Juan de Avila" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1980), 43.
175 Themes, p.43.
176 Themes, p.44.
178 Franciscan and Dominican friars
avoid sin. The education of mendicant friars varied between the university education of the Dominicans and the spirit-filled evangelism of the Franciscans. The mendicants preached to various types of people, mostly to the poor and uneducated, while university professors preached to their students and other professors.

Torrance cited several reasons for the decline of fervent preaching the fourteenth century: Many preachers failed to adequately study Scripture, while others, more eager to please the audience than preach the Gospel, took on a more vulgar or earthy style. As a result of the lack of Scripture study and knowledge of the faith, "preaching became more aggressive, emotional and apologetic, thus unable to move the hearts of the people." During this period, as sermon content was weakened, the message of the Gospel was deemphasized and the delivery and style became more confrontational and crude. Torrance notes that in this period, Spain did produce an exceptional preacher, the Dominican priest St. Vincent Ferrer, who preached the Gospel in a missionary style that presented solid scholastic theology in a language suitable for the level of the people to whom he was preaching.

From the middle of the fifteenth-century onward, several events brought dramatic changes to Spanish politics, culture and religion. Through the consolidation of political power by Ferdinand and Isabella and the expulsion of the Moors and the Jews, Catholicism was to become the religion of all of Spain. With the movement toward a political, religious and cultural uniformity, a new

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179 *Themes*, p.45.
180 *Themes* p.45.
181 *Themes*, p.47.
The evangelization of Spain was initiated with the help of Fray Hernando de Talavera who, after serving as confessor to Queen Isabella, was named Archbishop of Ávila and later of Granada. He was known as a holy man and a good preacher. The preaching of Talavera was described in this way:

... his sermons- a contemporary says- were different from those that were commonly done and were often expressly pompous. He preached in such a way that even though he articulated difficult and subtle things about the great mysteries of the faith, the simplest old woman of the audience understood these mysteries as well as the one who knew them well ... and therefore his sermons seemed so unadorned that some said they left without having heard a sermon.

Talavera attracted many people with his simple and sincere style. He taught them the faith and exhorted them to live moral lives.

Torrance believed that Talavera was a person that Ávila would later imitate in his preaching. Both sought to educate people in the faith by using simple methods and both preached throughout Andalucía, where Christianity had been overshadowed by Islam. Talavera prepared the way for the renewal and reform of preaching in Spain that Ávila later would continue.

B. PREACHING MANUALS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

In the prologue to the book *Instrucción de Predicadores* by don Francisco Terrones del Caño, published in 1617, Felix Olmedo, SJ, has written a thorough survey of preaching manuals that influenced the work of Bishop Terrones de

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182 *Themes*, p. 48.
183 *Themes*, p. 49
184 *Themes*, p. 49.
Caño. Olmedo presented over fourteen manuals on preaching in the prologue. Eight of these will be examined in this section besides the manual, *Avisos para los Predicadores del Santo Evangelio*, written by the Dominican preacher Agustín Salucio (1523-1601). The exact dates of these works were not given, but it is assumed that they were published or at least well known in the sixteenth-century. Many of these works were published after Ávila had begun preaching in Andalucía.

These preaching manuals have five points in common: 1) They were written at the request of students to help them become better preachers; 2) The study of Sacred Scripture and of scholastic theology is considered a necessary preparation for the preacher; 3) Most of the manuals agreed with the proposition of the poet Horace, who wrote that the purpose of the poet (and, for purposes of this chapter, the preacher) is to “teach, delight and move;”\(^{186}\) 4) The thorough spiritual preparation of the preacher through prayer, the sacraments and the virtuous life allowed God to use him as his evangelical instrument; and 5) Good and clear delivery must accompany solid doctrinal and moral teaching. Let us now examine the teachings of these preachers through their manuals.

1. Alfonso Zorilla

Zorilla divides his manual on preaching, entitled *De Sacris Concionibus Recte Formadis, deque Ratione Theologiae Discendae*, into two parts. Part one addresses the disposition of the preacher and the art of preaching. Part two

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addresses sermon preparation. At the beginning of the work, Zorilla made a clear distinction between rhetoric and preaching. He did not deny the importance of speaking well but believed that there was more to preaching that rhetoric. Zorilla explains it in this way:

To preach is to attract men to the way of virtue and the knowledge of divine things by means of Sacred Scripture. Profane discourse (rhetoric) is the work focused on the ability and cleverness of the speaker. Sacred discourse should always be based on Scripture, although to accomplish that it may be appropriate to ignore or contradict human cleverness.187

Zorilla believes that the words of the preacher possess little value if they are not accompanied by good works.188 The preacher must also know Greek and Hebrew so that he can move beyond the letter of the Word to its deeper meaning,189 and, to be effective, he needs to be a mirror of the Word of God in the way he lives.

2. Fray Lorenzo de Villavencencio

Fray Villavencencio, an Augustinian monk who served as preacher to King Phillip II, had spent time in Germany where he had defended the Catholic faith against the Lutherans. Villavencencio believed that the reason for the spiritual ruin of Europe was religious ignorance due to the lack of Catholic preachers and teachers.190 It could be said that the Reformation was the culmination of the poor

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187 "Predicar es atraer a los hombres al camino de la virtud y al conocimiento de las cosas divinas por medio de las Sagradas Escrituras. El discurso profano es obra de la habilidad e ingenio del orador; el Sagrada debe ir fundado siempre en la Escritura, aunque para ello sea preciso desatender o contrario al ingenio humano." Instrucción, p. LIX.
188 "... que la palabra sola, por elocuente que sea, vale muy poco, si no va a acompañada de buenos obras." Instrucción, p. LIX.
189 "Quiero que el predicador aprenda varias lenguas y lea los clásicos griegos y latinos; que ejerçite el ingenio y el estilo; pero que al predicador no sea tan demasiado a la letra." Instrucción, p. LXI.
190 "Observó que la causa principal de la ruina espiritual de aquellos países era la ignorancia religiosa, debida a la falta de maestros y predicadores católicos." Instrucción, p. LIX.
spiritual and doctrinal formation of the people. If the faithful lacked clarity and moral example, they would be more susceptible to the arguments of the Protestants. Olmedo wrote: "In some provinces, the ministry of preaching was completely ignored. In other areas, it was entrusted to men so ignorant that it pained people to hear them."191 For this reason, Villavencencio took two Protestant preaching manuals, Tabulae Compendiose in Evangelica et Epistolas Concionaturis Omnibus Summopere Utiles et Necessariae by John Spangenburg, and De Formandis Concionibus Sacris, written by Andres Gerardo Hyperio, corrected the doctrinal errors and had them republished. Villavencencio divided Hyperio’s manual into three parts with the first part explaining 1) the excellence and dignity of the ministry of preaching and the four characteristics needed by the preacher: knowledge, virtue, spirit and a vocation to preach.192 Hyperio discussed the five basic parts of the sermon: introduction, proposition, confirmation, refutation and conclusion.193 2) Hyperio then, ignoring the three-fold rhetorical division of demonstrative, deliberative and judicial presented a five-fold division: doctrinal (didascálico), elegiac, instructive, corrective and paracletic.194 3) Hyperio discussed his method of scriptural interpretation, which included both the treatment of the literal and spiritual senses of the text.

191 “En algunas provincias estaba completamente desatendido el ministerio de la predicación; en otras estaba encomendado a hombres tan ignorantes que daba pena oírlos.” Instrucción, p. LX.
192 “... y de las cuatro cosas necesarias para ejercitarlo como conviene, a saber: ciencia, virtud, espíritu y vocación...” Instrucción, p. LXI.
193 “... exordio, proposición o división, confirmación, refutación, y conclusión.” Instrucción, p. LXI.
194 “... doctrinal o didascálico, redargutivo o eleguético, institutivo o paideutico, correctivo o epanorzhético y consolatorio o paraclético.” Instrucción, p. LXII.
While Villavencencio stressed the skills that the preacher needed in order to be effective, he acknowledged that the grace of the Holy Spirit was absolutely necessary:

If the Holy Spirit does not communicate his grace to the preacher, that we commonly call “anointing,” or “spirit,” his words will be like sounding brass. It might be that they will sound very good in the ears of the audience, but they will pass from there quickly because they are dead words, without power or strength to reach the heart and to subject it to grace. That is what the spirit is, a supernatural power of thought and Word that the Holy Spirit communicates to preachers so that they might move the hearts of the listeners and dispose them so that the Kingdom of God may come to them. 195

Without the “anointing” of the Holy Spirit on the preacher and his words, “his sermons were admirable, but dead sermons, beautiful cadavers of sermons.” 196 It is clear from the two manuals which Villavencencio corrected and republished that, while the power of God plays an essential role in the reception of the sermon, the preacher must develop rhetorical skills at the same time.

3. García Matamoros

In De Methodo Concionandi, Matamoros took a more humanistic approach to preaching by stressing the knowledge and practice of rhetoric as proposed by Cicero. 197 Matamoros did not believe that rhetoric weakened preaching. Similar to other forms of public speaking, “preaching had to be adjusted to the general laws of oratory. If some part of rhetoric were set aside or

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195 “Si el Espíritu Santo-dice- no comunica su gracia al predicador, eso que vulgarmente llamamos unción, espíritu, sus palabras serán como bronce que suena, y podrá ser que suenen muy bien en los oídos del auditorio; pero de allí no pasaran porque son palabras muertas, sin fuerza ni virtud para llegar al corazón y rendirlo a la gracia. Porque espíritu eso es: un fuerza sobrenatural de pensamiento y de palabra que el Espíritu Santo comunica a los predicadores para que muevan los corazones de los oyentes y los dispongan para que venga a ellas el reino de Dios.” Instrucción, p. LXII.

196 “Sus sermons serán admirables, pero serán sermons muertos, hermosos cadáveres de sermones.” Instrucción, p. LXIII.

197 Instrucción, p. LXIII.
if something else were substituted for it, the sermon would be presented in an earthy (vulgar) way.\textsuperscript{198} Rhetorical skill could make a preacher’s words more attractive, but they still needed something more to be efficacious. Matamoros stated:

> It is not hidden from me that in this ministry, God is the one who governs the tongue of the preachers. It is the grace of the Holy Spirit that gives force to the words to penetrate hearts and subject them to the sweet yoke of the Gospel. Neither was it hidden from me that there have been and are apostolic men who without knowing the laws of rhetoric have preached with much success and provided great benefit for souls.\textsuperscript{199}

He responded to those who believed that preaching was not a natural gift, but a supernatural grace, by saying,

> Perfect, accomplished speakers are only those in whom the nature and craft are joined. The future preacher should frequently study the works of Cicero and Quintilian under the direction of wise teachers who will teach him how to understand and put into practice the teaching of these masters of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{200}

While Matamoros supported the vigorous study of rhetoric, he also believed that the key component in preaching “was not the human element but the divine, and what was to be said about preaching had to be based on the divine, not the human.”\textsuperscript{201} One particular area in which he gave advice to new preachers concerned preaching on the feast days of saints. He reminded his readers of the

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\textsuperscript{198} “La predicación tiene que ajustarse a las leyes generales de la oratoria. Si alguno se aparta de ellas o trata de susituirlas por otras, dará en tierra con la predicación.” Instrucción, p. LXIV.

\textsuperscript{199} “No se oculta—decía Matamoros—que en este ministerio Dios es el que gobierna la lengua de los predicadores; que la gracia del Espíritu Santo es la que da fuerza a las palabras para penetrar los corazones y sujetarlos al yugo suave del evangelio. Tampoco se me oculta que ha habido y hay en la Iglesia de Dios varones apostólicos que, sin conocer las leyes de la retórica, han predicado y predicen con mucha aceptación y fruto de las almas.” Instrucción, p. LXIV.

\textsuperscript{200} “Perfectos consumados oradores solamente son aquellas en que se junta la naturaleza con el arte. El futuro predicador debe manejar asiduamente las obras de Cicerón y Quintiliano bajo la dirección de sabios maestros, que le enseñaran cómo se ha de entender y cómo se ha de poner en práctica la doctrina de estas dos príncipes de la retórica.” Instrucción, p. LXIV-V.

\textsuperscript{201} “... no es el elemento humano sino el divino en el divino y no en el humano se ha de fundar cuanto se diga de la predicación.” Instrucción, p. LXVI.
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words of St. Basil the Great, who believed that the preacher must not focus on the exterior deeds of the saints, but rather on the interior dispositions of virtue and prayer that were the roots of their good works.

4. Juan de Segovia

Juan de Segovia, a conciliarist theologian of the fifteenth-century, was cited by Olmedo as a model for preachers in the sixteenth-century. He did not give the title of Segovia's work on preaching, but stated that it exercised great influence over preachers at the time. Olmedo described the contents of the books:

The first two dealt largely with the ministry of preaching: those who preach in the church, the qualities preachers must possess, and the things they should teach. Book three addressed style and delivery of the sermon, indicating what he believed to be most appropriate for preaching. Book four speaks of the holiness and spirit of the preacher and the ways of moving the emotions of others.

When Juan de Segovia described the nature of the preacher, he believed that the most important quality was the preacher's spirit: “After the grace of God, the principal means to move the listeners is the spirit of the preacher.” He goes on to say that the spirit of the preacher is two-fold:

The spirit of the preacher can be natural and supernatural. The natural is the gift of persuasion that some persons possess. The supernatural is what God gives to preachers of the Gospel so that upon hearing them, sinners may be turned from sin and the just are justified more and more each time. How is the spirit received? With prayer and humility. The profession of the Christian faith does not

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202 While Juan de Segovia was separated from the church for a period of years because of his belief in conciliarism, he later renounced it and returned to the church.
203 “En los dos primeros trata largamente del ministerio de la predicación: quiénes lo han de ejercitar en la Iglesia, qué cualidades han de tener, qué cosas deben enseñar, etc. En el tercero trata del estilo y de la declamación, indicando lo que en esto lo parece más acertado. En el cuarto, finalmente, habla de la santidad y espíritu del predicador y de la manera de mover los afectos.” Instrucción, p. LXVI.
204 “Después de la gracia de Dios, dice, el medio principal para mover a los oyentes es el espíritu del predicador.” Instrucción, p. LXVI.
concern those things that can be exercised with crudeness and coarseness. There is nothing that requires as much culture and elegance since there is nothing in it that is empty or without value. All the truths of our religion are immense truths that hold within them much substance.  

The principal purpose of preaching was to instruct the faithful. It was the responsibility of the preacher to be “educated in the Sacred Scriptures so that he could present them to the people with clarity and resolve the difficulties that are offered . . . .” If the teaching was done well, then the delight and the persuasion would follow. The content of the teaching was the Word of God, found in the scriptures and interpreted by the Fathers of the Church. Fidelity to Tradition was necessary for all preachers, but the young preacher must be watched particularly closely, because he wrote that a “very young preacher was always a potential danger and disaster for the hearers since those who heard the sermon could not practice well what they heard badly.” He believed that young preachers lacked experience and were in need of an older preacher whom they could model.

Segovia’s second book served as an introduction to Sacred Scripture. In this book he emphasized knowledge of the Fathers of the Church, particularly St.

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205 “El espíritu del predicador puede ser natural y sobrenatural. El natural es el don de persuadir que tienen algunas personas. El sobrenatural lo da Dios a los predicadores evangélicos para que, oyéndolos se conviertan los pecadores y los justos se justifiquen cada vez más.

Como se consigue este espíritu? Con oración y humildad . . . la profesión del cristiano no es de aquellas que se pueden ejercitar con grosería y rustiqueza. Ninguna hay por el contrario que requiera tanta cultura y elegancia porque nada hay en ella vacío o sin provecho. Todas las verdades macizas y de mucha sustancia.” Instrucción, p. LXVII.

206 “ . . . docto y versado en las Escrituras de modo que pueda exponerlas al pueblo con claridad y soltar las dificultades que se ofrecieren.” Instrucción, p. LXVIII.

207 “El estudio de la Sagrada Escritura y de los Santos Padres, sin el cual no merecen el nombre de teólogos, pues la raíz y el fundamento de las conclusiones escolásticas está en el Escritura y los intérpretes más autorizados de ella son los Santos Padres y Doctores de la Iglesia.” Instrucción, p. LXIX.

208 “Un predicador chavacano es siempre un gran peligro y una gran calamidad para los oyentes, poque nadie practica bien lo que aprendió mal en el sermón.” Instrucción, p. LXIX.
Augustine, St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Great.\textsuperscript{209} He also believed that the most effective sermons were those that revolved around a single theme, that is, a particular scripture verse.\textsuperscript{210}

Book three addressed the preacher's delivery and style. Segovia taught that "it is not enough for a sermon to contain substance, but it is also necessary to adorn the sermon so that the listeners will receive it with pleasure.\textsuperscript{211} When the preacher spoke to a people who possessed a simple faith, he was to use language that would lift them up. The language of his preaching should not be crude or coarse in any way. Segovia also recognized that even if the preacher received grace from God, he still might be unable to speak well. He presented the following solution:

If he does not have the grace to speak well, let him imitate good preachers, but not so much that he may seem artificial. The craft should be imbibed in such a way that it is not obvious as when a little bit of water is mixed with wine so that it appears that it is all wine.\textsuperscript{212}

In book four, Segovia treated the spiritual life of the preacher and offered suggestions to young preachers to help improve their sermons. In his conclusion he added:

The pulpit is a fearful place. No one should go up to it without fear and trembling. If we would have only examined our own unworthiness and our lack of resources, it would seem better that we should prevent ourselves from going up into the pulpit, fearful

\textsuperscript{209} Instrucción, p. LXX.
\textsuperscript{210} "Segovia es partidario de los sermones de un solo tema, aunque reconoce que gustan más, sobre todo en la corte los que apostillan todo al Evangelio." Instrucción, p. LXX.
\textsuperscript{211} "...no basta que al sermón sea sustancial sino que hay de procurar aderezarlo de manera que lo reciban con gusto los oyentes." Instrucción, p. LXX.
\textsuperscript{212} "Si no tiene gracia para hablar, imite a los buenos predicadores, pero no de manera que se vea el artificio. El arte debe ir tan embebido en la naturaleza que no se eche de ver, como cuando se mezcla con el vino un poco de agua, que parece que todo es vino." Instrucción, p. LXXI.
of profaning it.\textsuperscript{213}

In short, the ministry of preaching is a sacred task that must be taken seriously since it affects not only the salvation of the preacher, but also the salvation of the people who hear him.

5. Venerable Fray Luis de Granada OP

The venerable Luis de Granada wrote two books on the art of preaching. His first book, \textit{Vida de Padre Maestro Juan de Ávila y las partes que ha de tener un predicador del Evangelio} (1588), served two purposes: it provided a basic biography of his friend and mentor, Maestro Juan de Ávila, and it extolled him as an example of the authentic Gospel preacher. It will be discussed in part three of this chapter. His second work is entitled \textit{Los Seis Libros de la Retórica Eclesiástica o de la manera de Predicar} (1575).

The six books of the \textit{Retórica Eclesiástica} addressed every aspect of preaching. In book one, Granada “treats the origin, usefulness and necessity of rhetoric as well as the study of the virtues of the sacred orator and the loftiness of his ministry.”\textsuperscript{214} This book served as an overview of his theology of preaching. Book two presented the arguments and proofs that the preacher must use to be effective. He defines rhetoric as “the art of speaking well or the science of speaking with prudence and color (adornment).”\textsuperscript{215} “Rhetoric is a wisdom that

\textsuperscript{213} “Terrible lugar es el pulpito. Nadie debe subir a él sin temor y temblor y si hubieramos de mirar sólo a nuestra indignidad e insuficiencia, más bien parece que deberíamos retraernos de subir a él, temerosos de profanarlo.” \textit{Instrucción}, p. LXXII.

\textsuperscript{214} “El primer trata del Origen, utilidad y necesidad de la retórica, del orador sagrado de sus estudios y virtudes de la alteza de su ministerio.” \textit{Instrucción}, p. LXXIII.

\textsuperscript{215} “. . . arte de bien hablar. Ciencia de hablar con prudencia y ornato. . . ” \textit{Instrucción}, p. LXXIV.
speaks plentifully. There can be no eloquence without wisdom.”216 Following the writings of his contemporaries, he divided public speaking into the demonstrative, deliberative and judicial forms, although he admitted that the judicial form was used only by lawyers. He wrote:

The role of the orator is to speak in order to persuade and, in the end, to persuade one to do what the orator wishes. What is necessary is that the orator teach, delight and move. This goal is accomplished by means of art derived from practice and imitation with regard to the five points that the speaker must keep in mind: construction (of the sermon), disposition, elocution, memory and pronunciation.217

Book three presented Granada’s thoughts on amplification and the moving of listeners’ emotions. Examples of a particular type could be used to communicate a difficult point. In other cases, a preacher might wish to use the story of a repentant sinner to move his listeners to the desire to repent and thus recover the happiness they were lacking.

Book four listed the parts of the sermon and the different classes of sermons. The six classical parts of the speech/sermon are the “introduction, narration, proposition, confirmation, refutation and conclusion.”218 Granada then described the three types of deliberative sermons, which were considered to be most useful in exhorting people to pursue virtue and avoid vice. The first model was the demonstrative sermon which pertained to the panegyrics that were preached on the feasts of saints. While the purpose of this kind of sermon was to

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216 “retórica es ... una sabiduría que habla copiosamente...” Instrucción, p. LXXIV.
217 “El oficio del orador es hablar a propósito para persuadir y el fin persuadir de hecho lo que quiere para lo cual es necesario enseñar, deleitar y mover. Esto se consigue por medio del arte del ejercicio y de la imitación con los cuales se perfeccionan las cinco que él llama, partes del orador: invención, disposición, elocución, memoria y pronunciación.” Instrucción, p. LXXIV.
praise a particular saint, he reiterated St. Basil’s warning that saints must be presented as models of holiness by examining their interior love of God over their actions. In the second model, the preacher gave the literal meaning of the Gospel text that was proclaimed. Granada wrote: “The preacher in this matter should paraphrase or gloss more than interpret, and relate with greater extension what the holy Evangelists said with a short and plain style.” In the third model, a combination of the first and the second, the preacher takes a passage from sacred scripture and uses it to exhort people to live virtuously and turn away from sin. He advised the preacher that if he wanted to be effective, he must recognize that the listener has a certain attention span that must be respected:

... in this type of speaking, there is a risk that while we want to be complete with both parts of the sermon, we may stretch out the length of the sermon too much. We should avoid a lengthy sermon, so as not to upset the listeners. If we go on too long, we may lose both the grace and the benefit of what was said well; we can be certain that the disturbed listener does not pay attention to what we say and he loses the pleasure and memory of that he heard in the first part of the sermon.

Book five addressed the issue of elocution (delivery and style). Granada reviewed the writings of Cicero, Quintilian, St. Augustine and St. Cyprian as models for proper style and delivery. He quoted Cicero who stressed the four principal virtues of elocution: good grammatical Latin, clarity, adornment with good images and words, and a delivery that was suitable to the audience being

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219 Terrones del Caño, *Instrucción de Predicadores*, p. LXXVI.
220 “... declarando en una parte del sermón la letra del Evangelio ...” *Instrucción*, p. LXXVI.
221 “Pues el predicador en este asunto debe hacer más de parafrase ó glosador que de intérprete, procurando referir con alguna mayor extensión lo que dijeron las santas evangelistas con estilo breve y llano.” De Granada, *Ret. Ecl.*, p. 564-5.
222 “... en este género hay el riesgo de que mientras queremos cumplir con ambas partes, nos alarguemos en el sermón más de lo justo, de lo cual los predicadores deben huir mucho no sea que fastidiando al auditorio perdamos la gracia y fruto de todo lo que se dijo bien; siendo cierto que el oyente fatigando no atiende a lo que dices y pierde por otra parte el gusto y memoria de lo que oyó.” De Granada, *Ret. Ecl.*, p. 566.
addressed. He gave many examples of the proper use of language as well as
the use of allegory and other techniques.

In book six, Granada treated gestures, pronunciation and other aids for
the preacher. He wrote that “All that is usually said about pronunciation can be
reduced to speaking as we naturally do.” Preachers should not mimic the
pronunciation of others. He wrote:

Pronunciation has to be correct, clear, elegant, and accommodated
to the things about which we are speaking. Elegant speech helps to
wonderfully excite attention. Since the soul of the listener hangs on
every move or voice inflection from the mouth of the preacher, he
perceives inside of himself so many movements that what the
preacher says can change him.

Clarity and elegance in speaking emphasize the importance of what is being said
and can dispose the person to hear the words of the preacher in the way he
intends.

6. Fray Agustín Salucio

A preaching manual book that was not included in Olmedo’s survey of
sixteenth-century preaching was *Avisos para los Predicadores del Santo
Evangelio* by Agustín Salucio who spent his life in Andalucía (1523-1601).

Salucio, a student of both Granada and Ávila, focused on two topics: “sacred
oratory and the statutes in regard to the purity of blood.”

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223 “Cuatro cosas, dice Cicerón, deben principalmente atenderse en la elocución: conviene a saber
que hablemos latina clara, adornada y apta ó congruamente al asunto que se trata cualquiera que
224 “Todo lo que suele decirse acerca de la pronunciación se reduce a que hablemos como la
naturaleza nos enseña.” *Instrucción*, p. LXXVIII.
225 “La pronunciación ha de ser correcta clara, elegante y acomodado a las cosas que decimos lo
cual ayuda maravillosamente para excitar la atención porque a cada mudanza e inflexión de la
voz, el ánimo del oyente que cuela de la boca del predicador percibe dentro de sí tantas
movimientos cuantos sonidos muda el que habla. . .” *Instrucción*, p. LXXIX.
226 “. . . oratoria sagrada y estatutos de limpieza de sangre.” Agustín Salucio, *Avisos para los
Predicadores del Santo Evangelio*, (Barcelona: Juan Flors, 1964), 43.
Salucio's *Avisos* is divided into four parts; Introduction: concerning the preacher and the prophet; Part one: the topic or material of sermons; Part two: preaching delivery; and Part three: the formation and actual preaching of the sermon. In the prologue to Salucio's book, Álvaro Huerga divided *Avisos* into three parts: preaching and prophecy; preaching and study; preaching and art.\(^{227}\) Huerga's divisions will be used to discuss the Salucio text.

Salucio clearly stated the purpose of the sermon in his introduction:

> The purpose of preaching well, properly stated, is not to give pleasure, or doctrine, or to declare some obscure thing; it is not to prove a truth or persuade one to believe it, but to benefit the spiritual health of the person with the divine word and the preaching of the Gospel.\(^{228}\)

He believed that the gift of preaching was similar to the gift of prophecy, because one must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is not with the preacher, he will not preach well. Just as a prophet cannot prophesy whenever he desires, so the preacher cannot preach well whenever he wishes. The Holy Spirit, who blows where he wills, must be there.\(^{229}\) Huerga wrote that "the preacher is the living reed, the harp on which the Spirit plays . . . ."\(^{230}\) As the prophets of the Old Testament prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah, so preachers

\(^{227}\) "Su teoría del orador sagrado aparece con toda evidencia en estos tres puntos: predicación y profecía; predicación y estudio; predicación y arte." *Avisos*, p. 71.

\(^{228}\) "Porque bien predicar, si propiamente y de verdad hablamos, no está en dar gusto, no doctrina, ni en declarar alguna cosa oscura, ni en probar ser verdad, ni en persuadirlo, sino en aprovechar a la salud espiritual con la palabra divina y doctrina del Evangelio." *Avisos*, pp. 129-30.

\(^{229}\) "...porque el don del Espíritu Santo no es hábito, sino ubi vult, spirat." *Avisos*, p. 131

\(^{230}\) "El predicador lo mismo que el profeta es la cana viva, el arpa donde tane el espíritu." *Avisos*, p. 72.
must make known the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, not as a hope for the future, but as one who is in their midst. 

Regarding the relationship between preaching and study, it was necessary for the preacher to be a learned man, so that he could guide people to heaven. For that reason, the preacher had to know what he was talking about. Salucio recommended that every preacher possess his own library. Even those preachers who were poor should own “the Concordia or Harmony of the Gospels and the Catena Aurea of St. Thomas.” Knowledge of the Gospels was not enough. The preacher needed the knowledge of all scripture, particularly the Epistles of St. Paul, the Psalms and the Prophets of the Old Testament. In terms of Scholastic Theology, knowledge of the Summa Theologiae was necessary:

The material of preaching is, for the most part, to persuade people to follow virtue and turn away from vice. The one who does not have more than a moderate knowledge of the Secunda Pars of the Summa of St. Thomas cannot treat these things properly. . . . It is also necessary to study the life of Christ, which is the other important part of preaching; the teaching on the sacraments, equal to this . . . is found with greater resolve and distinction in the Tertia Pars of the Summa.

Following in the footsteps of Granada, his teacher, Salucio recommended that preachers possess knowledge of the classics and humanities as well as that of the Fathers of the Church.

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231 “El predicador lo anuncia también, no como esperanza venidera, sino como realidad consumada como “hecho carne.” Avisos, p. 72.

232 “Pues como la intención del predicador. . . guiarlo por el camino al fin, que es cielo. . . .” Avisos, p. 136.

233 Avisos, p. 138.

234 “La materia de la predicación es, por la mayor parte, persuadir virtudes y disuadir vicios. Quien no hubiere más que medianamente estudiado la secunda Parto de la Suma de Santo Tomás, no podrá tratar estas cosas sino muy abajadas. . . . y los misterios de la vida de Santo Tomás, no podrá tratar estas cosas sino muy abajadas. . . . y los misterios de la vida de Cristo que es otra gran Parte; la doctrina de los sacramentos que es igual a esta, donde se saben con mas resolución y con mas distinción es en la tercera Parte.” Avisos, p. 141.
The third point was the connection between preaching and art. In chapter three, Salucio stressed the importance of rhetoric. He listed five rules that the preacher should follow to better serve his listeners. The first rule was to console and encourage the people by word and example so that in their many trials and hardships they would not despair.\textsuperscript{235} The second was to enlighten the ignorant and make known the things they needed to know, such as the divine law and those things connected to it. For this reason the preacher should clearly and simply explain the Apostle’s Creed and the Ten Commandments.\textsuperscript{236} The third was to defend the faith not only by teaching the truths of the faith, but also by responding to those who denied the truths of the faith by showing these people the errors of the false teachers.\textsuperscript{237} The fourth was to instruct the faithful regarding the customs and culture that needed to be lived in the light of the Catholic faith.\textsuperscript{238} The fifth was to correct vices and heal them, both in general and specific cases.\textsuperscript{239} Of all of these, it was equally important to instruct so that anyone who did not know Latin would learn the Gospel.\textsuperscript{240}

\textsuperscript{235} “Por lo cual cumple que el predicador entienda ser su oficio consolar a los trabajados y desconsolados, poniéndoles, por palabras y ejemplos ánimo para no dejarse vencer de la desconfianza y dar en el abismo de la desesperación…” Avisos, p. 152.

\textsuperscript{236} “Es, pues, el segundo oficio alumbrar las ignorancias, señaladamente en aquellos cosas que se han de saber por fuerza… Tales son los artículos de la fe contenidos en el Símbolo, los mandamientos de Dios y de su Iglesia…” Avisos, p. 153.

\textsuperscript{237} “…el predicador se requiere para no solo enseñar verdades sino poder responder a las objeciones que se oponen contra ellos, mostrando que son mentiras, pues contradicen a la pura verdad…” Avisos, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{238} “Lo cuarto, que es instruir pertenece a la información de costumbres de la Sagrada Escritura; y más mejor se toma de la Nueva…” Avisos, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{239} “…el quinto oficio del predicador… es para corregir los vicios y emendarlos así in común como in particular…” Avisos, p. 155.

\textsuperscript{240} “De todas las cosas dichas la más a mano es enseñar porque sólo decir el evangelio de modo que nos entienda quien no sabe latín, lo hacemos.” Avisos, p. 155.
Huerga summarized ten principles that Salucio wished to pass on to new preachers: 1) Inexperienced preachers must learn from their teachers;\textsuperscript{241} 2) The preacher must study the background of Sacred Scripture and the commentaries;\textsuperscript{242} 3) The preacher must be conscious of the dignity and responsibility of the mission he is going to discharge, which is the office of Jesus Christ;\textsuperscript{243} 4) The center of the sermon is the Gospel even if the he uses other books to explain it;\textsuperscript{244} 5) The preacher must always shape his sermons for the instruction and salvation of souls if he wishes to be a collaborator with Christ;\textsuperscript{245} 6) The preacher use simple, transparent and understandable words in a familiar, varied and serious tone of voice;\textsuperscript{246} 7) The preacher must avoid various obstacles such as the unevenness of style;\textsuperscript{247} 8) The preacher must realize that the pulpit is opposed to every kind of silliness; here all is farce, there all is truth. The preacher must be serious since in foolishness one learns to live in evil; in the sermon, one learns to live as God commands.\textsuperscript{248} 9) The preacher must always remember to go up to the pulpit to preach Christ crucified;\textsuperscript{249} 10) The preacher must not forget

\textsuperscript{241} "... el joven que aspira a convertirse en buen predicador es reconocer maestros." \textit{Avisos}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{242} "Estudiar a fondo la Sagrada Escritura y las comentaristas..." \textit{Avisos}, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{243} "Al subir al púlpito, tener conciencia de la dignidad y responsabilidad de la misión que se va a desempeñar que es hacer el oficio de Jesucristo." \textit{Avisos}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{244} "... sobre el Evangelio debe cantarse todo el sermón..." \textit{Avisos}, p.93.
\textsuperscript{245} "El predicador debe orientar sus sermones siempre a la instrucción y salvación de las almas si quiere ser colaborador de Cristo." \textit{Avisos}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{246} "La dignidad utilidad del púlpito exigen también que las palabras que se usan sean transparentes, llanas, inteligibles; y en tono familiar, vario, serio." \textit{Avisos}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{247} "Hay muchos escollos de los que el predicador novel debe huir... la desigualdad de estilo..." \textit{Avisos}, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{248} "El Púlpito es lo mas opuesto que hay al escenario de las farsas; aquí todo es fingido; allí todo es de veras; en las farsas se aprenda a mal vivir; en el sermón vivir como Dios manda." \textit{Avisos}, p.95.
\textsuperscript{249} "Ponga el predicador siempre delante de los ojos que sube al púlpito a predicar a Cristo crucificado..." \textit{Avisos}, p.96.
that good preaching is the fruit of grace and work. Study and prayer are best aids in order to be prepared for the pulpit.\textsuperscript{250}

7. Diego de Estella, OFM

In 1576, Diego de Estella published \textit{Modus concionandi et explanatio in Psalm CXXXVI} in 1594, together with Granada’s \textit{Retórica Eclesiástica}. Fr. Olmedo describes Juan de Segovia, Luis de Granada and Diego de Estella in this way:

Segovia studied the foundation of the material (rhetoric); Granada tried to thoroughly fuse Christian and pagan rhetoric; Estella did away with the pagan aspect and gave his \textit{Modus Concionandi} a totally sacred character that was eminently practical and hit the mark.\textsuperscript{251}

This manual is divided into forty chapters, and dealt with every aspect of preaching, including the disposition of the preacher, the use of the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture as well as the preacher’s style, delivery and pronunciation.\textsuperscript{252} Patience and courage were necessary virtues:

The preacher has a dangerous role and is subject to great trials and so it is necessary that he be shielded by God’s grace and that he always bring God with him; his role as preacher concerns the truths which the world abhors and persecutes.\textsuperscript{253}

Knowledge and study were important tools for this task: “God desires that the preachers study and not rely only on prayer.”\textsuperscript{254} The preacher needs to be an

\textsuperscript{250} “...no olvida el Predicador que le predicar bien es fruto de la gracia y del trabajo. Estudio y oración son los mejores auxiliares para prepararse al púlpito.” Avisos, p.96.
\textsuperscript{251} “Segovia estudio a fonda la materia; Granada trató de fundir a retórica gentile con la cristiana; Estella prescindió de la gentil y dio a su Modus concionandi un carácter totalmente sagrado y eminentemente practico y acertó.” Instrucción, p. LXXXIV.
\textsuperscript{252} Instrucción, p. LXXXVI.
\textsuperscript{253} “Oficio tiene el predicador peligroso y a grandes adversidades está sujeto y así es menester que se escude por Dios y lo traiga siempre consigo; su oficio es de verdades las cuales el mundo aborrece y persigue.” Instrucción, p. LXXXVI.
\textsuperscript{254} “Quiere Dios ... que las predicadores estudien y no lo remitan todo a la oración.” Instrucción, p. LXXXVI.
artist/poet, a theologian, one who knows the lives of the people he serves, and
many human things about jobs and business property in the area in order to
make proper comparisons, not inappropriate ones about hunting, war and
navigation thereby making his listeners laugh at his inept remarks. For example,
Estella believed that if a priest was going to be preaching to sailors and talking
about the Lord on a boat in the Sea of Galilee, he had better know something
about sailing. 255 Thus the tools of the preacher are his books.

Estella told his readers that one of the reasons for publishing the *Modus
Concionandi* was to reform preaching:

> The barbarians entered during the preceding years and
destroyed the ancient style of the Holy Doctors and they
passed over the letter of the Gospel as if they were
grammarians and not as men who knew Scripture or
understood the Gospel, but have recourse to their illusions
and moral imaginations. 256

In order to help facilitate the reform of preaching, he advised avoiding
digressions and being humble and modest in speech because it was not right to be
discourteous or insulting. 257 Everything in the sermons had to be centered on the
salvation of souls. For this reason, he warned that the pulpit was not the place for

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255 "... y así es menester que el predicador sea artista y teólogo y sepa de historias... y que sepa
muchas cosas humanas y de oficios y propiedades de casa de acá para inventar comparaciones y
no decir impropiedades hablando de cosas de caza o guerra oficios o navegación... porque no se
rian los que saben aquellas oficios oyendo impropiedades porque mal podrá representar al
tormenta del mar, que los Apóstoles padecieron si no sabe que casa es amainar y bomba y
gobemalle, etc..." *Instrucción*, p. LXXXVI.

256 "Entraron bárbaros los años pasados y destruyeron el estilo antiguo de los Doctores Santos y
pasando por la letra del Evangelio y declarándola a por mejor decir, pasándole como puros
gramáticas y no como hombre que saldrán Escritura ni entendían Evangelio se acogían a sus
quimeras y imaginaciones morales..." *Instrucción*, p. LXXXVII.

257 "... que conviene acabar cada digresión y de la manera de hacerlas con la modestia y crianza
que conviene porque no le es lícito decir palabra descortés ni injurioso..." *Instrucción*, p. XCI.
speculative theology or confusing opinions. 258 “While the rhetorician puts all his trust in reasons and arguments, the preacher puts his trust in God to move the hearts of his listeners.” 259

In this practical treatment of the ministry of preaching, Estella did not dismiss the art of rhetoric in his manual. However, he believed that rhetoric was to serve preaching while the Word of God and the Holy Spirit played the predominant role.

8. Fray Diego Perez de Valdivia

In 1588, Fray Diego Perez de Valdivia, Chair of Positive Theology in Barcelona, presented material about preaching in a clear systematic way in his manual entitled De Sacra Ratione Concionandi:

Preaching is an art and, as such, it has to be treated in regard to its purpose, duties, materials and instruments. I will treat first the purpose, the craft, the materials and instruments of preaching in general. Second, construction; third, disposition; fourth, instruments proper to the preacher; fifth, the different types of preaching; sixth, the way to make notes; seventh, the way to use preaching for the benefit of others. 260

He compared his purpose for preaching with Aristotle’s purpose for rhetoric:

The purpose of rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is not to persuade, but to speak in order to persuade, just as the purpose of medicine is not to cure, but to provide the means to cure. This purpose produces, in regard to the human orator and doctor, confidence in his own abilities, but his abilities do not guarantee success. The preacher has success because he

258 “El predicador no dispute cuestiones sutiles en el pulpito ni se detenga mucho en cuestiones escolásticas…” Instrucción, p. XCIII.

259 “…el predicador no ha de ser así, sino que tal manera persuada con razones que ponga su confianza en Dios para mover los corazones de las oyentes.” Instrucción, p. XCIV.

260 “La predicación es un arte y como tal se ha de tratar considerando su fin, sus oficios, su materia y sus instrumentos. Trataré pues, primero del fin de los oficios de la materia y de los instrumentos de la predicación en general; segundo, de la invención; tercero de la disposición; cuarto, de los instrumentos propios del predicador; quinto, de los diversos géneros de predicación; sexto de la manera de hacer los cartapacios y séptimo, de la manera de ejercitar con provecho la predicación.” Instrucción, p. CXIX.
cooperates with God and communicates the truth of his promises.\textsuperscript{261}

It was clear that Valdivia believed that the preachers must trust God more than their own intellectual or speaking talents and use the Gospel as their primary material:

> The Good News is sometimes Christ himself. Other times it is the Spirit of Christ communicated to the faithful or the gifts that the Spirit brings; also, finally, it is the text of the Evangelists.\textsuperscript{262}

Since the Gospel is more than the written page, “it principally signifies the grace that the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts as St. Paul repeats in the Letter to the Romans.”\textsuperscript{263} Grace is operative both in the preacher and in the hearer. If the material of the sermon is the Gospel message seen in various forms, then the content of the Gospel is love. Valdivia wrote:

> ... to preach the Gospel ... is to preach the perfect love of God and neighbor. The preacher needs to achieve this love in all of his sermons: to make men perfect in Christ, that is, perfect lovers of Christ. All the other aspects of preaching should be seen as means to achieve this end.\textsuperscript{264}

In addition, one is to follow the Holy Fathers, not the rabbi’s or the heretics in the interpretation of Sacred Scripture.\textsuperscript{265}

\textsuperscript{261}“... el fin de la Retórica según Aristóteles no es persuadir sino hablar a propósito para persuadir como el fin de la medicina no es curar, sino poner los medios para curar. Eso nace... de que el orador humano y el médico fiados en sus propias fuerzas no tienen seguridad del éxito y el predicador si, porque cuenta con la cooperación de Dios y la verdad de sus promesas.”\textit{Instrucción}, p. CXX.

\textsuperscript{262}“Esta buena nueva unas veces es el mismo Cristo, otras el espíritu de Cristo comunicado a los fieles o los dones que ese espíritu trae consigo; otras finalmente el texto del los evangelistas.”\textit{Instrucción}, p. CXX.

\textsuperscript{263}“Evangelio, pues significa principalmente la gracia que el Espíritu Santo infunde en nuestros corazones como lo repite una y otra vez el Apóstol San Pablo en la Epístola a los Romanos.”\textit{Instrucción}, p. CXX; cf. Romans 5:5.

\textsuperscript{264}“Predicar el Evangelio, según esto, es predicar el perfecto amor de Dios y del prójimo. Esto ha de procurar el predicador en todas sus sermones, hacer hombres perfectos en Cristo, esto es, perfectos amadores de Cristo. Todo lo demás debe mirarlo como medio para llegar a este fin.”\textit{Instrucción}, p. CXXII.
In terms of preaching style, Valdivia did not cite Cicero or Quintilian or Horace. He wrote that the Gospel must be preached “in the style that Christ preached it since the Gospel is not only things, but words.” He warned the preacher: “... let us not want to be more elegant than St. Paul nor more eloquent than Christ.” Valdivia took a Gospel-oriented approach to preaching rather than a rhetorical one. Nevertheless, he did not dismiss rhetoric completely, but believed that rhetorical elegance or eloquence could not be for its own sake, but for the spread of the Gospel:

If someone is naturally eloquent, does he have to renounce this gift of God? No. Rhetoric is good and eloquence is good. What we want to say is that the preacher should not rely too much on those gifts because he does not have to speak in the court or the arena like Cicero, but he announces the Gospel to the poor.

Valdivia also listed the qualities that a good preacher should possess:

The duty of the preacher is to encourage prayer, to return frequently to Scripture, to converse with his neighbors, to be merciful to them, to be consumed with the zeal of the faith, to be a model of chastity, of blameless habits, prudent, serious, constant and courageous in the face of trials, who admonishes the faithful and teaches them the Word of God and what they have to do. St. Paul reduces all these duties to four: prayer, example, reading and preaching. The one who does not fulfill these things is a charlatan, but not a preacher. He will make a lot of noise, but not edify.

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265 “El la interpretación de la Escritura se ha de seguir a los Santos Padres no a los rabinos ni a los herejes. Instrucción, p. CXXIII.
266 “en el estilo en que lo predicó Cristo, pues Evangelio no son solamente las cosas sino las palabras también.” Instrucción, p. CXXIII.
267 “No queramos ser nosotros más elegantes que Pablo ni más elocuentes que Cristo.” Instrucción, p. CXXIII.
268 “Y si uno es naturalmente elocuente... ha de renunciar a ese don de Dios? No; buena es la retórica y buena es la eloquencia. Lo que queremos decir es que el predicador no confíe demasiado en esos dones, porque no tienen que hablar en la tribuna de las arengas como Cicerón, sino anunciar el Evangelio a los pobres.” Instrucción, p. CXXV.
269 “El oficio del predicador, dice, es instar en la oración, revolver asiduamente la Escritura, conversar santamente con los prójimos, ser misericordioso con ellos, abrasarse del celo de la fe, ser dechado de castidad de costumbres intachables, prudente, grave, constante, y de una fortaleza...”
These qualities reinforced the idea that the art of preaching demanded much more than eloquence and clarity of words. The preacher was to make known the beauty and clarity of God’s Word by the life that he led. With his moral action and homiletic skill, the preacher would achieve his purpose, which was “to bring man to perfection . . . teach the truths of the faith; to refute errors contrary to the faith; to free man from sin and lead him to every good.” Valdivia believed that one cannot overemphasize the human role to the detriment of the role of God’s overflowing grace.

9. Don Francisco Terrones del Caño

In 1617, El Doctor don Francisco Terrones, Bishop of Tuid and later of León wrote a manual on preaching, entitled *Instrucción de Predicadores*. Olmedo wrote in the prologue to this book that he believed that this work was the culmination of the manuals that had been previously discussed. It was both a summary of what has been taught before as well as Terrones del Caño’s own reflections, which the bishop’s readers would be able to judge as either good or bad.

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270 “el fin de las predicaciones es llevar al hombre a la perfección. . . enseñar las verdades de la fe, refutar los errores contrarios a ellas, librar al hombre del pecado e inducirle a todo bien.” *Instrucción*, p. CXXVII.

271 “Esta arte es la que me pongo a escribir no porque sea yo, por la misericordia de nuestro Señor tan vano que presuma de enseñar a otros como han de predicar. . . sino porque simplemente pienso decir aquí no como se ha de predicar sino como lo ha discado yo y procurado hacer. Otros verán si va bien os mal.” Terrones del Caño, *Instrucción de Predicadores*, CL.
In the first part (tratado primero)272, “What is presupposed before one can begin to preach,” Caño pointed out that there was not one but rather several essential qualities that had to be combined to make a good preacher.273 He mentioned three particularly important ones:

1) The preacher must have a natural disposition for public speaking:

   The preacher has to have a good sonorous and pleasing voice, a good understanding of the text that is clear and magisterial; and a good memory to learn the sermon and speak it without confusion in the order in which he wrote it or intended to deliver it.274

2) The preacher must possess knowledge of God, the world and the virtues:

   His required knowledge should include the three languages of Greek, Hebrew and Latin; a general encyclopedic knowledge; something about medicine, law and canon law; ancient history and the humanities . . . and rhetoric in order to speak well. He also must know philosophy and scholastic theology, sacred scripture in the literal sense, and the commentaries of the Saints and other authors on sacred scripture.275

3) The preacher’s “infused” gifts were more necessary than all the virtues:

   The preacher must practice continual prayer in order to share in the great and living Spirit of our Lord. He must possess a burning desire to gain souls for Christ, the supernatural gift of moving the people, in conformity to what is written about Christ our Lord, powerful in word and deed and the words of

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272 *Instrucción*, pp. 2-45.
273 “No hay parte ni buena calidad natural, infusa ni adquirida, que la pueda sobrar a un predicador perfecto. Todas las ha menester . . .” *Instrucción*, p.CL.
274 “Ha de tener buena voz, sonora y agradable; buen entendimiento claro y magistral; . . . buena memoria para aprender el sermón decírlo sin confusión sino por el orden que lo escribió o propuso decirlo.” *Instrucción*, p.18. This note and the following are from Terrones del Caño’s actual text, which appears after Fr. Olmedo’s Prologue.
275 “. . . supiése todas las tres lenguas, latina, griega y hebrea. . . . al fin una enciclopedia general, no le sobraría nada de todo ello. . . . es menester saber algo, ya de medicina, leyes y canones; ya de la historia antigua, humanidades. Para decir bien dicho el sermón, es menester saber Retórica. . . . e inexcusable es saber Dialéctica y filosofía Natural, Moral y Metafísica, y sobre todo Teología escolástica. . . y Sagrada Escritura, mayormente en sentido literal; lección de santos y otros autores graves que escriben comentarios sobre la sagrada Escritura o tratados o sermones.” *Instrucción*, p.18-19.
eternal life.\textsuperscript{276}

Even with all these qualities, the education of the preacher was something that never ceased because the preacher needed to grow not only in the knowledge of the people but also in the wisdom of God. None of these aspects could be ignored or rushed:

From all that has been said, it is understood that young men cannot preach well, although they think they do; since in many years little can be known, but in a few years very little can be known. If the preacher needs to learn all the things we have said, he needs years to learn them.\textsuperscript{277}

The second part (\textit{tratado segundo})\textsuperscript{278} dealt with two categories of sermon preparation: “the first group concerns a saint or a mystery, the others concern doctrine.”\textsuperscript{279} In regard to a saint or a mystery, the preacher was to speak about was the life of the saint, but more importantly the preacher needed to express the deep love of God that resided in the heart of the saint. The life of the saint or the mystery should be addressed in moderation either at the beginning or end of the sermon, and last no longer than fifteen minutes.\textsuperscript{280}

The doctrinal sermons treated a single theme or point and which could take a great deal of study and preparation. Preferably, the topic should come from

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{276}] “...mucha y continua oración; grande y vivo espíritu de Nuestro Señor; ardiente deseo de ganarle animas; don sobrenatural de mover, conforme a aquello que está escrito de Cristo nuestro Señor, potens in opere in sermone y en otra parte: Verbum vitae aeternae habes.” \textit{Instrucción}, p. 19.
\item[\textsuperscript{277}] “De todo lo dicho se extenderá que no puede predicar bien un mozo, aunque ellos piensan que si; porque aunque en mucho años se puede saber poco; pero in pocos anos no se puede saber mucho. Luego si el predicador ha de saber tantas cosas como hemos dicho, anos ha menester para aprenderlas.” \textit{Instrucción}, p.34.
\item[\textsuperscript{278}] \textit{Instrucción}, pp. 47-98.
\item[\textsuperscript{279}] “De dos maneras divido yo los sermones: la primera es que unos son o de Santo o de misterio, otros son de doctrina.” \textit{Instrucción}, p.47.
\item[\textsuperscript{280}] “Las avanzas y excelencias del Santo es bien tratarlas lo más en un cuarto de hora al principio o al fin del sermón.” \textit{Instrucción}, p.48.
\end{footnotes}
Scripture: “there are some sermons . . . that are more beneficial as homilies in which the Gospel is preached by giving a reflection on some particular verse.\textsuperscript{281}

The third part (tratado tercero)\textsuperscript{282} discussed the actual parts of the sermon. Caño followed the rhetorical model: introduction, narration, affirmation, confutation and conclusion. He devotes the second chapter of this section to the structure of a scriptural homily in terms of the salutation, introduction and body of the sermon.\textsuperscript{283} When speaking about the “courtesies” in the introduction, he wrote that after he extended courtesies to those who were present, he also added a courtesy to the Virgin Mary: “The greeting was addressed to our Lady and to God for his grace.”\textsuperscript{284} Before the preacher began the body of the sermon, he might ask the congregation to recite the “Ave Maria” with him so that Mary’s intercession might make that sermon fruitful.

The fourth part (tratado cuarto)\textsuperscript{285} addressed elocution, pronunciation, gestures and the memory. Caño wrote that “the elocution and language of the preacher has to be a natural and common way of speaking.”\textsuperscript{286} The purpose of speaking well was not an end in itself, but was used as a means to lead people to hear the Word of God. Therefore, clarity of thought and language were important, because they had the capacity to lift the people up to consider the things of

\textsuperscript{281} “Otros sermones hay . . . y los más provechosas como homilías en que se va apostillando el Evangelio diciendo una consideración sobre una cláusula y otra sobre la siguiente, etc. . . .” \textit{Instrucción}, p.49.

\textsuperscript{282} \textit{Instrucción}, pp. 99-123.

\textsuperscript{283} “ . . . salutación, introducción y cuerpo del sermón.” \textit{Instrucción}, p.104.

\textsuperscript{284} “ . . . y la salutación fue enderezada a nuestra Señora y a Dios por su gracia . . .” \textit{Instrucción}, p. 105.

\textsuperscript{285} \textit{Instrucción}, pp. 124-163.

\textsuperscript{286} “ . . . la elocuencia y lenguaje del predicador ha de ser natural y común manera de hablar.” \textit{Instrucción}, p.125.
God. The gestures of the preacher should always be both moderate and modest in order not to distract from the message: "stay in the middle if possible, because in this way the people from both extremes hear you and if you support one of the extremes, you will lose the other one." He wrote that while it is good for the preacher to have the sermon in his memory, it was also helpful to write it out and make appropriate marks in the margins so as to know what to emphasize.

Caño, in his collection of practical documents, produced a suitable balance between rhetoric and Gospel-centered preaching, a balance rooted in prayer and in his deep desire to pass on his burning love for Christ and his Church to his listeners.

**C. THE PREACHING OF SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA**

The life and ministry of Maestro Juan de Ávila in Andalucía and Extremadura had lasting effects in sixteenth-century Spain. While Ávila was a founder of schools, a teacher of the young and a model for future priests, he was known foremost as an apostolic, evangelical preacher whose life greatly influenced his friend and biographer Luis de Granada. Granada wrote in the prologue of his biography that "... one will see (in Ávila) a most perfect image and figure of the qualities, virtues and spirit that an evangelical preacher must possess."

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287 "Bien creo y veo que el lenguaje y estilo subido o extraordinario levanta a las cosas humildes y las hace parecer altas..." *Instrucción*, p. 134.
288 "...si es posible de medio a medio, porque desta manera le oyen los de los lados y si se vuelve a uno de los extremos le pierden los del otro." Terrones del Caño, *Instrucción de Predicadores*, 152.
289 "También es bueno poner en las márgenes alguna señal, como cifras de lo que va escrito en frente de ellas como echar unas rayas por debajo de los latines..." *Instrucción*, p.159.
290 "Porque en este predicador evangélico verán claramente, como en un espejo limpio, los propiedades y condiciones del que este oficio ha de ejercitar." De Granada, *Vida*, p. 28.
1. Ávila and the Importance of Preaching

For Maestro Ávila, the preaching of the Word of God was of paramount importance. Granada wrote that he learned much from Ávila’s first letter which described the proper attitude of the preacher:

Ávila held the office of preaching in high esteem. He stressed the purity of the intention that the preacher must possess as well as the prayers and tears with which he is aided in seeking from the Lord the conversion of souls. When preachers go up into the pulpit, they say a prayer that they may succeed in their preaching, but God knows from what spirit this prayer proceeds—whether it is from self-love and the fear of the world, or from the love of God and the desire to save souls. The self-love that we bring inside our hearts is so subtle that it is mixed up in everything; and so hidden that there is scarcely anyone who would know it. Many times their self-love may lie to and deceive them, as St. Gregory says. 291

Granada presents the reader with the basic description of the preacher, a man of prayer who desires the conversion of souls with God’s Word and who exercises spiritual fatherhood.

2. Ávila’s Images of the Preacher

Just as Maestro Ávila used images to communicate his ideas from various perspectives in his sermons, letters and spiritual works, so he also used five images to describe the preacher: the heavens (clouds), sun, roosters, angels and spiritual father.

In his Tratados del Sacerdocio, he referred to the preacher as the heavens and the sun:

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291 “...la estima que el tenia de la alteza de este oficio, y de la pureza de la intencion que en él se debe tener, y las oraciones y lágrimas de que el predicador se ha de ayudar, pidiendo a nuestro Señor la conversion de las animas.... Los cuales aunque cuando están para subir al pulpite hacen oración para que les suceda bien el negocio, mas Dios sabe de que espirituo procede esta oración si del amor propio y temor del mundo o del amor de Dios y deseo de salvar las animas. Porque este amor propio que dentro de nuestro pecho traemos tan sutil que en todas las cosas se entremete; y tan escondidamente que apenas hay quien lo conozca y muchas veces miente y engaña a su mismo dueño, como dice San Gregorio.” De Granada, Vida, p.63.
Preachers are called the “heavens” because . . . it is from the heavens that it is understood what the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah: “The rain and the snow fell from heaven.” The Word of the Lord in the mouth of his preachers waters the dryness of the souls as rain coming from heaven; and intoxicated with the sweet love of the Lord, the Word makes the people produce fruits of good works. It is seen through experience that where there is the preaching of the Word of God, the people are different from where there is none, like moist and fertile land to dry land. And while the land is watered, it is necessary that this moisture be helped with the warmth of the sun. Preachers are also compared to the sun since with the warmth and fire of the Word of God, they produce beneficial fruits for those who hear the Word . . . .

Another image was that of an angel:

Knowledge comes from the lips of the priest, and men should seek instruction from his mouth. The priest, the preacher and the angel. Since angel means messenger and the preacher is the messenger of God, God speaks to you through his mouth. We are messengers of God, chamberlains of the king . . . .

In a Christmas sermon he said of the angels:

The child, born for our salvation and the Most Holy Virgin, his Mother . . . These are the words of the angel that were spoken to the shepherds. The preacher is now an angel in this office. Like the angel messengers, we preachers come to you to speak on behalf of God . . . .

A fourth image was that of a rooster:

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292 "Son llamados cielos porque . . . de estos cielos se entienda lo que el Señor dijo por Isaías: Quomodo descendit imber et nix. La Palabra del Señor, en boca de sus predicadores riega la sequedad de las ánimas como pluvia del cielo venida; y embriagadas con dulce amor del Señor, les hace dar frutos de buenas obras. Y por experiencia se ve que el pueblo donde hay predicación de la Palabra de Dios, se diferencia de aquel donde no hay como tierra llovida y fertil a la seca . . . mas que porque la tierra aunque llovida ha menester juntamente con su humedad ser ayudada del calor del sol son también (las predicadores) comparados al mismo sol porque con el calor y fuego de la Palabra de Dios producen en las ánimas fruto provechoso a quien lo hace y sazonado y sabroso al Señor . . . " Tratados del Sacerdocio, (OC I, ¶ 45, p. 944-45).


294 "El niño, nacido por nuestra salud y la Sacratísima Virgen, su Madre . . . Las palabras del tema dijo un ángel a los pastores. El predicador también es ahora ángel en el oficio. Ángel, mensajero quiere decir y los predicadores también somos mensajeros que os venimos a hablar de parte de Dios." Sermon 4, (OC III, ¶ 3, p. 67).
The roosters, who are called preachers, raise their voices. By their mouths God says to you what he said through the mouth of St. Paul: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.” God wishes to save you... the Virgin and the angels desire to save you; the preachers and the whole church wish to draw you out of this sad night (of sin) in which you live.295

The fifth image, a spiritual father, was described in his first letter on preaching. He wrote about spiritual fatherhood in his five letters on preaching. The first letter sent to Granada, stated:

Christ, the man, was the first in who was lodged the full and life-giving spirit for the listeners, engendering by word sons of God and dying for them, for which he deserved to be called “Father of the age to come.” Because of him and his favors, there is a communication with us, just as he made us sons by being Son, made us priests as the Priest, by being gracious made us gracious... and being Heir of the Kingdom of the Father, we are also heirs with him. He wished to place this spirit in some so that for his glory, they could rejoice in the title of spiritual fathers, as He is called according to which St. Paul so boldly confirmed: “I bore you through the Gospel.” 296

Taking the role of spiritual father very seriously, as both a gift and a responsibility, Ávila elaborated on this importance later in the letter:

Possessing then the spirit of the Son with God with which we call out “Abba;” having in our hearts reverence, trust and a pure love for God, as a faithful son with his father; the Spirit of the Father prays for his children whom we are to engender. Because it is not enough for a good father to engender a son and give the responsibility of

295 “Los gallos que son los predicadores te dan voces también por boca de los cuales te dice Dios también lo que dijo por boca de San Pablo: Levántate tú que duermes, despierta de entre los muertos y alumbre ha Cristo (cf. Ef 5:14). Dios quiere salvarte... la Virgen desea lo mismo los ángeles de la misma manera; los predicadores y toda la Iglesia te desean ver fuera de esa triste noche en que vives.” Sermon 60, (OC III,§ 19, 809-810).
296 “...Cristo hombre fue el primero en este espíritu lleno y vivificativo de los oyentes se aportó engendrado por la palabra hijos de Dios y muriendo por ellos por lo cual mereció ser llamado Pater futuri saeculi (Is 9:6) Y porque de él y de sus bienes hay comunicación con nosotros así como nos hizo hijos siendo él Hijo y sacerdotes siendo él sacerdote hizimos él siendo graciosos graciosos... y siendo heredero del reino del Padre somos lo nosotros también en él y por él si estamos en gracia... quiso poner de este espíritu y de esta lengua en algunos para que a gloria y suya puedan gozar de título de padres de espiritual ser, como él es llamado según que San Pablo osadamente afirma: Per evangelium ego vos genui (1 Cor 4:15) Carta 1, (OC IV, lines 8-15, 22-25, p. 5-6). cf. 1 Cor 4:15

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education to another; but to suffer with a persevering love all the trials that occur in raising them, until seeing them presented into the hands of God, taking them from this place of danger as a father cares for the well-being of his daughter until he sees her married. And this persevering care is a particular gift of God and a clear image of the fatherly love and care that He has for us.297

During his life, Maestro Ávila begot several spiritual children, including doña Sancha Carillo, for whom he wrote Audi Filia, St. John of God, Luis de Granada, the men of Ávila’s priestly school and many others to whom he would write letters of encouragement in the spiritual life.

Of the five images, the primary one was the preacher as messenger of God, who sought to awaken the people from the darkness of sin by raining down upon them the merciful and life-giving word of God. The other important image was that of spiritual father who had the duty to raise new followers of Christ not just in word, but in deed.

3. St. Paul: Model for Ávila’s Preaching

The roots of Maestro Ávila’s preaching, like the roots of his theology, are found in the writings of St. Paul. There is a story about his Pauline style of preaching:

While Maestro Ávila was speaking in Córdoba on one occasion, a Dominican friar wrote a letter in which he expressed his doubts concerning the doctrinal accuracy of Ávila’s teaching. He went to hear Ávila, taking his biases with him. He left Ávila’s sermon saying “I have heard St. Paul interpreting St. Paul.”298

297 “Teniendo pues, el espíritu de su Hijo para con Dios con el cual clamamos: Abba (Rom 8:15); teniendo en nuestras entrañas reverencia confianza y amor puro para con Dios como un hijo fiel para con su padre; resta pedirle el espíritu de padre para con sus hijos que hubiéremos de engendrar. Porque no basta para un buen padre engendrar él y dar la carga de educación a otro; mas con perseverante amor sufrir todos los trabajos que en criarlos se pasan hasta verlos presentados en la manos de Dios, sacándolos de este lugar de peligro como el padre suele tener gran cuidado del bien de la hija hasta que la ve casada. Y este cuidado tan perseverante es una particular dádiva de Dios y una expresa imagen del paternal y cuidados amor que nos tiene.” Carta 1, (OC I, lines 57-66, p. 6).
After carefully studying the Letters of St. Paul, Ávila presented a commentary on the Letter to the Galatians in Córdoba before 1537. Ávila did not copy Paul’s thought word for word, but rather went to Jesus Christ, the source of Paul’s theology, to understand it better. Like St. Paul, he applied Galatians 2:20 to his own spiritual life: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son who loved me and gave himself for me.” Ávila reflected on the passage:

The apostle Paul was dead to the glory and honor of the world. . . . He was dead because he felt his own affronts, persecutions and trials . . . . He was able to feel the affronts of Christ and the offenses that were done against him. The apostle was alive for God, since he carefully understood the things that touched upon his services.

Maestro Ávila’s goal was like St. Paul’s: death to the ways of the world and life for Christ. He believed he could only be an effective preacher, or messenger of God if he died to the world and lived for Christ.

In an extended passage from one of his sermons, he expressed his desire of following St. Paul by responding to those who thought that preaching was merely passing on book knowledge:

. . . as the Apostle said to those of Thessalonika: “Now we live if you stand in the Lord. Look, do not ask me how I am, but see how you are: If you are sad I am sad, if you are standing, I am well, if you have fallen down, it is unfortunate for me. This itself determines a

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298 “Exponiendo en Córdoba, en una ocasión, no sabemos cuáles de esas cartas un fraile Domenico tenía sus reticencias sobre la exactitud doctrinal de dicha exposición avilina. Y con sus prejuicios a cuestas se fue a oírle. Salío diciendo ‘He oído San Pablo interpretar a San Pablo!’” Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila, 194

299 Bifet, Doctrina, 96.

300 “Muerto estaba el Apóstol para la gloria y honra del mundo. . . . Muerto estaba el Apóstol al mundo para sentir sus afrentas persecuciones y adversidades. . . . Vivo estaba para sentir las afrentas de Jesucristo y las ofensas que contra él se hacían. . . . Vivo estaba el Apóstol para Dios pues con tanto cuidado entiende en las cosas que tocan a su servicio. . . .” Lecciones sobre La Epístola de Galatas, (OC II, 125, pp. 55-56).
good preacher and not those preachers who think they only have to speak. Do you think that there is nothing more to preaching than reading books and later throwing up here what you read? How are you, St. Paul? I am like a shadow with the body that wherever the body goes the shadow goes, my joy depends on yours. . . . I saw myself in Christ who was dead when I was proud and foolish, when I counted on only the honor and vainglory of the world and when, I did not know my Lord Jesus Christ. I live after I love, because I see myself in Christ whom I did not love. Love is the life of the soul. He who does not love is dead. I live chastely and humbly . . . no longer I; I do not live for myself; there is no longer Paul, but there is only Jesus Christ. Are you dead, St. Paul? Since I live in the flesh, I live in the hope of the Son of God. Oh, how well the Apostle knew how to make this spiritual communion! What I live in this flesh is the faith by which Jesus Christ gave himself for me. I have to be his son. I do not disregard the mercy with which Christ loves me and died for me. Be careful not to deceive yourselves because this is not a school lesson. We do not know how to distinguish reading from preaching. We commit a serious error when we confuse reading with preaching. There, one who speaks well does well, and he is pleased with presenting an eloquent argument; but here, a good preacher is one who works and latches onto the heart what he hears. The law of God is not a thing of understanding, but the will; one is not to speak, but to work.\textsuperscript{301}

Maestro Ávila believed, like St. Paul, that preachers were "co-workers with God."\textsuperscript{302} Preaching was more than the exchange of information about God and

\textsuperscript{301} "... como decia el Apóstol a los de Tesalónica: Nunc vivimus, si vos statis in Domino (1 Tes 3:8). Mirad, no me pregunteis cómo estoy sino mirad qué tales estáis vosotros: Si estáis tristes yo estoy triste; si estáis en pie bueno estoy yo; si estáis caídos malaventurado de mí. Éste sí es buen predicador que no los que son el día de hoy que no hacen sino hablar. Pensáis que no hay más sino leer en los libros y veir luego a vomitar aquí lo que habeis leído? -Cómo estáis, San Pablo? -Estoy como la sombra con el cuerpo que donde quiera que va el cuerpo va allá al sombra; mi alegría depende de la vuestra... yo me vi en Cristo que estaba muerto cuando era un soberbia, fantástico; cuando no tenía cuenta sino con la honra y vana gloria de este mundo, cuando no conocía a mi Señor Jesucristo. Vivo yo después que amo, porque yo me vi en Cristo que no amaba. Vitae amine amor est, qui non amat mortuus est. Vivo yo, el casto, el humilde... ya no yo; no vivo yo para mí... ya no hay Pablo, no hay más de Jesucristo.

-Estás muerto San Pablo? -Quod autem vivo in carne in spe vivo Filii Dei (cf. Gal 2:20) Oh qué bien sabía comulgar espiritualmente este bienaventurado apóstol! Lo que vivo en esta carne, en aquella fe vivo de que se dio Jesucristo por mí. En mucho tengo ser hijo suyo. No desecho la merced que ama Jesucristo. Yo murió por mí. Mirá no os engañéis, que ésta no es lición de escuelas. No sabemos distinguir el predicar del leer. Pensamos que no hay más de leer un libro y predicar. Harto mal nos va por esto. Allá lo hace bien el que había bien y conténtanse con decir un argumente bien dicho; pero acá ése es buen discipulo el que obra y se le pega a las entrañas lo que oye. La ley de Dios no es cosa de entendimiento sino de voluntad; no es hablar, sino obrar..."

\textsuperscript{302} "...coadiutores Dei..." Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶ 21, p. 924). cf. 1 Cor 3:9.
his plans; it was a sharing in the life of Jesus Christ totally, so that the preacher’s
words were not his own, but Christ’s. Life in Christ opened up the depths of God’s
love and created in the heart of the preacher a fiery zeal for souls so that they
might share in his experience.

Sharing in the life of Christ for Ávila, as for St. Paul, was found in the
mystery of the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ showed the fullness of God’s love
for the world and was the means by which humanity was redeemed. He spoke
both in his sermons and letters of sharing in Christ’s cross:

There is no reason, with Jesus Christ bearing so much for us,
that we should leave him alone on the cross, but rather let us
accompany him with much love and rejoicing, not only seeing what
he suffered, but suffering together with him.303

Life in Christ must include the joyful acceptance of suffering with Christ. Ávila
explained this acceptance of suffering in his commentary on the First Letter of
John:

If you wish to love God perfectly, you have to pass this way. St. Paul
says that those who are in Jesus Christ have crucified their flesh
with its vices and sins of the flesh. After Jesus Christ came to the
world, the roles were exchanged. He was crucified for us; we have
to be crucified for him. Able to cure us with medicine, he cured
us at the cost of his most precious blood. This love that Christ has
for us moves the human heart so much that it makes Christians
want to suffer greatly for him.304

303 “Y no es razón que trabajando Él tanto por nos le dejemos sólo en la cruz sino que con mucho
amor y alegría le acompañemos no sólo mirando lo que padece, mas paciendo juntamente con
Él.” Carta 128. (OC IV, lines 9-12, p. 466).
304 “Mas si queréis perfectamente amor a Dios, habéis de pasar de ahí. Dice San Pablo que los que
son de Jesucristo han crucificado su carne con sus vicios y concupiscencias (Gal 5:24) Después
que Jesucristo vino al mundo trocaronse las lanzas. Él fue por nosotros crucificado; nosotros
hemos de ser crucificados por Él. Pudiéndonos curar con medicinas nos curó a costa de su sangre
preciosa. Mueve tanto el corazón este amor que Cristo nos tuvo, que hace a los cristianos
verdaderos desear padecer por Él mucho.” Lecciones sobre 1 San Juan [I]: (OC II, Leccion 14,
Along with sharing Paul's love for the cross, he also shared his love for the Word of God as the basis of the Christian faith:

With faith in Jesus Christ, we believe that the church declares scripture and the divine Word to us; and although it is spoken through the mouths of men, we possess it as the Word of God. . . because this faith does not look to human testimony that lies in human means, but in the fact that God inspires a prophet or evangelist to write the truth, assists him in transmitting the truth so that he cannot be deceived in what he writes. 305

The Word of God is living and vibrant, enlightening the soul and enabling the person to turn away from sin and trust Christ. The words of Maestro Ávila called to mind the humble words of Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power of God belongs to God and not to us." Ávila, like St. Paul, is a servant of the Word.

If Paul speaks as Paul, it would be good. But Paul provides the tongue and the throat, he provides the voice; but the Word is Christ's. St. Paul, Isaiah, Jeremiah, do you know what you are? You are baskets of the seed and Word of God. Do not hold the seed in low regard because the basket is unworthy. The Word of God is the light with which you have to look at your soul to see if it is good or evil. 306

305 "Con esta fe creemos que es Escritura y palabra divinal la que la Iglesia nos declara por tal; y aunque es hablada por boca de hombres, la tenemos por palabra de Dios. . . porque no mira esta fe al testimonio humano que escriba en medios humanos mas en que Dios inspira al tal profeta o evangelista para escribir la verdad y que asiste Dios con el, para que no pueda ser engañado en lo que así escribe." Audi Filia, (OC 1, § 8, p. 628).

306 "Si Pablo hablara como Pablo, bien fuera. Mas Pablo pone la lengua y garganta él pone la voz; mas la palabra de Cristo es . . . San Pablo, Esaias, Jeremias, sabéis que son? Son puertas de la semilla y palabra de Dios. No tengáis en poca la semilla, si la puerta es vil . . . Jesucristo; la palabra de Dios es la lumbre con que habéis de mirar vuestra ánima si está buena o mala." Sermon 28, (OC III, §20, 24, p. 342-344).
4. The preaching style of Maestro Ávila

Whether Ávila was preaching in a cathedral, parish church, town plaza or street corner, his preparation was always the same: prayer and study with the emphasis on prayer. According to Granada:

Maestro Ávila prepared the night before he was to preach. The sermons that he gave that would last more than two hours did not cost him more than a night of study. The reason for this short preparation was that he took two hours every morning and evening for prayer. Prayer was the water for the soil of his soul which he considered necessary for advancing in virtue as the earth needs water to bear fruit.  

Because of his constant daily prayer, in which he reflected continually on the mystery of Christ, the soil of his heart and soul was fertile with the wisdom and love of God necessary to preach the Gospel. When Granada described Ávila's actual preaching style, he used two particular images: hunting and fishing for souls:

When Ávila was to preach, his principal concern was to ascend to the pulpit restrained (templado). With the word “templado,” I wished to speak as those who hunt with birds. The hunters intend that the hawk or falcon may go “templado,” that is, go with hunger since it makes the bird go more lightly after its prey. Ávila desired to go up to the pulpit not only with actual devotion, but also with a lively hunger for gaining some soul for Christ with his preaching. Ávila's spiritual hunger for souls made him preach with greater force and spirit. This spiritual hunger was a special gift of the Holy Spirit, without which no one, no matter how much he does, will be able to accomplish.

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307 "Porque el me decía que la noche que procedía el día del sermón le bastaba para estudiarlo. Y con ser tales los sermones. Y frecuentados de tantos oyentes, que las más veces duraban dos horas, no le estaban más que el estudio de una noche... tenía cada día dos horas de oración por la mañana y otros dos en la noche. Lo cual tenía por tan necesaria para alcanzar las virtudes como la tierra de agua para fructificar..." De Granada, Vida, pp. 58, 101.

308 "Porque decía él que cuando había de predicar, su principal cuidado era ir al púlpito `templado.' En la cual palabra quería significar que como los que cazan con aves procuran que el azor o el falcón, con que han de cazar vaya `templado,' esto es, vaya con hambre porque esta le hace ir más ligero tras de la caza, así él trabajada por subir al pulpite no sólo con actual devoción sino también con una viva hambre y deseo de ganar con aquel sermón alguna ánima para Cristo; porque esto le hacia predicar con mayor ímpetu y fervor del espíritu. Este deseo es un..."
Later in the biography, he describes Ávila's preaching in this way:

And after Ávila had cast out the net of the Gospel, many fish entered into it consisting of nobles and clerics and peasants. And he preached to them with such fire, desire, great fervor and spirit that there were many conversions among his listeners.309

Both of these images portray the zeal and energy that Granada saw in Ávila's preaching. His words go out as flaming arrows from his burning heart that enkindled the fire of God's love and mercy in the hearts of his listeners. His heart burned because Christ's heart was burning within him.

Maestro Ávila used a dialogical approach in his preaching. He would often ask a question of the audience or even of God, and then respond to the question as he believed Jesus, God the Father, one of the saints or another person would.

In describing the sorrows of the Virgin Mary on Good Friday, Ávila boldly posed this question to God:

What does the Virgin Mary, our Lady, have to do with the death of Jesus Christ? Why is she so afflicted? Is it not enough to kill the Son and put him on the cross without also killing the mother? Why is Jesus boiled in the tears of his own mother? If you want him roasted, he has been roasted in the fire of great torment, the fire of love has roasted him that burns in his most blessed heart while he was suffering on the cross, and if you want him boiled, he is boiled in the tears that flowed from the eyes of the most Blessed Mother, witnessing what her Son was suffering.310

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309 "Y tendida la real del evangelio, entraron muchos peces en ella de diversas personas, asi del caballeros y clerigos y de otras personas de menor calidad ... y con este ardor y deseo les predicó con tan grande fervor y espiritu que hubo entre ellos muchas mudanzas." De Granada, *Vida*, p.132.

310 "Pero, qué tiene que ver con eso la Virgen María nuestra Señora? Por qué tan afligida? No bastaba matar al hijo y ponerle en una cruz sin matar también la Madre? Porque se cuece a Jesucristo en las lágrimas de su Madre? Si lo queréis asado, asado está en le fuego de tan grandes tormentos, asado lo tiene el fuego del amor que en su benditísimo corazón ardía mientras estaba padeciendo en la cruz..." *Sermon 67*, (OC III, § 9, p. 898).
Ávila is referring to the prohibition in the Jewish law of boiling a kid goat in its own mother’s milk (Deuteronomy 14: 21). Granada explained Ávila’s devotion to Mary whose role in salvation history will be a frequent topic in his sermons:

As Maestro Ávila was such a good friend of the Lamb, so he was also a friend of the Ewe that gave birth to him and reared him. I want to say that he was a friend of the mother as he was a friend of the Son. There is a bond between the mother and the Son such that the one who loves the Son must also love the mother as much. The flesh of the Son is taken from the same substance and flesh of the mother . . . .

His tenderness and love for the Virgin Mary were particularly evident in Sermon 70 on the Assumption of Mary. He imagined the response of the people to the news that the Virgin Mary was about to join her Son in heaven:

. . . they begged her not to abandon the little children she had engendered with her prayers and nurtured with her teaching and example. If she desired to leave this world, she should take them with her because they did not know how to remain here without her in the midst of so many dangers, nor could they suffer the absence of such a beloved mother.

The Holy Virgin did not hear these things without showing great compassion. With the tenderness of heart with which God endowed her, she sympathized with them, wept with them and promised them . . . she would not forget them in her heart. She said that while they lived she would be their faithful intercessor . . . and that since this life passes so quickly, they might hope and persevere in the faith and good life they had begun . . . and all would be joined without being separated forever.312

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311 “Como este padre era tan amigo del Cordero, así también lo era la Oveja que lo parió y crió. Quiero decir que como era tan amigo del Hijo así lo era de la Madre, Ca es tan grande la union y liga que hay entre Hijo y Madre, que quien ama mucho al uno ha de amar mucho al otro; pues la carne del Hijo es tomada de la misma sustancia y carne de la Madre... “De Granada, Vida, p. 120.
312 “... suplicábanelo desampararse a sus hijuelos que con sus oraciones había engendrado y con su doctrina y ejemplo había criado; y si se quería ir de este mundo que los llevase consigo porque no saben quedar sin ella entre tantos peligros ni podrían sufrir la ausencia de tan amantesima Madre.

No oía la Virgen sagrada estas cosas sin gran compasión; y con aquella ternura de corazón de que Dios la dotó, se condolió con ellos y lloraba con ellos y les prometía que, aunque según el cuerpo se apartaba de ellos, no los olvidaría en su corazón y que mientras viviesen les seria fiel abogada. . . y que pues esta vida tan presto se pasa se esperasen un poco y perseverasen en la fe y buena vida habían comenzado. . . y estarían todos juntos sin se apartar para siempre jamás.” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶60-61, p. 969).
From the passages of the sermons previously cited, it can be said that Maestro Ávila’s words were clear, image-filled and engaging. It can also be said that his approach to his listeners was positive and straightforward. He recognized that each person was created in the image and likeness of God and was called to become a saint in Christ. At the same time, he recognized the sinfulness of humanity and did not hesitate to remind his listeners of it. Humanity was wounded because of original sin:

... (by sin, our first parents) wounded their understanding with ignorance and blindness; the will with desires of harmful things and tedium regarding good things; they wounded their memory with sores of earthly origin... they wounded their senses with the tinder of sin, a serious wound.313

His goal was to bring his listeners to recognize their sinfulness, to desire the blessedness that Christ had achieved for the human race through the Paschal Mystery, and to reform their lives. If they did this, Ávila announced to them that they could proclaim: “Jesus Christ, God and man, is mine; his merits are also mine: I possess the good with which to pay for what I ask. Think well of yourself, man, because Christ is yours.”314

When Granada described the gift that Ávila had of bringing people to Jesus Christ, he said that Ávila was a “spiritual drugstore where the Holy Spirit deposited the necessary medicines for the cure of the many ailments that caused

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313 “Que al entendimiento hirieron con ignorancia y ceguedad; a la voluntad con deseos de cosas de aca dañosas y con hastío de la buenas; a la memoria hirieronle con llagas de cosas terrenas... hirieron la parte sensitiva con aquel fomes peccati, que es una gran llaga...” Sermon 22, (OC III.¶ 16, p. 270-271).
our souls to suffer worse than our bodies.”

The medicine was the grace of the Holy Spirit who produced conversions in the hearts of his listeners. Ávila was always aware that the effects of his preaching were the result of the efficaciousness of God’s grace and not his words alone. He reminded his listeners of this fact: “Salvation is not all in your hands. Oh, what is necessary is the grace and help of God. But because we do not remove free will, grace is necessary to encourage you to desire what you should want in order to be saved.”

As a preacher, Ávila saw himself as truly a co-worker with God. His responsibility as a preacher was to bring people to the realization of their sinfulness so that they would repent and receive the grace of Jesus Christ. God would supply the grace and the opportunities; Maestro Ávila supplied the prayer, study, zeal for souls and the love of Jesus Christ.

5. Maestro Avila’s Instructions for New Preachers

Along with the study of Maestro Ávila’s theology of preaching and personal preaching style, it is important to examine what he wished to hand on to his students as well as other future preachers. His writings pointed out a crisis in preaching the Gospel in sixteenth-century Spain. In his First Memorial (1551), he wrote:

Preachers [in this age] take away from the Word of God and are forgetful of this duty of the clerical state; the lack of preaching inflicts great harm on Christianity. Preaching is the means of engendering and nurturing spiritual sons, but it is lacking. There is scarcely a trace of Christianity in the lands that lack the preaching

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315 “En lo cual parece que el pecho de este padre era una espiritual botica, donde el Espíritu Santo había depositado las medicinas necesarias para la cura de tantas enfermedades como padecen nuestras ánimas; que sin duda son más que las de los cuerpos.” De Granada, Vida, p. 60.

316 “No está todo en tu mano, O! que menester es la gracia y ayuda de Dios; aunque no quitamos al libro albedrío mas es menester la gracia para esforzallo a que quiera lo que debe querer para se salvar.” Sermon 20, (OC III,† 9, p. 255).
of the Word of God. 317

His perspective on the state of preaching in Spain was grim. Through his letters as well as his personal example, he would provide a model for training new preachers. In one of his sermons, he prescribed: Those who are going to be preachers or curates must have both the love of God and the love of neighbor.318

He described the meaning of this Gospel commandment in his five letters on preaching, two of which were sent to Granada. He provided “four general rules for those who desire to serve the Lord” in Letter One.319 The first rule was “that they frequent the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion.”320 The idea of the frequent reception of Holy Communion was not a wide practice at the time. He responded to a preacher who questioned the prudence of the frequent reception of Holy Communion by the faithful:

Concerning what you ask about the frequent reception of Holy Communion that is going on in that city, it seems to me that no one should put an absolute norm limiting the reception of this Heavenly Bread; looking at things in the world as they are, daily reception of Holy Communion is a very great good. . . .321

The second rule called for students cultivate a love of reading, and be well educated, especially in the interpretation of the spiritual sense of Scripture:

317 “Restan los predicadores de la palabra de Dios, el cual oficio está muy olvidado del estado esclerástico y no sin gran daño de la cristianidad. Porque como este sea el medio para engendrar y criar hijos espirituales, faltando este. Que bien puede haber sino el que vemos que en las tierras de falta la palabra Dios apenas hay rastro de cristianidad?” Memorial Primero al Concilio de Trento, (OC II, ¶ 14, p. 493).
318 “Dígase qué tales han de ser los que van a predicar o ser curas Amor de Dios y prójimo, en ir dos juntos.” Sermon 81, (OC III, ¶ 9, p. 1087).
319 “Las recepitas generales que se deben dar a los que quieren server al Señor; demás de las dichas, son cuatro.” Carta 1, (OC IV, line 291-292, p. 12).
320 “La primera, que frecuenten los sacramentos I, de la confesion y communion...” Carta 1, (OC IV, lines 293-295, p. 12).
321 En lo que vuestra merced pegunta de la frecuencia de comunión que en esa cuidad hay, me parece que ninguno deber poner tasa absolútamente en la comida de este celestial Pan; pues mirándolo así, es bien y gran bien, tomarlo cada día si hay cada día aprejo para lo recibir.” Carta 3, (OC IV, lines 6-10, p. 23).
It appears to me that in reading St. Paul, St. John and Isaiah, the students need to know scripture. While I see them reading a lot of scripture, they know nothing about it. And so I see that if the Lord opens, reveals and teaches the (spiritual) sense of scripture, he has the keys, power, control and authority in the spiritual kingdom of the church, prefigured in the kingdom of David. It is so true, as St. Jerome says, that no one else could teach the true sense of scripture except the Lord. I do not know more, Father, than to tell them to read scripture; and when they do not understand it, let them seek out a holy interpreter, especially let them read St. Augustine’s *Contra Pelagius*; and let them place a crucifix before them that it may help them understand the passage and He on the cross understands everything because he is all and all preach him. Let them pray, meditate and study. I have nothing more to tell them. 322

The third rule was prayer “for which much care is necessary so that what the Lord gave for our benefit would not do us harm.”323 He advised two hours of prayer every morning and afternoon, accompanied by spiritual reading. For Maestro Ávila, prayer was vocal (the rosary and the Psalter), meditation on the Lord’s Passion and one’s own death, attending Mass, and the practice of silence. In describing meditation and silence, he wrote to Granada, “After some spiritual reading, let them meditate a little with a very calm soul on the Passion, being contented with a simple and humble vision, sitting at the feet of the Lord and begging for alms and mercy.”324 He concluded his discussion on prayer by writing that “all types of prayer must be done with a very calm demeanor so that if God

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322 “Parérome que, leyendo a San Juan y San Pablo y a Esajas, que luego han de saber la Escritura y veo muchos leerlos y no saben nada de ella. Y así veo que sí aquel Señor abre y descubre y enseña el sentido de la Escritura, que tiene la llave, el poder y mando y autoridad en el reino de la Iglesia, figurado por el reino de David, lo cual es tanta verdad que como dice San Jerónimo no puede otro enseñar el verdadero sentido de la Escritura sino este sólo Señor. Yo no sé más, padre qué decirle sino que lea a estos; y cuando no los entendiera vea a algún intérprete santo sobre ellos, y especialmente lea a San Augustín, Contra Pelagianos y contra otros de aquella secta; y tome un crucifijo delante y Aquél entienda en todo porque Él es todo y todos predicen a éste. Ore y Medite y estudio. No sé más.” *Carta 2*, (OC IV, lines 244-256, p. 22).

323 “La tercera cosa es la oración, en la cual es menester mucho tiento, porque no se tiene en daño lo que nuestro Señor nos dejó para provecho nuestro.” *Carta 1*, (OC I, lines 306-307, p. 12).

324 “Y después de haber leído, mediten un poco por la mañana en un paso de la pasión con todo sosiego de ánima, contentándose con aquella vista sencilla y humilde acatando a los pies del Señor y esperando su limosna y misericordia.” *Carta 1*, (OC IV, lines 318-322, p. 12-13).
would want to speak to them, he would not find them preoccupied with all their words.\textsuperscript{325} The fourth rule pertained to works of charity. Apostolic works and prayer must be kept in a proper balance. Both were necessary for training priests and preachers. However, the preachers' actions in either of these areas were not to be extreme. Ávila learned from his own life that extremes in penance or prayer or deeds could have harmful effects on one's health. He wrote:

> Let the preachers understand the importance of works of charity, each one as he is able; let the ones who can, give alms, shelter, counsel... all of their time is not to be spent only in recollection or in exterior deeds. Have them do acts of penance, especially if they are young.\textsuperscript{326}

Besides these four rules, Granada mentioned another rule in his biography of Maestro Ávila. He passed on the latter's belief that good preaching must depend more on sound arguments than flowery language:

> The one who persuades with powerful reasoning can persuade and conquer a heart of stone. And those who claim to do this with words alone are like trees loaded with flowers of chili peppers without any fruit. Therefore, it may be that while they delight their ears, they will not move their hearts. The more eloquent the preacher tries to be, the less profitable he becomes. Men lose attention to the meaning when the words are very elegant because they steal attention away from the sentences and they won't hear what is said because they are listening to how it is said. The good preacher will work better with good reasons rather than elegant and polished words.\textsuperscript{327}

\textsuperscript{325} "Todo se ha de hacer con el más sosiego que pudieren para que si Dios los quisiere hablar no los halle tan ocupados en hablarlo todo ellos que calle Dios." \textit{Carta 1}, (OC IV, lines 331-333, p. 13).
\textsuperscript{326} "... que entiendan en obras de caridad, cada uno según pudiere; quien pudiere dar limosna, casa, consejo... ni todo se ha de gastar en recogimiento ni todo en acción exterior. Alguna penitencia, especial si son mozos." \textit{Carta 1}, (OC IV, lines 347-351, p.13).
\textsuperscript{327} "Lo cual le persuade con tanta fuerza de razones, que bastarian para persuadir y convencer un corazón de piedra. Y los que esto pretenden hacer con solas palabras sin los nervios de las razones son como árboles cargadas de ajíes de flores sin fruto alguno; por eso podría ser que estas deleiten los oídos, mas no moverán los corazones. Y cuanto más elegante fuere tanto menos aprovechará: ... quiere decir que pierden los hombres la atención a las sentencias, y no miran lo que se les dice por mirar cómo se les dice... y así obrará más con sus buenas razones que con elegantes y polidas palabras." De Granada, \textit{Vida}, 54.
The discipline gained from practicing these rules had two goals: a deeper love for Jesus Christ and a fiery zeal for bringing souls to the love of God. Reception of the sacraments, study of Scripture, prayer and works of charity united the preacher more closely to Christ and at the same time motivated him to enthusiastically share the fruits he has received. Maestro Ávila explained it in this way:

Do you know the causes of this heavenly life? They are the preachers who are on fire with heavenly love who enflame the hearts of their listeners to a fervent love of our Lord Jesus Christ and to receive the Heavenly Bread every day or almost every day.328

Ávila drew a parallel between the preacher enflamed with the love of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, who generously offered her Fiat. Preaching served a Marian function since both made the Word incarnate through their words:

This eternal word became temporal. If there had been preachers who preached this, there would be no need for anything else. Perchance are not all things enclosed in God? Then to preach God Incarnate would be to preach everything . . . . If this Incarnate Word is preached to you not by the tongue of flesh but by spirit and grace, it would be more than enough to move your hearts than if they preached everything to you. With the Word we would give them a greater fear than that of hell; with the Word we would give them a greater consolation than that of heaven . . . . This Word was hidden in the bosom of the Father; and now it appeared in time, taking human flesh among us, and he walks through the churches by ascending the pulpits.329

328 “Qué era la causa que ponía esta vida celestial . . . . Haber predicadores encendidos con fuego de amor celestial, que encendían los corazones de los oyentes al fervoroso amor de Jesucristo nuestra Señor y usarse entonces comer de este Pan celestial o cada día o poco menos de cada día.” Sermon 55, (OC III, § 41, 733).
329 “Esta Palabra eterna se hizo temporal. Si hubiese predicadores que esto predicases no habría necesidad de predicar otra cosa. Por ventura no se encierran todas las cosas en Dios? Luego, predicar a Dios encarnado sería predicar todas las cosas. Pues luego si esta Palabra encarnada se os predicase, y no por lengua de carne, sino de espíritu y gracia, más suficiente sería para mover vuestras corazones, que si os predicase todas las cosas. Con ésta haríamos temer más que con infierno; con ésta consolariámos más que con el cielo. . . . Esta Palabra de vida estaba abscondida
Gallego-Palomero summarized Ávila's reflection in this way:

The Eternal Word becomes temporal on the tongues of the preacher and it is this Incarnate Word that saves. The Word became flesh in the womb of Mary in order to save all. The Word became flesh on the tongues and in the hearts of preachers to make salvation present.  

Ávila’s words for future preachers were simple and direct. It was his hope that the example of discipline and spiritual zeal of these preachers would enkindle flames of spiritual renewal throughout Andalucía and Extremadura.

D. THE EFFECTS OF THE PREACHING RENEWAL IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

The sixteenth-century marked a period of reform for both the universal church and the church in Spain. The preaching manuals as well as the preaching of Maestro Ávila showed a renewed emphasis on preaching that contained both a return to the sources (Scripture and the Fathers of the church) and an accommodation to the sixteenth-century world. Three major effects were noted.

1. The Elevation of Language and Style.

One of the key principles that the manuals and Ávila stressed was the importance of clear communication. In the age of Renaissance humanism, language was seen as a tool that could be used to teach things in exalted ways that respected the value of what was being proclaimed. Because of the importance of language, the manuals stated that the tools of rhetoric used in a proper and

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330 “La palabra eterna se hace temporal en la lengua del predicador, y esta Palabra encarnada es la que salva. Palabra hecha carne en las entrañas de María para salvar todos. Palabra hecha carne en las lenguas y corazones de los predicadores para actualizar la salvación.” “El Ministerio de la Predicación y San Juan de Ávila,” (AC1, 822).
balanced way could attract listeners to the message. Clarity in pronunciation and style as well as rich and colorful images were worthy servants of the Word of God. These tools were seen as means to good preaching and not as an end in themselves.

2. Preaching Provided a Renewed Emphasis on Catechesis and the Practice of the Faith.

In the period leading up to the Protestant Reformation, ignorance of the Christian faith was widespread in Spain. A new era dawned when, with the increase of the number of schools in Spain, the teaching of the faith played an important part in every student's education. Moreover, the motivation for preaching flowed from the desire of saving souls in Christ, and a desire to grow both in faith in Christ and to live that faith in an active way. For this reason, the new manuals emphasized the importance of the preachers' knowledge of the doctrinal and moral teachings of Catholicism, a thorough knowledge of Scripture as well as the Fathers of the church, and the Secunda Pars of the *Summa Theologicae* that dealt with the moral life. They also taught that the Holy Spirit would reform the church by moving the hearts of preachers and their audiences. Finally, the manuals and Ávila impressed upon preachers the need for a strong prayer life and burning love for God so that the Holy Spirit could dwell in them and direct them.


Fray Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, Archbishop of Toledo and an advocate of Renaissance humanism, recognized that faith and culture were not to be seen as antithetical, but rather complementary to each other. Cisneros wished
to create a truly Christian culture in a Spanish culture that possessed very diverse elements. His approach to education with its focus on the arts and humanities as well as theology and law influenced the contents of the preaching manuals. Maestro Ávila who had been educated at the University of Alcalá, a center for teaching the Christian faith within the context of humanism, was of like mind. Both believed that preachers needed to be aware of the world in which they lived, to be in touch with how people were living, and to be able to speak at the people’s level. The preachers’ knowledge could not be limited simply to theology, Scripture and canon law. They needed to be acquainted with art, science, philosophy, medicine, literature and trades, etc. The preachers’ knowledge of the secular as well as the sacred would enable them to proclaim the Gospel to princes, merchants and peasants in a way that could be clearly understood and effectively lived.

CONCLUSION

The preaching manuals of the sixteenth century and the teaching of Maestro Ávila were not theoretical treatises on rhetoric and theology. These manuals were written as practical guides for the proper proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They were written by men with real experience who wished to pass on to their successors not only what errors to avoid, but also what paths to take. The manuals of many sixteenth-century preachers as well as the teachings of Maestro Ávila served as excellent tools to prepare future preachers and to reform older preachers in regard to their responsibility as servants of the Word of God.
CHAPTER FIVE
SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA AND THE
BOOK OF THE VIRGIN

INTRODUCTION

In 1865, Maestro Ávila’s fourteen sermons on the Virgin Mary were published separately from his collected Works in a book entitled Libro Espiritual o Tratados sobre las Principales Festividades de la Santíssima Virgen María, Madre de Dios, por el V. Maestro Juan de Ávila, Clérigo Apóstol del Andalucía.331 This collection came to be known as the Book of the Virgin.332 The critical text of these sermons, provided in the 2002 Edition of the Obras Completas del San Juan de Ávila, Vol. III, Sermones, will be used in this study. The Spanish text of these sermons is found on pages 801-991 of Volume III.

Juan Bifet wrote that

the sermons of St. John of Avila can be divided into two parts. The temporal cycle (59 sermons) spans the entire liturgical year, highlighting Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Paschal (Death and Resurrection), Pentecost (Holy Spirit), Ascension and Corpus Christi (Eucharist). The sanctoral cycle consists of the sermons on the Feasts of our Lady (14 Sermons) and sermons on the saints (10 Sermons).”333

331 Sermones, (OC I, p. LIX)
333 “Se suelen dividir los sermones del Maestro Ávila en dos grandes apartados: ciclo temporal y ciclo santoral. El número total es de 83. El ciclo temporal (59 sermones) abarca todo el año”
While the Blessed Virgin Mary is mentioned in both temporal and sanctoral cycles, this study will focus on the sanctoral cycle, specifically, the fourteen Marian sermons.

A. LISTING OF THE SERMONS IN ÁVILA’S BOOK OF THE VIRGIN

The Marian sermons in the Obras Completas III, are numbered 60-72. Two sermons on the Feast of the Annunciation are numbered as Sermon 65, with no reason given for the identical numbering. These sermons appear to be independent of each other, even though they are on the same feast. Sermon 72 on the Assumption of Mary is missing the first section and is printed only in a fragmentary form. The years in which the sermons were preached are not listed, but the dates of the feasts are given. Bifet gives a possible reason as to why there are no dates: “while his students transcribed and Ávila edited, there might have been double or triple editions of a particular sermon with certain variations for adaptation to different audiences.” Ávila’s sermons will be quoted in English. The sermons to be studied are:

**Sermon 60** “El Alba es María, medianera entre la noche y el sol.”
*Natividad de la Virgen (8 de septiembre)*

**Sermon 61** “Como la mañana, tres propiedades tiene la Virgen.”
*Natividad de la Virgen (8 de septiembre)*
Sermon 62 “Esto es honra: ser del linaje espiritual de Jesucristo.”
Natividad de la Virgen (8 de septiembre)

Sermon 63 “Quien viera a esta niña luchar con Dios!”
Presentación de Nuestra Señora (21 de noviembre; en un convento de monjas)

Sermon 64 “Día de ofrecer a Dios mucho.”
Purificación de Nuestra Señora (2 de febrero)

Sermon 65 (1) “Este negocio es todo de amor.”
Anunciación de Nuestra Señora. (25 de marzo)

Sermon 65 (2) “Esta obra es sólo puramente de gracia.”
Anunciación de Nuestra Señora (25 de marzo)

Sermon 66 “¡Dichosa persona a quien María visita!”
Visitación de la Virgen (2 de julio)

Sermon 67 “A quién te compararé, hija de Sión?
Soledad de María

Sermon 68 “No es razón que la Bienaventurada Madre de Dios esté sola en el rogar.”
La Virgen de las Nieves (5 de Agosto; Córdoba).

Sermon 69 “Reinarás sobre todas las cosas que desea tu ánima.”
Asunción de María (15 de Agosto)

Sermon 70 “Vase la Virgen llena de gloria; Nos gozaremos con ella?
Lloraremos?”
Asunción de María (15 de Agosto)

Sermon 71 “Escogió la mejor parte.”
Asunción de María (15 de Agosto)

Sermon 72 “Qué deseáis Señora?
Asunción de María (15 de Agosto) fragment

The fourteen sermons were preached on both major and minor Marian feasts. Ávila did not normally write out his sermons, but rather preached from an outline with only a few ideas on a piece of paper.335 In his biography of Ávila, Duque reported that when he preached, three or four of his students were present during the sermon to transcribe his words.336 Ávila would later edit their notes.

336 “Porque la mayoría de los sermones son ‘reportados.’ Sabemos que hasta el P. Granada tomaba notas mientras Ávila predicaba, sentándose ‘en la gradica del púlpito.’ Y los estudiantes de Baeza, cuando él predicaba en San Andrés, y otros en Montilla, en la Iglesia de Santiago, tomaban sus sermones de la siguiente manera: ‘La mas de las veces que predicaba, estaban tres o cuatro estudiantes cerca del púlpito; y estaban escribiendo lo que el P. Maestro predicaba en el púlpito de esta manera: uno tenía cargo de apuntar los lugares de Escritura; otro, las sentencias; otro, la doctrina; y después juntaban el sermón y sacada en tiempo, lo llevaban al P. Maestro Ávila y se lo leían. . .’” Duque, El Maestro Juan de Ávila. p.162.
Ávila liberally quoted Scripture passages from the Old and New Testaments and used the writings of Jerome, Augustine, Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas as resources. He also made use of the apocryphal traditions of the *Proto-Evangelium of James* and the *Transitus Mariae*. While he addressed the Marian themes of divine and spiritual maternity, mediation, intercession and Mary's spousal relationship to Christ in all of these sermons, each one still painted a unique picture of the Mother of God. In this chapter, I will present a summary of each of these sermons, paying particular attention to the central themes and images that Ávila uses.

**B. SUMMARY OF ÁVILA’S BOOK OF THE VIRGIN**

1. **Sermon 60: Mary is the Dawn, the Mediatrix between the night and the sun. “Who is the one who goes out as the dawn?” (Song of Songs 6:9)**

Ávila began this sermon on the birth of Mary by citing a passage from the Song of Songs. He believed that in the Christian faith, two key questions must be answered: Who is Jesus Christ and who is his Blessed Mother? He stated that when one knows Christ, he knows his Redeemer and his help and that when one comes to know the Blessed Virgin Mary, he knows the proper way to rejoice in Christ and celebrate his redemption. The angels knew that there was something particularly beautiful about Mary and that “Mary is someone in whom there is nothing of another’s hands, but that all has been made by the Lord God is a marvelous wonder, an admirable vessel, and a work of the Most High.”

337 “... esta sacratísima Niña, en la cual no hay cosa de mano ajena, mas toda hecha por mano de Dios, y por eso toda llena de maravillas, vaso admirable, obra del muy Alto.” *Sermon 60*, (OC III, §3, p. 802).
marveled at her beauty and asked, “Who is this one who goes out from the womb of her mother as dawn that is born and as beautiful as the moon?”

Mary is then described in four images: the dawn, the moon, the sun and a well-ordered squadron of soldiers. He first described Mary as the dawn: “Just as the dawn does not have anything to do with the night, so when you were born, you did not have anything to do with sin.” “You were particularly chosen by the divine goodness so that for God’s own honor sin did not befall you, but you are all pure and precious as fine gold.” The type of holiness possessed by Mary had never been seen nor would be seen again. In fact, the moon would not dare to appear with one so beautiful because she is all whiteness and pure. While the moon is faster than all seven planets, Mary is more diligent and quick in serving God than anyone else. While the moon is the lowest of the planets, the Virgin is most humble of all in heaven or on earth. Just as there are times the whole moon cannot be seen, so the Virgin carries out humble earthly duties, but is always oriented to and attentive to God.

The third image of Mary was the sun. Although Jesus Christ is truly the Sun, Mary who shared in his holiness was also likened to the sun: “Mary loved the Lord more than herself and her entire life was a light, a fire more than bright

338 “-Quién es esta que sale como alba, hermosa como luna?” Sala-Balust, OC III, Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶3, p. 802).
339 “Porque así como el alba no tiene que ver con la noche así vos, cuando naciste del vientre de vuestra madre no tenéis que ver con pecado.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶4, p. 802).
340 “...escogida particularmente por la divina bondad para que por honra suya no cayese pecado en vos, mas toda fuese limpi y preciosa como oro fino...” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶4, p. 803).
341 “Es la luna blanca y la Virgen purísima; es la luna la más veloz de todos los siete planetas, y la Virgen la más diligente y presta en el servicio de nuestro Señor que ninguna criatura; la luna es la más baja de todos los planetas y la Virgen la más humilde que hay en el cielo ni en la tierra. Así como la luna... no parece llena... mas ella siempre tenia su ánima convertida y atenta a Dios...” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶6, p. 803).
enough to move those who looked to her to serve the Lord." He also compares her to a well-ordered squadron of soldiers (Song of Songs 6:4): Mary knows God’s commandments and puts them into action. Because of this, she terrifies demons . . . “and she gives all of her strength to serve the Lord, no matter what obstacle may appear. For those who love her Son, she is the sweetest of mothers. For those who are enemies of her Son, she is their most dreadful foe.”

Maestro Ávila continued to exhort his listeners: “Let anyone here in the state of mortal sin seek forgiveness. We have to treat holy things with holiness and therefore we must be holy.” He addressed the sinner in this way: “Who is this one who was created in the image of God and has handed himself over to the ugly and abominable image of the enemy?” Sin, moreover, kept the believer from seeing Mary as she was and from giving her proper praise.

He proclaimed that the path to forgiveness led through the Virgin Mary: “The Blessed Virgin is the Mediatrix between the sinners who live in the night and Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the true Sun. Just as no one can pass from night to day except by the dawn, so God desires that no one might pass from mortal sin except through Mary.” He believed that for some, Mary might be

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342 “Pues sin comparación amó más al Señor que a sí misma; y su vida toda fue una lumbre, un fuego bastantisimo a mover a los que la miraren a servir al Señor.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶8, p. 805).
343 “…ferventísimo amor tuvo que es el que da las fuerzas para servir al Señor y por ninguna adversidad tentación ni trabajo, dejo de cumplir la santa voluntad y andar sus santos caminos … que es terrible y espantable a los demonios y los pecados.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶9, p. 805).
344 “Confesados y comulgados y todos en estado de gracia y alegres con el testimonio de la buena conciencia…. Porque las cosas santas, …con santidad las habemos de celebrar y tratar…..” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶11, p. 806).
345 “Quién es esta que, siendo criada a imagen de Dios, ha puesto sobre sí la fea y abominable imagen del enemigo?” Sermon 60, (OC III,¶12, p. 807).
346 “…y esta Virgen bendita medianera es entre los pecadores que viven en noche y entre Jesucristo nuestro Señor, sol verdadero. Y como no se puede pasar de la noche al sol por el alba, tampoco quiso Dios que alguna pasase del pecado mortal a la gracia sino por Maria.” Sermon 60, (OC III,¶16, p. 808).
the easier way to return to Jesus. She was a new advocate and gentle mother born for our consolation. He said, “If you have fear of approaching Jesus Christ since he is not only your brother, but all-powerful God, draw near to the Holy Virgin, meek and kind, who only has a human nature . . .”347 And as the moon has power over the waters that signify tribulations, so this precious lady is delegated by God to help the bereaved and she is the universal beggar of all the mercies God does for men . . .”348 As the rising of the dawn brings a sense of urgency to the day, so the birth of Mary was a call to all people to put away sin and to do it quickly.

As roosters crowed to welcome the light of day, so preachers called people to repentance so they could receive God’s pardon. One of the duties of Mary was to call sinners to repentance. He said that “the desire of grace is the stirring of the dawn in your heart . . . the favor of the Virgin Mary who walks through your heart has obtained prevenient grace for you to share in God’s friendship if you prepare yourself to receive it.”349 He addressed Mary’s role in redemption by saying:

As Eve helped the first Adam in what pertained to the service of God, so this little girl has been created so that she may help the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ in order to help the redemption and to gather souls for whom he shed his blood. Cry out to Mary as intercessor between God and you and see her as the true Mother who will attract, heal and

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347 “Y si tienes miedo de allegarte a Jesucristo, porque no sólo es hombre, hermano tuyo, sino omnipotentísimo Dios de majestad infinita, allegate a esta Virgen sagrada, mansa y piadosa y que no tiene otra naturaleza más que la humana . . .” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶18, p. 809).
348 “La luna tiene poder sobre las aguas que significan las tribulaciones; y esta piadosa Señora está diputada por Dios para socorro de atribulados y es universal limosnera de todas las misericordias que Dios hace a los hombres.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶18, p. 809).
349 “... te ha amanecido el alba que es el aparejo para venir a estado de gracia. . . anda por tu corazón el favor de la Virgen María que te ha alcanzado la gracia preveniente significada por ella misma con que te aparezas a recibir la gracia de Dios que te ponga en su amistad.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶24, p. 812).
Ávila added that not only was Mary our intercessor but also our model for holiness. He exhorted his listeners to “imitate the Virgin who grew from light to light so that you can be light to bring to the service of God those who are in darkness.” By imitating Mary, “They would grow in the lights of the dawn and beauty of the moon, and then become like the light of the sun, delighting in imitating our Lord Jesus Christ in his holy life and death.”

He concluded this sermon by comparing Mary to three final images: 1) the strength of the tower of David, 2) the “neck” which unites the head, Jesus Christ and his body, the Church, and 3) a nurse. “You are placed as the means of our healing before the reverence of God, and into your hands we place our works that you may heal them since you are the nurse of the hospital of the mercy of God where the wounded are healed.” His listeners were to present their sins to Mary so that she might take them to the throne of God to be destroyed. Finally, he compared Mary to Rebekah, the wife of Isaac: “We give you our deeds while full of many defects, and we give you our hearts so that, like Rebekah, you who know what is pleasing to your blessed Son, can prepare our heart and works in

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350 “Porque así como Eva desayudó al primero Adán en lo que tocaba al servicio de Dios, así esta Niña es criada para que ayude al segundo Adán que es Jesucristo para ayudarle a la redención y a recoger las ánimas por quien Él derramó su sangre...ponla por intercesora entre Dios y tú; gime tus culpas y pecados y vete a ella que como verdadera madre te halagará, remediará, y consolará.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶26, p. 813).
351 “…imita la Virgen que creció de luz en luz... sea ya lumbre para traer al servicio de Dios a los que están en tinieblas.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶27, p. 813).
352 “…que no sólo tengas luz de alba y luz de luna, mas también seas semejable a la lumbre del sol. Entonces te deleitarás en imitar a Jesucristo nuestro Señor en su santa vida y en su muerte.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶30, p. 814).
353 “Vos sois puesta para medio de nuestro remedio delante del acatamiento de Dios; en vuestras manos Señora, ponemos nuestras heridas para que las curéis, pues sois enfermera del hospital de la misericordia de Dios, donde los llagados se curan.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶32, p. 815).
such a way that they may delight his Majesty finding them in your hands and not ours."354

This sermon on the birth of Mary proclaimed that with her sinless birth, there is one clear path to Christ: all who wished to come to Christ must repent of their sins. The human race now has an advocate, who can obtain pardon from God, since Mary is our pure and beautiful Mother.

2. Sermon 61: Like the Morning, the Virgin has three qualities

"Who is this who goes forth like the rising dawn?" (Song of Songs 6:9)

In his second sermon on the birth of the Virgin Mary, Ávila began by having an angel ask who that most beautiful new-born girl was, using the above passage from the Song of Songs as his theme. He compared Mary to the dawn of a new day: “Who is this one who is not born in the night of sin nor was conceived in it, but is born as resplendent as the dawn without any clouds and as the midday sun?”355 Her birth brought hope and rejoicing, for she would be the Virgin Mother of God.

He explained how, like the dawn, she was the announcer and bearer of the day, the bearer of dew and the one who hated darkness. As the dawn brings us the day so Mary brings us the saving day, the sun of justice, Jesus Christ: “She brought us to that saving day, the day of pardon, the day of rest when her blessed

354 “A vos también presentamos nuestras obras, aunque llenas de muchos defectos en vuestras manos sagradas ponemos nuestro corazón, para que vos, como otro Rebeca, . . . sabéis muy bien lo que es gustoso a vuestro Hijo bendito, guísies nuestro corazón y nuestras obras de manera que sean sabrosas a su Majestad . . . hallándolos en vuestros manos no mirando a las vuestras que los hacen, sino a la vuestras que los dicen.” Sala-Balust, OC III, Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶33, p. 815).
355 “Quién es esta que no nace en noche de pecado ni fue concebida en él, sino que así resplandece como alba sin nubes alguna y como sol de mediodía?” Sermon 61, (OC III, ¶1, p. 816).
Son walked through this world: the day is forever, because a day is all the time that the sun walks over the earth.”\textsuperscript{356} For the day of the Incarnation of the Son to begin, one must begin with the dawn by the will of his Mother. The dawn was a perfect dawn. “The Son whom you conceived and bore without sin and without sorrow is born of you without clouds, Christ our Redeemer who was the Sun.”\textsuperscript{357}

As the dawn, Mary is also the morning dew and the enemy of darkness. As the dew waters the ground, “so in you, Lady, the blessed dew, which dampened our dryness with grace and made our souls bear fruit, rained and fell.”\textsuperscript{358} By means of this “dew,” Mary was born into our hearts, and she became our advocate, our guide, our defender and our intercessor. Mary was also the enemy of the darkness of sin. Ávila warned his listeners that it did not matter what type of devotion they gave to Mary, because, if they were in sin “she does not desire to see him (the sinner) in any way or receive service from him, but she shuns him and has him for an enemy.”\textsuperscript{359} He encouraged his listeners to approach her with contrition and humility and to imitate her virtues “so that by love of her one could be chaste and merciful.”\textsuperscript{360}

Ávila concluded this sermon by exhorting all his listeners to “flee the works of darkness and put on the weapons of light. We should not postpone making friends with Mary since we are her children and she is our Mother and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{356} “Aportómos aquel día saludable, día de perdón, día de descanso, cuando su bendito Hijo anduvo por este mundo: todo aquel tiempo fue día, porque día es todo el tiempo que el sol anda sobre la tierra.” \textit{Sermon 61}, (OC III, ¶6, p. 818).
\item \textsuperscript{357} “Sin nubes nació el sol de vos cuando concebisteis y paristeis a Cristo Redentor nuestro sin pecado y sin dolor, que fue sol…” \textit{Sermon 61}, (OC III, ¶7, p. 818).
\item \textsuperscript{358} “…ansi en vos Señora, llovio y cayó aquel bienaventurado rocío el cual con gracia humedece nuestras sequedades hace fructificar nuestras almas.” \textit{Sermon 61}, (OC III, ¶8, p. 819).
\item \textsuperscript{359} “…si en pecado está, en ninguna manera lo quiere ver ni recibe servicio de él, sino que lo aborrece y lo tiene por enemigo.” \textit{Sermon 61}, (OC III, ¶11, p. 820).
\item \textsuperscript{360} “…que por amor de ella uno procure de ser casto, otro de ser misericordioso.” \textit{Sermon 61}, (OC III, ¶13, p. 821).
\end{itemize}
because she hears us in our tribulations and may speak to God for us.”361 By the listeners’ uniting with Mary as the dawn, they would be able to welcome the Sun and so spend their lives in his light in order that one day they might see his glory.

3. Sermon 62: This is the Honor: To be in the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ. The Book of the Generation of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1)

Ávila, in began his third sermon on the Birth of the Virgin Mary, showed the relationship between Matthew’s genealogy of Christ to Mary’s role in his spiritual lineage. Her birth was a sign of hope because she would give birth to the Christ of royal lineage.

The physical lineage was so important because the people needed to believe that Mary, like Joseph, was from the house of David and so gave Jesus his Davidic heritage. In showing how honorable and less-than-honorable people were of Jesus lineage, Ávila pointed out how the lineage of the spirit surpassed that of the physical.

What is the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ? Ávila knew from the Gospels that all who did the will of the Father, heard the Word of God and kept it were truer relatives and closer to him than any member of his physical family. Both of these qualities, doing the will of the Father, hearing and keeping the Word, are attributed to Mary. Abraham, credited as the one who began this spiritual lineage

361 “Pues sea, Señores, abyiciamus opera tenebrarum et induamur arma lucis . . . todo se debe postponer por alcanzar el amistad de nuestra Señora por ser sus hijos y ella nuestra Madre, porque nos oiga en nuestros tribulaciones por que hable a Dios por nosotros.” Sermon 61, (OC III, ¶14, p. 821).
in the Old Testament by his life of faith, was called the "Father of Faith." He believed that Abraham's most important lesson on faith consisted of distrusting his own abilities and suspending the idea that he could accomplish salvation and happiness on his own. Ávila said, "We do not go to heaven except by grace. Therefore we are to confess our weaknesses and our misery." Those who lived their faith recognized that they were the poor in spirit. While people who possessed faith were distrustful of themselves and their abilities, they had to be as courageous, strong and confident in God as Abraham was. Reflecting on the birth of Isaac, Ávila said, "Sarah doubted a little whereas the strong Abraham believed without doubting. He immediately believed the word of God and trusted most firmly that he would not lack what God had promised to him."

He warned that persons who had faith could not let their weakness and fragility stop them from acting. A living faith was accompanied by humility and self-knowledge, and God helped penitents see the vanity and shortness of life so that they might desire God with more fervor. Abraham's living faith enabled him to see and rejoice in his son Isaac, a name meaning "God has made laughter for me," indicating that a living, dynamic faith is a source of great joy. Ávila also believed that when God grants a person joy, he also tests him in his faith to see whether the he is focusing more on the gift than the Giver of the gift. God's gifts can provide such a false sense of security because one can become so enamored of

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362 Cf. Romans 4:11; Hebrews 11:8-22
363 “... no vamos al cielo sino por gracia. Ansí pues, hemos de hacer, confesarnos por flacos y desmayados, por esteriles, miserables...” Sermon 62, (OC III,§11, 12, p. 827).
364 "Dudó pues, un poco Sara; mas el fuerte Abraham creyó sin dudar. Creyó luego a la palabra de Dios y confió firmísimamente que no habría falta en lo que Dios le dijese.” Sermon 62, (OC III,§13, p. 828).
God's gifts that God himself is forgotten. The Lord tests each person's perseverance during times of trial, when God himself seems to be absent. He believed that this was the reason that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to him.

By moving beyond the story of Abraham's faith and asking his listeners whether they were in the spiritual lineage of Christ or not, he was encouraging the listeners to evaluate their faith. He then described three possible answers: those who say no, those who are not sure, and those who can say yes.

He believed that those who responded "no" to possessing the spiritual lineage of Christ were in mortal sin and that each action of such persons was cursed so that they brought about their own destruction. While he presented the dreadful state of those in mortal sin in the harshest terms, he encouraged them at the same time to conversion and repentance because Jesus Christ was still offering them salvation.

Ávila also spoke harsh words for those who could not decide whether or not they believed in Jesus Christ. They were the lukewarm who did not want to give up anything to love Christ. He proclaimed: "You have to lose something of yourself if you want to gain Christ."366 The listener must make a definitive choice. He reminded the lukewarm that it took a great deal more effort to not decide than it would take to serve God with love. He concluded by warning them that if they did not choose Christ, they would lose what little they had.

The third group comprised those who said "yes" to Jesus Christ, serving him with a zealous and burning will, seeking the will of God in all things, and

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allowing nothing to stand in the way of their devotion, service and love of God.

Their faith in God was their most precious possession. Ávila returned to the story of Abraham and Isaac to show how Abraham possessed this kind of faith. By offering his son to be sacrificed, Abraham demonstrated his great faith and love. God then intervened so that Isaac would live. Ávila reminded his listeners:

> God hides himself to see how we will make it in his absence; he desires to see how we fight when he does not show his presence, how we deal with tribulations, trials, sadness and dryness. Soon God appears; he says: “This soul has been faithful in my absence, I have seen the good you have spoken and how you have resisted; you have done it well. . .

When God tests our joy, it will not be destroyed if we are faithful. For one to be in the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ, he must possess humility, obedience and a strong faith.

He then discussed the mystery of the birth of the Virgin Mary, who was seen as the one who was most perfectly conformed to the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ. While this little girl would grow up to be the Mother of God, it was her spiritual lineage that ultimately saved her. He stressed Mary’s humility and spiritual motherhood:

> The Virgin Mary has more sons, while not giving birth to more than one, since we who are brothers of Christ are all sons of the Virgin. The Mother of God is born into the world as a little girl to cure the evils brought on by Eve. Mary cures these evils by her great humility. God loves the humility of the soul very much and so he loved the Holy Virgin because she was so humble.

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367 “Escóndese Dios para ver cómo lo hacemos en su ausencia; quiere Él ver cómo peleamos cuando Él no nos enseña su presencia, cómo nos habemos en las tribulaciones, en los trabajos, en las tristezas, en la sequedad. Y luego aparece Dios; dice: ‘Fiel ha sido esta alma en mi ausencia; bien he visto lo que has hecho hablado, cómo has resistido; bien lo has hecho. . .’ Sermon 62, (OC III, 139, p. 839).

368 “Más hijos tiene la Virgen María, con no parir más de uno, que otra que hubiese parido muchos, porque todos los que somos hermanos de Jesucristo, que somos los cristianos, todos
While Eve sought greatness and brought down the human race, Mary living humbly and being exalted by God, helped to heal sinful mankind. He continued his sermon by referring to Mary as a “Wall” and as a “Gate.” Using Song of Songs (8:9) as a basis, he spoke of Marian mediation in terms of being a “Good Wall”:

“O Blessed Lady! How many have you defended among those whom God wanted to execute his justice? Placing yourself in the middle, praying for them, you have gained pardon for their sins!” As Mediatrix, the Virgin was not only the “good wall” but also the “beautiful gate” that leads into the dwelling of the Lord: “This young girl is the gate of heaven. If you would have the glory of going (to heaven), you would have to enter through this gate.”

He concluded with a prayer to Mary: “Lady, alms! I have been very evil, a sinner: I have offended God in many ways: I do not have the nerve to appear; I am unable to speak to your Son. I beg alms from you. Pray for me. Gain pardon for me. Pray to your blessed Son for me.”

This third sermon on the birth of the Virgin Mary extolled her as the perfect model of the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ her Son. Those who chose to live their spiritual lineage by doing the will of the Father, hearing the word of God and keeping it like Mary would be saved through her Son. Because of her great
humility, she is the spiritual mother, guide and intercessor to help mankind enter the dwelling of the Lord.

4. Sermon 63: Who would see this little girl struggle with God? “What will we do for our sister on the day she has to speak?” (Song of Songs 8:8)

Ávila preached this sermon to a group of religious sisters on the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The feast recalls the story from the Proto-Evangelium of James in which Anna and Joachim presented their daughter Mary at the Temple so that she could live a life consecrated to God. He quoted St. Bernard who said he must always speak about the Virgin Mary with great truth because she is the Mother of Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, and with fervor because of his love for her. He desired to remind the sisters of the infancy of Mary because “while Mary is now great in heaven, she was at a certain time a tiny girl here on earth and she remembers all the tiny ones who are humble and beg for grace.”

When Ávila recounted the story of Mary’s Presentation in the Temple, he was speaking of a tradition among the Jews in which some young girls were sent to live a consecrated life in the Temple until they reached the age of marriage. He quoted the tradition which said that Mary was brought there at age three and that it was appropriate for Mary to enter at such a young age because she would need much training and instruction in her dealings with God before she was to become his mother. Mary needed to be a spotless vessel to receive the “balsam” of God.

372 “Esta Señora. que ahora está tan grande en los cielos, algún tiempo fue chiquita acá en la tierra y verdaderamente será chiquita para los que de verdad fueron agora chiquita en sus ojos y se humillaren y le pidieron gracia.” Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶1, p. 843).
He compared Mary to a beautifully adorned wall, saying “although she is just a little girl, Mary is higher than heaven, deeper than the abyss, and wider than the earth. She is higher than the heavens in a spiritual sense because she is greater than the seraphim.”\(^\red{373}\) The God whom the heavens and earth cannot hold would take flesh in her womb. “The Virgin is the wall of protection for the universal world. All are sons of Eve according to the flesh and of the Virgin according to the spirit.”\(^\red{374}\) Through her, sinners were pardoned and the just were strengthened in grace. She was not seen as a fragile wall of glass, but as a wall of metal and a column of iron.

Ávila asked what weapons Mary would use to overcome God and protect humanity. He quoted the Song of Songs (4:9): “you have wounded my heart with one of your eyes and with a strand of your hair.” He explained that the single eye and the strand of hair described Mary’s undivided love for God. Mary desired only to carry out God’s will for her and that God had given her the perfect weapons with which to fight him: “There is nothing with which God is reached more securely than with love; God does not know how to defend himself from the heart that loves him because he does not desire to defend himself from love.”\(^\red{375}\)

Ávila believed that because Mary loved God and desired to do his will, her prayer would conquer God and protect her spiritual children. He compared Mary’s struggle with God to Jacob’s wrestling with Him (Gen 32:25). Jacob

\(^{373}\) “Esta chiquita de que hablamos más alta es que el cielo, más profunda que los abismos, más ancha que la tierra. Más alta que el cielo en lo espiritual. . . que aunque es chiquita en más que los ángeles más que los serafines.” \(\text{Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶6, p. 845).}\)

\(^{374}\) “Esta Virgen es muro de todo el mundo universo, y . . . de Eva somos todos hijos según la carne, y de la Virgen según el espíritu.” \(\text{Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶7, p. 845).}\)

\(^{375}\) “No hay cosa con que más aina se alcance a Dios que con amor; no sabe Dios defenderse del corazón que le ama; porque no quiere.” \(\text{Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶10, p. 847).}\)
prepared to fight by sending his family away to the other side of the river so that he could be alone, knowing that this battle would require the recollection of the heart. Like Jacob who "was alone one night and fought alone, the Virgin fought more recollected in her heart. Jacob fought prepared, but Mary was more prepared." He then described the "battles" that Mary had with God:

This young girl would arise in the middle of the night and sit in a little corner and begin to fight with God in her heart: 'Lord if I have found grace in your eyes, pardon them. . . .' You, man, are a little worm, you are an ant that walks through the earth and the Virgin is praying for you in heaven.

Because Mary offered herself to God in her intercessory prayers, God did not withhold anything from her and since Mary's love could overcome God, the demons were fearful of her and fled at her name.

After he described the Virgin Mary as possessing great power, he reminded the sisters of her great humility. He believed that if Mary were in that community of religious sisters, she would not be the Abbess but rather "the first in obedience and that she would take the broom and sweep and always perform the lowest duties." Mary would seek pardon and healing for all who came to her disheartened. The Virgin Mary was not the leader in her own eyes, but the lowest servant.

376 "Jacob una noche sola y solo luchó; luchó la Virgen más recogido el corazón. Aparejado luchó Jacob, pero más aparejada la Virgen." Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶14, p. 848).
377 "Quién viera la Niña levantarse de noche de escuras, y sentarse a un rinconcito y comenzar con su corazón a combatir a Dios! Domine si invent gratiain oculis tuis, dimite eis. . . .gusanillo eres hormigo eres que andas por la tierra, y está la Virgen rogando por ti en el cielo." Sermon 63, (OC III,¶15, p. 848-849).
378 "... la primera sería en obedecer, y que tomaría la escoba para barrer, y siempre haría los oficios más bajos." Sermon 63, (OC III,¶23, p. 851).
Ávila presented Mary as the most humble of maidens who by her love conquered God's wrath and protected her spiritual children. After questioning "Why so many people love her and have her written in their heart," he answered by saying that devotion to Mary was a sign that a person was saved. He explained it in this way:

How will I obtain this devotion? I will obtain it by fasting and tears and faithfully keeping the law of God. In payment for this, God gave Mary to them. Do you not have devotion to her? You have too much evil; good fails you too much; he should desire more to be without skin than to be without devotion to Mary. As the Father gave us the greatest gift in giving us his Blessed Son for our healing, so then the Son gave us the great gift in giving his Mother as our Advocate."

He concluded this sermon with the moral exhortation to serve and obey the Virgin Mary by imitating her virtues and obeying her words: "Do whatever he tells you." He described the courtship of God and the Virgin Mary, and her seduction of him by the holiness, purity and love that he gave her.

5. Sermon 64: The Day of Offering Much to God.
"Sanctify for me every first born male, both of men and animals because all things are mine. (Ex 13:2)"

Ávila began this sermon on the Purification of Mary by comparing the Temple of Jerusalem to the Mother of God: "Today the Lord of the Temple has been presented in the Temple by the hands of another truer temple who was the

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379 "Como hay tanta gente que la ama y que tiene a María escrita en su corazón?" Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶25, p. 852).
380 "Pues cómo la hubieron? Con ayunos y lágrimas y oraciones y guardando muy bien la ley de Dios; y en pago de esto les dio Dios a María. –Que hare para tener devoción con la Virgen? –No le tenéis devoción? Harto mal tenéis; harto bien os falta; más querría estar sin pellejo que sin devoción de María. Así como el Padre nos dio grandísimo don en darnos a su bendito Hijo para nuestro remedio, así tambien el Hijo nos dio gran don en darnos a su bendita Madre por abogada nuestra." Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶31, p. 853-854).
381 Cf. John 2:5.
Virgin Mary. In her we receive him so let us pray through her that we may now receive him."\textsuperscript{382} He believed that this feast is really the combination of three feasts: the Purification of Mary, Candlemas or the Feast of Simeon, and the greatest of the three, the Presentation of the Lord. He connected the Feast of the Presentation with the killing of the first born in Egypt, an action that brought freedom to the Jewish people. He believed that the Jewish offering of the first born was a suitable recognition of the mercy God had shown them.

He explained that this feast was called the Purification because a woman was not permitted to enter the Temple for forty days after giving birth if her child was a boy, or eighty days if the child was a girl. When the period of purification was completed, a wealthy mother would go to the Temple with her child and offer a lamb, but if poor, she would offer two pigeons or turtledoves. Ávila taught that since Mary's child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, she was exempt from the Law, but Mary performed this duty as an example of obedience.

Candlemas, the second aspect, recalls Simeon, who begged the Lord not to let him die until he had seen the Messiah.\textsuperscript{383} Ávila believed that God granted Simeon his request because he was wise and God-fearing and because he expected his redemption and that of all Israel. He said that when Simeon held the Christ-child in his arms,

\begin{quote}
He begins to become a little boy with the little boy who is Christ. If in the desire of this Saint you . . . come with the Spirit to the Temple, the Virgin would give her Son into your arms as she did to Simeon; and since she is so generous, let us beg her to give
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{382} "Hoy fue presentado al templo del Señor del templo, y por manos de otro más verdadero templo que fue la Virgen; pues en ella lo recibimos y por ella, rogúemosle que, mediante sus oraciones ahora lo recibamos." \textit{Sermon 64}, (OC III,\textsuperscript{1} p. 855).

\textsuperscript{383} Cf. Lk 2:22-35.
Once a person has received Christ from the hands of Mary, there is nothing more that is needed.

After explaining the two names for the feast, Ávila asks why God demands so much from humanity that they must give him their first-born. He believed that God was really asking everyone to give him their first love which belonged to God because it ordered all the other loves of the person’s life. He believed that God’s desire was that we would present our first-born not out of obligation but as an offering of love. Those who believed that God’s demands were unreasonable were not really aware how much they actually owed him who had destroyed the sins that would have resulted in their damnation and who gave his first-born Son for the salvation of all people: “After all, God took me from hell and destroyed my sins and for it he let his first-born Son be killed.” Mary’s presentation of Jesus in the Temple was the example of a holy offering because she offered everything from her heart. A humble person pleases God and destroys the dangerous beasts in his human heart, especially gluttony, anger, envy, and sensuality and then presents these beasts to the priest, so that he will destroy them through the sacrament of Penance. This is the debt owed for the death of Christ. With his teacher St. Paul, Ávila believed repentance moved a person from the life of the

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384 “Comiéznase a hacer niño con el niño que es Cristo. Si en el deseo de este santo... vinieses con espíritu al templo, la Virgen te daría su Hijo en los brazos como a éste; y pues es tan dádivosa, pidámosle a su Hijo que dárnoslo ha.” Sermon 64, (OC III,¶7, p. 857-858).

385 “El me sacó del infierno y mató mis pecados, y para ello mató a su mayorazgo.” Sermon 64, (OC III,¶15, p. 860).
flesh to the life of the Spirit. 386 If the person is unrepentant, everything is lost, but if he repents, everything is gained in Jesus Christ.

In the conclusion of the sermon, he exhorted all his listeners to offer their first love as Mary offered hers. He explained that if one were to ask Mary why she was going to the Temple, she would say: “. . . to present to God his first-born Son and mine, the one that he gave me.” 387 He placed this prayer on Mary’s lips: “Lord, I offer this little boy to you; he is yours since he is eternally begotten from you and mine because he was given to me for the remission of sins. May the glory be yours! He is yours, I offer him to you.” 388

6. Sermon 65 [1]: This business is all about Love
“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Ávila began this sermon on the Annunciation by proclaiming that it was a day of great joy for the human race and that Mary was the first to receive the joy. He asked his listeners to recite the “Hail Mary” with him, so that this news would be well spoken. He gave a detailed exegesis of the story of the Annunciation and described the day in five different ways: it was the day of the mercy of God, of healing the world, of the redemption of captives, the day of marriage, and of giving great alms. 389 He proceeded to draw a parallel between the Annunciation and the choosing of Rebekah to be the wife of Isaac. As Abraham sent his servant Eliezer back to his homeland to find a wife for his son Isaac, so God sent the

386 Cf. Romans 8:6-11
387 “A presentar a Dios su Mayorazgo y mío, el cual Él me dio.” Sermon 64, (OC III, ¶20, p. 862).
388 “Señor este Niño os ofrezco; vuestra es, pues de vos es eternamente engendrado; y mío porque por vos, para remedio de los pecadores me fue dado, ¡A vos sea la gloria! Vuestro es, yo os lo ofrezco.” Sermon 64, (OC III, ¶21, p. 862).
389 “Día de las misericordias de Dios . . .del remedio del mundo, . . .día de redención de captivos, día de desposorios, . . .día de dar grandes limosnas . . .” Sermon 65 [1], (OC III, ¶2, p. 864).
archangel Gabriel to announce to Mary that she was a suitable Mother for his Son
and to greet her with these words: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.”
Mary did not respond immediately to the greeting because, according to Ávila,
she was not sure whether the angel was from God or was a demon. After the angel
assured her, she questioned how this would occur since she was a virgin. He
extolled Mary’s virginity: “O purity, that you are so beloved of the Virgin! Not
without cause do you ask. . . . This is not a word of unbelief. Look at how great
the love is that Mary has for her purity so that she who had already vowed
virginity would not exchange it in order to be Mother of the Son of God.”390 Ávila
proposed that Mary had already taken a vow of virginity.

He drew another parallel from the Old Testament to describe the Virgin
Mary as the type of the burning bush from Exodus: “What blackberry bush is this
which burns and is not consumed? What do you see—a pregnant maiden?”391 He
drew further meaning by comparing his listeners to Moses removing his sandals
upon approaching the burning bush:

Do not approach the mystery of the Incarnation with a worldly
heart and eyes or with a profane and dishonest heart; uncover your
reason, come near with bare feet, distrustful of yourself, detached
from yourself, approaching and seeking help from God.392

This mystery must not be viewed from the natural but from the supernatural
point of view. Ávila asked God why he took flesh in a maiden and believed that

390 “¡Oh limpieza que tan amada eres de la Virgen! No sin causa preguntáis: Angel, cómo se hará
esto? No es palabra de incredulidad. Mirá que tanto es el amor que tiene la Virgen a su limpieza,
que no trueca su virginidad por ser madre del Hijo de Dios.” Sermon 65[1], (OC III, ¶9, p. 867).
391 “¿Que zarza es esta, que arde y no se quema? Que vean vuestros ojos, una doncella preñada y
doncella?” Sermon 65[1], (OC III, ¶15, p. 869).
392 “No te llegues con corazón y ojos mundanos no con corazón profano y deshonesto; desnuda tu
razón, llégate con pies descalzos, desconfiado de ti, arrimado de ti, arrimado y pidiendo
socorro a Dios.” Sermon 65[1], (OC III, ¶16, p. 869).
God would say: "I saw the trials of my people and the hardships and anguishes that they suffered and I have come down to free them."  

He then discussed the mystery of the Incarnation in nuptial terms. In the Incarnation of the Word, humanity and divinity were married in the person of Jesus Christ:

He became man and did not cease being God; two natures and one person so that God is spoken of as man and the man is of God, and all that is said of one can be said of the other and the goods of the Word may be communicated to man and the works of man to the Word. God descends to man and man ascends to God.  

He also portrayed the Virgin Mary as spouse: "Look Lord, your spouse owes you nothing. She never sinned. She was most pure in her conception. But look at how much we relatives owe; we are burdened with debts." In spite of our sinfulness and lowliness, God chose to take upon himself our human nature.

Ávila then connected the mystery of the Incarnation with the kenotic hymn of the Letter to the Philippians (2:1-7). In assuming a human nature, Jesus Christ became a slave. He showed the greatest humility. In her "fiat," Mary announced that she too was a slave of the Lord. For these reasons, his listeners were to become slaves of the Lord by their love of God and neighbor: "You are not complete within yourselves, but with others. If you see God who emptied himself by becoming man, why do you not humble yourself to exalt your

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393 "Vi el trabajo y penas de mi pueblo y los trabajos y angustias que padece, y he descendido a librarlo yo." Sermon 65[1], (OC III,¶16, p. 870).
394 "Hácese hombre y no deja de ser Dios; dos naturalezas y una persona, de manera que se diga Dios es Hombre, y el Hombre y Dios, y lo que se dice del uno se diga del otro, y que se comuniquen los bienes del Verbo al hombre, y los trabajos del hombre al Verbo. Desciende Dios hasta hombre y sube hombre hasta Dios." Sermon 65[1], (OC III,¶19, p. 871).
395 "Pues mirad, Señor, que vuestra Esposa no debe nada, nunca pecó, limísimas fue en su concepción; pues mirad cuanto debemos los parientes, que cargados de deudas estamos..." Sermon 65[1], (OC III,¶21, p. 872).
neighbor.” He knew from his teacher St. Paul that true slavery to the will of God would lead to perfect freedom.

He then returned to his parallel between Rebekah and the Virgin Mary. Eliezer, not knowing how to find a wife for Isaac, asked for a sign of generosity: “If I ask a maiden for a drink of water, and she offers to water my camels as well, she will become the wife of Isaac.” In comparing the two women, Maestro Ávila commented:

What does Rebekah have to do with Mary? Rebekah is wise, retiring and beautiful, but Mary is more so. Mary is greater than Rebekah in her generosity because Mary does not pour out her gifts with a pitcher, but the pitcher is taken away and the water of grace is given to the believer in abundance so that he will be aided in his trials.

Ávila concluded this sermon on the Annunciation by encouraging his congregation to become slaves of Christ, following the example of Mary. In the Incarnation, God became our brother. He took on a human nature so that he might share his divinity with all, thereby freeing all people to become children of God by adoption.

7. Sermon 65 (2): This work is purely about grace

In his second sermon on the Annunciation, Ávila examined the Incarnation and Mary’s role in it in terms of the fulfillment of the promises God

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396“No cumplais con vosotros sino con los otros. Pues si ves a Dios que perdió su descanso por los hombres, qué es la causa de que no te humillas para ensalzar tu prójimo? Sermon 65[1], (OC III.128, p. 875).
398 Cf. Genesis 24:14
69 Qué tiene que ver la caridad de Rebeca con la de María? Qué gran cosa era aquella señal, que diese de beber a quien llegaba a una fuente con sed! Una ha de ser la esposa del Verbo, que está tan llena de amor, llena de entrañas de caridad, que no le pidas cosa que no te lo dé; que se quite el cántaro, y te dé agua de gracia que en tus tribulaciones sientas se ayuda.” Sermon 65[1], (OC III.128, p. 876).
made to Israel. He preached that when God heard the cry of his people in Egypt, he appeared to Moses in a burning bush to send him on a mission to liberate Israel from slavery. This theophany was fulfilled on the feast of the Annunciation, a feast which revealed a great mystery. The only way that people could speak about it would be to remove mortal things and their affections from their thoughts. He asked his listeners to recite a "Hail Mary" with him that he might have the purity and grace to speak well of the Annunciation.

The Annunciation was an event to be joyfully proclaimed to all humanity. If a person would chose not to speak of the Incarnation on this feast, he could be accused of betraying his faith. The gift of the Incarnation was not something that was earned or deserved but was purely a work of grace by which Jesus Christ not only paid the ransom for the sins of humanity but infinitely surpassed it.

Ávila mentioned once again the parallel between the Annunciation and Eliezer's return to Abraham's homeland to search for a wife for Isaac.400 Sent by Abraham, his servant Eliezer, after finding out who gave water both to him and his camels, gave her an earring and two bracelets on behalf of Isaac. In a similar way, Mary was from God's homeland, because of her humility and purity: Freed from all sin not by nature but by grace, she possessed even greater charity than Rebekah since she not only gave herself totally to God to be his mother but also continued to give many gifts to her spiritual children. Ávila added that if he

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wanted to write down all the generous deeds of Mary, there would not be enough paper to hold them.  

Ávila believed that a person who has devotion to the Virgin Mary will be saved. Since devotion constitutes more than lip service, those devoted to her have known and served her with their actions and their purity. The Virgin Mary, a source of blessing and strength for all who are saved, is God’s gift to them. He then returned to his treatment of Rebekah and the Virgin Mary by interpreting the meaning of the earring and two bracelets given to Rebekah and their meaning for Mary. He said: “... the earring signifies her faith, and the bracelets hope and charity since God himself is embraced in her arms.”

There was only one earring because Mary’s faith was not divided, but united in Jesus Christ. Her hope was seen in her trust in the Lord, and her charity was seen in the pure generosity of her heart, asking God for whatever her children might need.

Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, Ávila offered a paraphrase of the Annunciation narrative. He emphasized four points in particular. First was Mary’s lowliness and humility. She came from a poor place, Nazareth, and was betrothed to a carpenter. Second, her name:

Mary could mean, “sea of bitterness,” and in another sense “princess” or star of the sea. Each one describes Mary well. She was the sea of “grief” in the Passion of her beloved Son and “star” of the sailors for the great and spacious sea of this world, the “north” of sinners and “princess of the seraphim.”

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401 “Ideo deseo mucho, cada vez que hablo de la Virgen, que hubiera en libro para que se viera su caridad; y lo que debemos de lo que la Virgen ha hecho y hace con nosotros, no cupiera en papel.” Sermon 65[2], (OC III, 18, p. 881).
402 “... el zarcillo significa la fe, y las ajorcas, esperanza y caridad porque con estos brazos se abraza Dios.” Sermon 65[2], (OC III,11, p. 882).
403 “María quiere decir en una lengua ‘mar de amargura,’ y en otra ‘princesa,’ o ‘estrella del mar.’ Todo le viene bien a la Virgen María: fue mar de ‘amargura’ en la pasión de su bendito Hijo, y
Third, Mary showed fear at the encounter and greeting of the angel, because she was trying to discern whether the messenger was from God or a trick of the devil. Fourth, Mary expressed concern about her virginity. He assumed that Mary had previously made a vow of virginity: “The Blessed Virgin loved her virginity so much that she hesitated becoming Mother of God,” and said, “How can this happen, since I have promised to not know man?” When the angel responded that this work was not the work of man, but of the Holy Spirit, Mary pronounced her “fiat.”

Ávila concluded this sermon by exhorting his listeners to thank God for the gift of the Incarnation and the Virgin Mary for being his Mother:

If you arrive at a beautiful tree and see a pear or a very beautiful apple, say ‘Blessed is the tree that gave such fruit.’ When you see Jesus Christ in the consecrated host . . . and receive our Lord, give thanks to the Eternal Father who gave it to you and say, “Blessed is the tree, which is the most Blessed Virgin, that gave such fruit.”

8. Sermon 66: Happy is the person whom Mary visits!

“The words of the wise are like javelins and nails firmly fixed are the collected words that are given by one shepherd.” (Eccles 12:11)

Ávila used this citation from Ecclesiastes to begin his sermon on the Visitation and to stress the power of words. He believed that “life and death are in the hands of the tongue.” With Mary’s words, “Behold the handmaid of the

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'\textquote{estrella}' de los navegantes por este mar grande y espacioso de este mundo, 'norte' de los pecadores y 'princesa' de los serafines. Sermon 65[2], (OC III, ¶15, p. 883).

404 “Cómo se hara eso, que tengo prometido de no conocer varón?” Sermon 65[2], (OC III, ¶19, p. 884-885).

405 “Que sí llegáis a un árbol muy hermoso y veis una pera o manzana muy hermosa, decís 'Bendito el árbol que tal fruto dio!' Cuando viéredes a Jesucristo en la hostia consagrada, . . . cuando recibáreis a nuestro Señor, dad gracias al Padre Eterno, que os lo dio; decid: '¡Bendito sea el árbol que tal fruto dio, que es la Virgen benditísima!'” Sermon 65[2], (OC III, ¶21, p. 885).


131
Lord," the Eternal Word took flesh in her. The Virgin Mary’s words of greeting aroused the child in Elizabeth’s womb, “receiving the acceleration of free will and grace so that when her child left the womb, he left it holy.”

Along with a Hail Mary, he recited a prayer for his listeners that referred to the power of Mary’s intercession: “Remember, Virgin Mother, when you stand before God, speak good things on our behalf and turn his indignation away from us.”

For Ávila, Jesus Christ was the example for all who had been and would be saved. When one drew close to Christ, he became more like him. There was no one closer to Jesus Christ than his Mother who, he contended, “… was a blessing over men and angels, possessed more grace than they did and consequently more glory.” He described the Visitation in this way: “Look at the morning star that came first before the sun and you will see her deep humility and love in visiting St. Elizabeth today.”

The Virgin Mary, the highest of God’s creatures and worthy of honor, was also the most humble after her Son. “The humility of the Virgin, who is all pure and whiter than snow, is a thing worthy of admiration. She, who is lovable to God, attracted him to herself because he looked on her lowliness.”

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407 This refers to the commonly held belief that John the Baptist was sanctified in his mother’s womb at the Visitation and born free of original sin.


409 “... que tiene bendición sobre hombres y ángeles, y más gracia que ellos y por consiguiente, más Gloria.” Sermon 66, (OC III, 14, p. 887).

410 “… mas mirad el lucero que vino primero que el sol, y veréis su profunda humildad y caridad en visitar hoy a Santa Elisabet.” Sermon 66, (OC III, 5, p. 888).

411 “... mas en la Virgen, donde todo es limpio y blanco mas que la nieve, sin ninguna mancha de pecado allí tanta humildad, es cosa digna de grande admiración, con la cual se hizo amable a Dios y lo atrajo a sí; palabras son de la Virgen: Quia respexit humilitatem.” Sermon 66, (OC III, 7, p. 888).
humility was the root of the other virtues. The humble possessed God's grace; the proud and sinful person lost it. Her visit was an act of humility, because “after conceiving her Son, she went to see and serve one who was lesser than she.”412 Mary was the model of humility that all people must strive to imitate: “Let him who seeks to have some idea of God be humble and imitate the Virgin Mary, being pregnant with God, goes to serve one pregnant by man.”413

Ávila continued his sermon by saying that anyone who was visited by the Blessed Virgin was blessed: “What good would not the Virgin Mary, who carries God in herself, give?”414 God spoke to Elizabeth and John through the voice of the Virgin Mary: “Good things came to them by the words of the Virgin Mary.”415 He advised his listeners that if they wished to be visited by Mary, they must be remembered by God and keep the commandments. When Mary visits us, she repeats the words she said at Cana, “Do whatever he tells you,”416 and she brings her Son, so that people’s hearts will leap for joy and receive consolation.

Before the conclusion of this sermon, Ávila presented two other Old Testament types of Mary: The Ark of the Covenant and Abigail. Just as Obededom was blessed because he received the Ark of the Covenant in his house, so the one who welcomed the Virgin Mary was one who would have her grace.417

413 “Quien quisiere tener alguna conjectura de que tiene a Dios, sea humilde e imite a la Virgen que, siendo preñada de Dios, va a servir a la preñada de hombre.” Sermon 66, (OC III, §11, p. 891).
414 “Qué bien habrá que no traigas contigo, pues llevas contigo a Dios?” Sermon 66, (OC III, §12, p. 891.)
415 “... por el medio de la Virgen les vino este bien...” Sermon 66, (OC III, §13, p. 892).
416 Cf. John 2:5.
Like Abigail, the wife of Nabal,418 who turned away David's wrath by bringing bread to him and his men, so Mary in asking pardon for sinners, “... reminds him (Jesus) that she gave him human flesh, carried him in her womb and nursed him. Thus, Mary is able to calm God.”419 He concluded by reminding his listeners that Mary's prayers were hindered by their sins. They must help Mary by their prayers and penances that they might enjoy the benefits of her visitation.

9. Sermon 67: To whom shall I compare you, Daughter of Zion?
“Weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice.”(Romans 12:15)

In this Good Friday sermon, Ávila meditated on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the Virgin Mary. He began by exhorting his listeners to spend time weeping with the Mother of God and gave them the most important reason for joining Mary: "We are the cause of the Passion of Jesus Christ and the anguishes of his mother."420 The Passion needs to be remembered with tears of sorrow: "For the reverence of God, spend this day in accompanying the widow and be with her each day in her little corner to help her weep, since you are the cause of her sorrow."421

Ávila quoted the Lamentations of Jeremiah, asking whose grief has been as deep as that of the Virgin Mary. He asked God directly why Jesus and Mary had been treated in such a harsh way: "What have this sheep and her innocent

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418 Cf. 1 Sam 25:33.
419 "... mas la Virgen, traele a la memoria que le dio carne humana que lo trajo en su vientre que le dio leche. De aqui nace que alcanze que se amanse Dios."Sermon 66, (OC III,§17, p. 894).
420 "Nosotros somos la causa de la pasión de Jesucristo y las angustias de su Madre." Sermon 67, (OC III,§12, p. 895).
421 "... por reverencia de Dios, este día en acompanar al vida, y dalla cada uno en su rinconcillo ayudarle a llorar y a estar allí con ella, pues sois la causa de sus dolores." Sermon 67, (OC III,§3, p. 895-896).
lamb done, the pure ones, those without sin, the just ones? We are the traitors, we are the ones that sin; turn your anger against us.” 422 He understood that Jesus' death would bring life to the world, but wondered why the Virgin Mary had to be so affected. He reminded God of the passage from the book of Deuteronomy 423 which prohibited Jews from cooking a kid-goat in its mother's milk and then asked God: “Is it not enough to kill the Son and put him on the cross without also killing the mother? Why is Jesus Christ boiled in the tears of his mother?” 424 He proceeded to make Mary's case before God: “What has she done for you except serve you all the days of her life? What has she done to you except that while she was in this life, she did not spend her time in any other way but pleasing you?” 425 There was no consolation for Mary. He compared her to Abraham, who was sent by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham was able to walk down the mountain with Isaac because God had spared him. “Mary went up on Mt. Calvary with her Son, but he did not return with her. She left him there.” 426 He also contrasted her to the mother of the Maccabees who was able to comfort and encourage her sons when they died. The Virgin Mary, however, could not get close to her Son.

In Mary's other sorrows, her grief was as great as the love she had for her Son. She suffered much because she loved much. At the foot of the cross, “the

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422 “Qué os han hecho esta Oveja y su Cordero inocentísimo, los limpios, los sin pecado, los justos? Qué culpa tienen? Estas ovejas inocentísimas son, que no hicieron por qué, que nosotros somos los traídores que os ofendimos, nosotros somos los que pecamos; vuelvase vuestra ira contra nosotros.” Sermon 67, (OC III, ¶5, p. 896).
423 Cf. Deuteronomy 14:21
424 “No bastaba matar al hijo y ponelle en una cruz, sin matar también a la Madre? Por qué se cuece a Jesucristo en las lágrimas de su Madre?” Sermon 67, (OC III, ¶9, p. 898).
425 “Qué os hizo la que todos los días de su vida os sirvió? Qué os hizo la que, mientras en esta vida estaba en otra cosa no gastó su tiempo sino en agradaros?” Sermon 67, (OC III, ¶10, p. 898).
426 “Al monte Calvario subió con su hijo; mas no le trujo a la vuelta sonjigo que allá le dejó.” Sermon 67, (OC III, ¶14, p. 900).
Son dies, the mother falls. Jesus Christ died on the cross. The mother remains half-dead on the earth. You see the balances, one goes down, the other is raised up; the Son high, the mother low. One died on the cross and the other falls at his feet."427 He told his listeners that when the soldiers came to break the legs of Jesus, Mary beseeched them so much that they refrained and when the side of Jesus was pierced by the lance of Longinus, the lance drew out salvation from the side of Christ for the Church. He continued:

Do you not see the ransom of our redemption? You see the lake with which our sins were washed and the blood with which the justice of God is satisfied. You see heaven opened that until then had been closed by the sin of Adam. Now they have opened the window of the Ark of Noah, through whom all those who entered were served."428

Ávila, having placed Mary at the foot of the cross, told his listeners that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had come to remove Jesus from the cross and bury him. They approached Mary with shame and sorrow and said,

If until now, Lady, we have not served you or accompanied you in this great trial, forgive us. We have been cowardly in not having been bold with our lives. . . . From now on it will be better. See, Lady, we do what you command. We come to give a tomb to your Son . . . we bring here all the necessary things. Lady, give us permission."429

427 "Muere el hijo; cae la Madre. Expira Jesucristo en la cruz. Queda medio muerta la Madre en la tierra. Veis las balanzas: en bajarse la una, se alza la otra; el hijo alto, la Madre baja; muere la otra en la cruz y cae al pie de ella." Sermon 67. (OC III, ¶22, p. 903).
428 “Del costado de Jesucristo saca la Iglesia. No veis el rescate de nuestra redención? Veis ahí el lago con que fueron lavados nuestros pecados y la sangre con que se satisfizo la justicia de Dios. Veis ahí el cielo abierto que hasta aquella hora había estado cerrado por el pecado de Adán. Ya han abierto la ventana del Arca de Noé, por la cual todos los que entraron fueron salvos.” Sermon 67. (OC III, ¶24, p. 904).
429 "Si hasta agora, Señora, no os habemos servido y acompañado en este vuestro trabajo tan grande, perdona nos; hemoslo hecho como pusílanímes en no haber arriscado las vidas y las haciendas por confesar a vuestro Hijo; harto arrepentidos estamos de ello; de aquí adelante será mejor. Ved, Señora al presente que mandáis hagamos; nosotros venimos a dar sepultura a vuestro Hijo y nuestro Maestro y para ello traemos aquí todas las cosas necesarias; por eso dadnos, Señora, licencia." Sermon 67. (OC III, ¶27, p. 906).
With Jesus in her arms the Virgin Mary, according to Ávila, spoke from her breaking heart: “My Son, my God, my consolation. How could you have abandoned me, knowing how much I loved you? Where are you that you do not answer me? My harp has been turned to weeping and my music to tears.”

Thus Mary’s “fiat,” uttered at the Annunciation was fulfilled and Ávila placed this prayer on her lips: “Father of Mercy, you see here your maidservant; let your will be done in me. You gave this Son to me; with great joy I received him. You see him. Here, I return him to you. You gave him to me and you took him away from me. Let your holy will be fulfilled,” and then Mary cried out to all the people, “Oh sinners, how dearly you have cost me! He has paid for what you have done and my soul has felt it, so that you may receive his fruit and find pardon with God.”

Because God pardoned them, Maestro Ávila said Mary will pardon them as well:

I forgive them, Lord, and by the sorrow that comes to me by the trials I have seen you suffer out of love for them, pardon them, Lord. Be good to them, console them, hear them, Lord, when they call to you. Cleanse them. Be good to them for me, Lord.”

Ávila then recounted the burial of Jesus: “She took the shroud with her own hands and put it on his head and wrapped him well, giving him kisses of

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430 “Hijo mío. Dios mío y consuelo mío! Cómo me has dejado, sabiendo que tanto te amaba? Adónde estás que no me respondas? Cómo se ha tornado mi arpa en lloro y mi musica en lágrimas?” Sermon 67, (OC III, p. 907).
431 “Padre de misericordia, . . . veis aquí vuestra esclava, cúmplase en mí vuestra voluntad. Este Hijo me distes, con gran alegría le recibi. Veisle, ahí os lo torno; vos me lo distes, vos me lo quitaste, cúmplase vuestra santísima voluntad . . .” Sermon 67, (OC III, p. 909).
432 “¡Oh pecadores, cuán caro me costais! Lo que vosotros hecistes, El lo ha pagado, y mi ánima lo ha sentido; . . .porque vosotros recibáis el fruto de ello y alcancéis perdón de Dios.” Sermon 67, (OC III, p. 909).
433 “Yo los perdono, Señor, y por la parte que me cabe de los trabajos que os he visto padecer por amor de ellos, perdónadlos, Señor, hacedlos bien; consoladlos en sus tribulaciones; socorredlos en sus necesidades; ayudadlos en sus trabajados; oídlos, Señor, cuando os llamaren; alegradlos; hacedlos bien por mi Señor.” Sermon 67, (OC III, p. 909).
peace." Mary cried out, "Oh tomb, they give you the one to whom I gave birth! They take him away from me to give him to you! They place the Lord inside. Soon they will roll the stone over the door of the tomb; it covers the heart of the mother." Ávila concluded his Good Friday sermon by having John bring Mary to the cenacle where the Lord had celebrated the Last Supper. John tried to convince Mary to be alone and rest, but she refused. Instead, she asked John, "Tell me, my son, where are my sons? Your brothers, where are they? The clusters of my heart, the pieces of my heart, where are they? Bring them to me here. I will not rest until I see the disciples of my Son." John then went out to gather the apostles for Mary. Because they had abandoned the Lord, they were ashamed and hiding. When John found one of them because of his loud wailing, he said: "Be silent, brother. She has pardoned you. Do you not already know her mercy? Our mother has promised to obtain pardon for us. Do not be ashamed!" Ávila says that just as Mary called all the Apostles to share her grief and find pardon, so all who spent that day with true sorrow would find consolation and pardon from her.

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434 “Tomó el sudario con sus propias manos y pisóle en su cabeza y envolvía muy bien en él, y diole besos de paz.” *Sermon 67.* (OC III, p. 910).
435 “¡Oh sepulcro, que te dan a ti lo que yo parí! ¡Quitanmelo a mí por dártelo a ti! Pon en el sepulcro; cubrase el corazón de la Madre.” *Sermon 67.* (OC III, p. 910).
436 "¿Hijo mío, adonde están mis hijos? Vuestros hermanos dónde están? Los racimos de mi corazón, los pedazos de mis entrañas, adonde están? Traérmelos acá... que no descansaré hasta que veo los discípulos de mi Hijo.” *Sermon 67.* (OC III, p. 911).
437 “Calla, hermano, que perdonarte ha, no conoces ya su misericordia? La Madre me ha prometido de alcanzar perdón, anda acá, no hayas vergüenza!” *Sermon 67.* (OC III, p. 912).
10. Sermon 68: There is no reason that the Blessed Virgin Mary is alone in praying. “Who can sing the power of the Lord or make his praise complete?” (Ps 105:2)

In his sermon on the Feast of our Lady of the Snows, also known as the Dedication of the Church of St. Mary Major in Rome, Ávila announced to his listeners that God chooses the weak to make him known. When Jesus preached, everyone came to hear him and his words affected each one in different ways. Ávila recalled the woman who was so moved by Jesus' words that she cried out, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you” and then he addressed the woman: “You began this song of the praises of the Mother of God and you began to fulfill and draw out that true prophecy of the Virgin Mary, who said: 'All generations will call me blessed!’” The woman was not the first to praise Mary, but he believed that she represented the church that is “gathered from the diversity of peoples in one faith and one baptism, and with a determined heart proclaims the Most Holy Virgin Mary to be blessed . . . ” He added that when a person wished to honor Mary, the title that honored her most was “Mother of God made man.”

While Jesus heard the praise of his mother, he did not accept it at face value. Rather, he amended her statement by saying, “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.” With these words, Jesus blessed his Mother more than the woman had done. “Nothing is gained by being my mother

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438 Cf. Lk 11:27
439 “Tú comenzaste este tal canto de las alabanzas de la Madre de Dios y comenzaste a cumplir y sacar verdadera aquella profecía de la Virgen María, en la cual dijo: Bienaventurada me llamarán todas las generaciones.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶5, p. 916).
440 “. . . congregada de diversidad de gentes en una fe y en bautismo, que con determinado corazón confiesa ser bienaventurada la sacratisima Virgen Maria. . .” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶6, p. 916).
441 Cf. Lk 11:28.
according to the flesh if she had not first conceived according to the Spirit.”

Jesus did not intend to denigrate Mary’s biological motherhood, but to stress that she became Mother of God in the divine plan through her faith. Ávila said to Mary: “You are mother according to the flesh. God gave you grace to be a worthy mother. And just as there is no one joined to him in the flesh as you, so no one is closer according to the Spirit.” Everyone owed Mary a great debt because she bore, nourished and nurtured Jesus Christ our Savior. Mary gave us God’s Son, the Bread of Life, but because all believers were children, the Bread was too strong for our weak stomachs. Because of this, Mary took this Bread into herself and turned it into milk so that all her children might be fed and nourished.

Ávila contrasted the woman who praised Mary with sinners who “satisfied themselves by believing with a dead faith what the woman believed with all her heart; they did not believe as she believed nor rejoice as she rejoiced.” The ungrateful sinners were unable to hear and keep the Word of God because they were held captive by their sins. In order to join with the woman who praised Mary, they had to have sorrow for their sins and make a true confession. Their repentance would give them a profound joy and a new love for God and neighbor. He tried to explain it in this way: “If by eating from the fruit of the tree it seems that I give thanks to the tree and bless it; and if by eating that fruit one is spared some mortal venom, how many times would he say: ‘Blessed be God who created

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442 “... ninguna cosa le aprovechará ser madre mía según la carne, si no lo fuera según el espíritu.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶8, p. 917).
443 “Y de tal manera sois madre, según la carne que os dio tales gracias para que seáis digna madre. Y así como no hay cosa tan conjunta a Él, según la carne como vos, así tampoco lo hay según el ánima.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶10, p. 918).
444 “... nosotros, por nuestros pecados, contentamos con creer con una fe muerte lo que tú creíste y muchos de nosotros no gozamos de lo que tú gozaste.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶13, p. 920).

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that tree?"445 By blessing the “tree,” he, in fact, blessed the Virgin Mary. Mary was the one who heard and kept the Word of God. All who wished to follow and imitate her would be blessed.

Ávila then recounted the legend of the building of St. Mary Major church. After relating the story of how Mary showed Pope Liberius where the church was to be built in her honor, Ávila asked a question: Why did Mary make it snow in August? He believed that the miraculous snow signified Mary’s virginal motherhood. In other words Mary was “snow in a warm season.” The whiteness of the snow showed Mary’s purity of life. “She sends us water that will moderate the warmth of the earth so that it will be fruitful for her.”446 He added, in regards to Mary’s intercessory role that “she is in the habit of calming the anger of him who is in heaven as she calmed him on earth when he cried as a little baby.”447

He addressed Mary’s role as an intercessor by comparing her to the wise woman of Tekoa whom Joab sent to David that he might have mercy on Absalom, who had killed his brother Amnon.448 The woman, a widow whose two sons had a fight in which one killed the other, asked David’s help to prevent the death of the living son and he granted it. He preached that Mary, in a similar way, approached the Lord and told him she had two sons, one of whom had killed the other. The one who was killed was Jesus and the ones responsible were the ones he gave to her on Mt. Calvary. Ávila put these words in Mary’s mouth:

445 “Si por comer del fruto de un árbol parece que le agradezco al árbol y lo bendigo, y si con comer de aquel fruto escapase de una ponzúa mortal, cuántas veces diría: Bendito sea Dios, que crió aquel árbol?” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶ 14, p. 920).
446 “...nos alcanzará agua que tiemple el calor de la tierra y la fecunda para dar fruto.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶ 17, p. 922).
447 “Y ella suele amansar los enojos de Él estando en el cielo que lo acallaba en la tierra cuando siendo niño lloraba.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶ 17, p. 922).
448 Cf. 2 Sam. 14:2
“Remember, Lord, remember what I suffered here, seeing you die for the sons you gave me. Console me for the sorrows that I suffered in your death, that these my sons, whom by your great goodness you have taken as brothers, will not die.”449 Mary was the companion of her Son in prayer: “Our blessed woman was created so that she could help Christ, the second Adam, to restore what the first man and woman had squandered. It was not good that the man Christ be alone; let her pray for us and calm him in his anger caused by our sins, and so the Virgin did it.”450

Ávila, in conclusion, reminded his listeners that they must pray with Mary. As she cooperated with her Son through prayer, so we must cooperate with him. He said, “If the passion of the Lord is not useful for you, if you do not prepare for it yourself, why are you amazed that the prayer of the Virgin is not useful to you if you do not prepare with prayer, penance and good works?”451 Mary’s prayers would not help those who did not cooperate with her. Those who failed would experience a spiritual drought, in which God’s grace would not fall on them. He proposed an answer to overcoming and avoiding the spiritual drought: “Let us leave the public and private sins and let each one look at his conscience and cast

449 “Acordaos, Senor; acordaos de lo que allí pasé, viendoos morir por los pecados de los hijos que me distes. Consoladme de los Dolores que en la muerte vuestro yo pasé, con que no mueran estos hijos mios, que por vuestra grande bondad tomastes por hermanos.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶19, p. 923).
450 “Mas nuestra bendita mujer fue criada para que ayudase al segundo Adán, Cristo, a restaurar lo que el primer hombre y mujer echaron a perder. No es bien que el varón, Cristo, esté solo; haya quien le ruegue por nosotros y le amanese en el tiempo de su ira, causada por nuestras pecados; y así lo hace la Virgen.” Sermon 68, (OC III,¶21, p. 924).
451 “Si la pasión del mismo Señor no te aprovecha, si tú no te dispones, que te maravillas que la oración de Virgen no te aproveche, si no te dispones con penitencia con orar, con buen obrar?” Sermon 68, (OC III,¶22, p. 924).
out the evil in it."452 All people needed to be awakened from being asleep in sin so that through their prayers and penance, the Virgin Mary would be able to help them and bring them her Son.

11. Sermon 69: You will rule over all those things your heart desires. "I shall take you and you shall rule over all that your soul desires, and you shall be King over Israel."(I Kg. 11:37)

Before Ávila began his sermon on the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, he set the stage by reminding his listeners that the source of every good thing was God, who rewarded the meek and humble but punished the proud and the arrogant. Because King Solomon was guilty of idolatry, his kingdom was divided between his son Rehoboam, who received two tribes, and Jeroboam, ten tribes. Ávila believed that when kings allowed power to go to their heads, they forgot God. When people came to make Jesus king, he fled. A good king needed to hold the power of ruling in low esteem so that he would not lose faith and be disobedient to God. If the kings desire spiritual goods, they will be close to God. Those who seek temporal pleasures and lack a desire for spiritual goods will never find happiness and ultimately be destroyed. However, those who seek spiritual things, "if they desire God, they are desired by God and they banish from themselves every distrust and affliction of vain sadness and they ... rejoice all day... understanding that it is not because of them, but from the great mercy of God that these gifts come to them..."453

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452 "Quitemos los pecados públicos y secretos y cada uno mire su conciencia y quite lo malo que en ella hubiere..." Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶26, p. 926).
453 "...si ellos desean a Dios, son ellos deseados de Dios, destierran de sí toda desconfianza y aflicción de vana tristeza...y se regocijan todo el día...entiende que no de ellos, sino de la grande misericordia de Él les vienen estas mercedes..." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶9, p. 932).
He told his listeners that if they wished to attain to the heights of Mary, they first had to climb little steps. He was at a loss of words to describe both God's love for the Virgin and the greatness of the Kingdom, but said that because of God's ineffable love for the Virgin, "He created and preserved her from all sin and she lived such a life of grace that she deserved to go today to heaven to reign with greater excellence than any man or angel . . . ." Only God and the angels could understand these heavenly realities. He believed that "we in this exile with our limited vision can see very little and can say even less of what we may understand."

He proclaimed that the desires " . . . of the sons of Adam, who remain in their own misery, and the purest heart of that Lady, who did not receive the sin of Adam was so taken by the grace of the Holy Spirit that she could be called more divine than human." He then recounted the story of how God commanded Ezekiel to dig a hole in the wall of the Temple to witness "people tuning their backs to the Temple and their faces toward idols." He compared this to the movement of the human heart: "If we dig into the wall of our own heart, we will find that this . . . interior dislike has self-love for a cause where one turns his

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454 " . . . resultó el ser criada y reservada de todo pecado y vivir tal vida que con la gracia del Señor mereció subir hoy al cielo a reinar con mayor excelencia que ningún hombre ni angel. . . ." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 10, p. 933).

455 "Mas nosotros en este destierro con nuestra corta vista, muy poco podemos ver; y aun de lo que entendiéremos, menos podemos decir." Sala-Balust, OC III, Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 11, p. 933).

456 "¡Gran diferencia entre el corazón de los hijos de Adán, que se quedan en su propia miseria, al corazón purísimo de esta Señora, al cual no tocó el pecado de Adán y fue tan tomado de la gracia del Espíritu Santo, que más se puede llamar divino que humano!" Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 12, p. 933).

back to God and his face to temporal things, loving them more than God himself."

When he reflected on the Virgin Mary, he said, "She fled the pomp of riches so that her deeds were wholly to glorify the one who created her . . . and the one who digs into the heart of the Virgin will find in the innermost part of it a very abundant sea of grace and love, where the virtues flow like rivers." Mary never desired to turn her eyes away from God. Rather, "her practice was to behold and love the Lord her God and say . . . 'My heart told you! Your have sought my face. Your face will I seek.'" God encouraged Mary to desire to gaze upon his face: "The beauty of this Queen is all on the inside where the eyes of God look." Mary sought a deeper spiritual bond with God:

God kept his Son with his most Holy Mother since she possessed the dignity of Mother and Bride and through the most perfect love they had between them, he had her for his very own . . . and she embraced him with such a great love of her heart that she loved him one hundred thousand times more than herself.

Since the Virgin yearned for this deeper love for God, Ávila asked her if she desired something more. She responded by saying that she desired all creatures to join her in loving and obeying God:

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458 "Y si cavamos más en la pared de nuestro corazón, hallaremos que . . . malquerencia interior tiene por causa el amor propio, el cual vuelve las espladas a Dios a la faz a las cosas temporales, amándolas para sí mismo más que al mismo Dios." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶13, p. 934).
459 "...huyó de toda pompa de riquezas . . . sus obras para glorificar al que la crió . . . y quien cavare más en el corazón de la Virgen, hallará en lo más dentro de él una mas abundantísima de gracia y amor de la cual salían las virtudes así como ríos." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶16, p. 935).
460 "¡A ti dijo mi corazón; Mi faz has buscado; tu faz, Señor buscare!" Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶18, p. 935).
461 "Que la hermosura de esta reina toda es en lo de dentro, donde miran los ojos de Dios." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶18, p. 936).
462 "...lo guardó Dios con su sacratisima Madre, pues en la dignidad era Madre y Esposa, y por el perfectísimo amor que entre ellos había, Él tenía a ella por cosa muy suya. . . . y ella tenía a Él tan abrazado con tal grande amor de su corazón, que lo amaba cien mil veces más que a sí misma." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶21, p. 937).
She invited them many times, from the highest seraphim to the ant hill and the herbs of the field that all jointly exalt God with her and praise his name in unison. The Virgin took all of it for kindling in order to fatten and sustain the most living and lavish fire of divine love that burned in her heart.\footnote{Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 24, p. 938).}

Mary’s love was so great that she even became sick from it.\footnote{Cf. Cant. 2:5} Ávila asked the Virgin, to let him understand the fire of love in her heart, and asked whether Mary’s love for God would ever be satisfied on earth. He believed that it would not, and added that if the Father and Jesus were not enough to satisfy her, then “we have much reason for being ashamed that our love is so weak and scanty since we do not have the desire to love him more and more, nor desire that everyone serve and praise him.”\footnote{Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 28, p. 940).}

On this feast day, he congratulated Mary, saying that her going to God was good news: “Now the day has come in which you see every good and when the face of the Lord whom you seek is revealed to you . . . . He will be shown to you and he will give you the desire of your most loving heart.”\footnote{Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 30, p. 941).} Mary’s experience of the Beatific Vision was too much for Ávila to describe, because in heaven, the love of God would be experienced in its totality since it was infinite. However, “the one who carries the bigger vessel of love rejoices more in the goodness of God . . . .

463 “. . . y los convidaba muchas veces, desde el más alto serafín hasta la hormiguita e yerbicita del campo, que todos juntamente engrandeciesen a Dios con ella y ensalzasen el nombre de Él en concordia. Todo lo tomaba la Virgen por leña, lo alto y lo bajo, para cebar y mantener el vivísimo y gastador fuego del amor divinal que ardía en su corazón.”Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 24, p. 938).

464 “. . . mucha razón tenemos de avergonzarnos de que nuestro amor es tan flaco y tan corto, que con un no sé qué que hacemos o que sufrimos nos contentamos, sin tener vivos deseos de hacer más y más por nuestro Señor y que todos le sirvan y alaben.”Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 28, p. 940).

465 “. . . ya es venida el día en que veáis todo el bien y se os descubra la faz de Señor, que buscáis. . . Él se os enseñará y os dará el deseo de vuestro amorosísimo corazón.”Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 30, p. 941).
The vessel of the Virgin's love is bigger than that of all men and blessed spirits."467

After Mary experienced her vision, God asked her if there was anything else she desired. There was something else: to have her soul joined with her body. Ávila said that "if the blessed souls desired to have their own bodies with them so that they might be participants in glory because of their good works, with how much more power would the soul of the Holy Virgin desire to possess in heaven her own most holy body, since it so faithfully helped her to serve God in this life without an evil inclination . . . ."468

He reminded his listeners that while Mary had fully entered into the joy of the Lord, she had not forgotten about her spiritual children on earth and said, "I have sons in the world, the salvation of whom I desire with a very loving and maternal heart . . . . Until the world is ended, I will have this duty: to be the faithful advocate of their affairs before God . . . . I have remembered the deeds that he gave me to do for him as an advocate for both the just and sinners."469 These words would bring joy to every Christian's heart because, as our spiritual mother, Mary was asking pardon and grace from God for all sinners.

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467 "Quién lleva el vaso más capaz del amor, más se goza del bien de Dios . . . pues que el vaso de su amor y del deseo causado de la vista de Dios es más capaz que el de todos los hombres y de todos los espíritus bienaventurados?" Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 34, p. 942).
468 "Y si las ánimas bienaventuradas desean tener sus propias cuerpos consigo para que sean participantes en la Gloria, pues lo fueron en las buenas obras, con cuánta más fuerza desearía el ánima de la Virgen Sagrada tener en el cielo consigo su santisimo cuerpo, pues que tan lealmente le ayudó a servir a Dios estando en esta vida, sin tener movimiento ni inclinación mala . . . ." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 37, p. 943).
469 "Mas tengo hijos en el mundo, la salvación de los cuales deseo con muy amoroso y maternal corazón. Este cuidado temré hasta que el mundo se acabe, este oficio haré: ser fiel abogada de los negocios de ellos delante el trono de Dios . . . y traerle he a la memoria los servicios que El me dio . . . . de abogar por justos y por pecadores." Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶ 39, p. 944).
Lastly, he exhorted his listeners to imitate and obey Mary: “If we love her, let us imitate her; if we have her as a Mother, let us obey her.” Mary commanded her children to do all that her Son commanded. She was given the dignity to rule over all things her heart desired because God was the sole ruler in her most pure heart.

12. Sermon 70: The Virgin leaves full of glory. Will we not rejoice with her? Will we not weep? “Who is that coming up from the wilderness, full of delights, leaning upon the Beloved?” (Cant. 8:5)

In this sermon on the Assumption, the longest and most detailed of all Ávila’s Marian sermons, Ávila spoke to Mary and Jesus and spoke for them as well. He presented the passing of Mary to heaven in a very dramatic way using the Transitus Mariae stories of her death and Assumption. He began by challenging his listeners not to take great pleasure in the temporal things of the world which would not last but instead, to see themselves as foreigners in a land of exile, awaiting the opportunity to return to their homeland, and not losing courage in their trials, since Christ had sworn to give them eternal consolations. He proclaimed that the feast of Mary’s Assumption must always be kept because “the Blessed Virgin has not only been given to us as an example of life to imitate . . . but also as a model of hope since if we follow her path, we will go where she has gone, though lesser in glory.”

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470 “Y si la amamos imitemosla; si por Madre le tenemos obedezcamosla.” Sermon 69. (OC III, ¶43, p. 946).
471 “No desmayéis en vuestros trabajos, porque jurado ha el Señor de quitar la copa del amargor de vuestra boca y daros eternas consolaciones.” Sermon 70. (OC III, ¶3, p. 948).
472 “...esta Virgen bendita no sólo nos da ésta para ejemplo de nuestra vida, a la cual sigamos e imitemos en sus virtudes mas también tenemos en ella ejemplo y motivo para esperar que, si
He stated that it must have been a very painful and difficult martyrdom for Mary to see her Son ascend into heaven while she was left in this earthly exile. Ávila said to Jesus, “The shadow follows the body, and the Virgin follows you . . . why did you go to heaven with much prosperity and leave her on the earth?” 473 The Virgin Mary possessed a great love for her Son and longed to see him face to face. Her deep love produced a greater yearning which caused greater pain because of Christ’s delay in returning. He said to Mary: “The greatest love you had for God, which surpassed all knowledge, made you exalted, pleasing and blessed in reverence. It was the measure of your greatness and tortured you as a great burden.” 474 The bitter cup that Mary drank after the crucifixion of her Son was the absence of her Blessed Son.” 475

The great love that Mary possessed for her Son had various aspects: “It wounded, it bound up, and it was never satisfied.” 476 It was like burning arrows that wounded the heart: “The world was happy for Mary’s love since God himself . . . was not defended from the arrow of her love.” 477 The relationship between the Virgin Mary and God can be described as the mutual wounding with love:

“Who would tell the mysteries of love that passed between God and the Virgin; he wounding her by the contemplation of her beauty and goodness, and she

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473 “La sombra sigue al cuerpo y la Virgen a vos por qué os vais al cielo con mucha prosperidad y la dejáis a ella en la tierra?” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶ 7, p. 949).
474 “El amor, y grandísimo amor que sobrepuja todo conocimiento que a Dios tuvistes, éste os hace alta y agradable y bienaventurada en su acatamiento; y este mismo a la medida de su grandeza os atormenta como gran sayón.” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶ 8, p. 949).
475 “Mas según veo, Senora, vos la que más allá padecistes os tornan a dar a beber el caliz de amargura de la ausencia de Vuestra benditosimo Hijo . . . ” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶ 10, p. 950).
477 “Dichosa herida para la criatura pues el mismo Dios omnipotente e insuperable no se defiende de esta saeta . . . ” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶ 14, p. 951).
wounding him by her love for him and thinking about him with the greatest fidelity? Mary desired to have God alone in her heart. Addressing Mary, Ávila said, “... you are all that a creature can be for him; you give him greater contentment than any other pure creature can give.”

He referred to this mystical bond of love as “this war so sweet, without anger between God and the Blessed Virgin ...” Her love for God bound her to his law and his will and produced a bond of salvation. He told his listeners that their love was not like Mary’s love, but one that focused only on the gifts and not the Giver. There was little gratitude or love for God among them. The Virgin Mary, however, “was wounded and was the prey of divine love more than any other creature; she wounded and preyed upon the Lord more than any other creature. Neither Mary nor the Lord resisted the wounds and fetters of love.”

Ávila warned his listeners about the anguish issuing from Mary’s insatiable love: “Let no one be astonished that the Blessed Virgin Mary might say with sighs in her heart: ‘Woe is me, because my dwelling on earth has been prolonged!’” The love Mary possessed was beyond the natural love of a mother for her child. It was a supernatural love of a creature for her God.

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478 “Quién contará los misterios del amor que entre Dios y la Virgen pasaban hiriendo Él a ella con la contemplación de su hermosura y de su bondad y ella a Él con amarlo y pensar en Él con grandísima fidelidad?” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶14, p. 951).
479 “... y todas las que una criatura puede ser para Él, vos lo sois; el mayor contentamiento que la pura criatura le puede dar vos se lo dáis.” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶16, p. 952).
480 “... esta guerra tan dulce, tan sin enojo entre Dios y la Virgen bendita...” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶17, p. 952).
481 “Herida y presa estaban la Virgen del amor divinal más que ningún criatura y herido y preso tenía a su Señor y su Dios más que ninguna criatura. Ni el Señor ni ella querían resistir a las heridas y prisiones de amor.” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶21, p. 954).
482 “No se maraville nadie de que la Virgen bendita díjese con suspiros salidos de su corazón: ¡Ay de mí, porque mi morada se ha prolongado!” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶23, p. 955).
Proceeding from his explanation of Mary’s deep love for God, Ávila attempted to resolve why Mary was left on earth when Jesus ascended into heaven. He gave three reasons. First, it was for her benefit. At the time same, he wondered how she could receive any more benefit on earth since she was free from all sin and decided that “with love and desire, she was better prepared and her heart was widened more so that, in her, more glory might be contained and so much more delight would the divine banquet be for her in heaven . . . .” 483 

Secondly, her stay was for the benefit of the Christians who remained on earth: the Apostles, the evangelists and the newly baptized. The Apostles “were comforted with the speech, faith and prayer of the most Blessed Virgin, with the efficacy that her words had for them and their prayers with God. God placed her with them so that they would have hope and receive the help of heaven . . . .” 484 The newly baptized Christians “desired to see and be grateful for the tree that had such fruit and sent a thousand blessings out to her. “485 All Christians would come to the Virgin Mary as to the house of the God of Jacob to be taught the ways of the commandments and of her counsels. 486 

The Virgin Mary also might have passed on to them three important pious practices: charity, remembrance of the Passion of Christ and the reception of Holy Communion. In terms of the Virgin’s great charity toward all, he referred to

483 “Con el cual amor y deseo, la que estaba aparejada mejor, y se le ensancha más el corazón para que en ella cupiese más gloria y tanto más sabrosa le fuese aquella divina comida en el cielo . . . .” Sermon 70, (OC III, 32, p. 959).
484 “Confortados con la habla, fe y oración de esta benditísima Virgen con la eficacia que sus palabras tenía para con los hombres y sus oraciones con Dios, se la ponía a ellos para esperar y recibir el socorro del cielo.” Sermon 70, (OC III, 34, p. 959).
485 “… y como gente agradecida deseaban ver y agradecer el árbol que tal fruto día, y echaban mil cuentos de bendiciones.” Sermon 70, (OC III, 35, p. 959).
486 “… y después venían a ver la casa del Dios de Jacob que era la Virgen sagrada templo santo de Jesucristo para ser enseñados de los caminos de los mandamientos de Dios y las sendas de sus consejos . . . .” Sermon 70, (OC III, 36, p. 960).
her as a shepherdess: “Happy the sheep who had such a shepherdess and such a pasture that they received by means of her! A shepherdess, not a day laborer ... since she greatly loved the sheep who, after having given the life of her Son, gave her own life.”487 She also demonstrated her maternal love by “visiting the places of her Son’s Passion ... thanking God for the tremendous good that had come to the world from the death of her Son . . . ”488 And she must have frequently received the Holy Eucharist:

the reception of the Holy Eucharist, more that any other practice, encouraged her to bear her exile since she was present and received in her depths the Desired One of her heart. And although she did not see him face to face as she desired to ... see him in heaven, he, as the pious Son, was shown to her in the sacrament.489

Thirdly, Mary was left on earth for the benefit of future believers. Her life, filled with trials, joys and sorrows, was always shaped by hope. By her example, Christians might be fortified in their faith to persevere when faced with hardships. These hardships and joys were to serve as preparations for life with Jesus Christ in heaven.

Ávila then dealt with the proper preparation for her death. By examining how well Mary was prepared to die, those hearing him would see how badly they

487 “¡Dichosas ovejas que tal pastora tenían y tal pasto recibían por medio de ella! Pastora no jornalera ... pues que amaba tanto a las ovejas, que, después de haber dado por la vida de ellas la vida de su amantísimo Hijo, diera de muy buena gana su vida propia ...”Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶38, p. 961).
488 “Y también se ejercitaba en visitar, los santos lugares donde su Hijo bendito comenzó medió y acabó su sagrada Pasión, los cuales ella regaba en copia de lágrimas, trayendo a su memoria lo que en todos aquellos lugares su Hijo había padecido ... daba inefables gracias a Dios por el gran bien que al mundo había venido y había de venir mediante el precioso precio de su sagrada Pasión ...”Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶42, p. 961-62).
489 “Y más que otro ejercicio ninguno la esforzaba a pasar su destierro, pues que tenía presente y recibía en sus entrañas al deseadó de su corazón. Y aunque no le viese faz a faz, como lo deseaba y esperaba ver en el cielo más El, como piadosa Hijo y Señor se le enseñaba en el Sacramento ...”Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶42, p. 962).
had been preparing themselves. The Virgin Mary prepared by detaching herself from the material things of this world and desiring the spiritual ones, especially heavenly life. Her constant prayer was one taught to her by her Son: “Lord, may your kingdom come.” While some worldly people joined her in this prayer with lukewarm and uncertain hearts, the Blessed Virgin prayed with great fervor. His listeners were to imitate her fervor if they wanted to be properly prepared.

He asked his congregation when was Mary sufficiently prepared to enter heaven, and answered by saying when she was sick from love:

seeing one so overcome by the love and desire of God, without having the power to live or suffer that love, which was stronger than death, . . . she sent new cries to provoke the Lord to mercy: ‘Lord, draw forth my soul from this prison to praise your name. Show me your face and I will be content since I am dying with desire each day and each moment without it.’

In her great humility, she begged the blessed souls and the angels to intercede for her before the throne of God. Their response follows:

All-powerful and most merciful Lord . . . since you said that ‘Blessed are those who weep, for they will be consoled,’ nothing can console her except to see herself with you in heaven. Grant her this consolation, since she left behind all others for you.”

They reminded the Lord of Mary’s constant fidelity and service to him and believed she should be with him in heaven “because a kingdom without a queen

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490 "Y viéndose tan vencida del amor y deseo de Dios, sin tener fuerzas para vivir ni sufrir aquel peso de amor que era más fuerte que la muerte. . . enviaba a Dios nuevos gemidos, suficientes para provocar al Señor a misericordia. Y decíale: ‘Saca Señor, de esta carcel a mi ánima para alabar tu nombre. Enseñame tu faz y seré contento; porque sin ella cada día y cada momento estoy muriendo con deseo de ti.’” Sermon 70, (OC III, 53, p. 966-967).

491 “Omnipotentísimo y misericordiosísimo Senor. . . Pues vos dijistes que son bienaventurados los que lloran, porque ellos serán consolados y ninguna cosa la puede consolar sino verse con vos en el cielo dalde esta consolación pues todas las otras ha dejado por vos.” Sermon 70, (OC III, 55, p. 967).
and a house without a Lady seem incomplete since the principal person was missing."\(^{492}\)

After the prayers of the angels and the saints, Jesus sent the archangel Gabriel to tell Mary that she would be with him soon. Gabriel happily announced,

> The Lord sends me and commands me to tell you that since he descended from heaven to earth and you gave him a very pleasant dwelling place, he wants to bring you from earth to heaven and give you an even better dwelling . . . Tell me, Lady, how do you respond? \(^{493}\)

Mary responded with the same words she spoke at the Annunciation, “I am the maidservant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.”\(^{494}\) While she rejoiced that she was going to the Lord, those who loved her on earth were greatly saddened. They begged Mary to stay with them and “not to abandon her little sons . . . and if she desired to go from this world, then she should take them with her because they could not suffer the absence of such a beloved Mother.”\(^{495}\) Mary responded that although her body was separated from them, she would not forget them in her heart and she would be for them a faithful intercessor . . . until all would be joined with Christ forever.\(^{496}\) Using the stories of Mary’s Assumption from the *Transitus Mariae*, he recounted that before Mary’s death.

\(^{492}\) “... porque reino sin reina y casa sin la señora de casa parece que no está perfecto pues le falta persona tan principal.” *Sermon 70*, (OC III, ¶56, p. 968).

\(^{493}\) “Ahora me envía el mismo Señor, y os manda decir que pues descendió del cielo a la tierra y vos le distes muy apacible morada que Él os quiere llevar de la tierra al cielo y daros por de sí la mejor morada . . . Decidme, qué respondéis?” *Sermon 70*, (OC III, ¶58, p. 968).

\(^{494}\) “He aquí la sierva del Señor; sea hecho en mí según tu palabra.” *Sermon 70*, (OC III, ¶59, p. 969).

\(^{495}\) “... suplicábanle no desamparase a sus hijuelos . . . y si se querría ir de este mundo que los lleve consigo, porque ni podrían sufrir la ausencia de tan amantisima Madre.” *Sermon 70*, (OC III, ¶60, p. 969).

\(^{496}\) “... no los olvidaría en su corazón y que mientras viviesen les sería fiel abogada . . . y estarían todos juntas sin se apartar para siempre jamás.” *Sermon 70*, (OC III, ¶61, p. 969).
all of the apostles, living and dead came to her bedside to weep for her and said that Mary's last words to them were to keep all of the Lord's commands. Not only were the apostles present at the death of Mary but Jesus himself came to personally bring his mother to heaven:

The Lord desired to descend to the earth to take his most Holy Mother back with him and commands that her court accompany her. Just as Mary held Jesus in her arms at his death, so now he carries his mother to heaven in his arms.497

Ávila did not attempt to describe Mary's actual Assumption but ventured to guess that with this glorious sight, all heaven broke into song at Mary's arrival singing “Glory to you Lord, who have been born of the Virgin.”498 In conclusion, he compared the Assumption of Mary to Elijah's being taken up to God in a flaming chariot 499 and asked: “Would we rejoice because the Virgin has gone (to heaven) full of glory and joy or weep because we have been left behind?500 Just as Elisha rejoiced at Elijah's departure and wept because he was no longer there, so the church rejoices for Mary, but weeps for itself. Ávila begged for Mary's prayers:

... what would we your unworthy ones do but run after you seeing you going up to heaven. We say with the voices of our heart: My mother, my mother, the chariot which upholds the tiresome sinners and the guide of the good! Let our cries... move you to cast into our hearts your memory, your devotion, your obedience... Let us pass through the dangerous river of this world without being drowned with the sinners in it.501

497 “... que el Señor quiere decender a la tierra a traer consigo a su benditisimo Madre y que manda la acompana su corte... A cuya muerte... la reclinase en sus brazos... pues él fue recibido en los brazos de la Madre...” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶63, p. 970).
498 “Gloria a ti, Señor, que naciste de esta Virgen...” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶68, p. 972).
499 Cf. 2 Kgs. 2:12
500 “Gozarémonos porque la Virgen va llena de gloria y de alegría o lloraremos porque nosotros nos quedamos acá?” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶69, p. 972).
501 “Que haremos los indignos hiijuelos tuyos sino corer tras ti, y viéndote subir al cielo decir con voces de nuestro corazón: ¡Madre mía, Madre mía, corro que sustenta a los pecadores pesados y guia de los buenos! Muevan os a vos Señora, nuestros gemidos... echad en nuestros corazones
13. Sermon 71: She chose the better part.

"Mary chose the better part." (Luke 10:42)

Ávila began his third sermon on the Assumption by proclaiming that it was

a day of great glory for Mary. In her greatness, she would never forget her

children:

In the mercies that we received today let us not feel that
the most holy Virgin was selfish in regard to the goods given
to her, but being in the heights of heaven, she remembers

to send to the poor ones on earth some drop of water of that
river that flows out from the throne of God and the Lamb . . .

from which she drinks with more abundance than all."502

These drops of water would prepare them to properly celebrate the feast. After

the recitation of the “Hail Mary,” he reflected on the story of Martha and Mary503
in which Jesus tells Martha that Mary “chose the better part” by sitting at his feet.

Ávila believed the “better part” for Mary was her choice of the things of the spirit

over the things of the world and her pure and burning love for God. She was not

holy because she was detached from earthly things but because she chose God

above all else. He exalted Mary as one from whom all his listeners could learn.

Mary’s love for God wounded God’s heart. He said:

Mary has tied up God with her soul so that he could never be

far from her, and her thirst for God was great in her soul and

in her flesh . . . . ‘Daughters of Jerusalem if you have seen my

beloved, tell him I am sick with his love. But this sickness is

healthy and the one who is unhealthy is not sick from this

502 “... en las mercedes que hoy recibamos sintamos que la sacratísima Virgen no es avarienta de

los bienes que hoy Dios le han dado, mas que estando en las alturas del cielo, se acuerde de enviar

a los pobrecillos de las tierra alguna gota de agua de aquel río caudal que de la silla de Dios y del

cordero sale en el cielo... y del cual ella bebe con más abundancia que todos.” Sermon 71. (OC III,

§2, p. 974).

503 Cf. Lk 10: 38-42.
sickness."504

He hoped that by showing Mary’s love for God, his congregation would be sorrowful that their hearts were far from God, even though they performed religious acts.

Ávila connected the love of God with keeping the commandments. He believed that for Mary this was a very small issue since her immaculate heart was so tender and soft that “not an idle word, or useless thought, or anything outside of God entered her heart.”505 This was not the case for his congregation, however, whom he exhorted to build a fence around their souls so that they could avoid even venial sins. Because venial sins led to mortal sins, they must be on guard. Only Mary, because she possessed the unique privilege of being preserved from original and personal sin, had “a most courageous love that compelled her to do all things for the greater pleasure and greater glory of the God of her heart.”506

In explaining why he had spent more time on Mary’s holiness than on her Assumption, he told them that since they could not see the mystery as the angels and saints had seen it, they had “the need of knowing something about it by the trail of her holiness and deeds.”507 In speaking of her Assumption, he said,

O most blessed and prudent Virgin . . . where did you go except to receive the crown of glory over every servant . . . and that every

504 “Ataba a Dios con su ánima para que nunca se fuese de ella y era tan grande la sed que de Dios tenía, no sólo su ánima mas aun su carne . . . Hijas de Hierusalem, si vieredes a mi amado, decilde que de su amor estoy enferma. Mas esta enfermedad salud es, y muy malsano está quien de esta enfermedad no está enfermo.”Sermon 71, (OC III, ¶10, p. 978).
505 “… que ni aun palabra ociosa ni aun pensamiento desaprovecho ni a cosa a ninguna fuera de Dios, no le daba entrada en su corazón.”Sermon 71, (OC III, ¶13, p. 979).
506 “Fortísimo fue su amor que le compelia a buscar en todas las cosas el mayor contentamiento y mayor gloria del Dios de su corazón.”Sermon 71, (OC III, ¶18, p. 981).
507 “… tenemos necesidad de conocer algo de él por el rastro de la santidad y servicios de ella.” Sermon 71, (OC III, ¶19, p. 982).
knee in heaven and earth and under the earth is bent to you . . . and that you might be given a name over every name, and that only your Son surpasses you.\footnote{508}

Ávila also compared the mystery of the Assumption by comparing Mary to Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery in Egypt. When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams and saved all of Egypt from starvation, he was set over the house of Pharaoh and all his subjects with only the Pharaoh above him. Since Pharaoh treated Joseph in this way, then Jesus would treat his mother in a more magnificent way because she was the one who “... engendered by her wisdom and purest blood, by the Holy Spirit, not the perishable bread of the earth, but the eternal heavenly bread, so that he became man . . . who is, was, and will be God forever.”\footnote{509}

Since Pharaoh named Joseph Vice-Pharaoh of Egypt, Ávila believed that Jesus said this to his mother:

My mother, you will be eternally over my household and all the people of my heavenly court and all of the earth and under the earth will be obedient to what you command; only I will precede you on the throne of the Kingdom because I am the Creator-God and you are a creature and my mother. . . . After those words Jesus took the ring off his finger and put it on hers that she might have power and authority to refer all to the mercies that God would make to the world . . . and that she was the universal beggar of the graces and alms that God gave to man.”\footnote{510}

\footnote{508} “¡O benditísima y prudentísima Virgen! Dónde vas sino a recibir corona de gloria sobre todo lo criado . . . y que toda rodilla del cielo y de la tierra y debajo de ella se te incline. . . . y te sea dado nombre sobre todo nombre y que sólo tu Hijo te exceda?”\textit{Sermon 71}, (OC III, ¶20, p. 983).

\footnote{509} “Ella fue la que de su propia sabiduría y purísima sangre engendró por Espíritu Santo, no al pan perecedero de tierra, mas al eterno Pan celestial, haciendo que fuese hombre. . . el que era, es y será Dios para siempre.”\textit{Sermon 71}, (OC III, ¶22, p. 983-84).

\footnote{510} “Madre mía, tú serás eternamente sobre toda mi casa y todo el pueblo de mi celestial corte y de la tierra y debajo de ella, será obediente a lo que tu boca mandare; solamente precederé en una silla del reino porque yo soy Dios Criador y vos criatura y Madre mía. Tras cuales palabras quitó el anillo de su mano y lo puso en la de ella, para que tenga poder y autoridad para referendar todas las mercedes que Dios al mundo hiciere. . . y que es hecha universal limosnera de todas las gracias y limosnas que Dios a los hombres hiciere.”\textit{Sermon 71}, (OC III, ¶23, p. 984).
He then referred to the *Transitus Mariae* story in which Mary was assumed into heaven after three days in the tomb: “Jesus lifts up her most holy body clothed with glory; he joins it with her soul that has more glory. He commands his Mother to be placed in a second chariot, giving her the second place of glory and dominion after him.” He exhorted his audience to rejoice for what God had done for Mary and to know that she was the one to whom they must entrust their affairs and beg favor in their needs. He believed that “Jesus desires that we should go to the most holy Virgin Mary in our need and that we should do what she tells us, since without a doubt, God would grant what she begs from him.”

He concluded his parallel between Mary and Joseph, the son of Jacob, in this way:

> If Pharaoh bestowed on Joseph the great and honorable name of savior of the world, with much more reason has it been bestowed on the Virgin, since she gave God human flesh which was the way he saved and redeemed the world from its miserable captivity; she assisted the redemption that was accomplished on the cross with a body and soul just as the first woman persisted with father Adam to throw away the universal world by distorting from what God had made.

The Virgin Mary also remembers all who have shown devotion to her on earth: “The Virgin has the heart of a mother with you, and if you do not believe that message, behold the clothes and riches she sent to her poor sons on earth ...”

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511 “... le resucita su santísimo cuerpo y vestido de gloria lo junta con el ánima que tiene más gloria... la manda poner sobre su carro el segundo, dándole el segundo lugar de la gloria y del universal Señorio, después de él.” *Sermon 71*, (OC III, ¶24, p. 985).

512 “… Jesucristo nuestro Señor quiere que en nuestras entrañas necesidades vamos a la sacratísima Virgen María y hagamos lo que no dijere, porque sin duda Él hará lo que ella le pidiere...” *Sermon 71*, (OC III, ¶26, p. 986).

513 “... si Farón puso a Josef en aquel grande y honrado nombre de Salvador del mundo, con mucha más razón le es puesto a la Virgen, pues dio a Dios carne humana que fue el medio con que salvó y rescató al mundo de su miserable captiverio y asistió a la redención que se hizo en la cruz con cuerpo y con alma ayudando a ella, como la primera mujer insistió al padre Adán a echar a perder el mundo universo, despintando lo que Dios hizo.” *Sermon 71*, (OC III, ¶27, p. 986).
obtaining pardon for their sins . . . freeing others from punishments . . . giving consolation to the sad and comforting the weak of heart . . . "514

His audience was encouraged to send their sighs and needs to Mary until the day of their death, and to, " . . . beg her to gain for them the power to imitate her in choosing the better part as she chose it." 515


Ávila’s final sermon has only been preserved in fragmentary form. Mary’s throne in heaven was then compared to that of Bathsheba who sat at the right hand of her son Solomon. So he explained that Mary sat next to her Son, between him and his blessed ones. He also compared her to Deborah who dwelt between Ramah meaning "height" and Bethel, "house of God," and whose name meant "bee." The “most Blessed Virgin was like a bee, giving us such honey and wax as the Son of God.”517

Ávila then had Jesus ask his mother what she desired. He reported that Mary first desired to be united body and soul in heaven. He used the story of Martha and Mary to illustrate Mary’s wish not to be divided body and soul before coming to Christ, so Ávila said:

It is clear that in her own way she says, ‘Just Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me alone? I have always been subject to and in total harmony with her and I helped serve you with many deeds. And she has left me alone to serve on earth while she was rejoicing with you in heaven!’ Therefore, the Lord granted

514 “Corazón de madre tiene la Virgen contigo y si no crees aqueste mensaje mira las ropas y las riquezas que ha enviado la Virgen a sus pobres hijos en la tierra tenía alcanzando a unos perdón de pecados . . . librando a otros de penosas . . . dando consuelo a los tristes, conforete a los de flaco corazón . . . ”Sermon 71, (OC III, I,29, p. 987).
516 This title was given by the editor since the first part of the sermon is missing.
517 “ . . . et beatissima Virgo, quae quasi apes argumentosa, nos dio tal miel y cera como el Hijo de Dios.”Sermon 72, (OC III, I,1, p. 989).
her request that the most holy soul would come to be joined with her body.\textsuperscript{518}

The second time Jesus asked Mary what she desired, she responded “... to do good for men.”\textsuperscript{519} Christ granted her the privilege as universal Mother to intercede for all people. “This was the joy of the Virgin; to see us progress in faith by her intercession. If you see yourself in sin and then out if it, it was by the intercession of the Virgin. If you have not fallen into sin, it was by her prayer.”\textsuperscript{520}

Avila concluded this sermon by asserting that devotion to Mary was a sign of predestination: “Our Lord gave this reward to the devout one: that those that his Majesty had chosen might have a great devotion to his mother implanted in their hearts.”\textsuperscript{521} The all-pure Virgin Mary commanded her children to serve her in purity. She would not hear those who prayed and offered devotion to her with sinful and impure hearts.

CONCLUSION

Maestro Ávila’s presentation of Mary in his Book of the Virgin provides the reader with three reasons why his Marian preaching is so necessary: The first is his deep love for the Virgin Mary and his desire to move others to a deeper love of her and thus to Jesus her Son. He is also drawn to Mary’s humility, purity, single-minded love for God and devotion to the ones Jesus has entrusted to her

\textsuperscript{518} “Claro está que suo modo dice: Iuste Domine, non est tibi curae quod soror mea reliquit me solam, pues yo siempre estuve sujeto y en todo conforme, y le ayudé a serviros con tantos trabajos. Y reliquit me solum ministrare. Déjome acá en la tierra estando ella en el cielo gozando de vos. A lo cual Señor proveyó, ordenando que aquella santísima ánima viniese a ayuntarse con el cuerpo.”\textit{Sermon 72}, (OC III, ¶2, p. 989).

\textsuperscript{519} “-Hacer bien a los hombres.” \textit{Sermon 72}, (OC III, ¶3, p. 990).

\textsuperscript{520} “Pues ésta es la granjería de la Virgen: vemos aprovechados en el servicio de Dios por su intercesión. Si te viste en pecado y te ves fuera de él, por intercesión de la Virgen fue; si no caíste en pecado por ruego suyo fue.”\textit{Sermon 72}, (OC III, ¶3, p. 990).

\textsuperscript{521} “Este premio le dio nuestro Señor: que los que su Majestad tiene escogidas, tengan a su Madre gran devoción arraigada en sus corazones.” \textit{Sermon 72}, (OC III, ¶4, p. 991).
maternal care. Secondly, God has given Mary to all people so that they may receive her help to attain everlasting life with Christ in heaven. Thirdly, Mary deserves the love and reverence of all believers because of her maternal role in salvation history. This love impels him to spread this message: Jesus is our Savior and God, Mary is his mother and our advocate before her Son.
CHAPTER SIX
THE MARIAN TEACHING OF
SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA’S
BOOK OF THE VIRGIN

INTRODUCTION

San Juan de Ávila did not write a systematic treatise on the Virgin Mary. Instead, the majority of his Marian doctrine was expressed in his sermons, particularly the fourteen sermons of his Book of the Virgin, which had a two-fold purpose: 1) doctrinal instruction on the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God; and 2) moral exhortation to follow Mary’s example of faithfulness, humility and love of Jesus Christ her Son. This chapter will discuss the doctrinal and devotional aspects of Ávila’s Book of the Virgin in two parts. Part one will present Ávila’s teaching on Mary’s Divine Maternity, Immaculate Conception, Perpetual Virginity and Assumption. Part two will briefly present four points of Ávila’s Marian devotion.
A. THE MARIAN DOCTRINE OF ÁVILA’S BOOK OF THE VIRGIN

1. The Divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

When one examines the Mariology of San Juan de Ávila from the perspective of his fourteen Marian sermons, it is clear that the title “Mother of God” is the source and summit of his Marian thought, the source because all that can be said about the Virgin Mary flows from her relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God and her Son, and the summit because nothing greater has ever been or will ever be achieved by another human person. In his sermon on Our Lady of the Snows (Sermon 68), Ávila made the significance of her divine motherhood very clear “the greatest name that honors the Virgin Mary is “Mother of God made man.” 522

Ávila wished to explain Mary’s divine Motherhood from three different perspectives: her physical and spiritual relationship to Christ, the spousal nature of her motherhood, which includes the role of Mary as Sorrowful Mother, and the spiritual maternity of Mary for all the faithful believers. In the discussion of Mary’s spiritual maternity, he made use of the titles: Mediatrix, Protector, Advocate, and Intercessor.

a. Biological Motherhood

In discussing Mary’s physical relationship to Christ, Ávila clearly defended the biological motherhood of Mary. In his sermon on the Spiritual Lineage of Christ (Sermon 62), he answered the question of how Jesus could be from the

family of David and the tribe of Judah if Joseph was not his biological father. He explained:

Joseph and Mary are from the same tribe, since those of one tribe were not married to those of another; and so in speaking of the lineage of Joseph and saying that he married the Virgin Mary, from whom Jesus Christ was born, it is clear that Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah and the house of David. 523

In his sermon on the feast of Our Lady of the Snows, he said, “Oh, Mother, truly blest, you engendered Jesus Christ, God made man with a body and soul. And in such a manner you are mother according to the flesh, and God gave you grace so that you would be a worthy mother.” 524 The significance of Mary’s physical motherhood for the redemption of the world was that “... she gave God human flesh which was the way he saved and redeemed the world from its miserable captivity....” 525 Jesus did not neglect Mary’s motherhood. Ávila put these words in the mouth of Jesus:

... you call my mother blessed because she carried me in her womb and nursed me at her breasts; but I tell you they are blessed who hear the word of God and keep it. Nothing is gained being my mother according to the flesh if she had not first conceived according to the Spirit.” 526

523 “La respuesta es que Josef y María eran de un mismo tribu, porque entonces no se casaban los de un tribu con el del otro; y ansi en contar ellinaje de Josef y decir que casó con la Virgen María de la cual nació Jesucristo, está claro que viene del tribu de Judá y de la casa de David.” Sermon 62, (OC III, ¶ 5 p. 824).

524 “¡ O Madre verdadamente bienaventurado, que con anima y cuerpo engendraste a Jesucristo, Dios humano! Y del tal manera sois madre según la carne, que os dio Dios tales gracias para que seáis digna madre.” Sermon 68. (OC III, ¶10, p. 918).

525 “... pues dio a Dios carne humana, que fue el medio con que salvó y rescató al mundo de su miserable captiverio...” Sermon 71, (OC III, ¶ 27, p. 986).

526 “Tú hablas... llamará su madre bienaventurada y porque lo engendré y dio su leche. Mas esa alabanza en los ojos de Dios, cosa es de muy poco valor, y si mi madre no tuviera virtudes, con las cuales me concibiera en su anima y oyera y guardarla la palabra de Dios, ninguna cosa le aprovechará ser madre mia sigun la carne, si no lo fuera segun el espiritu.” Sermon 68, (OC III ¶ 8, p. 917).
In his second sermon on the *Annunciation* (Sermon 65[2]), he also emphasized that Mary's love prepared her to be the Mother of God: “The Virgin had the greatest love. God would not take her for a mother if she did not possess great love.”\(^{527}\)

**b. Mary's Spousal Motherhood**

Ávila also expressed Mary's divine motherhood in spousal terms. The spousal nature of Mary's divine motherhood was most clearly seen in his sermons on the *Assumption* and the *Presentation of the Virgin Mary* (Sermon 63). The love between the Virgin Mary and God was so intimate and profound that it could be described only in mystical terms:

> Who will tell the mysteries of love that passed between God and the Virgin? He wounds her with the contemplation of her beauty and goodness and she wounds him by loving him and thinking about him with the greatest fidelity.\(^{528}\)

Mary's spousal love for God was total:

> This was her practice; to gaze upon and love the Lord her God and say to him with greater truth than anyone ever said . . . My heart told you: My face has sought you; your face, Lord, will I seek. It is from the heart and not the tongue alone that Mary says to her Creator: My face has sought you.\(^{529}\)

Ávila further expressed the intensity of this love: “Mary ties up God with her soul so that he can never be far from her, and her thirst for God was great not only for

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\(^{527}\) “La Virgen grandísima caridad tuvo. No Ia tomará Dios por Madre si no tuviera mucha caridad.” *Sermon 65[2]*, (OC III,¶8, p. 881).

\(^{528}\) Cf. Chapter five, n. 148.

\(^{529}\) “Este era su ejercicio; mirar y amar al Señor, Dios suyo, y decirle con mayor verdad que nadie le dijo . . . ¡A ti dijo mi corazón: Mi faz te ha buscado; tu faz, Señor, buscare! (Ps 26:8) De corazón y no de sola lengua dice la Virgen a su Criador: ¡Mi faz te ha buscado!” *Sermon 69*. (OC III,¶18, p. 933).
her soul, but for her flesh ... Daughters of Jerusalem, if you have seen my
Beloved, tell him I am sick with his love."530 In his sermon on the Presentation of
the Virgin Mary, he described God’s “weakness” as love: “Mary desires only
God’s will. There is nothing with which God is reached more easily than with
love; God does not know how to defend himself from the heart that loves him;
this is because he does not want to defend himself from love,”531 and “God is glad
to see her face and hear her voice.”532 A final example of the spousal nature of the
Virgin Mary’s motherhood comes from Ávila’s paraphrase of the passage of
Genesis: “It is not good for man to be alone; there may be one who prays for us
and calms Christ in his anger caused by our sins; and so the Virgin does it.”533

c. Mary as Sorrowful Mother

The Virgin Mary as Sorrowful Mother relates both to her physical and
spiritual maternity. While she was united with God in a true bond of love, she
was not removed from suffering. Rather, her suffering increased with her love
and was a question that Ávila could not sufficiently answer. He viewed Mary’s
suffering as an injustice and so he addressed God personally, seeking an answer.
Preaching on Good Friday he asked God: “Is it not enough to kill the Son and put
him on the cross without killing the mother? Why is Jesus boiled in the tears of
his mother?”534 He went on to voice Mary’s grief when holding her Son in her
arms, by putting on her lips: “My Son, my God, my consolation. How have you

530 Cf. chapter five, n. 174.
531 “No quería ella que se hiciese su voluntad sino la de vos. ‘Cúmplase vuestra voluntad; no se
haga cuenta de mí, sino de vos; vea yo vuestra voluntad cumplida.’ No hay cosa con que más aña
se alcance a Dios que con amor; so sabe Dios defenderse del corazón que le ama; poque no quiere.” Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶10, p. 847).
532 “...que se hagase Dios de mirar su faz y oír su voz.” Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶19, p. 936).
533 “No es bien que el varón, Cristo, esté solo; haya quien le ruegue por nos y le amanese en el tiempo
de su ira, causada por nuestros pecados; y así lo hace la Virgen.” Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶21, p. 924).
534 Cf. chapter four, n. 137.
abandoned me, knowing how much I loved you? Why has my harp turned to weeping and my music to tears?”  

535 In the death of her Son Mary professed her faith through her “fiat.” He also spoke to God about Mary’s great sorrow at the time of Jesus’ Ascension: “Why have you left her on the earth, since by your grace she lived a life alien to all sin? While she was away from you, it was a painful exile.”  

536 Addressing Mary, Ávila said: “I see you, Lady, who suffered there (at the cross) more; they return to give you a drink from the cup of the bitterness of the absence of your Son.”  

537 Mary suffered greatly at the foot of the cross, and after Jesus’ Ascension, she had hope for the redemption of all people and the future joy with her Son in heaven.

d. Mary’s Spiritual Maternity

Ávila’s treatment of Mary’s as spiritual mother of all believers is clearly seen in his sermons. Mary has become for all followers of Christ the maternal connection to her Son. “She has more sons, while not giving birth to more than one, since we who are brothers of Christ and Christians are all sons of the Virgin.”  

538 After Mary witnessed the death of her Son and returned home, she asked the beloved disciple John:

Speak, my son, where are my sons? Your brothers, where are they? The clusters of my heart, the pieces of my heart, where are they? Bring them to me here. Bring them to me. I will not rest until I see the disciples of my Son.”  

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535 Cf. Chapter five, n. 100.
536 “... dejaste a ésta Señora en el destierro de la tierra, donde, aunque por vuestra gracia ella tuviese vida muy ajena de todo pecado, mas por estar ausente de vos le habia de ser un penoso destierro?” Sermon 70, (OC III, §7, p. 949).
537 Cf. Chapter five, n. 145.
538 “Más hijos tiene la Virgen María, con non parir más de uno, que otra que houbiese parido muchos, porque todos los somos hermanos de Jesucristo, que somos los cristianos, todos somos hijos de la Virgen.” Sermon 62, (OC III, §41, p. 840).
539 Cf. Chapter five, n. 106.
The spiritual bond of love and affection flows both ways. When Mary announced that she was about to go to the Lord, Ávila reported that the crowd “...begs her not to abandon her little ones ... and if she desired to go from this world that she brings them with her because they would suffer the absence of such a beloved Mother.”

**i. Mary as Mediatrix**

San Juan de Ávila used several titles to express certain aspects of Mary’s spiritual motherhood. The first is Mary as Mediatrix (medianera):

The dawn is in the middle between the night and the sun and this Blessed Virgin is Mediatrix between the sinners, who live in the night, and Jesus Christ our Lord, the true light. And as one cannot pass from the night to the sun without the dawn, so God desires that no one passes from mortal sin to grace except through Mary.

He also described her as a nurse: “You are given as the means of healing before the reverence of God, and in your hands, Lady, we place our wounds before you that you may heal them, since you are the nurse of the hospital of the mercy of God where the wounded are healed.” Not only is Mary the Mediatrix who connects humanity to God, she also “protects” humanity from God. Mary is seen as a “wall,” beautifully adorned, yet as strong as iron. Elsewhere, he addressed Mary in this way: “O Blessed Lady, how many have you defended among those on whom God wanted to carry out his justice? You have gained

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540 Cf. Chapter five, n. 165.  
541 “El alba en medio está de la noche y del sol y esta Virgen bendita medianera es entre los pecadores que viven en noche y entre Jesucristo nuestro Señor, sol verdadero. Y como no se puede pasar de la noche al sol sino por el alba, tampoco quiso Dios que alguno pasase del pecado mortal a la gracia sino por Maria.” *Sermon 60*, (OC III, §16, p. 808).  
542 Cf. Chapter five, n. 23.  
543 *Sermon 63*, (OC III, §18, p. 846).
pardon for them by placing yourself in the middle and praying for them.”  

He later added: “If the arrows of the justice of God would come because of our sins, you would put yourself forward, you would place yourself in the middle and you would do this so that they might not reach us.” Mary’s mediation was an important part of salvation history: “As Eve did not help the first Adam in his service of God, so this little girl has been created so that she may help the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ in order to aid the redemption and gather the souls for whom he shed his blood.” In another sermon, he stated:

God created the first woman to help the man and it is certain that the first woman carried it out very badly since she helped her husband with evil that made him sin. But our beautiful woman was created to help the second Adam, Christ, to restore what the first man and woman had squandered.

In his sermon on the sorrows of Mary, she explained Mary’s role as Corredemptrix: “Adam and Eve lost the world; Christ and Mary have recovered it.” He saw Mary as the “neck” between the head and the body of Christ: “Who is the neck, the one who joins with her prayers the body with the head, intermediary between God and man? The neck of the Virgin is like an ivory tower.” As the Virgin Mary connected Christ and the Body, she also stood between her spiritual children and the devil to keep them from harm; she stood

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544 Cf. Chapter five, n. 39.
545 “Si vinieron las saetas de la justicia de Dios por nuestros pecados, vos os poneis delante, vos os ponéis en medio, y hareís que no lleguen a nosotros....” Sermon 62, (OC III, ¶66, p. 841).
546 “Porque así como Eva desayudó al primero Adán en lo que tocaba al servicio de Dios, así esta Niña es criada para que ayude el segundo Adán que es Jesucristo, para ayudarle a la redención y a recoger las ánimas por quien El derramó su sangre.” Sermon 60, (OC III, ¶24, p. 812).
547 Cf. Chapter five, n. 120.
548 “Adán y Eva perdieron el mundo; Cristo y María lo han cobrado.” Sermon 67, (OC III, ¶15, p. 901).
between Christ and his people, seeking pardon for their sins and she played an important role in Christ's redemption of the world, although always subordinate to her Son. 550

ii. Mary as Protector and Warrior

Ávila also used military titles to explain Mary's spiritual motherhood. They are Protector and Warrior. Mary's love for her spiritual children made her an enemy to all who would seek to take her children away from her Son. In the first sermon on the Birth of Mary, he said, "This young girl is exceedingly sweet for man, the most gentle and subject to God, but against sin, there is no persecutor or enemy as harsh as Mary." 551 To the unrepentant sinner he says,

Mary does not desire to see him or receive service from him, no matter whose servant he may be, even if he is on pilgrimage and walking in her service, even if he prays many Hail Mary's and lights candles in her honor. Rather, she shuns him and has him for an enemy. 552

Not only did Mary battle with demons and sinners, she also battled with God. Like Jacob, she wrestled with God: 553

Jacob was alone one night and he fought alone; the Virgin fought more recollected in her heart. Jacob fought prepared but Mary was more prepared. Who would see the little girl get up in the middle of the night and sit in a little corner and begin to fight with God in her heart: Lord if I have found grace in your eyes, pardon them. 554

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550 This is seen in "solamente te precedere en una silla del reino, porque yo soy Dios criador, y vos criatura y Madre mía." Sermon 71, (OC III,¶23, p. 984).
551 "Dulcísima es esta Niña para los hombres, blandísima y sujetísima a Dios; mas contra los pecados no hay cosa tan brava, ni tan perseguidora, ni enemiga de ellos." Sermon 60, ¶10, p. 806.
552 "Que ninguno por servidor suyo que sea, por romeríal que anda en su servicio por más Avermarías que rece, por más candelas que quema en su honra, si en pecado está en ninguna manera lo quiere ver ni recibe servicio de él, sino que lo aborrece y lo tiene por enemigo." Sermon 61, (OC III,¶11, p. 820).
553 Genesis 32:9-32.
554 Cf. Chapter five, n. 46.
In seeking pardon for sinners, Mary’s weapons were love, recollection, prayer and humility. With these weapons, given to her by God, she was able to win pardon for her spiritual children through her Son.

iii. Mary as Advocate and Intercessor

San Juan de Avila describes Mary’s spiritual motherhood through the titles Advocate and Intercessor for humanity. Her roles of Advocate and Intercessor were seen as part of God’s plan: “As the Father gave us the greatest gift in giving us his blessed Son for our healing, so the Son gave us his blessed Mother as our Advocate.” If it was the will of God that all should turn to Mary as their advocate, “... Jesus Christ our Lord wants us to go to the most holy Virgin Mary in our need and to do what she tells us, since without a doubt God will give her what she asks from him.” Ávila also addressed our fear: “If you have a fear of approaching Jesus since he is not only your brother, but all-powerful God, approach with the Holy Virgin, meek and kind, who only has a human nature.” While he likened Mary’s intercession to that of Abigail before King David, Mary’s intercession before her Son, was more effective because “she recalled for him that she gave him human flesh, carried him in her womb and nursed him with her milk.” Another reason for Mary’s intercession: “was her joy at seeing us progress in faith.” Mary’s role as intercessor was a ministry “delegated to her by God to help the troubled, and she was the universal beggar of all the

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556 Cf. Chapter five, n. 50.
557 Cf. Chapter five, n. 182.
558 Cf. Chapter five, n. 17.
559 1 Samuel 25
560 Cf. Chapter five, n. 89.
561 Cf. Chapter five, n. 190.
mercies that God does for men."562 Ávila himself called on the mercy of Mary because

\[\ldots\text{it is extended to many: for all those who call on her "Lady alms!"}\]

I have been very evil, a sinner: I have committed many offences against God. I do not have the nerve to appear; I do not have the eyes to speak to your Son. I beg alms from you. Pray for me, gain pardon for me, pray to your Blessed Son for me."563

Just as God could not say no to the Virgin Mary because of her purity, humility and fidelity, so Mary, with her maternal heart, could not deny the grace given to her by God for her repentant children.

All of these Marian roles were a result of her divine Maternity; and by the will of her Son, she shared that greatness with her spiritual children so that one day all would be gathered with her around Him.

2. Ávila and the Immaculate Conception

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was controversial at the time of San Juan de Ávila. In the century preceding his birth, the Immaculists, who supported the Immaculate Conception were prevailing over the Maculists who denied it: "The doctrine that occupied the attention of the theologians of the fifteenth-century was that of the Immaculate Conception,"564 and the literature of the fifteenth century stridently defended it. A work of particular importance from this period, known as *La Concepción de la Intemerada Madre de Dios* by Fernando Diaz, put forth a strong defense of this doctrine and was examined by a theological commission and published in 1487, thirteen years before Ávila's birth.

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562 Cf. Chapter five, n. 18.
563 Cf. Chapter five, n. 41.
In 1957 Tarcisio Herrero de Collado published *La Immaculada en el Beato Juan de Ávila*. Intrigued by the discovery that San Juan de Ávila’s doctrine on the Immaculate Conception was not mentioned in the current works on the history of the Immaculate Conception in Spain, Collado wished to prove that Ávila was clearly an Immaculist in his preaching and teaching, particularly in his sermons on the *Birth of the Virgin Mary*, as well as in writings not part of *The Book of the Virgin*. Using texts from Ávila’s sermons, he was able to make a strong case for his defense of the Immaculate Conception.

It is clear that Ávila presented the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in his sermons from two perspectives: 1) Mary is free from all sin, original, venial and mortal, and 2) Mary is “full of grace.”

**a. Free of All Sin**

Most of Ávila’s treatment of Mary as free from all sin was seen in his sermons on the birth of Mary. In answering the question regarding why Mary is referred to as the “dawn,” he wrote: “As the dawn did not have anything to do with the night, so you, when you were born from the womb of your mother did not have anything to do with sin.” He went on to say, “You were chosen by the divine goodness so that no sin would befall you; you were all pure and precious as fine gold, and, like Jacob, you received the spiritual blessing over all men and angels; you were freer of sin than all others and richer in grace and virtues as well.” He continues the theme of freedom from sin: “Who is she who is neither

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566 Cf. Chapter five, n. 9.
567 *... mas ninguno que en este mundo vive ha estado (sin él) sino vos, escogida particularmente por la divina bondad para que por su honra suya no cayese pecado en vos, mas toda fuésedes*
born in the night of sin nor conceived in it, but was as resplendent as the dawn without any clouds and like the midday sun?" And "the sun was born in you without clouds when you conceived and bore without sin and sorrow Christ our Redeemer, who was the sun; however, you were not burnt like the blackberry bush that Moses saw . . . ." In the preceding phrase, "... and without sorrow," Ávila was referring to the belief that Mary underwent no labor pains at the birth of Jesus, since such pains were a consequence of original sin. In his second sermon on the Annunciation, he explained how Mary was free from sin: "She is purest without sin, but not by nature since she was freed by grace from all sin."

b. "Full of Grace"

The second aspect of the Virgin's freedom from sin was her state of being "full of grace" or "all-holy." Ávila extolled her great holiness when he said: "In Mary is someone in whom there is nothing of another's hands, but all made by the hand of God and therefore full of wonders and an admirable vessel." Later on, he said: "The angels were amazed at seeing such a new thing from a sterile womb . . . that she seemed to be nothing of this world but made from heaven." In describing Mary as the spouse of Christ, he spoke to Jesus: "See Lord, your spouse owes you nothing. She never sinned. She was most pure in her

limpia y preciosa como oro fino; y como Jacob, recibisteis la bendición espiritual sobre todos los hombres y sobre todos los ángeles; más ajena de pecados que todas, más rica gracias y virtudes que todos." Sermon 60, (OC III, §4, p. 802-803).
568 Cf. Chapter five, n. 25.
569 Cf. Chapter five, n. 27.
570 "La Virgen limpísima, sin pecado; y aunque no por naturaleza, por gracia fue librada de todo pecado." Sermon 65[1], (OC III, §8, p. 881).
571 Cf. Chapter five, n. 7.
572 "Maravilláronse los ángeles de ver cosa tan nueva y de que del vientre esteril . . . que parecía no cosa de este mundo, sino hecha del cielo." Sermon 61, (OC III, §1, p. 816).
conception . . ." The phrase that Mary owed no debt to God implied his belief in Mary’s freedom from original sin. In his second Annunciation sermon, he explained the meaning of the phrase “full of grace” in this way:

Full of grace has two senses, either of which can be understood: grace of the world and grace before the eyes of God, as the angel said to her, “full of grace.” If she was said to be “gracious” of the flesh, and beautiful, she would not desire it because . . . beauty is vanity. The prudent woman is praised; if the angel spoke to her as “gracious” before the eyes of God” her humility would not admit it since she sees herself as nothing in God’s eyes.574

The Virgin Mary must have been truly perplexed by the angel’s greeting, since she did not see herself as “full of grace.”

Ávila also referred to Mary’s holiness in two of his Assumption sermons.

He proposed: “There was a great difference between the hearts of the sons of Adam who remained in their own misery, and the purest of heart of that Lady who was untouched by the sin of Adam and was so taken by the grace of the Holy Spirit that she could be called more divine than human!”575 It does not seem to be Ávila’s intention to deify Mary with this statement. Rather, he wished to express that since Mary possessed no sin, she was spiritually closer to God than all other human beings who were conceived and born with original sin:

The Virgin Mother of God, forever blessed. was always holy both in her conception and throughout her entire life, but while she was full of grace and holiness as the angel said, she was also in this life very burdened with trials as it

573 Cf. Chapter five, n. 65.
574 "... 'llena de gracia,' tiene dos sentidos y se puede echar a uno y a otro: gracia del mundo, hermosura y gracia delante de los ojos de Dios como el ángel le dijo, 'llena de gracia' . . . Si la decía 'graciosa' de la carne, hermosa, no lo quería ella . . . Vana es la hermosura. La mujer cuerda esa es loada; si la decía 'graciosa' delante de los ojos de Dios, su humildad no consentía, que se tenía por nada ella en sus ojos." Sermon 65 [2], (OC III, ¶17, p.884).
575 Cf. Chapter five, n. 126.
The closeness of the Virgin Mary with God in no way excluded her from suffering hardships in life. As a matter of fact, Mary’s holiness possibly increased her sufferings. Ávila made his point clearly in sermons 67 and 70. While he never used the term “Immaculate Conception,” he made it very clear that because of Mary’s future dignity of being the Mother of God, she was conceived without original sin and she lived a life of perfect holiness.

3. Ávila and the Perpetual Virginity of Mary

San Juan de Ávila spoke frequently about Mary’s virginity and purity and associated both virtues with her humility and faithfulness. When the issue of Mary’s virginity is addressed in doctrinal discussions, it is usually divided into three parts: Virginitas ante-partum, Virginitas in partu, and Virginitas post-partum. Ávila, however, presented Mary’s virginity in a two-fold way: 1) The meaning of Mary’s virginity to God and 2) to herself.

a. God’s Understanding of Mary’s Virginity

From God’s perspective, Mary had to be all-pure and possess an undivided love of God if she was going to be his Mother. He used the following analogy in his sermon on the Presentation of the Virgin Mary: “Tell me now, if you had placed a little balsam or very excellent liquor in a glass, would you not first look

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576 “La Virgen y Madre de Dios, para siempre bendita, siempre fue santa, ansí en su santa concepción como por toda su vida; mas ansí como fue llena de gracia y santidad, como el ángel dijo, así fue también en esta vida muy lastimada con trabajos según parece por las historias y por el santo evangelio.” *Sermon 71*, (OC III,11, p. 974).
at it to see if the vessel was dirty or cracked so that the liquid would not be wasted.”

He also connected Mary’s virginity with her Immaculate Conception:

Only the most holy Virgin Mary by her singular privilege was preserved from original sin: she had the purest life and was free of all sin: a body pure through virginity and a stainless soul called all-beautiful by God.

San Juan de Ávila seems to imply a causative relationship between Mary’s Immaculate Conception and her virginity. God gave the Virgin Mary, through her purity, the ability to love him in the most profound way. Ávila believed that Mary was free from concupiscence. In his sermon on the Feast of Our Lady of Snows, he said: “Why snow in warm weather?” This analogy was a very good way to describe the Virgin Mary, since she possessed no concupiscence when she conceived her Son. “Snow in warm weather: Virgin and Mother.”

b. Mary’s understanding of her Virginity

When Ávila spoke of Mary’s understanding of her virginity, he made it clear that she saw it as a sign of her undivided love for God and her desire to serve him totally, body and soul. He expressed his interpretation of Mary’s understanding of her virginity in his two sermons on the Annunciation. He prayed:

Oh purest heart, because love of virginity has been sealed there! You do not ask without reason: Angel, how can this be, since I do not know man? It is not an act of unbelief. Look at how much love

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577 “Decidme ahora: si hubiésemos de echar un poco de bálsamo u otro licor muy excelente en un vaso, no miraríamos primero si está sucio el vaso o agujereado para que no se perdiere aquello?” Sermon 63, ¶3, p. 844.

578 “Mas como la sacratsima Virgen Maria por su singular privilegio fue preservada de pecado original, tuvo vida limpisima y ajena de todo pecado: cuerpo limpio, por virginidad y anima tal, que es llamada de Dios toda hermosa y que no hay en ella mancha.” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶17, p. 951).

the Virgin has for her purity, that she does not exchange (trueca) her virginity to be the Mother of God."^{580}

He expressed his belief about Mary's vow of virginity, saying:

The Blessed Virgin Mary loved her virginity so much that she puts off being Mother of God and says, "How will this be, since I have promised not to know man?" Lady, will you not exchange (trocareis) your virginity, without sin and with great merit, to be the Mother of God?^{581}

Ávila's words could be misinterpreted by some to mean that Mary loved her virginity more than God and that it was something she was unwilling to give up. This misinterpretation would portray Mary as being selfish. Ávila, it seemed, desired to describe Mary as someone who was trying to discern whether or not the message she had received was from God. Mary had consecrated her entire being, body and soul, to the love of the Lord. When she was told that the child was to be born by the power of the Holy Spirit overshadowing her, she realized that the supernatural marriage she would enter into with God was going to bear miraculous fruit in Jesus Christ and gave her "fiat." Mary did not value her virginity more highly than her love for God. Rather, she committed herself to virginity as a gift of pure love to God.

c. Mary's Humility and Fidelity

Mary's virginity was also a reflection of her humility and fidelity. All three virtues (virginity, humility, fidelity) manifested her total love for God. When

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^{580} "¡O entrañas limpiísimas que sellado está en vuestro corazón el amor de virginidad! No sin causa preguntáis: Angel, cómo será esto, que no conozco varón? No es palabra de incredulidad. Mirá que tanto es el amor que tiene la virgen a su limpieza que no trueca su virginidad por ser Madre del Hijo de Dios." *Sermon 65[1]*, (OC III,¶9, p. 867).

^{581} "Amaba tanto la virginidad la Virgen bendita, que pospone ser Madre de Dios; y dice ella: 'Cómo se hará eso, que tengo prometido de no conocer varón?... Señora, no trocareis vuestro virginidad sin pecado y con gran merecimiento por ser Madre de Dios? *Sermon 65[2]*, (OC III,¶19, p. 884-885).
Ávila referred to Mary’s fidelity, he recalled her “fiat” and proclaimed Mary’s faithfulness to it when holding her crucified Son, she said: “Father of Mercy, you see here your maidservant, let your will be done in me. You gave this Son to me; I received him with great joy. Here I return him to you. You gave him to me, you took him away from me, let your holy will be fulfilled.”

Prior to the Assumption, when the saints and the angels begged the Lord to bring Mary to himself, they reminded him of his mother’s fidelity.

Hear her, Lord, and grant her wish because of her tears and because she never closed her ears to your law or to the cry of the poor; but as it is written, she extended her hand to the poor and even more her heart, in which there had never been evil. Therefore she should be heard. . .

Ávila extolled the humility of Mary in all his Marian sermons, presenting her as the anti-type of Eve: “Greatness brought Eve down. Mary, being a little girl, healed us and has been exalted.” When he preached to religious sisters on the Feast of Presentation of Mary, he spoke of how Mary would live in their community:

“The Virgin was meek and gentle with all, seeking the last place; she would not be the abbess. . . . The humility of the Virgin, the slave of the Lord! I believe that she would be first in obedience and she would take the broom and sweep and always do the lowest duties.”

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582 Cf. Chapter five, n. 101.
583 “Oídla Señor y poned sus lágrimas en vuestro acatamiento porque ella nunca cerró sus orejas a vuestra ley, ni las cerró al clamor del pobre; mas, según está escrito, so mano extendió al pobre y mucho más su corazón, en el cual nunca hubo maldad y por eso debe ser oída según dice David.” Sermon 70, (OC III, p. 967-968).
585 “Tal lo tenía la Virgen, mansa, blanda con todos, buscar el lugar postrero; no sería abadesa. La humildad de la Virgen la esclava del Senor. Y así creo que la primera sería en obedecer y que tomaría la escoba para barrer y siempre haría los oficios más bajos.” Sermon 63, (OC III, p. 851).
Mary served others as she served the Lord and since God was attracted to the humble of heart, she attracted God more that any other creature:

The humility of the Virgin who was all pure and whiter than snow was worthy of admiration, since she was the one who was loveable to God and who attracted him to herself: the words are the Virgin's' "He looked on my lowliness." (Lk 1:48) God saw and loved Mary's humility because, although it is not the greatest of the virtues, it is the foundation and cause for the preservation of the other virtues.586

He described the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth as another example of her great humility: "Look at the morning star that came first before the sun and you will see her deep humility and love in visiting St. Elizabeth today."587 Since only the humble possessed God, Ávila gave this advice to his listeners: "He who wants to have some idea of whether he possesses God, let him be humble and imitate the Virgin, who, being pregnant with God, goes to serve one pregnant by man."588 Because of Mary's humility, she was the "universal beggar of all the graces that God would give to men,"589 and she would beg from God whatever her spiritual children might need for them to be closer to her Son. God would never reject any of her requests because he always heard the prayers of the humble, the faithful and the pure of heart.

4. Ávila and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary

San Juan de Ávila wrote four sermons on the Assumption, but only a fragment of the fourth sermon exists. His treatment of the Assumption can be divided into four parts: the significance of the feast, use of the Transitus Mariae,
Queenship of Mary, and Mary's ongoing maternal presence in the Church and the world.

**a. Significance of the Feast of the Assumption**

San Juan de Ávila in his three complete Assumption sermons explained to his listeners why the feast of the Assumption was important to Mary and to the Church. He connected the Assumption to Mary's divine Motherhood and Immaculate Conception in his first sermon.

> God created Mary to be a creature and preserved her from all sin. She lived such a life in the grace of the Lord that today she deserved to go up to heaven to reign with greater excellence than any man or angel, as the holy Church says: "Exalted is the Holy Mother of God over all the choirs of angels and heavenly kingdoms." ⁵⁹⁰

He also saw the Assumption as the fulfillment of Mary's desire, to be with her Son: "Now the day has come in which you see every good, and the face of Lord whom you seek is revealed to you. . . . He will be shown to you and give you the desire of your most loving heart." ⁵⁹¹ Ávila pointed out the importance of the union of Mary's body and soul:

> And if the blessed souls desired to have their own bodies with them in order to be sharers in glory since they did good works, with how much more power would the soul of the Virgin Mary desire to possess her own precious body in heaven, since it so faithfully helped her to serve God in this life without any evil inclination. . . . ⁵⁹²

In the second sermon, he continued: "The day will come . . . in which God will give you the desire of your heart and will open your prison and break the chains of your mortality and put in your mouth a new song and you will offer an

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. chapter five, n. 124.
⁵⁹¹ Cf. chapter five, n. 136.
⁵⁹² Cf. chapter five, n. 138.
unending sacrifice of praise to God in heaven." Ávila explained one reason why Mary remained "in exile on earth" after the Ascension of her Son: "With her love and desire, she who was prepared was even more prepared and her heart was widened even more so that she could hold more glory, thus leading to much more delight in the divine banquet." Ávila also compared Mary to the Ark of the Covenant which "is placed in heaven today and surpasses without comparison the dignity of the other Ark . . . " Mary, as the true Ark of the Covenant, was in the true Temple of the Lord in heaven. Her pilgrimage was complete.

b. The Assumption and the Transitus Mariae

It is not clear why Ávila used the apocryphal Transitus Mariae narratives in his description of the Assumption, except to tell the story of Mary's death and assumption to heaven in a way that would interest his listeners. He referred to three particular pericopes from these narratives. The first one was the angelic visitation from Gabriel to announce Mary's death. When the time had come for Mary to go to the Lord, he sent the archangel Gabriel to give her the message: "The Lord sends me and commands you to speak that since he descended from heaven to earth and you gave him a very pleasant dwelling place, he wants to bring you from earth to heaven and give you an even better dwelling." The second story described Mary on her "death bed" and the arrival of "the apostles

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593 "Y día verná . . . en que Dios os dé el deseo de vuestra corazón, y abrirá vuestra carcél y romperá las cadenas de vuestra mortalidad y porná en vuestra boca un cantar nuevo y sacrificaréis a Dios en el cielo sacrificio de alabanza perpetua." Sermon 70, (OC III,¶3, p. 948).
596 Fragments of these traditions can be found in the work by Stephen J. Shoemaker entitled Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 290-414.
597 Cf. Chapter five, n. 163.
who were still living . . . and she told them of the mercy that God desired to do for her; they did not hear it without tears, because of the tender love they had for her."\(^{598}\) The third one presented the possibility that Mary might have been in the tomb three days before she was actually assumed, to mirror Jesus’ three days in the tomb before the Resurrection:

Represented by the purity of the linen and earned with works as white as the linen, the most kind Lord dresses the soul of his most holy Mother and thus clothed with glory, he joins it to her soul which has greater glory.\(^{599}\)

These stories on the Assumption of Mary, all based on the church’s tradition, were attempts to fill in the missing parts of Mary’s life for the people who were naturally curious about the details that Scripture did not mention. The presence of the Apostle’s is seen as a necessary witness to Tradition.

**c. Mary’s Queenship**

Ávila believed that because of Mary’s humility, queenship was not her desire. Instead, her spiritual children and Jesus Christ her Son desired the honor for her. Her queenship derived from her interior beauty as “where the eyes of God look,”\(^{600}\) so that God has made her rejoice in his good things, and she, “having been engulfed in the depths of his blessings and transformed more than any other creature, has therefore become Queen and Lady of every servant.”\(^{601}\)

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\(^{598}\) “Vinieron también los apóstoles que entonces eran vivos . . . y ella les daría cuenta de la merced que Dios le quería hacer; lo cual ellos no oirían sin lágrimas por el amor tierno que le tenían.” *Sermon 70*, (OC III, ¶62, p. 969).

\(^{599}\) “Pues representada por la pureza de holanda y ganada con trabajos como la blancura de la holanda, vio hoy el Señor benignísimo al ánima de su santísimo cuerpo y vestido de gloria lo junta con el ánima que tiene más gloria.” *Sermon 71*, (OC III, ¶24, p. 985).

\(^{600}\) “. . . toda es en lo de dentro, donde miran los ojos de Dios.” *Sermon 69*, (OC III, ¶18, p. 936).

\(^{601}\) “. . . engolfada en el abismo de la bienaventuranza de Él, transformada en Él más que ninguna criatura y por eso hecha Reina y Señora de todo lo criado.” Sala-Balust, OC III, *Sermon 69*, (OC III, ¶35., p. 942-43).
The angels and saints wanted the heavenly court to have its queen because “a kingdom without a queen and a house without a lady seem incomplete since a principal person is lacking in it.”602 In a later sermon he exclaimed:

Oh most blessed and prudent Virgin! ... where are you going except to receive the crown of glory over every servant ... and every knee in heaven and on earth is bent by will or force and you are given a name over every name, and only your Son surpasses you?603

He connected Mary’s spiritual motherhood with her Assumption and queenship and showed that her Son had willed all of them.

d. Mary’s Ongoing Maternal Presence

Concerning Mary’s ongoing mediation, Ávila put these words on her lips:

I have children in the world, whose salvation I desire with a very loving and maternal heart ... . Until the world is ended, I will have the duty to be the faithful advocate of their affairs of others before God ... . I will bring to his memory the services that he gave me the grace to do for him, ... to be an advocate for the just ones and for sinners.604

He presented the people as begging Mary to stay with them or take them with her: “The Virgin heard these things with great compassion; ... and she promised them that although her body was separated from them, she would not forget them in her heart and would be a faithful intercessor ... .”605 He reinforced the idea of Mary’s presence in the Church when he told his listeners:

... in the mercies that we will receive today, let us not feel that the most Holy Virgin is greedy concerning the goods given to her, but being in the heights of heaven, she remembers to send to the poor ones on earth some drops of water from that flowing river that goes

602 Cf. Chapter five, n. 162.
603 Cf. Chapter five, n. 178.
604 Cf. Chapter five, n. 139.
605 “No oía la Virgen sagrada estas cosas sin gran compasión; ... y les prometía que, aunque según el cuerpo se apartaba de ellos, no los olvidaría en su corazón y que mientras viviesen les sería fiel abogada.” Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶61, p. 969).
out from the throne of God and the Lamb ... from which she drinks with more abundance than all.\textsuperscript{606}

\textbf{B. MARIAN DEVOTION IN ÁVILA'S \textit{BOOK OF THE VIRGIN}}

San Juan de Ávila lived what he preached about Jesus Christ and his Mother. As a missionary throughout Andalucía, his teaching on the Mother of God was designed to be simple and applicable to the lives of his listeners. Devotion to Mary not only consisted of prayers and pious acts for the Mother of God, but also demanded apostolic action on the part of the believer so that his interior life and exterior practice were in harmony with each other.

\textbf{1. The Meaning of Marian Devotion}

Ávila's Marian devotion was Christ-centered, as is seen in his third sermon on the Assumption: “... all you who honor the Son honor the mother, and know her and possess her and serve her as your natural and true mother. ...”\textsuperscript{607} His deep love for the Mother of God had the goal of producing an even deeper love for her Son.

If you arrive at a very beautiful tree and see a pear or a very beautiful apple, say: “Blessed is the tree that gave such fruit!” When you see Jesus Christ in the consecrated host ... and receive our Lord, give thanks to the Eternal Father who gave it to you and say “Blessed is the tree that gave such fruit!”\textsuperscript{608}

\textbf{2. The Heart of Mary}

Throughout Juan de Ávila's sermons, the image of the heart of Mary possessed great significance. His treatment was very broad and touched on

\begin{footnotes}
\item[606] Cf. Chapter five, n. 172.
\item[607] “... todos los que Hijo honráis honrad la Madre y conocedla y tenedla y servidla por vuestra natural y verdadera Señora.” \textit{Sermon 71}, (OC III, ¶25, p. 985).
\item[608] Cf. Chapter five, n. 75.
\end{footnotes}
elements of his mystical theology. Avila described the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary in this way. Her heart was the place for the believer to encounter Christ. In his first sermon on the Assumption he said that “her deeds were holy to glorify the one who created her . . . and the one who digs into the heart of the Virgin will find inside a most abundant sea where the virtues flow like rivers.”609 It was a privileged and sacred place: “Lady, who am I to enter into the treasuries of snow that are the inestimable and innumerable riches of holiness and purity, whiter than snow, of your heart?”610 Mary’s love for God and for her spiritual children was total because “The one who carries the bigger vessel of love rejoices more in the goodness of God . . . . The vessel of the Virgin’s love is bigger than that of all the men and blessed spirits.”611 Mary expressed her love for the disciples of Jesus, “her sons” by referring to them as the “clusters of my heart; pieces of my heart.”612 Lastly, the heart was the place where Mary “battled” with God (Sermon 63) as well as a place of consolation and healing.

3. Marian Devotion: Sign of Predestination

San Juan de Ávila wished to provide an answer to every Christian’s question: “How do I know if I am saved and in a state of grace?” He believed with many of his contemporaries that a sign of salvation was a devotion to the Virgin Mary, which was not something that the believer created but rather was a gift

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609 “. . . sus obras fueron santas para glorificar al que la crió . . . y quien cavare más en el corazón de la Virgen, hallará en lo más dentro de él una mar abundantísima de gracia y amor de la cual salían las virtudes así como ríos.” Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶16, p. 935).
610 “Señora, quién yo para entrar en los tesoros de la nieve, que son las inestimables e innumerables riquezas de la santidad y pureza más blanca que nieve, de vuestro corazón? Sermon 69, (OC III, ¶26, p. 940).
611 Cf. Chapter five, n. 137.
612 Cf. Chapter five, n. 106.
that the believer received from Christ. In the fourth sermon on the Assumption, Ávila said: “Our Lord gave this reward to them: that those his Majesty has chosen may have a great devotion to his mother implanted in their hearts.” Marian devotion was one of the signs of true conversion. In his second sermon on the Annunciation, he said: “True devotion of the Virgin does not have roots on the top; but instead by this devotion you confront your will and your passions because devotion to Mary is most pure although your passions incline you to other things, you may become pure through her love and be separated from evil. Ávila quoted a passage from Sirach 24:16 to help explain this devotion as a sign of salvation:

Devotion to Mary has to have the deepest roots, as our Redeemer says: “Send out roots into my chosen ones.” – What roots? – A great devotion of heart to the Virgin; and the one who does not have this devotion does not rest until he finds it. One of the signs of those who have been saved is to have a strong devotion to the Virgin.

He also spoke to those who lacked devotion to Mary. In his sermon on the Visitation, he said, “The reason that we are not visited by the Virgin is that we do not keep the commandments of God and of the Church.” In his sermon on the Presentation of Mary, one of his more memorable responses to Marian devotion was recounted. “What will I do to have devotion to the Virgin? - Do you not have

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613 Cf. Chapter five, n. 191.
614 “La verdadera devoci6n de la Virgen que tenga raíces no de encima, sino que por su devoci6n hagas fuerza a tu voluntad y a tus pasiones; que, porque ella fue limpisima por su devoci6n aunque tus pasiones te inclinen a otras cosas, seas tu limpio por su amor y te apartes de males...” Sermon 65[2], (OC III, ¶9, p. 881-882).
615 “Más hondas raíces ha de tener su devoción que así dice nuestro Redemptor: ‘In electis meis mitte radices’ - Qué raíces- una gran devoción de corazón con la Virgen; y quien esta no tiene, no descansará hasta que la halle. Una de los señales de los que se han de salvar es tener gran devoción a la Virgen.” Sermon 63, (OC III, ¶29, p. 853).
616 “Esta pues, es la causa por que no somos visitados de la Virgen, el no guardar los mandamientos de Dios y de la Iglesia.” Sermon 66, (OC III, ¶15, p. 892).
devotion? You have too much evil; much good is lacking in you, but I would rather be without skin than without devotion to Mary." Ávila believes that if devotion to Mary is lacking, then one has not received the grace of Christ. There is no salvation without Christ. The person must repent and turn away from sin. When there is repentance, one will discover Jesus Christ, and when he finds Christ, he will also find Christ’s most holy Mother.

4. Imitation of the Virtues of the Virgin

San Juan de Ávila knew that prayer to Mary was useless unless a person’s devotion was actively lived out in seeking holiness. In his second sermon on the Assumption, he described Mary as possessing three practices that he believed all her children should imitate: 1) Practice charity to all people, 2) Meditate and reflect upon the Passion of Christ on Fridays and the sorrows of Mary on Saturdays, 3) Receive Holy Communion often. The other virtues to be imitated were Mary’s humility, purity, obedience to the will of God and generosity in giving herself to God and neighbor.

In his homily on the Visitation, Ávila said:

... if the humility of the Son commands us to imitate his humility, so we must imitate the mother’s humility, since she is the mirror of all humility. “Imitate,” says St. Jerome, “whom you love and honor with imitation the one whom you revere.”

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617 Cf. Chapter five, n. 50.
618 “Este ejercicio ... de caridad con los hombres ... visitarlos santos lugares donde su Hijo bendito comenzó, medió y acabó su sagrada Pasión ... y era el recibir el cuerpo sagrado de su Hijo bendito, consagrada por las palabras que Él ordenó." *Sermon 70*, (OC III,§42, p. 961).
619 “... que si la humildad del Hijo nos manda que la imitemos, también la de lo Madre. Imitemos todas la humildad de la Virgen, pues es espejo de todos. ‘Imitad- dice San Jerónimo- a lo que amáis, y honremos con la imitación a la que honramos con reverencia.’ *Sermon 66*, (OC III,§9, p. 890).
Christians must be active witnesses to their love for the Virgin Mary. In his first sermon on the *Assumption*, he told his listeners that "if we love her, let us imitate her; if we consider her as our mother, let us obey her, and what she demands of us is that we do all that her blessed Son tells us because the way that Mary gained what she had was her obedience to God." Ávila did not see devotion to the Mother of God as a mere option for those to whom he preached the love of Jesus Christ. A personal relationship with the Virgin Mary was necessary for all who wished to know, love and serve Jesus Christ. If his listeners had a burning love for Mary, they would also have a burning love for Jesus Christ, because he was the object of her love.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the Mariology of San Juan de Ávila's *Book of the Virgin* has been examined in light of the four Marian doctrines, particularly Mary's Divine Maternity. As the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary is the bearer of God for the salvation of the world. As the spiritual mother of the Christian faithful, she serves as the surest link to living in the love of Jesus Christ. Conceived without original sin and free from personal sin, her love is pure, undivided and perfect. The doctrine of her virginity highlights her role as the faithful and pure spouse of the Word. The doctrine of the Assumption highlights that faithfulness to Jesus Christ which brings Mary, and by extension, her children, to her ultimate destiny, to be seated, body and soul, at the right hand of her Son in heaven. From these

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620 "Y si la amamos, imítelas; si por Madre la tenemos, obedezcámosla. Y lo que nos manda es que hagamos todo aquello que su Hijo bandito nos manda. Porque el camino por donde ella ganó lo que tiene, la obediencia de Dios fue." *Sermon 69*, (OC III, ¶43, p. 946).
sermons, it is clear that Ávila's desire was to bring people to a love of the Virgin
Mary and to an apostolic response in faith so that they could love her Son and
experience Christ's love in a deeper way through the transforming power of the
Holy Spirit.


CHAPTER SEVEN
WHO IS THE VIRGIN MARY
IN SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA’S
BOOK OF THE VIRGIN?

Introduction

Ávila believed that the Christian faith places two questions before every person: Who is Jesus Christ and who is his Blessed Mother? He sought to answer the latter question through the fourteen sermons that comprise his Book of the Virgin. These sermons provide a glimpse into his teaching on the Virgin Mary as well as his preaching style. This chapter will present 1) Two conclusions in regard to his preaching style. 2) Five conclusions on his Mariology in the Book of the Virgin and 3) Areas that still need to be examined in order to formulate a more complete vision of Ávila’s Mariology.

A. CONCLUSIONS ON SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA’S PREACHING STYLE

1. Strong Christo-centrism

The Book of the Virgin finds its beginning and end in Jesus Christ. The Virgin Mary and any privilege given to her is never presented in isolation but is always oriented towards bringing people to Jesus Christ. Her mission is to bear

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the Son of God and to make him known to all people and to intercede for them. In the sermons on the Birth of Mary, Ávila justified the celebration of the feast by saying that “Mary brought us to that saving day, the day of pardon, the day of rest when her blessed Son walked through this world . . . .” On the *Feast of the Presentation of Jesus*, he said that if Mary were asked why she was going to the Temple, she would reply, “. . . to present to God his first-born Son and mine . . . .” In both sermons on the feast of the Annunciation, the focus is on the consequence of Mary’s fiat, namely the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Mary’s mission is not only to go in haste to bring Christ to the world, but also to plead on behalf of sinful humanity that through their repentance they will be united with Christ: “Until the world is ended, I will have this duty: to be the faithful advocate of the affairs of my children before God . . . . I will remind him of the deeds that he gave me to do for him and all of which I did.”

2. **Strong Dramatic Style**

Ávila’s sermons possess an intensely dramatic character. They are not lectures, but invitations to participate in the lives of Jesus and Mary in the mysteries that he describes. They usually consist of the following persons: God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, sinful humanity, the angels and saints. Through his speaking to and for these characters, he brings his listeners inside the Gospel story so that they can see their lives in light of the message and experience conversion of heart. Ávila’s Good Friday sermon deals with the sorrows of Mary in dramatic fashion. For example, he asks his listeners to join

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625 Cf. Chapter five, n. 139.
him with Mary at the foot of the cross to weep with her, comfort her and ask for her forgiveness since “we are the cause of the Passion of Christ and the anguishes of his mother.”626 He then challenges God as to the reason for Mary’s suffering, since she was free from sin. In painting the picture of Mary holding her Son after he was taken down from the cross and laying him in the tomb in vivid terms, he has Mary say: “My Son, my God, my consolation. How could you have abandoned me, knowing how much I love you? Why has my harp turned to weeping and my music to tears?”627 He brings Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus into the scene to represent sinful humanity who abandoned Christ on the cross: “If until now, Lady, we have not served you or accompanied you in this great trial, forgive us. We have been cowardly . . . but from now on we will be better.”628 He concluded the sermon with Mary sending John out into the night to gather together all of Jesus’ disciples so that she can pardon them and ask Christ to pardon them. By telling the story of the Passion through these characters, Ávila gives his listeners the opportunity to stay with Mary, witness her suffering and the suffering and death of her Son, and see their complicity in the death of Christ. They are to examine their lives as to their fidelity to Jesus and Mary, to seek forgiveness for their sins and to ask for strength to begin their life of faith again. In this sermon, Ávila shows himself to be a master of capturing the drama of the moment, inviting his listeners to experience it and then allow them to be transformed by it.

626 Cf. Chapter five, n. 90.
627 Cf. Chapter five, n. 100.
628 Cf. Chapter five, n. 99.
B. CONCLUSIONS ON SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA’S MARIOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF THE VIRGIN

1. Mary: Mother, Mediatrix, Spouse

Maestro Ávila consistently used titles to present the church’s faith about Mary. The three central headings under which particular titles are discussed are Mother of God, Mediatrix and Spouse.

a. Mother of God

The primary title given to Mary is Mother of God. In the sermon on the Feast of our Lady of the Snows, Ávila said that when a person wishes to honor Mary, the title that honors her most was “Mother of God made man.” Mary is also the spiritual mother of all believers: “All are children of Eve according to the flesh and children of Mary according to the spirit.” Another maternal image of Mary is that of the nurse: “you are the nurse of the hospital of the mercy of God where the wounded are healed.”

b. Mediatrix

The majority of the titles, however, deal with Mary’s role as Mediatrix. She is the dawn, leading one from the darkness of sin to Christ the Sun: “just as no one can pass from night to day except through the dawn, so God desires that no one pass from mortal sin except through Mary.” As one who stands between Jesus Christ and sinful humanity, Mary serves as a “wall of protection for the universal world” in two ways: protection from evil and protection from the wrath of God. As for being a protector from evil she is, “for those who are

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629 Cf. Chapter six, n. 1.
630 Cf. Chapter five, n. 44.
631 Cf. Chapter five, n. 23.
632 Cf. Chapter five, n. 16.
enemies of her Son, the most dreadful foe and the sound of her name instills fear in demons."634 His presentation of the Virgin Mary as the protector from God’s wrath presents some theological difficulties. In his *Lady of the Snows* sermon, he says that as Mary calmed the baby Jesus,635 she could also calm his anger in heaven,636 he seems to imply that Mary is capable of changing the will of God. This idea is contrary to other parts of Ávila’s Marian sermons, which state that Mary’s life is not focused on changing the will of God, but doing it. A possible explanation for this seeming contradiction is that Mary is in fact doing the will of God by pleading for him to show mercy to his children. Mary’s actions can then be seen as the result of God’s mercy. This interpretation calls to mind John 5:30: “I can do nothing on my own authority, I hear as a judge; and my judgment is just because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.” Other terms that Ávila uses to describe Mary’s mediation are “Advocate,”637 “Intercessor,”638 and “the universal beggar of God’s grace.”639

**c. Mary as Spouse of the Word**

In his sermons on the *Annunciation*, Ávila also referred to Mary as the Spouse of the Word who never sinned,640 and as the new Eve who repaired the evil wrought by the first sin. She did so by assisting in the redemption of Christ.641

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635 *...* cuántas veces con estas y semejantes razones habéis amansado a vuestro Hijo bendito .. vos le habéis suplicado por nos y le habéis tenido las manos y hecho que tore su espada a su vaina y que no nos castigue.” *Sermon 68*, (OC III, p. 20, p. 923).
636 Cf. chapter five, n. 117.
640 Cf. Chapter five, n. 65.
641 Cf. Chapter five, n. 183.
He added the idea that she was “... born into the world as a little girl to cure the evils brought about by Eve and that she did so by her great humility.”642 The title, “Queen of Heaven,” was also given to Mary to whom is conferred, at her enthronement, the power and authority to refer all people to God’s mercy.643 Finally, Ávila makes a spousal allusion in sermon 70 when he has the angels and saints reminding Jesus that a kingdom without a queen and a house without a lady are incomplete.644 These various images under the headings of Mother, Mediatrix and Spouse help to provide a fuller picture of Ávila’s view of the Virgin Mary by highlighting the role God has given her in salvation history.

2. Mary: Daughter of Abraham

Ávila compared Mary’s response to God’s plan with responses of men and women in the Old Testament. In every case, she was equal to and even greater than they are in faith, generosity, obedience to God and intercession. When he compared the choice of Rebekah to be the wife of Isaac with Mary who was chosen to be the Spouse of the Word, he said that Mary’s gifts of grace were more lavish in comparison to Rebekah’s generous gift of water and that in her tremendous love she would give the water of grace that her children need in their tribulations. Moreover, Mary is not limited to a pitcher because she gives the water of grace in abundance.645 When Mary was compared to Jacob, who spent the night preparing to wrestle with God, Ávila said that “... Mary was more

643 “... quitó el anillo de su mano y lo puso en la de ella para que tenga poder y autoridad para referendar todas las mercedes que Dios al mundo hiciere...” Sermon 71, (OC III, ¶ 23, p. 843).
644 Cf. Chapter five, n. 162.
645 Cf. Chapter five, n. 69.
prepared and recollected in her heart than he was." Like Abigail, the wife of Nabal, who averted David's wrath upon her family by bringing his men bread, Mary saved those entrusted to her care by reminding Jesus what she did for him in giving birth and caring for him. She was compared to the woman of Tekoa, who interceded with David for her last living son who was to be put to death. While this woman pleaded for only one son, Mary pleaded for all her children. Ávila compared Mary to Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was made second in authority over Egypt after Pharaoh. He argued that if Pharaoh gave the title "savior of the world" to Joseph, with how much more reason has it been bestowed on the Virgin, since she gave God human flesh . . . ?" Ávila also compared Mary to Abraham. While Mary was in the spiritual lineage of Abraham because of her faith, more was asked from her because, unlike Abraham who was able to walk down the mountain with his son, Mary did not have that comfort. Rather, she left her Son there. In these comparisons with persons of the Old Testament, Mary's power surpassed that of the men and women who had gone before so as to highlight her unique role in God's plan.

3. Mary: Tested in Faith

While Ávila recognized that "Mary was a blessing over men and angels and possessed more grace and consequently more glory" because of her holiness, he also saw her as a human creature whose faith was tested and whose love could

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646 Cf. Chapter five, n. 46.
647 Sermon 68, (OC III, ¶ 19, p. 923).
648 Cf. Chapter five, n. 183.
649 "A Abraham mandóle Dios que subiese al monte y sacrificase a su hijo pero después contentóse Dios con sola su obediencia de corazón y dio le un carnero de sacrificase. (Gen 22:13) Al monte subió con su hijo Isaac y del monte bajo con él; mas la Virgen nuestra Señora no así. Al monte calvario subió con su hijo; mas no le trujo a la vuelta consigo que allá le dejó." Sermon 67, (OC III, ¶ 14, p. 900).
650 Cf. Chapter five, n. 79.
grow. Mary was described as being disturbed by the angel’s greeting and pronouncement because she was not certain as to whether the angel was from God or a demon. At a very young age, Mary entered the Temple school because she needed to become prepared for the day that she was to be the Mother of God. She was tested at the foot of the cross and she cried out to the people around her, “Oh sinners, how dearly you have cost me! He has paid for what you have done and my soul has felt it.” In the midst of her sorrow she prayed to God, “I forgive them Lord, and by my sorrow at your suffering out of love for them, pardon them Lord.” She was tested after the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Ávila believed that one reason that Mary remained on earth after the ascension of her Son was that while she loved the Lord deeply, she could love him even more: “Mary was more prepared and her heart was more expanded so that more glory might be contained in her and so that the banquet of heaven would be so much more delightful for her . . .” In proclaiming Mary’s greatness, he never forgot that she had to endure tests of her faith and love that brought her great suffering as well as great joy.

4. Mary: Model of the Spiritual Life

Sermons 63, 69, 70, and 71 focus particularly on the spiritual life of the Virgin Mary. Ávila praises the spiritual life of Mary, “who did not receive the sin of Adam and was so taken by the Holy Spirit that she should be called more

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651 “Y por eso cuando os viéredes en duda, pedid lumbre a nuestro Señor para conocer si lo que os viene es espíritu bueno a espíritu malo. Y así Virgen no responde nada.” *Sermon 65* (OC III, ¶ 6, p. 866).
652 “-Porque ha de venir día en que ha de recibir en sus entrañas a Dios.” *Sermon 63*, (OC III, ¶ 3, p. 844).
653 Cf. Chapter five, n. 102.
654 Cf. Chapter five, n. 103.
divine than human." This description of Mary’s holiness referred to Mary’s bond of love with God. Because she is free of all sin and possesses great purity of heart, she would speak of yearning for the presence of God, saying, “... My heart said, my face has sought you. Your face, Lord, will I seek.” The spiritual bond of love was also described as a “war so sweet ...” Ávila claimed that “Mary tied up God with her soul so that he would never be far from her, and that her thirst for God was strong in her soul and in her flesh.” Her intense desire for God made Mary “lovesick,” a healthy sickness, one not caught by an unhealthy person. Ávila believed that the love that Mary was able to give to God because of the prevenient grace of the Immaculate Conception could be achieved in a less perfect way by believers who imitated Mary by giving God their hearts. They could also imitate her by love of neighbor, daily meditation on the Passion of Christ, and frequent reception of Holy Communion. If the goal for the Christian believer is to be united with Jesus Christ, then the Virgin Mary not only presents the path to follow, but also intercedes with God so that all believers may follow her path.

5. Mary: Model for the Moral Life

Each of Ávila’s sermons ends with an exhortation to live a moral life. His listeners are encouraged to reject sin and return to Jesus Christ. Given her freedom from sin, Mary never turned away from God. Nevertheless, her virtues

656 Cf. Chapter five, n. 126.
657 Cf. Chapter five, n. 130.
658 Cf. Chapter five, n. 150.
660 Cf. Chapter five, n. 174.
could be lived by all believers with the grace of the Holy Spirit and Mary’s example. As the teacher of the moral life, Mary’s message is clear: “Do whatever he tells you and keep the commandments.” As a model for the Christian moral life, Mary exercised the virtues of humility, obedience to the will of God, service to one’s neighbor and perseverance in the face of trials in an exemplary way. Of all of these virtues, the first in importance was humility: “Let him who seeks to have some idea of God be humble and imitate the Virgin, who being pregnant with God, goes to serve one pregnant by man.” The practice of these virtues attracts persons to God, and the more they are attracted to God, the easier the virtues are to live. Growth in the virtues is the best way to increase one’s capacity for loving God.

C. UNEXAMINED AVILIST MARIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

While the Book of the Virgin makes up the largest amount of Ávila’s Marian thought, it does not exhaust it. He speaks about the Mother of God in his other works. These works will be taken into account when all of Ávila’s teaching on the Virgin Mary is studied. The works that have not been examined are 1) His sermons in the temporal cycle; 2) his letters; 3) his treatment of Mary and the Eucharist and Mary and the Priesthood; 4) his spiritual writings, especially Audi

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662 "Que les diría la Virgen bendita sino como humilde que guardesen lo que el Señor les mandó!" Sermon 70, (OC III, ¶ 62, p. 970).
663 Cf. Chapter five, n. 83.
664 These sermons would include Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and the Sundays after Pentecost (i.e. Ordinary Time)
Filia; and 5) A more developed study of Ávila's understanding of the heart of Mary as the gateway to the heart of Christ.

D. CONCLUSION

These seven conclusions have attempted to answer two questions concerning the Book of the Virgin: 1) Who is the Virgin Mary for San Juan de Ávila? 2) What are two key aspects of his preaching on the Blessed Virgin Mary? His preaching contributed greatly to the renewal of the Catholic faith in sixteenth-century Andalucía and throughout the rest of Spain. His deep love for Mary increased even more his love for Christ and he believed that it was his mission to teach others that if they wanted to love Christ, they must first love his Mother and recognize her role in bringing them to Him. It is hoped that this project and the English translation of his Book of the Virgin will continue his mission of teaching the love of Christ through the love of Mary.
PART TWO
THE SERMON TEXTS OF
THE BOOK OF THE VIRGIN
OF SAN JUAN DE ÁVILA
Sermon 60

Mary is the Dawn, the Mediatrix between
the night and the sun

Birth of the Virgin - September 8

Introduction: A Great Question!

They say that an ignorant person can ask more than a wise person can answer; and if the questions of the ignorant cause difficulty for the wise one, what will the question of the wise do to the ignorant? The Lord asked his Apostles one time who they would say he was. (cf. Mt 16:5) A question, certainly, quite difficult even for the angels all the more so for people who have spent their life fishing rather than preaching theology. And although they had preached it, what the Lord said is a great truth: No one knows the Son except the Father and the one to whom the Father wishes to reveal him. (cf. Mt 11:27) And because it was important for the salvation of the world that men know who Jesus Christ is and they could not know it, the Eternal Father provided what was said through the mouth of the Apostle St. Peter: You are Christ, Son of the living God. (cf. Mt 16:16)

A great question! Who is Jesus Christ; and after this one, another important question is: who is his blessed Mother? This child who was born today was so great that she compelled great admiration in men and angels and so, as admirers, they asked: Who is this who is born as the dawn which rises, beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, fearful and frightening as a well-ordered squadron of soldiers? (Cant 6:9) Who will be so daring to respond to what the
angels asked with admiration? How much more, we, knowing so little, do not even know how to say all that there is in them, if we are questioned by an ant or a worm. Most blessed Lord! Your eternal Father declared who you were through the mouth of St. Peter. Look at how much good ensues in the world from our knowing who your most blessed Mother is, who is born today. This knowledge is good because to know you is to know our Redeemer and our help; and to know her is to know the way for rejoicing in you and your redemption. We proclaim, Lord, that we are not sufficient to know or speak the least thing about the great riches that you gave your Mother; take my hand since you are her Son and you desire to honor your most holy Mother. You are her Creator and her God who created her and endowed her with all the grace that she has, and therefore you know her very well and you reveal her as we have need of her.

While the Angels ask us, they teach

Who is this one who goes forth, etc. (cf. Cant 6:9) One day the prophet David, contemplating the deeds of God with the enlightenment that he gives to him for it, and without which no person can know well, he so admired their greatness that he called out with his voice and said: Lord your works are marvelous and my soul will know them exceedingly. (Cf. Ps 138:14) Happy is the one whose soul will know this work of God that we have in hand, this very holy child in whom there is nothing of another’s hand, but all has been made by the hand of God and therefore all full of wonders, an admirable vessel, a work of the Most High, (Sir 43:2) as Sirach says. “She is tiny in their eyes but her dignity and greatness surpass every created person with great benefit.” “She is higher
than the heavens”—says St. Augustine—“this one that we want to praise; she is
deeper than the abyss; she is wider than the sea and her length is greater than
from east to west.” Men and angels regard her with wonder: the daughters of
Zion saw Mary and they called her blessed and the queens have praised her.
Just as the angels keep watch face to face before God in heaven, so, in the same
manner, the very holy souls that are on the earth know its benefit and they
prostrate themselves before her reverence and they proclaim their inability to
know her greatness and they would ask, if there would be one who could answer
them: Who is this one that comes forth from the womb of her mother as dawn
that is born, beautiful as the moon? (cf. Cant 6:10)

Let us not be so bold as to want to tell the angels what they do not know;
they ask and by questioning they teach us; and we will accomplish a lot if with the
grace of the Lord we would know how to understand and declare what they teach
by their questions.

-Who is she who comes forth as the dawn, beautiful as the moon? –So
now we know something of this most blessed Mary, who is the dawn, moon, sun,
and a squadron of well ordered soldiers.

Who is this one that goes out as the Dawn?

Why do you rise, blessed little girl? Just as the dawn does not have
anything to do with the night, in the same way when you were born from the
womb of your mother, you did not have anything to do with sin. In the dawn, God
drowned King Pharaoh and his own soldiers in the Red Sea (cf. Ex 14:27); and in
you who were born as the dawn, God drowned the devil and sins so that they had
nothing to do with you. Oh blessed child! How safe you are from what would close the gate of heaven for you with the word that St. John said: Nothing foul enters that city. (cf. Rev 21:27) The entire city is pure gold and does not admit the scum of small or great sin! Lady! Lady! You say this word to us and it frightens us, since we were conceived in original sin and from the womb of our mother we were born sinners; and with our carelessness and evil consideration about the sin that we inherited from Adam, we have added others through our own fault and will. Some have committed more than others but no one that lives in this world has been without sin except you, particularly chosen by divine goodness so that for your honor sin would not fall upon you, but rather you are all pure and precious as fine gold; and like, Jacob, you, free of all sin and richer in grace and virtue than all the others, bestow the spiritual blessing upon all men and angels (cf. Gen 32:20). There were some like Jeremiah and St. John the Baptist, who were born from the womb of their mothers without original sin and afterwards lived in great holiness; but these, Lady, do not have anything to do with you, since even if they were not born with sin, they were conceived in it; and if the elders did not commit mortal sins, they committed venial ones, from which no one is free except you alone.

You rise like the dawn and you frighten those who do not know you; you give joy to those who look at you. We see your body which never rebelled against its soul; you did not even have one movement against it, and your senses that always obeyed reason without rebellion. Your reason and will, always obedient to God, are new deeds, and until today, they have been seen in no one before or after you, except in your most holy Son. With much reason do angels and the entire
church admires you, born with the light of dawn, since they see in you a holiness that was like nothing in the past nor will there be in the future. Let us praise God forever because he has declared to us by means of the question of the angels the identity of this holy Virgin, in order that we may know her as one free of all sin, joyful, pure and with the light of God.

Beautiful as the Moon

Now there is a reason that we may speak of how she is as beautiful as the moon: she is all whiteness, most pure: and just as her Son is the whiteness of the eternal light, so she participates more in this whiteness than men and angels; as St. Anselm says, "it was suitable that this most blessed Virgin was resplendent with such great purity that after God a greater one could not be imagined. She is the white moon and the Virgin is the purest; she is the moon, the swiftest than all seven planets and the Virgin is the most diligent and quickest of any creature in the service of our Lord; the moon is the lowest of the planets and the Virgin is the most humble one there is in heaven or on earth. And the moon, although it appears with little light sometimes and at other times it does not appear at all and at other times it appears full, it really never has less light one time than another, but instead it is always full. Since that part which is enlightened by the sun is not seen by the eyes of men, we judge, therefore, that sometimes the moon has little light. But the moon is always full. The holy Virgin possesses all the goodness and splendor that she has from Jesus Christ our Lord who is the Sun of Justice who comes to her. While she often performed the practical tasks that seem to have little importance, such as eating, drinking, working and other things like these,
Mary always had her soul turned to and attentive to God, the brightest sun. She possessed with greater fervor, love and elevation of understanding and will for all God’s works great and small, bodily and spiritual.

For all that we confess to you Lady, you who are as beautiful as the moon and one thousand million times much more beautiful, so that in comparison with your most blessed soul and with the spiritual beauty that the Holy Spirit placed in it, the moon will not dare to appear; and your beauty surpasses the blessed angelic spirits, who are the most beautiful mirrors of God.

**Chosen just as the Sun**

And being like the dawn and the moon is not enough for the Virgin’s holiness. Alas, we are so quickly pleased with a small amount of goodness! But this Lady fulfilled what is written: that *the way of the just is as light that is born until the perfect day.* (Cf. Prov 4:18) Oh what care! Oh what diligence this little bee of God brought, making the sweetest honey inside of the beehive of her heart! Growing in the light of the dawn to the light of the moon which is greater; and afterwards the light of the sun that is the greatest; because not only is she praised by the first two things, but it says she has been *chosen just like the sun.* The sun is the name that her most holy Son is given because he is the fountain of all spiritual light in the heavens and on the earth, as this sun is the fount of life for the heavens and the earth; but he who gave her a share of his holiness, has also given her his light of the sun since he gave it to his holy Apostles, to whom he said: *You are the lights of the world.* (cf. Mt 5:14) The sun that proceeds from the sun is this holy little girl and *the woman clothed with the sun* (Rev 12:1) that St. John
saw in his Apocalypse. The sun has light and heat and with so much greatness that they cannot see it clearly with their weak eyes. Who will tell about the light that was granted to this blessed girl to govern all his works in order to contemplate the Most High God and all that was suitable to serve him!

It is said about Abigail and other women in the Divine Scripture that they were prudent (1 Sam 25:3); but the church sings of this Virgin: "Virgin most prudent, where are you going?" We can measure with our instruments the prudence of others; but the prudence of this Virgin, who will be able to understand it since so she knew how to please the Most High God, with much more profit than David did? There is no tongue that can explain how much the fire of love that God came to light on the earth (cf. Lk 12:49) is possessed by the heart of this little girl, since she loved the Lord more than herself without comparison; and her entire life was a light, a fire more than enough to move those who look to her to serve the Lord. "Today is the birth of the holy Virgin Mary- sings the church-, whose excellent life enlightens all the churches."

Although the day of our salvation and the acceptable time for the Lord (cf. 2 Cor 6:2) existed ever since Jesus himself was incarnated and born into this world, in comparison to him, the holy Virgin and her birth are called the dawn. When one looks at the excellence of the Virgin's life, she is also in her way called the sun and the cause of joy in the church as it has been written: Just as the sun that rises on the world so is the face of the good woman. (cf. Sir 26:21) "Take away"- says St. Bernard- "the bodily sun of this world and all will remain in darkness; take away the Virgin and all will remain in the obscurity of sin." May our God be blessed, who intended to please us with the birth of this most holy little girl, so full of light
that from the dawn she proceeds to the moon and from the moon to the sun; she gives us an example of the way in which we ought to grow in the service of God and helps us to do it with her most efficacious intercession and prayer.

**Fearful as a well-ordered squadron of soldiers**

What more remains to be said? What more remains where this blessed little girl rises up since she is compared with the light of the sun that is the font of all light? Even more remains; because in order to be a little girl, perfect in the service of God, not only is there a need that she may have the light to know the holy pleasure of God but that she also have power to complete it and put it into practice. It is of little advantage to many to know that the commandments of God are the way to heaven if they do not put them into practice. It is a cause of greater condemnation to know the good and not do it; and as the Gospel says: the servant who knows the will of his master and does not complete it will be whipped with more lashes (cf. Lk 12:47) than he who neither knows it nor completes it. This attitude is far from the Virgin Mary: She had a most fervent love that gives the power to serve the Lord and by no calamity, temptation or work, did she cease to fulfill the holy will of the Lord and walk his holy paths. She took it to her heart and as a person determined to die or overcome, she came forth with victory over all her enemies and she was feared by all of them and they would not dare to appear before her; and for this the angels praised her who is fearful and terrifying to the demons and to sins as a squadron of ordered soldiers.
This little girl is the sweetest for men, the softest and most subject to God; but against sins there is no one so fierce nor such a pursuer nor enemy of them; because of the strong love that she had for God it made her abhor sins so much as David said: *those of you who love God, hate evil.* (Ps 96:10) Since the Virgin has a magnanimous heart full of heavenly strength with which she treads *on the lion and the dragon* (Ps 90:13) that is the devil with all his cunning and shrewdness; and he and his own who had acquired so much fear of her, that at her presence and her name they went fleeing and they *melted just like wax.* (Ps 67:3) If with St. Anthony the demons had this motive, who, upon hearing his name they fled, with how much more reason ought one to believe that at the name of Mary they would flee and with more swiftness, since she is the woman of whom it is written that *she was to crush the head of the demon,* (cf. Gen 3:15) not only because she escaped original sin but also all other mortal and venial sins, which St. Anthony nor anyone else escaped.

**Is there something here in the darkness of original sin?**

Do you not see what a very sweet thing it is to speak about the life and the excellence of that most blessed little girl? How lucky would we be if there had been no need to speak on these holy feasts of our miseries and sad ways, but rather that all of us would occupy ourselves in praising God who created such a little girl and thank him because he gave us such a Mother, and in our rejoicing in her riches as the holy church says in an antiphon: “Let us celebrate with joy the birth of this most holy Virgin since she is our intercessor with Jesus Christ our
Lord;" and everyone confessed their sins, received Holy Communion and was in the state of grace and happy with the witness of a good conscience and with the lively hope of seeing this Lady in heaven and rejoicing with her forever, whose blessed birth we celebrate in this unhappy exile. We are to celebrate these holy things and treat them with reverence if we do not want them to be changed into harmful things for us; and we will celebrate this holy feast of the splendid little girl, who has the light of the dawn, of the moon and the sun who is always victorious over her enemies very exceedingly who are in the sad darkness of the night of mortal sin, like a man who lives without light nor knows the evils that he presently possesses nor the terrible torments of hell that await him, which for a long time are to be avenging the momentary pleasures that he spent in this life, nor does he have the light of grace to know and to love his God and neighbors; since as it is written: He who walks in the night does not know where he is going. (Jn 12:35)

Oh Lord, if someone is here who is outside of your grace and light and life and lives in the darkness of mortal sin, whether it may be with the purpose of committing it or because he has committed it, and he has not done penance so that he can be pardoned for it. The angels ask today: “Who is this Virgin that is born?” They are amazed at her great light and virtue. And if someone is here among us in the great and unspeakable evil of mortal sin, and he looks at it, fearful of the darkness, captivity, sadness and misfortune that cannot be told, he will ask: “Who is this soul so unaware of the light of heaven and so hidden in spiritual darkness? Who is this one who being created in the image of God has placed over himself the ugly and abominable image of the enemy?”
Oh what great truth Jeremiah the prophet said: *that the Nazarenes of God who first were white as snow and more beautiful than ivory are so inclined in the opposite direction that they are dead in the plazas and so ugly that no one recognized them!* (Lam 4:7-8) How will he know God and his angels, I mean to say, how will he approve of something that is not his workmanship, that is the work of the devil and a contradiction and destruction of his own works? “I created you beautiful- God says- how have you deformed yourself so miserably? And I washed you with my own blood, how have you become so dirty again?” *Depart from me- says the Lord- all you who do evil* (Ps 6:9) because I do not know you. And although you are maidens and have the appearance of good works, if you lack the divine grace that makes the soul beautiful before the eyes of God, whatever you are, whatever you have had, whatever you want you have to hear this fearful word of God: *I do not know you, depart from me.* (cf Lk 13:25)

Oh my brother, whoever you may be, whomever this touches, how can you suffer so much of your own evil and such an amount for some fleeting goods or pleasures that disappear just like smoke? What can they give you that may bring you profit, if in the counterbalance of it they take your soul? Do you not remember what Christ our Lord said: *What exchange can a man give for his soul?* (Mt 16:26) And if in exchange for your soul that you lose, they cannot give you an equal exchange, tell me out of reverence for God through your holy wounds, through the birth of this Blessed Virgin, what is that which they give you in exchange for abandoning God, and you may renounce the right that you have to rejoice with him in glory and you can live in your hatred and be so far from rejoicing in him that God did not have anything to do except to punish you? A
man grieves and notices the loss of a ducat and a thing of less value; do you not notice the loss of your soul, loss of God's grace and the same God himself, infinite and eternal? What do they give you when they take away such riches from you? Say it, if you dare to say it.

Oh Infinite Goodness and Goodness so great, there is nothing that can be equaled to you; because you are such that whoever only has you, although he may have no other good, is truly blessed; and whoever does not have you, woe to him, woe to him, woe to him, that he is openly cursed although he may have all the riches there are in heaven and on earth! This, brother, is the darkness of the night and therefore such a great lie happens and you suffer it, that they give you a spin and say it is a ten-ducat coin and they carry a piece of gold to you saying that it is lead, and you are so blind and so miserable that you amuse yourself with the misery that they give you, and you weep when you lose it and you do not regret that they take God away from you and they have deceived you with terrible harm.

St. Augustine tells us about himself when he was without the grace of God, that when he read in Virgil that Queen Dido committed suicide because Aeneas went away and left her, his heart was softened and he wept; and he complains after saying the same about himself: “And I suffered Lord, with dry eyes, being separated from you, my life, my God!” He wept because his soul had separated from his body and he suffered with dry eyes the separation of God from his soul, which remains deformed, duller and dead by separating it from God, so that only the body remains when the soul leaves it.

The Dawn is between the night and the sun

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Brother, if your misfortune has reached such a point that by a foul delight, prohibited by the law of God or by desiring to take it or by aversion or by gossip or by another breaking of the divine law, you are in the darkness of night and do not see the light of heaven, grieve over your evil and give thanks to the divine goodness which allowed you to reach this day and come to the church to celebrate the day of the birth of this most blessed little girl who not only has the light of dawn, the moon and the sun, and great strength for herself, but even for you as well. The dawn is the boundary of the night and the sun, and this blessed Virgin is Mediatrix between the sinners who live in darkness and Jesus Christ our Lord, the true sun. And as no one can pass from the night to day except by the dawn, so neither did God intend that anyone would pass from mortal sin to grace except through Mary.

Brother, do not be discouraged. Do you want to be cured? Do you want to recover from these mortal wounds? If you do, do not respond to me: I do not have a man. (Jn 5:7) You have a man as your remedy who is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who pleads for you before the Father and risks his life for you. And to this one who is flesh of your flesh and bone of your bones, the Father placed everything in his hands, (cf. Mt 11:27) as he himself said it; and this one he made your Judge and he has the keys of the dead and of hell (Rev 1:18) and of life and heaven; because if you shunned entering into judgment in the tribunal of the most all-powerful Father, you do not shun entering into his judgment who although he is the same God with the Father, he is man with you and gave his life for you. He was judged by Pontius Pilate and therefore he is constituted as judge of the living and the dead; and as the Gospel says: the Father judges no one
because he has given all judgment to the Son. (Jn 5:22) Give thanks to God for having given you as a judge one who is God and man and who knows infirmities (Is 53:3) and was tempted with experience to learn to be merciful and he needs it all, such as it is (cf. Heb 2:18) and as human weakness would desire it.

But since the dismay and fear that sin causes in the one who commits it is in a great manner very extensive and with its great burden it made Cain and Judas and many others discouraged (Gen 4:13; Mt 27:3) and God, knowing this, intended it, as St. Bernard says, to console our weakness, to strengthen our resolve, by giving us, as an advocate, this blessed Virgin who is born today. Take courage, brother since you are at the birth of this very joyful dawn. And if the sickness of sin brings fatigue, fear and sadness in the night in which you have lived, see that the sick feel relief at dawn and the birds sing and a new joy is born. Rejoice on this day at the good news and cheer up and ask for mercy from this new advocate and most gentle Mother who is born today for your consolation. And if you are afraid of approaching Jesus Christ since he is not only man, your brother, but all most powerful God of infinite majesty, approach the holy Virgin meek and kind and who does not have another nature than human, as St. Bernard says: "If you discover in her something rough, some vexing response, some harshness of justice, I give you permission to fear her." But all that is in her is gentleness not only for the just who walk in the light, but as a perfect and beautiful moon full of mercy who is born to be an advocate of good people, shines for those who walk at night so that they do not get lost and may little by little come to the light of the sun. And as the moon is a planet among the seven and the one nearest to us, just as this moon is given to us by a true Mother and so near for
our help that our miseries do not touch any creature on the earth or in the heaven as quickly as they touch her virginal heart, so rich in mercy that the church calls her *Mother of mercy*. The moon has power over the waters that foretell the tribulations; and this pious Lady is delegated by God for the help of the sorrowful and is the universal beggar for all the mercies that God gives men and in whom is engaged in lifting her hands heavenward to receive the mercies of God and later turning them downwards to give us what she has received. For the love of God, take advantage of such a good opportunity and do not allow this day, full of mercy, to pass.

**Now is the time to go about. Rise up those who have fallen asleep**

The dawn is born, she herself calls out with the light that she brings and says: “Now is the time for going about, arise you sleepers!” The cocks crow and the other birds sing; and the heavenly Virgin is calling out on this holy day that she was born, that you awaken from the sleep of sin and walk in her light, that she will be your faithful advocate and kind mother. The cocks, which are the preachers, call out to you as well. God also says to you what he said through the mouth of St. Paul: *Arise you sleepers from among the dead for Christ has enlightened you.* (cf. Eph 5:14) God wants to save you and he beseeches you with his pardon; the Virgin desires the same thing, the angels in the same way; the preachers and all the church desire you to go out from that sad night in which you live. How do you respond to so many people as they beg you not to go to hell, but rather to serve God and gain the kingdom of heaven forever? How do you respond? Remember, you are sleeping!
Oh Lord, what an arduous thing it is to be a man, absorbed and intoxicated
by false delight, by hardened ill-will, by abhorrent things, by other similar
miseries! It happens to those who are deeply asleep in this dream. Even if one
places the Word of God before their eyes to remind them that he is the true light
for rousing those who sleep just as if he had said to them: “There is an eternal hell
where you are to pay with eternal torments for the momentary pleasures that
your sins give you here; you lose heaven if you love the earth. God goes away
through one door if sin enters through another; God is the enemy of evil and of
wickedness, and you will not be rid of him who is good to you, if you reject and
throw out his enemies and yours, which are sins,” Who will be able to sleep if they
place this light before your eyes? And therefore many with unfortunate counsel
turn their eyes from the light and they do not want to receive or hear the words of
God by having the one who will make their damaged wills taste bad. And others
even more hardened prefer evil to the truth and to the one whom it is spoken.
And as one who is sound asleep and does not want them to remember him, he
extinguishes the light that they put before his eyes and is angry with the one who
put it there. These people, worthy of being wept over with tears of blood from the
heart, have made an agreement with sin and hell, and it caused them such great
sorrow about the one who wants to separate from his evil ways that they neither
want him to have the truth nor justice, honesty or shame, not even the one who
said it. They live in darkness; and every man that does evil avoids the light and
does not seek to come to it (cf. Jn 3:20) - says St. John- since their great evils do
not show. Oh deceived and unfortunate men! Take another piece of advice since
the first one is of value to you. The Son of God has said: the things that you
preached in the dark will be proclaimed upon the rooftops (cf. Lk 12:3); and you have ordered that all the works of the night, which are sins, are publicly known on the day of judgment where they will be examined and condemned and their ugliness appears in the light of God; and you will not be powerful enough to annul these words nor stop what has been ordained by God. How will you answer me? Rise up, rise up, you who are sleeping among the dead and Christ will enlighten you; that the dawn is born and now is the time for walking about.

I wonder if there is, by chance someone to whom this admonition seems bad. Before he can be thankful for it, he must know what is important to him; but he will hear it and not love it, because he hopes that he will finish certain business matters or that he will first enjoy what he likes (as they say), and he will sleep all this time and afterwards remember it. Man, who made you god that you want the role of God since our Lord said: Do you not wish to know the time and moment that the Father appointed? (cf. Acts 1:7) How do you know you will reach that time that you promise yourself? You do not have certitude that you will last until night and you risk your salvation over the uncertainty of life. And now that you know that you were to correct yourself, who are so stupid that being captive in the power of the Turks, with terrible treatment and every day in danger of losing your head, you may respond to the one who then wants to redeem you: “I do not want to leave so quickly, even from here for two or three years,” for no other purpose except by being fond of some evil woman or something similar to her?

Brother, do not be more imprudent that the little children, and the infidels and the animals that if they fall in a well or in filthy mud, not only do they give a
hand to the one who helps them to get out, but they even call out to the one who will help them. St. Augustine wept for some time about this delay that he had had when he was in sin and said: “You called, me, Lord and you said to me: *arise you who are sleeping, and come forth from among the dead.* But I, Lord, did not respond except with the words of a sleeping man: “Wait for me a little bit. Then, I will get up.” But how long was that little bit, and then he never came; and so I am delaying my living in you, but I was not growing in dying to myself.” St. Augustine complains about this; and if God gives you light and some time he draws you out from among the sleeping and dead, then you will also weep because you sinned and because in sinning you did not raise yourself up with the help that God promised you, when he reached out his hand to heal you. Oh what knife of sorrow pierces the heart of the Christian when he remembers that, being able to serve our Lord, he has served the devil! We have an example in the same St. Augustine, who said: “Lord, you thundered from above with a strong voice and said: *Let there be light.* And the light was made in my heart and I saw the darkness in which I had been lying and I was scared and said: “Woe, Woe because of that blindness when I did not know you; Woe because of that time when I did not love you! Late have I known you, beauty so ancient; late have I known you, beauty so new.” Now you may not feel the evil in which you are like a crazy man nor one who is drowsy; but if God has given you salvation, you will give some sighs of grave sorrow for the blows that you gave yourself for being without wisdom. And the principal sign that one has that God is near to his soul, it is as if his heart speaks: “Lord, I regret how late I have known you.” Well, why do you put off, brother, what is certain since it fulfils you so much? And you do not know
if you permit it now, whether afterwards you will it; and if you had it, it will be more difficult because the evil habit that you have acquired and the sins you commit from now on, will put you in greater difficulty since the greater sins deserve greater punishment and the evil habit is very difficult to remove.

Now you have a good preparation; roar in your heart and say: “When will be the end of my ugliness and abominations? I have had enough of this food, although it may be good and even if I am not done offending God, you have not been eating food, but instead real poison for many years? If I do not put an end to my evils, woe to me that hell is my house! (Job 17:13) And if some day I have to leave them and approach God, why do I not do it immediately since the remedy is more certain and the difficulty less, and the benefit much greater without comparison? I do not want to keep these pigs any more, that even if I leave them, I do not have enough to eat. I want to raise myself up, go to my Father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I am not worthy of being called your son; treat me as your day laborer. (cf. Lk 15:18)

Has the dawn come upon you? The favor is from the Virgin

Brother, if that vigor and those motives go about stirring your soul, understand that the light has dawned on you, that is, the preparation for coming to the state of grace; understand that the favor of the Virgin Mary who has obtained prevenient grace walks through your heart, signified by herself so then you may prepare to receive the grace of God that he may place you in his friendship. It is not for man to put himself in the state of grace, neither is preparing himself for it so that God may place him; the pardon of our sins is the
gift of God; his gift is a *repentant and humble heart* (Ps 50:19) with the purpose of true amendment. This disposition moves the human heart by having asserted that he may be in his sins and vices and makes him turn his eyes to God and to fear that which he had previously feared a little bit.

*My beloved-* says the Husband- *put his hand through the hole of the gate and my womb trembled and my depths trembled when he touched me.* (Cant 5:4) This is not a cold thing, which is felt in the heart of a man whom God has touched; he makes him tremble no matter how strengthened he may be, and to humble himself although he may be proud and to make him so pliant and so fully confused that although they may ask him to speak, he will not know what to respond.

And this is the gift that this blessed little girl obtains for us; she who is born as the dawn and as we have said is the Mediatrix between the obscurity of the night and the light of the sun. Oh, who was so lucky that he has a book where all the sinner's names have been written for whom she had interceded so that they might leave the obscurity of the night and receive the light of grace! Who will tell us about the lost souls God gained through this little girl who has been born today? Just as Eve failed to help the first Adam in what pertained to the service of God, so this little girl has been created so that she may help the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ, in order to help him redeem and gather the souls for whom he shed his blood. *He died for all,* (2 Cor 5:15) as St. Paul says, and she is the *dawn, moon and sun,* that is born for all; and only that one will not enjoy her who wants to flee from his light to the deep caves and darkness of his sins.

Brother, have confidence in this Holy Virgin that if you desire to call out to her
with prayers, to do services for her, to implore her mercy and her role as intercessor, you will feel that she is neither deaf to hear you nor will your prayers nor her service be in vain.

God is very powerful and willingly uses his power in drawing out souls from sin. And it is written in Job: *He will free you from the narrow mouth and from the well that does not have a floor.* (cf. Job 36:16) Keep guard, brother, guard yourself from the narrowness of desperation; may your heart not be narrowed with distrust because of the multitude of the sins you have committed. Pray to the Lord what David says: *May the storm of water not sink me and the well not close its mouth over me.* (cf. Ps 68:16) No matter how much you have sinned, you may not distrust the mercy of God nor allow yourself to tighten up, nor think that with her favor the departure from the well will be impossible, as narrow as it may be and although it may have no floor; because he who falls into mortal sin falls from there into another and afterwards into another and into others; and not if it is because the kind hand of God holds him so that he will not go down anymore since sinning does not have a floor nor a foundation where it stops.

You may not emphasize to me that your sins are many because a drop of blood that the Son of God shed is more powerful if you seek to benefit from it than are all your sins in order to condemn you. Do not say to me: “Father, how will I change my life since I am accustomed to evil and it appears impossible for me to stop living as I live? What is written is: *He who throws oil onto the yoke will rot the yoke* (cf. Is 10:27); and with the little grace that the Lord will throw into your heart, this yoke will be relieved of the evil habit that subjected you, and
as a heavy load it carried you where it wanted. And if the devil has captured you and you want to fight with him and escape from his tyranny, you may think that he is stronger than you. Do not lose courage since it is written: *Perchance the captive one will be free from the hand of strength? Or the prey will be taken from the vigorous one? Since I say to you- God says- that although this may not be possible by human force, with the favor of my arms the captive one will be freed by a hand of strength, and the one the vigorous one seized and caught will be removed from him.* (cf. Is 49:24-25) Do not have, brother, those anxieties; because a little girl who has been born for you has crushed the head of the devil and so not only in her, but in the souls of sinners. She is born for you today for your consolation and healing; place her as an intercessor between you and God; cry out your faults and sins and, as a true Mother, she will come to you, heal you and console you.

**Imitate the Virgin who grew from light into light**

And if God shows you so much mercy that after your evil life and obscurity, the light of the dawn may give birth to you, do not stop there; imitate the Virgin who grew from light into light; and after the break of dawn, after your good beginnings, grow in the light of the moon so that as your past life was an example of obscurity and a cause that others may sin, now it may be light to bring those who are in darkness to the service of God and they will consider how you also were so and now you are without them. If you begin to serve God, begin from the truth, begin with courage, and begin perfectly. Look at how there is no man in the affairs of the world who, if he can have much, has little and if he can invest
his money where he gains a hundred, he is not content with fifty. Have a holy
greed of being rich in the true and eternal riches; since those who have a vain
greed and do a lot of jobs to fill their chests, purses, and laps with a little manure
and pure vanity, that they do not make even one hair better in God's sight nor will
it free them on the terrible day of the judgment of God; rather, it will be for them
more burdensome and that which they thought here was profit and gain it will
put them in greater tightness.

Great is the deceit of the lukewarm people in the service of God who by
avoiding a few small difficulties fall into many greater ones. Because if they place
in a balance the works that they do which serve God with devotion and put the
axe to the root of their passions to uproot them and cut them off with the knife of
the word of God and with the imitation of the life and death of Jesus Christ, the
works are much less burdensome with no comparison to the works which the
lukewarm do who are content with living carelessly in what touches upon their
development and who are content with a lazy life that only takes into account the
concern of not committing a mortal sin, and even that is very careless.

These fall continually into serious venial sins that are the cause of so much
sadness; and from there sometimes they fall into mortal sins which are the bitter
fruit of all sin; and they do not rejoice in the perfect victory over their enemies,
nor feel the pleasure of a pure conscience, nor the strong hope that rejoices in the
depths of the inheritance of heaven, nor in the sweet fruits of divine love, which
makes the works that are suffered for love of him sweeter than the pleasures that
the sins of the world give. He did not lie who said: "Sweeter are the tears of the
penitents than the delights of kings,” and if weeping for the love of God surpasses the pleasures of the world, where will we be able to rejoice with God?

Brother, go forward; do not forgive yourself nor let any difficulty seem harsh to you so that the grace of God may grow in you. Since, just as you discovered the strong and gentle Virgin so that you could leave the obscurity of the night for the light of dawn, in the same way you will then find her so that you may grow in the good life that reached you through her prayer. And you will be happy if some day you come to such blessedness in this life so that not only will you have the light of the dawn and the light of the moon, but also you will be like the light of the sun. Then your heart will burn most sweetly in divine love.

Then you will delight in imitating our Lord Jesus Christ in his holy life and in his death and you will know well his most blessed law, and you will feel any sin a lot, no matter how small it is and you will not deal with how much you will not offend him as how to serve him better and better, and have as the rule of your life his holy pleasure, and from there you will go on to being fearful of your enemies, and you will experience in yourself what David said: *I have abhorred wickedness and I have detested it and I have loved your law.* (Ps 118:163)

Since the good Christian truly loves God, he is to look at this sign for himself. As when they invite him with insipid food, which his stomach detests and rejects; in this way his soul *detests and abhors* the sin as a disgusting thing which is an abomination. In this way, sins are overcome and destroyed since true hatred for them is their own death.

And if you discover yourself weak in this fight and find some pleasure, though it may be small, in some sin, then raise your eyes to this holy Virgin,
begging her to obtain salvation for your corrupted palate so that you may know as
good what God knows to be good and evil what God knows to be evil, since
although she is a woman, she is a strong woman and that same one who is the
same that Solomon desired to find when he said: *Who will find a strong woman
for me?* (Prov 31:10) But when it was revealed to him that this one who is born
today was to be born, he said to her in the person of God: *My neck is like a tower
of David, on which are hung one thousand shields and all the weapons of the
strong ones.* (cf. Cant 4:4)

**Obtain for us, Most Holy Virgin, grace and glory**

Oh little girl forever blessed and the one closest to God made man of the
many there are in heaven and on earth! He is the head and the thing closest to
him is his neck because you are so advanced in virtue and holiness and much
more: *the tower of David* in spiritual height. From you are hung *one thousand
shields and all kinds of weapons so that the strong ones might fight* and so that
the weak ones might become strong. (cf. 1 Sam 18:17) And the one who will look
at your life will find the weapons that he needs to fight the battles of God, if he
would want to take them. The children have to look to you, the young ones and
the old ones; those who are married or not married, the greater and the lesser
ones. There is no virtue that you do not teach or difficulty in which you do not
console and encourage them because you were the most holy of the saints and the
most industrious of all. You are placed as the means of our healing in the
presence of God; and in your hands, Lady, we place our wounds so that you may
heal them, since you are the nurse at the hospital of the mercy of God where the
wounded are healed. And although we have great confusion and shame of presenting before such great purity the stench of our abominable wounds, we believe that God endowed you with so much mercy that in your cleanness and purity you do not disdain or reject spontaneously the wounded sinners but however great their need, so much more your mercy moves you to come to their aid, conforming yourself to your blessed Son, \textit{who did not come to call the just, but, rather, sinners to repentance}. (cf. Mt 9:13)

To you, Lady we present our sins so that you may destroy them before the throne of God and obtain pardon from them. To you we also present our deeds, though full of many defects, and in your holy hands we place our hearts so that you, as another Rebekah (cf. Gen 27:14) and much greater than she, know very well what is pleasing to your blessed Son; you prepare our hearts and our works so that they may be delightful to his Majesty, and by having you as our defender against sins and an advocate for us in our riches, the Lord may receive them. He finds them in your hands that offer them, not looking at our hands that do them. Most holy Virgin, obtain for us the grace so that with it and by it we may deserve to see you in glory.
Introduction: Who is this one?

The words of the subject are a wondrous question that the angels had when they saw this holy Virgin leave the womb of holy, old Anna, her mother. The angels themselves marveled at seeing such a new thing and that such a blessed fruit left a sterile womb so that it did not seem like an earthly event, but a heavenly one. Seeing her beauty, her grace, her golden countenance, her resplendent eyes and above all the beauty of her soul which was already holy before she was born and fearful that in this world there was such a thing, they say: Who is this?, etc, Who is this that comes out as a gracious morning? (Cant 6:9) Who is this one who is not born in the night of sin nor was she conceived in it, but as resplendent as the dawn without any clouds and as the midday sun? Who is this one though she is not wholly born, and already she makes us marvel and places us in fear of what she foretells in her countenance and much more of what she is to be afterwards? Who is this one, whose look gladdens, whose glance consoles, and whose name encourages? Who is this one, as joyful and gentle for us and as the demons are so dreadful and frightening for others, that in hearing her name, they seem to fall on their arrows which they are unable to carry but rather flee frightened of it? Who is this one for whom God has done such great things and has protected them for her? Who is this one? The angels ask.
This little girl is a wonderful child, ladies and gentlemen; she seems like a tiny little girl and must be very great. Her perfections are great since the angels admire her and are fearful of her and they cannot understand the great depth of her perfections. It is written about her: She ascended above the cherubim and flew over the wings of the winds and the knowledge of the angels. (cf. Ps 17:11)

And since the angels admire her and do not understand her, what will we poor ones do? Oh what can our clumsy tongues can say about her praises when the very elegant ones are found very inadequate in speaking about her?

Hear what the elegant tongue of St. Augustine says: What will I say about you, poor nature, when, whatever I will have said about you, it may be a lesser praise than your dignity may deserve? And in another place: What is so little to us, that we will respond with a small action in the praises of Mary, although all the members will be tongue tied, will no one be sufficient to praise her?

Likewise Jerome: What little bit of water will I bring to the sea? What limited little pebble will I toss up to the mountain? And in another place: As I reveal the truth, whatever can be said in human words is lesser than the praise of heaven because it has been preached with divine and angelic eloquence and praised by public commendations. Indeed it was foretold by the prophets, by the patriarchs. It has been indicated beforehand with forms and mysteries, having been shown and exhibited by the Evangelists, and venerably saluted by the angels.

Who will speak in praise of that little girl whom such great ones begin to praise, and above all of these great ones, God himself? These are their words: How beautiful you are my friend, how beautiful you are; and you are total
beauty, my friend and there is no stain in you! (Cant 4:1-7) O Blessed little girl!
And what will we perplexed ones do since we are few and unworthy to praise you?
And on the other hand we are obliged to praise you and say: “Blessed” as you
have prophesied it: they will call me blessed, etc., (Lk 1:48) and thank you for the
great things that from you and through you come to us and we hope that they will
fall upon us. And therefore, taking the advice of St. Jerome who says: Although
no one is suitable for this, he cannot stop praising Mary with his words etc. How
will we be able to go on existing without praising the one to whom we owe so
much, and whom all the creatures praise? We will certainly not abandon it; that
the morning is the Virgin, as our subject says. And in the morning all things
rejoice. Men rejoice, travelers are encouraged, birds sing; I wonder what this one
will do, even though he may be a sinner, that being born on this clear morning
and golden dawn, he will not sing, not rejoice, not praise the one who created
her? We will certainly sing and although unworthy, we will praise, this Virgin and
the One who created her, that is, the same One to whom she gave birth. And let
us say: “Happily, the dawn may be born and He may be blessed, who created such
a beautiful dawn! May such a dawn be honored and served!”

Three Attributes of the Dawn

Who is this one who is born as the dawn? (Cant 6:9) This is certainly a
great question: Who is this one? And for the ones who ask who are the angels,
and what they ask ought to be very great and nothing will be enough to respond
to them; as for whom it is asked, she is the most excellent one who God has
created or will create; so the question Who is she is a difficult thing to say?
Therefore, before we occupy ourselves in understanding what the angels said about her, let us not say to them who she may be. Go beyond them to the One who created her that he can tell them who the one whom we do not know is.

She is born as the morning. Why as the morning? For many reasons, *Jericho fell to the ground at the break of day* (Jos 6:15); so there seems to be many reasons that this most holy little girl is born on such a day as today, the dawn. And for the sake of not being too long, let us take three qualities of the dawn that our Lady resembles. The first is that she is the announcer and the bearer of the day. The second is that she is the bearer of the dew; the third is that she is the one who hates darkness. The morning has these three properties. And this clear dawn that is born today has the same qualities.

**Messenger and Mother of the Sun**

Consider the first one, since she was the messenger of that shining sun that was the birth of the sun of justice, Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Not only was she a messenger, but also a mother by appearing every dawn that she is said to be the mother of the sun. She brought to us that saving day, the day of pardon, the day of rest when her blessed Son walked through this world: all that time was day because a day is all the time that the sun moves over the earth. As he was the sun and light, accordingly he says: *While I am in the world for a short time, I am the light of the world,* (Jn 9:5) it follows that all that time which Jesus Christ is present is day.

O Blessed Day, and so desired by many prophets and patriarchs and only seeing him in spirit gave them great joy, according to what the same Redeemer
Abraham rejoiced that he might see my day, he saw and rejoiced! (cf. Jn 8:56) He rejoiced and the prophets rejoiced in seeing this day of salvation, of joy, of grace; what the Lord did so that we may praise and rejoice in him. (Ps 117:24) Since for such a day as this one of the incarnation of God, such a morning as the Blessed Virgin is required. If that day is the day of salvation, she is the saving dawn; if it is a day of mercy, she is the mother of mercy; if it is a day of grace, she is the mother of grace.

Do you see how well the dawn agrees with the day? And this is what St. Bernard said: As the dawn is becoming intensely red in the world, so you advanced Oh Mary! You preceded the splendor of the true sun, with the radiance of such great holiness, as truly the day of salvation, the day of propitiation, the day that the Lord made from so much brightness was worthy to be transformed. There was such great holiness in you, most Blessed Virgin that you were the worthy morning of such a day. O Blessed Virgin! It is written of you: As the light of the dawn grows red with the eastern sun in the clear morning. (2 Sam 23:4) Thus it is Lady that your light shines as the light of dawn, when the sun is born without clouds.

The sun was born from your womb without clouds, when you conceived and gave birth to Christ our Redeemer, who was the sun, without sin and without sorrow; however, he did not burn you, as you were prefigured in the image of the blackberry bush that Moses saw (cf. Ex 3:2) and by Daniel, who saw a stone cut off from the mountain without hands. (Dan 2:34) Although Christ our God went out from your womb made man, he who is spoken of as a rock in Scripture, was not in becoming man made by the hand of man, but all was from the Holy Spirit.
and you. Lady, you are, with much reason, the dawn because you are the messenger and mother of the sun.

**The Mother of Dew**

Lady, you resemble the dawn more because, at dawn, the dew falls on the fields, dampens the earth, the tempers the heat and preserves the grass in its freshness, as that blessed dew rained and fell on you Lady, that dampens our dryness with grace and makes our souls fruitful. And while this dew did not remove the verdure of virginity from you even though it was your fruit, it did not remove the flower from you. In you alone the fruit is the flower and the flower is the fruit (cf. Sir 24:23) *as it has been written: Flowers are my fruit, and: I am the flower of the field.* (Cant 2:1) Soon the flower and the fruit are one in you.

Do you want a figure that Christ descended as? Read the book of Numbers and you will discover that manna descended at dawn on the sons of Israel. O Blessed Virgin! It was said that through you and in you the Eternal Father sent us his blessed Son and he sends him to us every day for our justification. God blesses us as it is written through you and in you, who are the morning, prefigured in the fight of Jacob with the angel, who was blessed in the morning: *“Dismiss me now since dawn ascended,* (cf. Gen 32:26) said Jacob; as he might say: give me your blessing now since this blessed Virgin is born.

Do you desire another thing that came in the morning? Pharaoh and all his army were drowned in the sea in the morning. Who were these but the demons and sins that are drowned in the waters of tears that the sinner sheds when this
morning is born in his soul? O blessed dawn in whom this sacred dawn is born and how blessed she is!

O ladies and gentlemen! I wonder what we did so that on such a day as today this dawn was born into the world as she is born today in your hearts. Woe to us if we do not hold on to her! And what will we do if we do keep her contented and served? Who will free us from the wrath of the Almighty? If now an armada comes to wound us for our sins, who will make a plea to God that he will not draw out of its sheath the sword of justice for the great sins that we have committed against him? To whom will we call in our tribulations if we have made her angry? Oh how unfortunate is one who is an enemy against her! And what does it profit him since he has no favors from her, nor eats, nor drinks, nor walks? Please God, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no one here who is angry at this Lady, nor is he bad to her.

**Enemy of the Darkness**

And besides: do you want to see if you are good or evil in her eyes? Look at the third quality of the dawn which is that it is the enemy of darkness. Now you know that this darkness is that of which it is written: *The way of the impious is dark* (Prov 4:19) *and men love darkness more than light*. (Jn 3:19) In good spanish: “these are the sins that our Lady abhors above all things.” And do you know how much? No matter what kind of servant he may be who walks in her service, either as a pilgrim, or as one who prays more Hail Mary’s and burns more candles in her honor, if he is in sin, in no way does she desire to see him nor receive service from him, but she shuns him and has him for an enemy. Do not
think, ladies and gentlemen, that I tell you this to scare you and that it is not really true. There is great evil, but there is truth; she speaks it herself. So that you may believe it better and not deceive yourselves, read Proverbs eight, that chapter in which the holy church speaks of the Holy Virgin. Listen: *I pray against the arrogant and the proud and the crooked way and a treacherous mouth.* (Prov 8:13) Each one of you, examine your conscience; and if you are in lust, keep in mind that you are cursed by our Lady; if you are indifferent to your neighbor, you are cursed by her; if you walk in vanity and pride, in speaking evil, if you have two tongues, you are cursed from those blessed lips. The tongue that God gave you is only for speaking well and praising God. If you speak evil, you have two tongues.

Oh unfortunate sin! It is enough that the dove that is without bitterness, who does not know how to be anything but merciful, becomes angry and seeks evil for us. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen; by the love of this Lady (since we are valued in being her devoted ones), by being good to her, let us leave behind our sins; let us examine our consciences. Let him who is evil be reconciled with his neighbor; in regard to the flesh, let him leave behind the bait of lust so that he may not be an enemy of this Lady. Oh, he who is in sin is miserable and worthy of being wept for, since he is angry with our Lady! How does she know well what you consume? And how can you sleep? How can you walk, being separated from this Lady? Woe! Let a provincial or bishop curse you and you would be afraid, but you do not fear the curse and anger of our Lady?

Call to this Lady, beg her pardon for your sins; kiss those holy feet, say that from now on you desire to amend your ways and do it so that you will be friends
with her. She wants your friendship, because my delights are with the sons of men. (Prov 8:31) May love move you with that love which she asks you to go to her: Come to me all you who desire me and you will be filled with my grace. (cf. Sir 24:26) Leave those that are in the party of the devil; leave them behind, those of you that are in sin; for, if you are with them, you will not be able to come to me. Leave behind your sins that you may increase in my fruits; which mean, according to my examples, my virtues. This is a very good devotion to the Virgin, ladies and gentlemen, to imitate her virtues; for love of her, one may become chaste, another become merciful. And especially it is proper to women who follow her in being chaste, honest, silent, not very adorned with trinkets nor full of themselves, those are the things that appear evil to our Lady. And this is good devotion. And while one might not be good within, do not think that by whatever devotions she might have that she will appease our Lady. This is because she is the dawn, and in being light, she is an enemy of the darkness of sins.

Conclusion

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, let us flee the works of darkness and let us put on the weapons of light. (cf. Rom 13:12) So that when we pray our Hail Mary's, she will not face us and say: “Behave you who are in lust; behave you who have been indifferent to your neighbor; behave you who seek evil to your neighbor.” No matter what it costs, brothers, although it may do us harm, everything should be postponed in order to obtain the friendship of our Lady by becoming her sons and recognizing her as our Mother, since she may hear us in our tribulations, and speak to God for us. Oh blessed is the one who was good to
her every single time, even though every other one may be negligent of her. And
unfortunate is the one who, by a trifle of sin, desires to be evil to her, although he
has all riches. He who possesses her has life, as she says; he who has her, has
salvation (cf. Prov 8:35) and joy; he has more than he can say.

Oh blessed Mother of God: how well employed is any work for you and for
seeing you at the right hand of your Son! What hardship, Lady, will we not
assume for you? I truly think that one great part of the glory of the blessed is to
see the most peaceful Mother of God in heaven. What will we do Lady, in order to
see you? How will we serve you? If in leaving behind our sins we do a service to
you, on the part of the many that are here, I say that we leave them behind; that it
grieves our heart for having committed them; that we do not want to commit
more before seeing God, and you alone, Lady. That last day, let us see you on your
throne, and go to kiss your hands full of hyacinths; and let us see how beautiful
you are, how delightful to love, how joyful for consolation, how sweet for
rejoicing. In so much Lady, our duty will be to think of you, to speak of you, to
follow you in your life and look at how you did them and intercede for us. Our
mouth is to bless you, our heart is to give you thanks; we have given all in your
service until we go to where you are, Lady. You are the glory to which he may
bring us along.
Sermon 62

This is the Honor: To be in the Spiritual Lineage of Jesus Christ

The Birth of the Virgin-September 8

Introduction

_Let he who thirsts_- says our Redeemer Jesus Christ through the mouth of St. John the Evangelist- _come and I will give him to drink from the fountain of living water, free of charge_ (cf. _Jn 7:37; Rev 22:17_). Jesus Christ our Redeemer was pleased that we thirst for and desire him instead of a payment for what he offered; he does not want more from us; he is only pleased with this: that we are thirsty and desirous. God takes pride in and is driven by this greatly and demands that he be called the Desired One; because God is given to no one except to the one who desires him and is denied to no one who desires him. Do you think that before he came to be incarnate and aid us in our needs and become man for us that he was desired so little? What about the sighs? What about the cries? “When will he come? When will this hour be reached when he who is to help us comes?”

He will hope a very little bit, says God: _Still, in a short time I will move heaven and earth, sea and dry land and the Desired One of all the people will come when the nations are united_

I think that on this day, great news was sought by the angels in heaven. What about the feasts, what about the delights, what about the rejoicing that I believe they did? What about the disturbed and dismayed hearts that were consoled and encouraged with the hope of the Desired One, already seeing the time arrive in which he was to come with the birth of the one who was to give
birth to him? I think that today the prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled spiritually and truly to the letter. And immediately the king that you seek and the angel of the covenant that you wish will come to his own Temple (Mal 3:1). He will come immediately: he will come quickly, he will not delay; soon he will come to his Temple; now the maiden is born who is to give birth to him. How much news the angels sought from the fathers of limbo! What pleasures and joys are happening in the heavens? What about the consolations for the servants of God and for the holy men on earth that have received this blessed news? Today is born the maiden from whom the Desired One of the nations is to be born.

-How does her birth concern us? The birth of the Virgin Mary has already passed. Indeed, she is not to be born again for us. -Do you think that the favors of God are over? No. If we are faithful in giving thanks to God in this life for the gifts that he gave us with this little girl, this maiden, we would feel the birth of the Virgin in our hearts today. What about the joys similar to those of heaven that our souls would feel? If there is someone here who will walk eagerly to meet God: “O Lord, may I die from the desire of you. It has been so many years that I have traveled searching for you and I am not able to find you. Reveal yourself to me now, Lord, whoever you are. O Lord, I desire you so greatly and I cannot find you! Give me as a sign that the Virgin has been born today, so that just as her birth was a sign that Jesus Christ our Lord was near, so now through her intercession may we obtain grace for speaking about her birth.

Why do you present the history of your lineage, Lord?
This is the book of the generation of Jesus Christ. The glorious evangelist St. Matthew writes these words that are at the beginning of the holy Gospel. They are the foundation for this sermon. (Matt 1:1) They are sung in the Gospel of today’s feast of the birth of the most holy Virgin Mary, our Lady. The book begins with the lineage and genealogy of Jesus Christ. —what does God have to do with lineage? —You are to understand it according to the flesh. (cf. Rom 1:3)

Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and so on. (Mt 1:2) —Lord, why do you command these words to be written, since, on the other hand, you order us to scorn the flesh, lineage and all honors. Manasseh, who made Jerusalem swell up from the blood of the prophets and servants of God, was an idolater who killed them all. Then Ahaz was one even worse than him. In the midst of these two was born a good one, King Hezekiah. Why do you order your lineage to be reported? There are two reasons: first for education in the faith and second for the building up of morals.

The lineage is reported for the faith because it was foretold that the Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah and from the house of David; and because he would not say: “He was not able to be of the house of David since he was not born from the tribe of Judah.” Therefore, it is said, Matthan begot Jacob and Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of the Virgin. (Mt 1:15-16)

—Father, if Jesus Christ is not born from the lineage of Joseph since he is not his son, but rather the son of the Virgin Mary who conceived him by the power of the Holy Spirit, how will this connection be verified speaking only about Joseph without reporting the lineage of Jesus Christ who comes from the tribe of Judah and the house of David? —The response is that Joseph and Mary were of
the same tribe since at that time members of one tribe were not married to one from another tribe; and so by reporting the lineage of Joseph and saying that he married the Virgin from whom Jesus Christ was born, it is clear that she comes from the tribe of Judah and the house of David. You see here that doubt is eliminated.

-How? Were not the sons of Levi married with another tribe? And St. Elizabeth, I know that she was a relative of our Lady and was not of the same tribe as Zechariah. As a result, it is not proven that Jesus Christ comes from the tribe of Judah by proving that Joseph was from it and that he married our Lady since it could be that they were from different tribes. How will we know what it was? -The response is clear: although they take spouses from another tribe, the people know this and everyone knew who they were. How much more, on the other hand, the Evangelist says: And Joseph went up from Galilee and the city of Nazareth to the city of David, which was called Bethlehem: because he was from the house and family of David. (Lk cf. 2:4) -The conclusion is that it was so well known that Joseph and our Lady were not only from one tribe, but also from the same lineage and relatives that it was enough for the evangelist to say that Joseph was of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, without making mention of this about our Lady since it was not customary to report the lineage of women. And in saying that Joseph was the husband of our Lady, it is clear that Jesus Christ came from the tribe of Judah and the house of David. Now let us move beyond the things that St. Paul says are in myths and endless genealogies. (1 Tim 1:4)

The second reason why the Lord orders his lineage to be told is to build up morals. It is not important that these kings and lords and patriarchs who are
recounted in the Gospel were relatives of Jesus Christ according to the flesh, and for the Virgin, it was of little importance to her being the Mother of God. It is not much to be of the lineage of Jesus Christ according to the flesh, for many evil persons were listed in it, but it was also not enough for the relatives to be good to have this relationship; nothing good clung to them and nothing evil was inherited by Jesus even though he came from so many evil kings. *I do not accept the glory of men, etc.* (cf. Jn 5:41); before they received the glory of the Lord. And so it was not to be said that Jesus descended from them, but rather he rose up from them, because if his relatives had honor and nobility, they have it through him; and the closer they are to this kinship makes them be nobler since they are closer to the measuring stick of goodness. Then the closer they were to the lineage, they were to go up and not descend from him, even though he is last in order.

The genealogy is not to be understood according to the flesh. One time, St. Paul said in a letter to the Corinthians: “what is the means to remove the veil from the sons of Israel that they have before their face when they read Sacred Scripture, which remained from the time of Moses who spoke to them with a veil placed over his face so that they could not see its brightness?” *When Israel returns to the Lord, the veil will be removed; however, the Lord is Spirit.* (cf. 2 Cor 3:17) Since St. Paul says that this is the means: Let Israel be converted to God and “converted” to the Spirit. The Law, so full of ceremonies, the Ark, the law so hidden from the outside that had so much light from the inside. –Just as Moses, whose face radiated so much light that he had a veil to cover it- was converted to the Spirit; do not look at the outside, but rather the mysteries that are enclosed within. The Lord commanded: “Do not eat pork, eat this lamb and in this way.”
(cf. Lev 11:7; Dt 14:8) Let it be returned to God and to the Spirit; when it is understood that not eating pork symbolizes not possessing anything foul such as things of the flesh, and then eating lamb refers to things of the Spirit.

Since you do not love the flesh; you abhor it above all and you order us to avoid it, what moved you Lord, to order us to report your lineage? Let us convert the lineage of the flesh to the lineage of the Spirit, the generation of the flesh to the generation of the Spirit and we will see what moved the Evangelist to tell us the lineage of Jesus Christ. What is the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ? Praise that spiritual lineage, O sinner that I am of that one and am jealous of that one; not the one that descends from Abraham, from Isaac, from Jacob, from David, and from so many kings and patriarchs. Do not be envious of one who descends according to the flesh of such nobility, but be jealous of being in the spiritual generation. That is what you are to have a lot of; of that you ought to be very wealthy, not by being his relative, as close as that might be. Did Jesus not say it one time when he was preaching and his mother and brothers were at the gate and someone said to him: Behold your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to talk to you? And then Jesus responded: Who are my mother and my brothers? He who would do the will of my Father, etc. (cf. Mt 12:4) And another time he responded in a similar way to the women who said: Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you, etc. (Lk 11: 27-28) A nobleman is one who is of the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ; he is an honorable nobleman.
What is the spiritual meaning of “Abraham begot Isaac?”

Let us try to understand that Abraham begot Isaac in the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ. Do you wish to be in the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ? Do you wish to be counted among those of his generation? Pay attention. The way to be in this generation is told in this Gospel, and the incidents of those who are of this lineage are described, and those that you are to join if you want to be part of this generation.

Who is first in the lineage of Abraham? You cannot understand the fleshly meaning; leave that behind. What do you understand for one such as Abraham? St. Paul understands him in this way: The Father of many nations, etc. (Rom 4:8; Gen 17:4); the Father of believers. Then absorb as much as a believer can. What does the first one who wants to be Abraham say? If you are outside of this spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ, the first rock that you are to set in place, the first foundation is faith; if you are to believe, you are must unite yourselves to what God would say to you, no matter how little or how much. It is enough that God says it to you in order for you to think that it will be just as God promised, without fail.

Abraham was so old, he was so unbelieving for having to hope for a son (Ávila tells the story of Isaac's conception and birth).

Distrust your own strengths

How does it seem to you? What are the sources of this lineage? Abraham and Sarah are the first ones to enter into the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ.
What does it mean that from two old people, from two weak ones, from those of low extraction, from the harassed, from the discouraged, and with no vigor or strength, from the “feeble;” Jesus Christ is born from them; from them the Son is born. Thus it seems to me that it means the Son is from the friendship of God. He who is to be in his love and in his grace; he is the one to be born of the old, the weak, the discouraged, those distrustful of themselves and those of low extraction. The fantasy takes away the natural order; we do not go to heaven except by grace. Although you may be wiser than Solomon, although you may be richer than Midas, although you may be purer than Jenocrates, none of that is of value to you. Do not trust what the world values. You can be distrustful of your little strength. You know that you are nothing. Do not exalt yourself because of your knowledge. Cling to the mercy of God. Do not ask for alms or strength or merits. Say: “Lord I cannot reach you without your help. Is he not able to come to you? I cannot go to you unless you give me the strength to do it. Help me. Protect me, you, who are my every consolation, my every defense. In your hands is my strength. You alone can help me.

We ought to pray in this way; to confess because of our weakness and discouragement, sterility and wretchedness, because we do not know nor are we able, nor do we have value, nor are we to enter nor are we able by our nature to go to heaven. If you are exalted and a bit self-satisfied, because neither the sky nor the earth is yours, nor because of your chastity, nor your humility nor patience you will never enter the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ. You will be able to enter only in this way: humble yourself, belittle yourself, not trusting in your own strength. These are the poor of spirit (Mt 5:3), because to these belongs the
kingdom of God. Solomon said: “I do not want too many riches because by possessing them, they will deceive me and I will deny you, Lord.” (cf. Prov 30:9) Say instead: Of what value to the Pharisee was his wealth since he left the Temple condemned with it because he trusted in his own strength? Was not poverty of greater value to the Publican because with it he left justified, since he did not trust in himself and his strength? (cf. Lk 18:10) The poor man is an heir of the kingdom of heaven, because he sees himself as nothing. He does not dare to appear before God, because he knows himself to be wretched and sees his littleness. He says: “Lord I am not worthy to appear before your reverence. How can someone so lowly appear before such incomprehensible goodness and grandeur? I am not worth anything nor capable of doing anything; you Lord, are my entire reward, my strength, my wealth; you, Lord are all my support, all the good of my soul. Then, among the weak, the feeble, and the discouraged ones, Jesus Christ is born. One enters into your presence by lowliness, O Lord.

-Did not Abraham possess more faith? –Yes, he was very confident. He had the greatest faith in God. If you do not have trust in God, it does not matter if you see yourself as lowly. It is not enough that you are discouraged about your strength if you are not confident in God nor think that there is in God power and mercy to strengthen you and heal you. It is not enough that you feel little about yourself but that you feel very highly about God. Thus it was that Abraham, very weak, lowly and distrustful of himself was also very encouraged, animated, secure and confident in God.

God came to the oaks of Mamre one day and he said that in a year Abraham would have a son. –Was this old and weak married couple to have sons,
Lord? Yes, they are to have them indeed. This couple, who appears dead are more ready for the tomb than for begetting children now after so many years that they have lived and have never begotten a son; now are they to have a son? –Yes. Abraham’s wife laughed a little about what God told him; she took it almost as if it were a joke. “I have been sterile from my youth, now in my old age I am to conceive? How can this be? (Gen 18:12) Sarah doubted a little, but the strong Abraham believed without the slightest doubt. He did not say to himself: I am old. How is this to be since my wife is sterile?” No. He did not waver at any of this. What did he do? He immediately believed the word of God (Gen 15:6) and he trusted most firmly that there would be no mistake in what God was saying to him.

For us, he says this: If you weep for your miserable state, if you stop to examine your weakness, if you stop and say to yourself, “For thirty years, I have lived each day terribly. I resolve to live well each day, but I never complete it; Today, I fall here; tomorrow, there.” If you stop to consider the times that you have sought to serve God and have never done it, do not be discouraged. It is necessary to know our weakness, but also to have great confidence. It is necessary to know and understand that without God, we have only sorrows. As a holy monk said, “Your temptations to wage war against yourself will never stop, until you truly know that you are nothing in yourself. You know that your help is in God alone and trust that he is there to help you. And you will be sure that you are of no value without God and that you cannot know yourself without him, since you would be what you would not be able to be, as if you would want to empty the large sea with a very small jar drawing out many jars until nothing is left.”
- "Lord I have been very evil. Who will be able to count the times that I have offended you? What about the years I have wasted in offending you? I will not be able to give an account of one hour well spent, but a thousand counts of abominations. If you do not heal me, I will be lost. What is to become of me if you leave me? —You are now good; you have two portions of the faith of Abraham: You are dismayed about yourself and the distrust of your strengths; you see yourself as weak. You are good, but are you therefore to be discouraged? No, but rather you are to trust in the mercy of Jesus Christ who raises up the fallen, who cures you and encourages you that he is to bring you to salvation.

**Living Faith, trust in the mercy of Jesus Christ**

It is good, profitable and necessary to do good works. There is a need to know your weakness and fragility; but if you remain here, it is of no value. —What more is there to have? What? One must have trust and a living faith in God. There is no income as certain as that of those who firmly trust in God. You have to trust, brother that God is to bring you news that your "Sarah" is to have a son. There will be a day in which God will give you grace with which your soul will be comforted; that God will come to that soul, which is so evil, sterile, proud, and lacking in devotion and announce a day in which she (the soul) will have a son who will be called laughter. Someday she will have the consolation of the grace of God; she will be humble, devoted and obedient to her God. What rejoicing the soul is in the habit of doing when humility is turned from pride, when the blind person sees, when one who was once disobedient is now seen as obedient to God!

Then she says: *I am sterile and not bearing children, having migrated and*
having been captured, and who nourished them? I am destitute and alone, and now where are these? (Is 49:21) When the soul is seen as gentle and devoted, a humble, chaste and pure beggar, it says: “What is this? Who has given me these sons? Was I not sterile and blind? Was I not a captive and a foreigner? Was I not proud and unpleasant? What is this? Who has given me sons? Who has begotten me and created these good works?” What is that? It is the great mercy of God that gives so many favors to the soul that it can’t comprehend them all.

-Father, if the angels said to me that there was a son to come to me on a day who would be called laughter, as they said to Abraham, I would be confident; if God had spoken it to me, I would await his promise with trust; but God has never said any of this to me; no one has spoken on his behalf. I do not understand the language. I have felt many of these things in my soul. I will not know how to interpret it nor do I understand it.

-Brother, the weaknesses that you possess are not on the part of God. He has not stopped sending you his messengers. I know that these things are said to men, not to angels. This promise has been made to you and your sons, (Acts 2:39) says St. Peter the Apostle. God is to reveal himself to you and your children and send you his ambassadors to warn you and communicate to you what he wants of you. Tell me, has God never called you? If you feel in your soul a change from evil to good, examining the vanity of this life and seeing how each one perishes, seeing for yourself how quickly you will die and how everything remains here: a saying: “Why do I want to place my hope in a thing that passes so quickly? Who trusts in a something so perishable? Who trusts in a thing that may quickly end?” If you feel this way, it is from God. Our Lord has called you. Were you

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thinking, Christians, that that was not from God? Do you have that awareness so seldom that you think you have enough to think that about yourself? You live deceived; know that inspirations are from God, you do not have the power. *Each one who heard and learned from the Father comes to me.* (cf. Jn 6:45) Were you thinking that this good belonged to you? If you have come to Jesus Christ, it is because you have heard and been shown by the Father. No one comes to Jesus Christ if he is not first called and the Father carries him by entering in his soul and speaking to him in holy inspirations. Those desires are good aims that change that you have turned from evil to good. If you have that word, it comes to you from God. If you have good intentions, you have good thoughts, if your heart walks enflamed with good desires of abandoning the evil life, of reaching God, of serving him and serving yourself, of not offending him, have hope that very quickly you soul will give birth to a son who will be called laughter.

-Father, where is the promise of that thing so I am to trust that the Word of God will not be lacking? –That is total evil, that we may not know it or if we know it, we may forget it. When they baptized you, the promise was made there; baptism is a sign that God has called you to grace. When he took you for a son in holy baptism, a sign was given to you that God would never be absent from you, that he would always help you in all your needs, that he would not stop speaking to you and counseling you in your doubts and sending you angels and messengers who would inspire you on his behalf. Do you think that it is a small thing to be a Christian?

-When did they promise me that God was to give me a son who would be called laughter or that God was to console and recreate my soul and help it in its
needs? – When they baptized you. And if you do not feel this laughter, and if you do not feel this goodness and joy; if the son has not been born to you: it is because you have separated yourself from God; Please, God, that it may not be because of sin, but if you feel the favors of the mercy of God, if you feel what he speaks in your heart, if you know how to be attentive to what he says, hope in him, have firm confidence that his promise will not fail you (since it is not lacking to anyone in this life and no one will complain that God has not fulfilled his promise), in giving you the son whom he promised in baptism.

Well, then, Isaac is born from such as these, the weak and discouraged and they are united with the trusting and strong ones who hope for the promise of God. Of these later an "Isaac" is born; a name which means joy and laughter. God made laughter for me. (cf. Gen 21:6) Tell me, who is that who is born after you have wept in your corner for your sins? What is born after repenting? Joy and laughter are born. He who does not know about weeping does not know anything well. What is born after the trust that you have about our Lord God, who has pardoned you with his mercy? The pleasure that the soul feels is such that it makes it go out of itself. What is born after having been greatly saddened? Much joy is born. The joy that comes after sadness is more secure than that which comes without having sadness precede the joy. Guard yourself from the joy that is not born from true joy; be suspicious of it. That is the condition of our Lord and God, that he does not want to be served by giving happiness nor by consoling anyone without first grieving him and making him sad. The little bit of pride that you may have, that they will make it fall to perceive yourself and weep for unhappiness, it makes you rejoice truly from joy and that you may know it well.
Laughter and joy are born from weeping, sadness, grief, discarding pleasures and trusting in God and the son that is given pertains to the lineage of Jesus Christ.

**Because you are pleasing to God, it is necessary that temptation test you.**

There is probably someone here who is very joyful and happy and encouraged by God, that he has confidence that he is in his grace through his mercy; “God loves me very much; I have been saved! What a gift! What a gift! When there is no man who is able to say.” You do not want this son that much; you are not happy with him! Look at what you are doing; see the great danger in it. Do not be like the mothers who love their children so much and play with them so much and give them so much that they spoil them. Wait and the son will grow and you will see what happens when Isaac has grown. After so many pleasures and joys as God had given Abraham through the birth of his son Isaac, when Abraham thought he was very secure, God called him and said: *Abraham, take your most beloved son Isaac and go the mountain that I will show you because I want you to sacrifice and kill him there.* (cf. Gen 22:2) Take him there. Does this appear to be a necessary blow to you? Never let anyone say: “Lord I am fine and I do not need anything; now I am happy; blessed be God” *Rejoice with fear.* (cf. Ps 2:11) Be humble, rejoice with fear, be moderate in your joy and look at what you have; because the time is coming when God will order you to sacrifice the son. God says, “Sacrifice your joy for me.”

The poor old man went with his son to kill him by hand and sacrifice him to God. O Lord, how much you have wanted to grieve the sad old age, the joys of this man that you order him to sacrifice with his own hands a son that he loves so
much. If evil men would kill him, it would be a shameful thing; but that you, Lord, made his grief stricken old age so happy with the birth of his beloved son and now you order Abraham to kill Isaac? It is certainly a harsh thing, Lord, to tell us: kill your son for me; he who gives you joy and happiness. This happens in the lineage of Jesus Christ our Lord; the same one who consoled you and gave you joy will rise within you great sadness and great trials so that you will lose the joy that he had given you. The same one who gave you consolation will say to you: “Sacrifice your joy for me.”

How happy the apostles sailed in the Sea of Galilee in the boat when Jesus went with them! How content they were, saying “Jesus Christ goes with us, the same one who created the sea, the winds, the heavens and the earth; because of this we are safe so that when a storm may come up, since the Lord of the world goes with us, there is nothing to fear! A wind comes up and the sea begins to be stormy and the waves rise up and soon they cried out to Christ: Lord save us. We are perishing! (Mt 8:25) Oh Lord, we are perishing! Do you not notice the storm, Lord? They begin to be afraid. What is this about, apostles? Why are you disturbed so quickly? How short the joy lasted so that now, you have had only a little joy. The pleasure with which you sailed was so little. And what is worse is that the same Christ, who went with them, in whose company they appeared to be safe from the storm, commanded that the storm be turned on them! Even so, that is because there are so few who serve you Lord. They think that it is easy to serve you; they enter with this security, they feel confident and secure that no storm will arise when you are with them, and it leaves them afterwards in the opposite direction. Lord, this is why you have so few friends.
What a gentle cause this is! Because you were pleasing to God, it was necessary to test you with temptation. The angel said to Tobias: *Because you were pleasing to God, because you were his friend and servant, and your service was so pleasing to his reverence, it was necessary to test you with temptation.* (Tob 12:13) That is, because you are a servant of God, you will be tested.

-That seems to be an excellent favor! –Since you may not have him in a little way that this test is done with very deprived ones. How much of this temptation the novices experience, saying, “When I was in the world, I felt nothing of what I experience now; nor did I even know what temptation was; how contented and joyful I was; and I did not experience a short period of grief; after that I came to this: What trials I have! The temptations of the flesh! The temptations of pride, the annoyances that the devil torments me because I have left what I have begun! Who is to suffer this? Brother, do not be frightened of these temptations. What do you think? God wants you to kill the joy and pleasure that you experienced in the world, the joy that you brought when you came to the monastery, and other consolations that you experienced after your arrival at the monastery; God wants you to kill them for him.

God says, “Give the joy here. Kill it for me.” Do you know how he does it? As with the married man, that he shows much love for his wife, and he wants to test if that love is true or imaginary; he pretends to go out from the land but does not leave his home; he lurks around to see what his wife does in his absence; and if she walks around very composed and laughing from window to window and from one thing to another, he sees that her love for him is not from her heart; but
if she does not leave the house and does nothing but cry and she does not want to get dressed except as he wants, all because her husband is away, the husband sees that his wife loves him truly.

When God is with the soul, how long does it not go to see the bulls, the contests with spears, the jousting, taking walks or any other amusements! The sweetness that it receives from God’s presence is so great that it is not to be marveled at that it scorns what is in this life. There is no bully or evil woman that, if God would give him or her a little taste of his sweetness, that both would not give up the devils when they are there and to the delight of the miserable life that they bring, and both would go in pursuit of God and after the savor and pleasure of the delights of God. If God gives you consolation, if he visits you, if he is continually present, how diligently you will walk, how much will you serve him willingly and you will walk looking at his face in order to see what he wants to you to do. Keep this in your heart so that you may be good. When you have trials, then one sees whom he truly loves. When he sends you sadness and tribulations, when he sends you one trial after another, then he tests the perseverance of those who serve him.

God says, “Wait for me, I will hide myself a little and I will see how great is the love of so and so; whether he walks as diligently as when I was with him, let us see if he walks so contented, whether he stops serving me, if he is as careful with the poor as he was with I was with him. The other one goes, thinking that God is away from him, removing the consolation, giving him a little bit of sadness and then he wants to return to his old ways and quickly thinks that God has left him behind. God says, “You grow tired by such little trials, then you want to go
away; you have little love for me.” The weak souls do this, unloved ones, those who do not know how to move except in the presence of God; but the good soul walks more firmly when God is absent, trying not to get into any trouble. The more he is removed from the help of God, the more he entrusts himself and tries to be faithful for when his Lord would return.

**Choose: Are you in Christ or not?**

Oh, how many times Isaac walks onto the horns of the bull. Many times you lose your joy and submit to God and please God, it will not be because of sin. This is the black evil; here is the black trial. Tell me if you are lost. Tell me if you are in Christ or not? Are you of the spiritual lineage of Christ? Tell me, how many nights have you spent thinking about this? How is it profitable for you to have so much property? How do riches, lineage, beauty, going around so adorned that everyone is afraid to look at you, bring you profit? How profitable is it that the entire world honors you and considers you beautiful if you are not in the spiritual lineage of Christ? What kind of life does one live who is not of the spiritual lineage of Jesus Christ? Are you in Christ or not? There will be some who will know how to respond to this question. There will be others who will not know how to respond to it. There will be some who if you ask them if they are in Christ, will respond that they do not know.

**Those who respond no**

Each person who is in mortal sin and has not repented from it - I call that being in mortal sin - is not in Christ. Unfortunate is the one who is of the father
and of the mother that gave him birth! Cursed is the bread that he eats and cursed is the water that he drinks and cursed are the dreams that he dreams.

Cursed are the steps that he takes. I am frightened more by being able to find you without Christ and to make you live without him and to say to God, “Go away from me so that I will not have need of you, I find myself content without you.”

This is the fearful thing. If you repent soon after you sin, there is not much one should not say and there is no need to speak about it; but after you have sinned, you find yourself living without Christ, which is much more amazing than doing without Christ. Tell me, how can you live without him? What kind of life do you live without Christ? How does it profit you that the entire world may be yours, that the king and the earth, men and demons favor you, if at the hour of your death evil claims your soul? None of that will free you from the never-ending torments and fires that are to last as long as God is God. It is an article of faith that if you die in an evil state, in a sin of the flesh or other mortal sin, you will go to hell without a doubt. It is unfortunate for you if you tell me you are not in Christ! How sad you make yourself without Jesus Christ. Where will you go without Jesus Christ?

They will say: - I am not in Jesus Christ. - What are you doing? Where is your love? Why do you do such an evil thing? Why do you decide to destroy yourself? Why are you so cruel to yourself that you absolutely want to cast yourself into hell? Do not hate yourself so much. Do not ruin yourself with closed eyes! What does God mean to you since he shed his blood for you? Are you not grateful and want to take advantage of this good thing? Why do you want Jesus Christ to waste so great a price that you cost him? Since you do not have
compassion for yourself, since you are so cruel to your own that you want to destroy yourself, do it now for Jesus Christ so that he will not have shed his tears in vain, nor become tired in vain, so that they have not beaten him in vain since it all happened for you so that you could gain from the price of his Passion and have the strength to overcome your passions and not offend him.

Those who do not know how to respond: the lukewarm

There will be others who will respond to the question: -Father, I am not one of those nor do I feel any mortal sin in me, nor do I wish evil on anyone. I do not know what I fear. I do not know what fears persist in my heart, I do not know if I am right with Jesus Christ, Father. I will not know how to say it to you.

-Brother, that is the other doubt. God, being who he is, guards you from being lukewarm. O moth, how many clothes you have eaten. In saying, “pestilence goes about, people die;” in being sick, in saying, “You have to die, there is hell for evil ones,” soon you will see the trembling. What is this? If we were not friends of tepidity, we would not be afraid, but you are tepid, you are afraid because you do not want to put the axe to the root and cut off everything that hinders you. You want to be finished with God and the world; you want God to love you and you do not want to love yourselves; you desire to speak by day as much as you could and you want to come by night to pray and you want pleasure in it; you do not want to lose any part of your honor and you desire benefit from the disgraces of Christ.

Believe me when I say that God is not pleased with the speaking and the wandering and the staggering around here every day so that you never have
peace. You must lose something of yourself if you are to grow in Christ. You cannot do everything: Are you upright? You cannot follow him. If we were not lazy we would not be afraid and there would be no sadness. If you take this path, you will never have a moment of joy, you will have no rest or peace in your heart. You will need a thousand surprise attacks, a thousand distresses and tragedies that tepidity brings by not choosing to break entirely from the world and to serve God in truth.

-I do not know what I stand for, Father. I do not know what fear I have. - Look, put in one side of the balance serving God with fervor and diligence, walking quickly and happily, content and attentive to what God demands in order to do it immediately, and on the other side place the fear, sadness, grief and restlessness that tepidity causes and you will see how it is more work being tepid than being a very diligent servant of God. But St. Bernard says “one must suffer more by changing from being evil sinners to just people than from being good and better to becoming more perfect.” Soon you will see the tepid walk, “Since I am not obligated to pray, I want to do more of what I am obligated to do; since today is not a mandatory fast day, who orders me to fast? I do not have to give a little alms, because it confirms to my state that I am not obligated to do more. I do want to do more in everything I am obligated to do.” Look, believe me if you measure out prayer and fasting, almsgiving and good works; if you go about doing less: “I do not have to do anything except the minimum,” your miseries will never end.

Tepidity is the mother of sadness, of fear; the mother of restlessness and grief and what you start, believe me, you will finish in the same way; the vice will
carry you; if you begin with tepidity, you will end with it; death will take you in the way you are now accustomed to living.

And Jesus Christ says: To him who has, more will be given, and to him who has not, what he has will be taken away. You will see if there is a need to try to find us with something at the time of judgment. To him who has, Christ says, more will be given him and the one who had nothing will have taken away even the little he has. (cf. Lk 19:26) To the one who is seen as devout, diligent, chaste and humble, gifts have been given to him; he who has multiple talents that the Lord gave him, more has been given him besides; he who has been lazy, not devout, who has no good works, what little he possessed is taken away and given to the former. It makes you serve God and you will see, and you will return to your customary habits such that you can almost not do the opposite. You do not do it willingly and afterwards your bad habit will not allow you to abandon it. If not, try it. I promise you that if you sleep too much, you will not stop it in many days. I promise you that it will require hard work from you. A little word, and I do not know what, no matter how frivolous it might be, if you are accustomed to it, you have too much to do and a lot of work to overcome it. These are the ones who do not know how to say of they are in Christ, the lazy and the tepid.

The zealous ones: Do you not know that Christ lives in you?

There are others to whom God gives the grace so that they can serve with fervor and diligence and can go around looking directly at the Lord to see what he will ask of them. Just as a fire that burns the straw around it, so those with the fervor that they bring to the service of God will destroy their passions,
extinguishing all that has been there in a way that nothing may obstruct them so that they can advance. Nothing gets in the way of their devotion, prayer, fasting, vigilance and concentration. These are the ones described by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: Test yourselves, examine yourselves as to whether you have faith; do you not know that Christ dwells in you? (cf. 2 Cor 13:5) The soul that does this is good. How rich, how fortunate it is, how happy and blessed! He does not remember anything that is there. Nothing is given to him by honors, riches, or delights. He scorns all of that, knowing that he has within himself, Jesus Christ. If he has Christ, he lacks nothing and if he lacks Christ, then there is nothing that will satisfy or gratify him.

You are not afraid of what the martyrs suffered; not caring about the fires, that they would burn them alive, and they rejoiced that they were skinned, that their flesh was opened by the lashes of whips, in those prisons, the hunger, the thirst, suffering bravely and scorning their torments; that they were amazed, having Jesus Christ before them, they gazed upon him and said: “My Lord who has been whipped, how much will they whip your slave? My king, crowned with thorns, how much will they roast me since I am your slave? My good and my Christ, so oppressed, how much can this little worm endure this small trial? He does whatever he wants so that everything is nothing. Do not fear that the soul suffers so greatly, knowing that Jesus Christ dwells in it, that he loves it, that he is looking at how it struggles, he is looking to see if the slave remains faithful. Do not fear having the knowledge that you will suffer hunger, thirst, fatigue and dishonor.
St. Paul, speaking with those whom God loves, says: *The Holy Spirit gives them testimony in their hearts that they are children of God* (Rom 8:10); the Holy Spirit helps them to know God’s love for them, that he desires good for them, that their works are pleasing to him, that they find grace in revering him. “Oh Lord, I am miserable and I love you from the depths of my heart, and shall I not hope that you love me, since you are the fullness of love? This does not amount to evidence, nor is it anything seen by the eye, but it is a very certain thing that the soul feels the fervor of the goodness of God, that it has to profess that God loves it, it does not guess whether it is in a right relationship with God and in his grace, that Jesus Christ dwells in it with whom he goes about so encouraged, desirous and beautiful. If we would persevere in the good, we would feel a benefit, some power, some desire of serving God of which we would never tire.

**Isaac will not die**

Where were we? About Isaac, God says, “Kill for me your joy and I will give you grief, I will hide myself; I will lock myself under seven keys so that you may not find me. I will make you call after me and I will not answer so that it will seem to you that I do not hear you or that if I hear you that I do not want to help you.” God hides himself to see how we do in his absence; he wants to see how we struggle when he does not show his presence, how we act in trials, in tribulations, in sadness and dryness. And soon God appears and says, “This soul has been faithful in my absence, I have seen the good you have done and spoken; how you have resisted temptation; you have done well, therefore, Isaac will not die.” How
happy the soul remains then! It has more joy than what existed before its sadness. Who blesses God, what about grace, what about praise for God since God has saved him from this dangerous situation? “Oh Lord, may your mercy be blessed! In the time of trouble you have not forgotten me; you have helped me as a good shepherd and you are my defender.”

Abraham was sad, but Isaac does not die; God does not want to test him anymore. When the Lord comes and finds you faithful, he says: “Stop. I do not want Isaac to die.” The flesh may die, the brute animal may die, the sensitive part may die, but not the son, the laughter will not die. The flesh may die, the passions may die, the sensual and recurrent temptations may die, but the joy of the Spirit will not die, the joy of the soul will not die. It does not matter what happens to the body, all will happen by preserving joy, all things have become subordinate so that Isaac will not die. This is the lineage of Jesus Christ, the lineage of the humble, the troubled and the confused.

Why did God create our Mother as a little girl?

Are we going to go on without saying something about the Virgin? Let us now leave behind the narrative of St. Matthew and go to the end where he writes: *Jacob begot Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary, from who is born Jesus the Lord.* (Mt 1:16) May your lineage arrive so that there may be a woman on earth who gives birth to you! Oh, what an honored heritage! Did you desire to exalt this most blessed little girl so much? Look at how much you magnified her in making her your mother. The Virgin Mary has more children, while not giving birth to more than one, unlike another mother who had physically given birth to many
children, since all those who are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ are children of the Virgin.

-Father, why did God create Mary, who was to cure the evils of our first mother Eve, as a little girl? Why was she, who was to lift up men from such a great fall as they committed through the sin of our first mother, born as a little girl? I will tell you: By entrusting the humility of her soul to us. God loves the humility of the soul very much and so he loved the holy Virgin because she was so humble. Do you see the little girl? It was more for her regard. *The Lord looked on the lowliness of his handmaid*, (Lk 1:48) she said of herself. Greatness knocked Eve down. Mary by being born as a little girl, helped us and she has been exalted.

-I said: Mother, so little, how can you carry such a Son to help us with our many needs?

**The Virgin serves as a strong wall**

-Who will this little girl be? Who will answer me, etc?

*-If she is a wall, let us put over her a silver fortification. If she is a door, let us construct it with planks of cedar. (Cant 8:9)*—Who is this little girl? She is like a very strong wall. Oh blessed Lady! How many have you defended whom God wanted to carry out his justice? Placing yourself in the middle and praying for them, you have obtained pardon for their sins.

I said, Father: Do you not want the wall to be high and very wide and deep in its foundation? How can you say that this little girl is a wall since she is so small?—"I am a wall." Our most holy virgin Lady has all that. *Higher than heaven is the one of whom we speak, deeper than the abyss is the one whom we*
praise; she is wider than the sea. (cf. Job 11:8-9) She is a good wall. If the wall is to be high, this little girl is higher than the heavens, if it is to be deep, she is deeper than the abyss, if it is to be wide, and she is wider than the sea. Solomon built such a rich house that none greater would ever be built. This is where God would dwell; where men would come to pray to God. Solomon beseeched God when the temple was dedicated that anyone who would enter that house with some trial or seek mercy would not be denied it. God would pardon all who were there to seek pardon for their sins. (1 Kgs 8:30-32) God granted this to Solomon. The Temple was a figure of the Virgin Mary. God did not do it for that house, but rather it is understood through this little girl, that if anyone who would call to her, God will hear him through her if he placed her in his midst.

I said, have you not seen the dawn on some morning? It is a great sight to see. It seems a miracle of God to see how the dawn rises: to see how the little birds sing, some well, other badly; it is a miracle to see it; it does not seem but that all creatures call to God in their own way, all bless God. So our calling upon this little girl for help in our difficulties can be called a miracle. This is a work of God. Look, one of the arguments with which it can be proven that there is God in this one, against the one who might deny it, and with the holy Scriptures, is that all call to God in their needs by pure natural instinct; by seeing him in some natural difficulty, even without looking at what he says, soon he goes to God and calls him. That action tells me that he may be a heathen, a Moor, and although he was one who had been created in the field as a brute animal, people had never seen nor known that there is a God for having heard it, he would soon say, seeing himself in difficulty, “There is a God.” Soon, since all call to God, there is God. In
the same way God has placed this instinct in all Christians of calling then to the Virgin Mary. In having a need, afterwards, “Oh Lady, defend me, pray to God for me!” and since we all call her in our difficulties, it is a sign that God has placed in her heart a prayer to his Majesty for us, since she is our mother.

You are good as a wall, Lady. If the arrows of the justice of God would come because of our sins, you put yourself forward, you place yourself in the middle and you will do that so that the arrows would not reach us. You obtain mercy for us. Much befalls the world, but much more befalls the Virgin; very high, very low; she serves as a good wall to defend us. She gave birth to a Son, so rich, so beautiful, so great a Lord, for our benefit and our salvation. Just as she knew how to delight her natural Son, by clothing him and giving him milk; so she will know how to nurse her adopted ones; she will delight us, give us milk; she will help us in our needs. She serves as a good wall for our protection and aid.

The Virgin Mary serves as a Gate

If she serves as a gate, let us place planks of cedar on her. The Holy Scripture says that in the time that Jotham ruled, he made a gate for the house of the most sublime Lord. (2Kgs 15:35) The Virgin Mary is this gate. If she is the gate let us begin knocking on her doors. Oh most blessed Virgin Mary! And how many who beseeched you have been freed form the gates of hell, they have been separated from the filthiness of the flesh and withdrawing into your humility, they humble themselves. How many lost ones have you guided to God? How many young women are attracted by your beauty, service and purity that they have not wanted to marry, but to remain virgins to resemble you?
If you see a well built door that is adorned and very beautiful, you say: “Oh Holy God, what a beautiful gate! What must this house be that has such a gate? Then she gives you the desire to enter the house. This little girl is the gate of heaven. If you have the privilege of going, you are to enter through this gate.

King Jotham built a very high gate. The mercy of the Virgin is very great; it is extended to many: for all who call on her. I am a very beautiful olive tree in the fields. (cf. Sir 24:19) The oil is very delicate. She has mercy on all who seek her. She has a very tender heart for love and mercy. Do you see this little girl who is born today to be the Mother of God and ours, not to one but to all? Be at the gate always, just as the lame man was for many days. If he had gone away, he would not receive the alms that St. Peter gave him. (Acts 3:2-6) See her and say: “Lady, alms! I have been a very evil sinner: I have committed offences against God. I do not have the courage to appear; I am ashamed to speak to your Son. I beg alms from you. Pray for me, obtain pardon for me, pray to your Blessed Son for me.”

-I wonder who this little girl is?—There is no one on earth who knows it.
Sermon 63

Who would see this Little Girl struggle with God?

Presentation of our Lady, November 21.
In a convent of nuns

Introduction

We come to the feasts of the most Holy Virgin with fervent and very grateful hearts. Therefore, St. Bonaventure says that those who speak of our Lady must have in their words a very great truth and fervor: Truth, because the Virgin is the enemy of liars and the friend of truthful ones in their words and works.

This Lady is the one who bore the Truth that destroyed all the heresies and a Light that enlightened all the darkness. Fervor, because if this is one whom we truly do not love, who will we love? St. Bernard says: "There is nothing that may please me so much as to speak about this Blessed Virgin or frightens me so much as to consider her greatness."

This Lady that now is so great in the heavens was at a certain time a tiny girl here on the earth and truly the tiny girl will be for those who would be tiny ones in her eyes and who would humble themselves and beg for grace.

Why does the little girl enter into the Monastery?

Our sister is little and she does not have breasts. What will we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? Our sister is tiny. What will we do for the day that they are to court her (cf. Cant 8:8) in the person of the Patriarchs and Prophets and all men? Now these words are said: Our sister is tiny; how will we adorn her for the day that they are to court her?
Today Holy Mother Church celebrates that Lady who in her canticle said: *The Almighty has done great things in me.* (Lk 1:49) We celebrate the feast of her Presentation, the day on which her blessed parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, presented this little girl of three years at the Temple so that she might serve Almighty God in the company of the maidens who served there. There was a house, incorporated with the Temple similar to the monasteries now; there the principal maidens went in order to serve the Lord and be instructed in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. It was a holy seminary and after they reached a certain age, they were married. The reason why Anna and Joachim presented Mary was that since they were sterile, they promised that if God gave them a child, they would offer it to him, keeping her in all seclusion until she would be married. Her parents presented her in the Temple.

-Why do you want her, Lord, to enter at three years, to be enclosed and not walk through the streets? –Because those who were to receive God and have dealings with him are not to be careless, but know that they have to prepare with much care to receive him. For God to give the Law to Moses and in order to speak it to the people, God commanded him that three days before they could not approach their wives and others as well as many other preparations for holiness; with how much more reason is it that that one be prepared to receive God and have dealings with him? Tell me now: If you were to place a little balsam or other very excellent liquor in a glass, would you not first look to see if the vessel is dirty or pierced so that it would not be wasted? Well, if in order to do this very great thing you examine the glass to receive God, what is the reason that you do it?
- Why does the little girl enter the monastery? Because the day is to come in which she is to receive God in her womb. The day is to come in which she is to use her hands and to be His mother. God does not want her precious gifts to be seen by all. If she were safe in her house and on the streets and the plazas God desires to enclose her, what will he do to those of us who are disposed to fall?

- Why do you enclose her Lord? –So that she may be an example to men and women; to show that if she who was safe desired God that she be removed from difficulties, how necessary it is that we avoid them. –Why do you enclose her, Lord? –So that a day is to come that they are to court her and the greatest work of God is to happen when they court the Virgin; and for that day great preparation is needed. –And why do they adorn her? –For the wedding day. Lady, enter into it with joy!

Her parents bring her at three years of age and place her on the last step of the altar, which had fifteen steps where they went up; and she went up with great agility. If she went up by a miracle or not, it is not said; it can be piously believed that such things happened to this little girl after she was born, that all marveled and looked at her and said: “what is this little girl to be?” Because of believing that God created that one for his own mother, there always were to be great marvels with her. She went up, her parents offered her to God. May she enter the Temple joyfully! Let us offer our hearts with hers. The Virgin was the best offering that ever has been offered or will be offered from a pure creature. “Willingly you give to me- God says-, willingly I receive her.” The Virgin enters into the monastery, she did not enter weeping or unwillingly, and she was not considering what she left behind, although she was a little girl; she said “My eyes
may not see things of this world. For the love of you may my mouth be closed; may I be silent since I am to speak to you; I may be where everyone commands me, where I may serve all for love of you." She enters to serve God willingly.

**This little girl serves as a wall**

Having entered into the monastery, *what will we do for our sister for the day they have to court her?* What will we arrange for her so that God may fall in love with her? What will we do for her? *If she is a wall, let us build over her a silver fortification.* (Cant 8:9)–The same divine word, asking this, responds and says: *If she is a wall, let us build etc.* . . . Why do you call her a wall? What does a little girl of three years have to do with walls? Walls are high, wide, strong and deep and moreover if they are like those of the Promised Land that those spies whom the sons of Israel sent, said: *they have some well adorned cities, and some walls reach up to heaven.* (cf. Dt 3:5) –For God speaks the truth, that she is a wall; *let us construct over her things that may protect her.*

*Higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth and wider than the sea is the Virgin Mary.* (cf. Job 11:8-9) This tiny girl of whom we speak is higher than heaven, deeper than the abyss, wider than the earth. Higher than heaven in the spiritual sense. Perhaps we say she is higher and greater. Among all the many things that God has created, the humanity of Jesus Christ excluded, among all the pure creatures, there is no more excellent and none as high as she; and although she is a tiny girl, she is more than the angels, more than the seraphim. May you be blessed, Lord, that for our generation you gave us this little girl, higher than the heavens. If you want her thoughts, the highest; if you want
her foundation, the deepest; if you have good eyes to look at this little girl, she is
the most humble. In this Virgin there is nothing more excellent than her humility.
She knows well the greatness that God did for her, but she attributed nothing to
herself, or to her goodness. There has never been a creature so pure that so truly
had given honor to God as this Virgin. As a wall she has good foundations.

Is width lacking to her? This Virgin is the wall of the entire world, and not
only of this world that is small, but of all men. Look at how many there were and
they died and others came. Finally, we are all sons of Eve according to the flesh
and of the Virgin according to the Spirit. The affection of a mother, this little girl
has the heart of a protector for all men; see if there is a need to be generous for
being mother of so many children. Little girl, from where do you get a mantle to
cover us all? From where are the wings to shelter so many chicks? You are wider
than the earth! The just and the sinners fit in her; the sinners are pardoned by
her prayers and the just are preserved in grace.; she takes in one whoever does
not fit in the sky, wider than the earth, heaven and angels; since God entered into
her and fit in her, will you not fit in her, sinner? Holy and immaculate virginity,
whose praises I will bring out to the ignorant because he whom the heavens
were not able to hold, gathered in your lap. He who does not fit into the heavens
is enclosed in your womb; sinner, you will fit well in the protection of the Virgin.

Blessed be God, that he gave us such a little girl as a wall, As Jeremiah
said: I have made you today a column of iron and a wall of metal. (cf. Jer 1:18)
She is the wall, but she is not like that which God says are weak walls, walls of
glass. Who are they? Please God that it may not be this one who talks to you!
Priests, prophets, cloistered men; I have a serious complaint against you: You did
not build yourself a wall around (cf. Ez 13:5) the house of Israel so that it might stand firm for them on the day of the battle of the Lord. A brave thing! “I go,” says God, “looking for a man that can be placed between me and my men so that if I desired to punish them, it may be in his name; and because I did not find one, I poured out my wrath.” (cf. Jer 10:25) When is the day of the battle of the Lord? It will be when our serious sins go up before his justice. God desires that when he is angry with his people that their priests nearby may go to him so that his anger may not be poured out. God complained that when he looked for one nearby to go to him, and he found no one among the many. These are the walls of glass; these are the ones who do not show justice to us; and if we do not have it to defend ourselves, how will we be able to defend the others? How will we be powerful enough to remove the anger of God against his people? The Virgin is not among those broken walls or those who cannot suffer a blow for the love of their neighbors. The bravest little girl, created and hardened by trials, serves as a wall.

The Weapons of the Virgin, Love and Reflection

What weapons will we arrange for her so that she may fight with the Lord in order to conquer him? Congratulations, little girl! Lady, what do you carry? You are serious in battling God that he may be pacified towards men; may the Lord give you weapons. What weapons do you carry? Are they riches? No, since she left them all behind; and when she was older, she worked with her hands in order to eat. What are you carrying? Beauty? She knew that the wise man says that charm is deceitful and beauty is vain. (Prov 31:30) There is none of that. What do you carry in order to conquer? Let God say it: You have wounded my
heart with one glance of your eyes and with one hair of your head. (Cant 4:9)

Her great love, her great obedience and virtues wounded the Lord. On the days of our Lady we were to confess, to take communion and give many praises to our Lady as the sign that on these days God has mercy for us through her prayers. Do you not believe that to those for whom these days are prepared, God will bestow great mercies on them since he loves this blessed Virgin Lady so much?

What will we give to the Virgin? What weapons will we give her to fight with God so that she may conquer him? *Your have wounded my heart, my spouse, with the glance of your eyes and with a hair of your head.* May you be blessed, Lord! How tender you are that they wound you with looking at you and so weak that with a hair they perplex you? What do you want us to say, Lord, but that you have the arms and the heart prepared to receive us? What thing is gentler, that it is wounded by looking at it? You see here the weapons with which the Virgin fights. What will this eye be, not two? God says, *Incline your ear.* (Ps 44:11) Not two ears; there is only one. *One is necessary,* (cf. Lk 10:42) a love, a disinterested intention. This is the eye of which in another passage the Lord says: *If your eye is innocent, all your body will be resplendent.* (Mt 6:2) Oh sorrow! How far away the heart of the little girl was when they said to her: *Your wine has been mixed with water, and your gold has been turned into slag!* (Is 1:22) The wine of the Virgin is her intention, her eye not twisted, not mixed. She did not wish that her own will be done, but rather God’s. “Your will is fulfilled; let there be no consideration of me, but only of you; may I see your will fulfilled.” The Virgin loves God and herself for the love of God and for the benefit of men. This was the eye of the Virgin, a clear eye; she who loves God will love her neighbor as
well. *You have wounded me with the glance of your eyes.* There is nothing with which God is reached more securely than with love; God does not know how to defend himself from the heart that loves him; this is because he does not want to. There is no crossbow that would wound so quickly. A little girl and so much love!  

Christ says: *Where your treasure is, there is your heart.* (Mt 6:21) If the eye is right, the hair is only one; since if the intention is right with God, there is only one consideration; all is done in God. How is your treasure? A treasure of mud and of coal if you have put it in the earth, flesh and vanity, or in the wind of honor, ruined treasure! *Where your treasure is, there is your heart.*

-What will I do, Father, that I desire to pray and I am dry as a stick without devotion? -Brother, look at that which you love there your heart goes; put your treasure in heaven and your heart will go after that which you love. If your love is covered with mud, how will you have the spirit?

The little girl, an object of love! Who would see you sing the Psalms with a greater spirit than David himself who composed them! *What is this to me in heaven? What do I have, Lord, in heaven; and concerning you, what do I want on the earth? God is my portion!* (cf. Ps 72:25) God desires one thing, that my portion be of pure love and since you did not have more than one God, you did not have more than one love. She thought about God when she ate and when she spoke; wherever she walked she always walked thinking about God. The angels, regarding that with much admiration, said: *Who is this one that went up from the desert?* (Cant 8:5) Lord, shame falls on me saying these words; but this shame may be taken away by seeing that this one who prays so well is flesh of our flesh. *Who is this one who goes up from the desert as a puff of smoke? What was
the prayer of the Virgin like since the angels marveled at her? Who is this one who rises like smoke? Smoke, not of the green firewood nor that which makes one cry such as ours does; that we seek vengeance on our enemies and the things of the earth; that is the smoke that makes one cry, it is not a puff of smoke that goes up, but as it is earth, it remains on the earth.

- Well, how does the smoke of the Virgin rise? From the aromas of myrrh. (Cant 3:6) The smoke of incense, of gum, and of the resins, and of odor producing spices; such were the thoughts of the Virgin. St. Bernard: “Some of the men who pray go through the act of prayer but have no life in it.” All the fragrant powder that smells good is a good prayer; accompanied by good works of charity of fasting, of disciplines. How does a short time of weeping profit you if the rest of the time you are chattering? What do you profit if you have a short time of prayer at night, if you waste the day in laughter and vanity? That life is not for a man who prays, because he who truly prays, guards himself all day that he might not offend God and is to walk always asking the Lord our God: “Give me more of your knowledge.” If you do not join the light of today with that of tomorrow and of yesterday and guard yourself very well, when will you be rich?

Hence, so little profit comes to men spiritually over a long time. And St. Bernard himself says: “You will discover more people that are turned from evil to good than from good into better.” It appears to us that we are safe in not committing mortal sins; God, awaken us so that we may serve you, and he has just awakened us when we return to sleep and fall into our laziness. The Virgin had a life of prayer which suited her because what leaves the heart carelessly goes
downward. The Virgin, recollected, is good for fighting, since she has the weapons to conquer God; now let us enter into the battle.

**The Virgin conquers God in Prayer**

Whoever wanted to see the jousts and the bulls run, let him see it happily. Whoever wanted to see vast squadrons of people and the shedding of blood let him see it. Let nothing seem good to my eyes except that spiritual war between a little girl of three years, on the one hand a cloistered maiden; and on the other hand, God. O game so blessed and who would see the little girl struggle with God better than the Patriarch Jacob! (cf. Gen 32:25) But the latter did not fight more than a night and he fought with an angel; but he did it wisely, that in order to prepare to fight he cast aside his wives and shepherds and cattle, and beasts in front of him; he made them pass over the river and he remained alone on the other side, prepared to fight well. Do you want to pray well? Throw out from you heart all that impedes you; say to all your interests: “Separate yourself from me for I am going to negotiate with God.” And if it is disrespectful to speak to a king or Lord, turn to other things. I wonder what it may be like speaking with God and doing so while being distracted. Jacob was alone one night and he fought alone; the Virgin fought, more recollected in her heart. Jacob fought prepared, but Mary was more prepared. And so the husband (bridegroom) says: *Enclosed garden. Enclosed garden, my wife (bride), my friend, an enclosed garden* (Cant 4:12); the body enclosed in a cloister, enclosed eyes and ears and thoughts within herself.

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Who would see the little girl get up in the middle of the night and sit in a little corner and begin to fight God with her heart? *Lord if I found grace in your eyes, be merciful to them.* (cf. Ex 34:9) Yes, Moses prayed in that way; but who goes from prayer to prayer? It was good for Moses, better for the Virgin. *Lord if I found grace before you, be merciful to men; heal the souls that are lost. Lord, may the Lamb come, the Desired One of the peoples.* (cf. Is 10:1; Hg 2:8) Heal us Lord; may the water come that makes the earth fertile. The Virgin prayed to the Lord that he send his Son in order that she might be a servant. She desired to be a servant and was his mother. Who would like to know God’s response to her?

You are a little worm, you are an ant that walks along the earth and the Virgin is praying for you in heaven: Lord, show mercy to the one who called me and pardon the one who is entrusted to me.”—“Do you not see that this one has done such a sin and deserves punishment?” This is the blow: “That man does not deserve mercy.” Those are the blows that the justice of God gives to him who begins to pray for another.

-Who would see you reply! What reply do you have?—“Lord, do I come before you to confirm your justice or seek your mercy? I know well that he deserves punishment; but I seek mercy, Lord: *either erase me from the book of life or pardon this one.*” (cf. Ex 32:32) If Moses had charity to seek this from God, will not the Virgin have it? “May the curse of the penalty come upon me and your blessing over them; I offer you my life and salvation; punish me and pardon them; I offer you my honor: treat me as you want and be merciful to these pious hearts.” Will I not believe this about your heart since it is more pious than that of Moses, and he begged this from God? Will I not believe, Lady, that you will take
pity on those sinners for whom God created you? The Virgin offered her life for men one thousand times. If we had crawled along the ground for love of her, it was little; if we had loved her and shed blood and lost our life for her, it was small. Lady, what do you offer men? Your life? It is small; she offered another life that she loved much more than her own. May men give thanks to you! She knew that the will of God was that the Son would die so that the world would be redeemed.—“My son would die, since you, Father, want him.”—What would you feel with the sorrow of the mother?—“Lord, may your will be done.”—What do we owe you? Who would know be able to calculate how much the Virgin loved Jesus Christ? This one will know how to think how much we esteem her.

So the Virgin prayed to the Lord: “If this world deserves punishment, let come upon me and have mercy on them.” St. Bernard says: *All prayer is lukewarm which did not proceed from inspiration.* There will be sufficient witnesses about this here; all prayer is cold when the inspiration of the Holy Spirit does not move it; he prays coldly when the Holy Breath does not come first. Saint Paul: *The Spirit begs for us with groans that cannot be heard.* (Rom 8:26) And another time St. Paul says: *The Holy Spirit who is within us teaches us to pray;* He made our heart burst forth, that many times the man does not know why he weeps. *The Holy Spirit begs in us with groans that cannot be told and the same one who groans does not understand them.* Nothing will be given to you that you do not understand, because God who inspires you understands them and makes you ask in agreement with what he wants. Virgin, what would such prayers be like, since they were moved by the Holy Spirit!
If the same God taught her to pray, it is clear that he would hear the prayers of the Virgin. She gained from God more than Jacob, more than Moses. What did Moses beg from God? “Lord, may you have gentle hands; may you not punish this people.” In the end, at that time he tied the hands of God so that he would not punish his people, and the Virgin tied his hands with her prayers so that he would take away his wrath and anger from men. A holy man is one who reaches God! If he wants to remove hunger from the world, say to him: “Lord, I beg you through your mercy not to send hunger to the world. Take sorrow away from the sorrowful person. Lord, take away those punishments.” Lady, what will you gain? “Lord, that you take away the sorrows.” She obtains that God may receive her pains and sorrows for men. God responds quickly to the pure prayers of the Virgin. He brings himself down from the heaven to the earth, he enters into her womb, arms himself with some weapons of flesh so delicate that hunger, thirst and fatigue weary him, and thorns prick him, giving him five thousand or more lashes; and he who has gentle hands and is silent, and they swell him with pain so that he says to the Father: *Lord, forgive them.* (Lk 23:24) Who can obtain from God such a great exchange? In response to the prayers of the Virgin, God says: *Woman, great is your faith; let it be done as you wish.* (Mt 15:28)

*If you have been strong against God, how much stronger will you be against men?* (Gen 32:28) Timid Jacob fled from his brother Esau. Jacob, you have fought with the Lord, you were strong against God, how much stronger will you be against your brother? Virgin, who will be placed before your power? Since you have conquered God, whom will you not conquer? From there it is seen that the demons are terrified of the Virgin, fleeing from her at the sound of her name;
her name is a fearful weapon against them. The one pursued by the devil runs again to the Virgin with faith, that soon he will be freed from the devil. One of the principal defenses against the devil is to have recourse to the Virgin.

**The Humility of Mary!**

What are you afraid of, that being with those maidens, you would prevail over them and exercise power over them? She who shed such tears, what kind of conversation do you think she will have? What joy would he show on his face that, still a man, when he leaves his prayer you see it in his face? Brides (Spouses) of Christ, devoted ones of the Virgin, no one saw the Virgin angry. And although the anger is not shown on her face, you do not understand that she went to a remote place to be angry, so that although she masked it outwardly, she was angry in her heart. *Learn from me*- says the Lord- *that I am gentle and humble of heart*. (Mt 11:29) The Virgin was so meek, gentle with everyone, searching for the lowest place; she would not be the Abbess! Would God give us the grace that we may understand this humility?

They ask the Son to be King; he does not want it and he flees; they did not find him. (cf. Jn 6:15) –Why do you not want to be King? Perchance they will be able to deceive you or you will twist justice? Why do you not want it? Will you, perchance, fall into sin? –No. –Why will you flee from such a safe thing? The Lord flees from the honors of the world to make us to understand that if he who was so safe fled, likewise the misfortunate worm flees from the occasions of sin. The sick one who became well: “Neither the sun nor the air will make me ill; I can eat well whatever I want, since I am now healthy.” The sick one is he who wants
to treat himself as healthy, will quickly fall again and the experience will make him understand how he was sick and not healthy. The harshest judgment—God says—will be done to those who have authority, (cf. Wis 6:5) and how much more if money is given for it.

-Sell me, your regiment, your twenty-four. —Lunatic! Where are your eyes? You see a little speck on your vineyard and in your olive grove, you have such an account of your money and you are so vigilant in your health that you walking around thinking: “This will harm me, that will give me profit,” even in the very insignificant things you greatly neglect that which touches your soul? You see a speck and you do not see a great mountain! It is a pitiful thing to see men so astute, that one must split a hair, and so foolish in what is so important. What thing is more foolish than to say: “Take money because God judges me with harsh judgment?” Because, what is it to say: “Sell me, your twenty-four”, but in plain language: “Take one thousand ducats because you give me that with which I may go to hell? Are you not happy, poor thing, with harsh judgment but rather that at your own cost you want to buy the harshest judgment because you take an office that you do not deserve?

The Virgin suffered persecutions, but it is read about her that she was joyful in persecution. One Virgin with such great light in your understanding, so much strength in your will, so much humility, what evil was there for you, Virgin, who in this world would show us you were so safe from falling? Come close that she might work a miracle. Those who are so far from the Virgin as the heaven is from the earth, work miracles through the saints, such small miracles, but none by your Mother? I suspect that the Virgin Mother threw herself down at the feet
of her Son since in this life he did nothing for her because of the greatness of her humility. She prayed this to her Son: “that they may not know me, that nothing may be done that resounds to my glory or honor.” You knew well our weakness that we are friends of our weakness and pride. “Let me be the model of many people that have to come after me; I have to be a model of married people, widows and maidens, to give them an example that they may love the last place; although I could do it for my salvation, I do not want to do it.” The humility of the Virgin, the hand maiden of the Lord! (Lk 1:38) And so I believe that she would be the first in obedience and that take the broom to sweep and always do the lowest duties.

Oh, who would see how this Virgin treated those she had in her company? What maiden who was disheartened came up to this woman? When someone was disheartened and came to her, this is how she prayed to God: “Lord, heal! May this disheartened one not come to me in vain.” Who has come to you that she had not been better by doing so? It is not much that she was strong with God was strong for men, and so I believe that she had imprisoned the hearts of all. Taken from the cloister, they marry her; married, the Virgin lived all her days. Do you believe that she received the mercies of God for them? It is because of believing this, that being so far from us, there are so many that wish her well.

**Sign of Predestination: to have great devotion to the Virgin**

I ask you to tell me: How many hearts are there now that would suffer death for the honor of the Virgin? This is the truth! What is this? How can we love the Virgin so much? Why are there so many people who love her and have
Mary written in their heart? Lady, if your virtues could seize the heart of God, how much could they seize the heart of men! Your neck is the Church, as the Tower of David, a thousand bucklers hang from it, all the armor of the brave. (cf. Cant 4:4) —who is the head? —Christ. -Who is the body? It is the Church. – Who is the neck, the one who joins with her prayers the body with the head, mediatrix between God and men, higher than anyone; and around God in goodness and height and around us by mercy; higher than anyone but lower than everyone in her own eyes. The neck of the Virgin is the tower: You neck is like an ivory tower. From this neck one thousand shields (Cant 7:4) hang where the strong ones arm themselves and the weak take refuge under her.

What do you say? How many maidens from the world have prayed for rich weddings and states of life, and the love of the Virgin overwhelmed them so much that they discarded all of it and said: “For the love of the Virgin I promise virginity to God and her!”: Virgins may be led to the King after her. (Ps 44:15) Happily she was a virgin and happily she entered into the monastery! Many virgins will be handed over to the king after her, for the love of her by desiring to imitate her virginity. He who wages war with the flesh knows that the strong are armed in her and conquer it with the love of the Virgin.

If you are too weak to fast on your watches, may you be made strong. How many martyrs by the effort of this martyr were martyrs, remembering the suffering that she had before the cross and they said: “I want to be patient in my trial since this Virgin had so much in hers!” How many mothers are consoled in the loss of their sons remembering the Son that this Virgin saw die before her eyes! And how many poor are consoled in her poverty and trials! How many
pardoned their injustices because the Virgin pardoned the ones who killed her Son! In the Virgin Mary, there is an example of suffering, forgiveness and virginity.

Lady, won’t we weak ones find some help in you for our weakness? If the flesh tempts you, call to Mary. Blessed be God! Have you not looked at this marvel: a man and a woman who have such virtue that while you love them more, your love is purer? Who struck chastity in the heart of a man loving a woman much? You see here a Virgin that while a man becomes more enamored with her, he will become purer. God gave flesh to Jesus Christ and to the Virgin (that each one is) virginity that it is enough to sanctify other flesh. The woman who falls in love with Jesus Christ will be chaste in the same way and while she would fall more in love with him, she would be purer.

A unique remedy against the temptations of the flesh is to receive the Body of Jesus Christ with purity. You have spoken to me: The weak people, who frequently receive the Lord, why are they not chaste? –Because they do not receive the Body of Jesus Christ well; because if they had received him well, they would not stop being pure. The filthiness of the flesh came to us through Adam; well, the flesh of Jesus Christ is purer than the filth of Adam; and few would receive the Body of Christ well. We would be more purified than the other who dirtied us, but we receive it badly.

-What will I do, since I am tempted by the flesh? –Have the Virgin for an advocate. Keep what you have: she who smells like excellent incense that sheds it fragrance in the plazas. (Cf. Sir 24:19-20; Cant 1:3)) The Virgin smells like myrrh which signified the chastity that kills the worms, that kills the worms of the filth;
and if you were devoted to her, you will feel the temptation dissolve as the wax before the fire. (Ps 67:3) Call to the Virgin and say to her: “Lady, because I do you a service, I will fight with love against love; against the love of my evil flesh, with yours.

And the Virgin has weapons for the weak and those tempted by desperation. St. Bernard: “In all your needs and trials call to Mary, that if she could prevail against God, will she not be against your enemies? And if you walk through the strong sea of this world, look to the north, look to Mary; only the one whom she did not help when he called on her with all his heart may not call on her now.”

Do you think that you are devoted to the Virgin when you no longer ask Mary to take away her protection? Your devotion must to have deeper roots, so that as our Redeemer says: Send roots in my chosen ones. (Sir 24:16) –What roots? –A heartfelt devotion to the Virgin; and he who does not have this, does not rest until he finds it. One of the signs of those who are to be saved is to have great devotion to the Virgin. In my chosen ones, Mother, put down your roots. –

How will I obtain this devotion? –How did your ancestors who were so sterile obtain it from God? Your heart is as sterile as your ancestors were to reach such a daughter. How did they possess her? With fasting and tears and prayers and keeping the Law of God very well; and in payment for this, God gave Mary to them. –What will I do in order to have devotion to the Virgin? –Do you not have devotion to her? You have too much evil; too much good fails you; he should want more to be without skin than to be without devotion of Mary. In my chosen ones she takes root. –What will I do to attain this? –Give alms. When you see a
daughter of your neighbor that by necessity is to be lost, that you may say: “I wish this maiden to be a nun or marry her for the love of the Virgin. I want to fast for her on Sabbaths, the vigils, on bread and water, or as I am able; I wish to pray this rosary for her love.” Such is the love of this Lady, that even if you shed blood, it is used well by her.

Have before the Father his Son, and before the Son, his Mother. Offer the Son to the Father and say: “Lord I offer you what you gave me; Lord, by your wounds have compassion on me.” If you had devotion for those wounds and offered them to the Father with faith that he is to hear you, you will have great benefit. Since if you would not profit from Jesus Christ and from his trials, it has been counted against you as a great ingratitude; that the benefits made to the ungrateful are counted as lost. God died for you, and you do not feel it or benefit from it; it is as if he had not died for you; on the contrary it will amount to your great harm that his terrible trials will be demanded of you, unless you say: “Father, I owe you so much, through your Son show me this mercy.”

And as the Father gave us the greatest gift in giving us his Blessed Son for our healing, so then the Son gave us the great gift in giving us his blessed Mother as our advocate. I know that when he said to St. John at the foot of the cross: See here your Mother, (Jn 19:27) he spoke in the name of all; there we, all the Christians, enter. God gives us his Mother for a mother; let us be grateful to him for it and let the angels be grateful. If you had done this, if you had put the Son in front of Father and the Mother in front of the Son, you have a great sign of salvation.
What will I do for the Virgin?

-What will I do for the Virgin? God has given me many good things through her; what will I do for her? – Remember that wedding when the wine ran out, that the Virgin said to the Son: Son, they have no wine, I have compassion for them?” Our Redeemer said to her: What do I have to do with you? —I understand it well!” She goes to those who serve the wedding: Do whatever he tells you: all that my Son says to you, do it. (Jn 2:5) What a very brief, but summarized sermon! Here she preached as much as Isaiah, St. Paul and St. Luke and all the Apostles and prophets. Now sons, hear me (cf. Prov 8:32); hear what I want to say to you: Perhaps from the mouth of the Mother it will be imprinted on your hearts: all that my Son tells you, do it. (Jn 2:5) And so the greatest service that you can make is to do what her Son commands: “Lady, I pardon this injustice for love of you.” Do you have an evil love for a woman? “I want to separate myself from her for love of you. I want to be silent, I want to have silence for love of you; that doing it or letting it be done hurts me more, offering it because of the Virgin.” Loving her and not imitating her is of little profit; Let us imitate her in humility and in the other virtues; because she is the model that we are to imitate, and doing this will obtain for us grace and glory afterwards.
Sermon 64

The Day of Offering Much to God

Purification of our Lady- February 2

Introduction

Let us begin this sermon where Mass begins: Lord, we have received your mercy in the midst of your temple. (Ps 47:10) This is the action of grace that today Holy Mother Church makes to God for having sent his Son to the Temple. Origen says that one of the names with which Jesus Christ is called is Mercy; and so to say that God is the Father of Mercy (2 Cor 1:3) is to say that he is the Father of Jesus Christ. Today the Lord of the Temple has been presented in the Temple and by the hands of another truer temple that was the Virgin Mary; for in her and through her we receive him and let us pray that through her prayers, we may receive him now.

Feast of the Presentation

Consecrate to me... Offer to me- says God- all the first-born ones, from men as well as from animals because all things are mine. (Ex 13:2) St. Gregory says that he cannot build morality without first telling the story of the offering of the first-born. And so you are to know that today, at least, three feasts come together which are: Purification, Presentation, Candlemas or the feast of Simeon.

The Presentation, which is the greatest feast, commemorates the time when Pharaoh would not free the people of Israel from Egypt, even though God punished him with nine plagues or calamities. As a result God killed every first-born in one night, from the first-born of the king to the first-born of a slave; and
then Pharaoh allowed them to leave to sacrifice (cf. Ex 13:15), as God said: “In order to free you I killed the first-born of Egypt. It is a just thing that in the recognition of this mercy, you offer to me all your first-born sons. The first-born from the tribe that is of Levi will be mine forever; you have to redeem the rest, each one for five shekels.” (Lev 27:26-27) And if they were unclean animals, as dogs, they were to kill them or exchange them for others, as he says there: you will exchange each first-born of the ass for a sheep. (Ex 34:20) And this was called the Presentation, which happened forty days after the birth of the first-born; and so the Evangelist says: After the days of the purification of Mary were completed (cf. Lk 2:22) (the text of the interlinear says, and it refers to our Lady as we say in our text, or as the same text means, to Jesus Christ), it is not because there was in her anything to purify, but to carry out what the law commanded: the forty days that the law commanded for purification.

**Purification**

The second feast is called the Purification, which remembers the sins that the pregnant woman committed in the conception and giving birth of the child: in the conception of the baby, in superfluous delights; when pregnant, whimsical, delighted, after the birth discontented, quarrelsome, annoying. Therefore God commanded that for these and other similar sins that if she had a son, she is not to not enter the Temple for forty days; and if a daughter, eighty days; At forty days, a lamb is brought, if she is rich, or a pair of turtledoves or pigeons, if she is poor. But on her part, the Virgin was free from this duty. This is because Moses took particular care of singling her out when he said: the woman who had
conceived by a man (Ex 13:13); in order to insinuate that a Virgin was to come who would not conceive from a man but rather the Holy Spirit; but she wanted to fulfill the law as a truly obedient servant, in order to give an example of obedience.

**Candlemas or the Feast of Simeon**

The third feast is that of the holy old Simeon, who desired and begged the Lord that he may send salvation that he had promised to all the people. For which you are to imagine that such a day as yesterday, the Virgin having prepared her offering, went out of the gate of Bethlehem and from where she had given birth; because it was not permitted to leave the place where she gave birth until the day of presentation or purification; and she purchased a pair of turtledoves or two small pigeons as a poor person since the gold that the kings had given her she now had, as alms, handed out to the poor. And late yesterday she came to Jerusalem and that night she would sleep in the house of some friend or relative. And so this morning she comes to the Temple with her baby son in her arms, and she dawns with his sun more clearly than this latter in the Temple. And there was a just and fearful man since he could not be just without the fear of the Lord; He who is without fear cannot be justified. (Sir 1:28) This is because he who does not have fear will fall quickly. He who says, “Although I may go there, I will not fall; although I may go to such a house, nothing will happen to me,” he will quickly fall. And for such a thing, the wise man says: Blessed is the man who is always fearful. (Prov 28:14) And before that he said, the wise man fled and
resisted evil; the fool is confident, and he sinned. (Prov 14:16) And so the holy old man, since he was just, feared.

And he expected the redemption of Israel. (cf. Lk 2:26) There could not have been a greater sign to see if that good old man was holy and good than his desire of the common good. St. Ambrose says: “He was just because he desired the good of the people.” He said “Do you think that I am to see such a great blessing, that I am to see the Lord with my own eyes, that I may see the freedom of the people? Oh Lord, if you please, do not take me until I see with my own eyes such a great blessing!” Thus it was. The old man, who is clearly not a priest, is very desirous of the common good. Fathers, priests, if there were many Simeon’s now, how blessed would we be? What confusion there is for us that we are not content with saying a Mass and what about the past and what about the rush through Mass without love, without gratitude? Blessed is he who, when he had Christ in his arms, felt what old Simeon did. That the priest must be so pure, that he is not to carry his own sins to weep for on the altar, but the sins of the people; because, as St. Augustine says, since mortal sin is not the sin of a Christian, how much less will it be for a priest? And so God complained through Malachi, saying: “Why do you swell my altar with cries? (cf. Mal 2:13) This can be understood in two ways: the first, about the complaints that your neighbors have about you, fathers, priests, poor widows; the second can be understood: Why do you commit sins after you have wept on my altar?” I said although you see the needs of the church, how many tears does it cost you? How many cries are made praying to God so that he may remedy it?
When Uriah was called from the war by David, and he sent him to sleep with his wife, Uriah said: *The Ark of God remains in tents: The Ark of the Lord remains in tents and my master Joab fights against my enemies, and I would sleep with my wife? For the salvation of your soul, I will do no such thing!* (cf. 2 Sam 11:11) Look at what the response of a married man was. And for not having many Uriah’s, the world goes on as it is. Since the Ark is in the field fighting against their enemies, Uriah did not wish to stay with his own wife and now there will be many who desire to reach the foreigner’s camps.

Because the holy man Simeon desired this common good, (Ps 102) he was just; and just as God had promised him that he would see the Messiah, he fulfilled it because Simeon came in the Spirit into the Temple. He does not mean that he came in spirit and not in the body, but moved by the Holy Spirit; not as many come to chat, to laugh or motivated by other vanities.

*And he took him in his arms, etc.* (Lk 2:28) What do you think -what joy did he have when he saw fulfilled such a great and desired gift and saw in his arms the righteousness of the world! He must have become like a little boy with the child who is Christ. *He has renewed his youth as that of the eagle.* If you devote yourself to the desire of this holy man or come with him in the Spirit to the Temple, the Virgin would give you her Son in your arms just as she did to Simeon and since she is so generous, let us ask her to give us her Son. He took him *into his hands* because he did not receive him by promise, but rather by action. Simeon received the grace of the Lord in his hands and he began to grow in grace. Do you see how the good old man rejoiced holding God in his hands? Well, how can a priest offend God having God in his hands? Oh, who would say
with trumpet blasts that *Priests of the Lord bless the Lord?* (Dan 3:84) How can we not be consumed with happiness when we see God in our hands? *My soul has melted after my Beloved spoke to me,* said the spouse. (cf. Cant 5:6) How do we dare to offend him and not say as Joseph said about his love: *How can I offend the one who has delivered to me all the things of his house?* (cf. Gen 39:9) With what eyes do we see her, since we offend the one she placed in our hands? Do you know where the feeling that this holy old man had came from? It is through not making made an effort and beseeching his arrival with tears, as Simeon begged her. Oh what pain one ought to have for the evil priest in hell! St. Basil says that at the death of a good priest, many angels come down from heaven for his soul and at the death of an evil priest many demons come for his soul.

He blessed God and says: *Now you can dismiss your servant.* It is certainly reasonable, since the one who receives God does not have any more to ask or desire.

**God has a right to ask so much from us**

*Sanctify for me, etc.* Grab your bags. Do you carry bags? Today is the day of giving and offering much to God since he demands so much: *Consecrate to me every first-born son both of men and of the animals; because all things are mine.*

I am frightened Lord. How can you ask a people as poor and greedy as we are for so much? Lord, if I had been as generous as the Virgin, I would give all that you ask of me; but being poor and greedy, how can I give it? For with that
word you command me to give you all things. *Give me your first-born*, that is, your first love.

The philosophers described two ways of love: one of desire and the other of friendship. God asks you for that of friendship because in Him it has been well used. Why do you want riches? I want them so that I may eat and be clothed. And why do you wish to eat and be clothed? Tell the truth that it is only because you love yourself well. Well, that self-love which is the cause of all other loves, that one is your first-born that God asks of you: “Give me the love of your soul that is the cause of all the others and the end and their stopping point. Give me here the power of your soul; let us see if you truly love me.” What is there that a man may not do out of self-love? He goes to the Indies; he does not fear the sea, trials or death. “Give me here your first love.”

-It appears good, my King, that you have eyes of a sharp-eyed person that can penetrate the secret of my heart; it seems good that you have scrutinized all the corners and the secret of my heart since in that word alone you ask me for whatever I have: my life, my soul, my body. –Give me your first love, because it is mine. -Well God, if it is yours, I cannot do anything else. I have to give it to you by force. –I do not want it by force, nor by fear, but give me your love and give it to me through love.

-Lord, do you ask so much from a man so miserable and needy? In truth you have the legal claim to show titles how it is yours if you desire to have your inheritance; if not, we will lift it up ourselves with it. –For it may be the first claim. I put the anger of God on one side of the scale, and on the other side I place all the torments that can be imagined and every cruel death. Look at how
the Lord is God, that you do not choose to make God angry, mortal sin is understood here, before you think to choose all the torments and death. –That is a strong law. –Elijah said to the old woman of Zarephath: Make me first a cake from that flour and oil, and afterwards make one for you and for your son. (1 Kgs 7:13) Do you understand this? First you have to fulfill your duties to God whether it is with your honor or with your property, or with yourself. Let it be for God and not for yourself. -A strong and harsh word. –It is neither harsh nor severe, but rather you are harsh, severe, and weak to complete it.

-Show me the claim. –For all things are mine. (cf. Ex 13:2) –Bring your little boy before God, and it seems a just thing to you to bring the little boy to Jerusalem, that means a vision of peace. Blessed is the soul of the one who would say with reason what is in the Gospel: They brought the boy: They brought the little boy to Jerusalem. (cf. Lk 2:22) When it seems to you a severe law, bring up your little boy, that is, your spirit to Jerusalem, a vision of peace, and you will see how it is a just thing; bring your little boy to consider who God is, to consider his beauty, his goodness and you will discover that infinite majesty demands infinite reverence; inestimable goodness asks for all your love.

If you would understand all these claims, you would see that everything is owed to God. When you are evil, you order a hen to be killed. Why do you demand it to be killed? –By my life, because it is mine. –Well, if it appears to you to be a just thing for you to kill an animal for your life because it is yours, you belong more to God than your animal belongs to you; although it soon would have died for your pleasure, with a just claim he asked life of you. To kill your animal for pleasure, although you have no need of it, is not a sin since by being
yours it owes you his death. Since you belong more to God than your animal belongs to you, you truly owe death to Him and to suffer as many torments as offered to you by Him and to love him above all things. How does it appear to you how a heart of flesh thinks when it hears it said there is a need to suffer trials in order to not displease God? God weighs such a commandment and order on you and you come to put less value on what the Lord commands you to offer.

Consecrate to me every first born. Lord, although this claim that you have made is enough, if we were those who had enough, but we are very greedy. See if you have another reason.

Let there be a second reason. Because I killed every first-born; I killed the devil and all his first-born which are our sins; because I destroyed your sins, through which you would be in hell forever; I took you from there and I placed you on the way to heaven. If you had understood how much you owe God for not having been given death when you had serious sins! Do you know how much you owe him? You deserved many hells, having as many sins as you had; if you would consider that not giving you the hell that you merited is as great as removing you from there, if one time they had taken you from there, how would it appear to you to be a severe law even though he sent you the greatest trials of the world?

Show another claim, Lord, if you have one. —Let him hear who has ears for hearing, hear! (Mt 13:9) If I owe him my first-born and he demands this love of me by the way in which he killed them, what must I owe him? If by killing the first-born children I owe him so much; by killing his first-born Son, adored by the angels, loved as he loved himself, his only-begotten, what do I not owe you, my
King? What law would seem harsh to me? Well, I owe you more because of the
way you redeemed me than because of the way you helped me.

**What will I give you Lord, in recompense?**

> What will I return to the Lord for all that he gives to me? (Ps 115:12) He

took me from hell and destroyed my sins and for it he killed his first born Son.

> What will I give you in recompense, my God? My life is nothing since, although

all the lives of the angels and the men and all that they gave you are spliced
together, you gave me more in giving me your life which I would give you in
giving you everything. What will I give you, Lord, since my life is such a little
thing in recompense to yours?

Oh blessed widow, who by God looking at your heart, you offered more
than everyone (cf. Mc 12:43). -What is it? What do we owe God: fasting, alms,
insults? –Offer me your heart (cf. Prov 23:26): Let us give him our hearts, since
with that he is more pleased than with everything else. Have I said it to you? I do
not know if I may say it; you have to pardon me and pray to God that I may
explain this to you and remove such a great shame from among Christians. God
says: *Consecrate to me every first born, both of men and of beasts.* Give here the
first born of your beasts, meaning your sensuality! And is there not any man who
wants to give that? The sons of your beasts are the sensual appetites and natural
passions. For if he had said to a friend for whom he has risked his life: “Kill a
little dog for me,” and if he would not do it, what would he think? Certainly one
who does not kill a beast for his friend is an evil friend. Oh, Lord, may you be
blessed forever because you do not demand my life in recompense for the death
of your only-begotten Son, but rather that I kill my beasts and I do not do it! You have a beast, man, an appetite of gluttony, anger, envy that although it may be a sin on the part of reason, it is also on the part of sensuality. God says: -In recompense for killing my Son for you, kill this beast for me. -Oh Lord, what is the beast which I have much need of? -I do not ask you, God says, for a beneficial beast, but one that is harmful and dangerous to you; a beast that is to bite, growl and kill you. Kill that beast because it is a gift of the flesh, since if you will not kill them, you will die; a bad pastime of your flesh, a delight of sensuality, because if not, it is to kill you. St. Paul: For if you live according to the flesh you will die; if, however, by the Spirit you mortified the deeds of the flesh, you will live (cf. Rom 8:13). If your beast lives, you are dead, you have been lost to God and the demons possess your soul. Who will not kill his beast since God handed over his first-born Son to death for us?

-Oh Lord, I am very merciful; I cannot kill anything, I do not have the heart for it! -God does not say that you may kill it, but rather that you give it to the priest so that will kill it and shed its blood with a knife. For such a thing, if there is someone here who may have the beast, let him give it to me and I will kill it for him. If there is someone who has the beast of the flesh, give it here and I will kill it with the knife of the Word of God: those who live in the flesh cannot be pleasing to God! (cf. Rom 8:8) St. Paul says that those who live according to the flesh cannot be pleasing to God. Why do you want to live if you have not been pleasing to God since it is more worthy to please God with trials and death than to live in his disgrace, with as many goods as there are? Do you carry the beast of ill-will? Show it to me here and I will kill it: If you will not dismiss their sins from
men, then your Father will not dismiss your crimes. If you will not pardon
injustices, neither will God pardon your sins. (cf. Mt 6:15) And in another place
he says: Pardon and they will pardon you. (Lk 6:37) If someone takes another’s
possession, St. Augustine says that the sin will not be forgiven if the thing taken is
not restored.

-Father, if with all that I am so greedy that I do not want to give my beast
to God, what will I give him? What help do I have if I do not want to give my first-
born? Since I do not know what God wants to make of me; I do not know if he is
to command me to give away property, honor, and life. Well, look at how you
deceive yourself, loss for the love of God is a gain. He who loves his soul will lose
it: He who loves his soul has lost it, and he who loses his soul for me has found it
in blessedness (Jn 12:25); that to lose for the love of God is gain and he who does
not lose for God is lost. Are you frightened about that? I know that there is a
game that is called “gain and loss”. Everything you keep for yourself, you lose;
and how much you lose through Jesus Christ, you have kept; like the precious
stone in the Ark, although you may not see it, it is more guarded than in the
hand.

St. Paul: all things are yours or Apollo’s or Cephas’ or Paul’s either the
present or the future; however, you are of Christ and Christ is of God. All things
are yours, serving God, then Paul, then it may be Cephas, all the present and for
the time to come; and Jesus Christ is yours with which you are Christ’s. (cf. 1 Cor
3:22) If you belong to Jesus Christ, all is yours, if not, you have nothing. What
can you lose? Life? St. Bernard says that life without Christ is hell. What can you
say is yours? Honor? How will I call mine that which throws me into hell?
Brother, if you give yourself to God, all is yours, if not, you have nothing. Let us soon give him honor, property money, life; that giving it away is not losing it, but rather that he keep it for us. St. Paul says: *I know in whom I believed and I am certain, because my powerful treasure is secure even to that day: I know well what I believed, that I am certain that he has guarded for me as much as I have given to him for that day.* (2 Tim 1:12) However much you give him, he will guard and however much you did not give him you will lose. How do trials and needs not console you, although you had the life of a galley slave, since you kept it for that day? How do you not face the injustices and insults well, since he has prepared such a thing for you?

**Learn to offer from the Virgin**

-What will he do who may not dare to give his first-born to God and does not dare to say to God: “Lord, I do not want to live my happiness but yours?”

Walk here with the Virgin Mary to the Temple. –Lady, where are you going? -To the temple. –Why? To present to God his first born Son and mine, the one that he gave me.

Who would see that the reliquary of God and with how much humility she offers it? He who is powerful has done great things for me. (Lk 1:49) “Lord, I offer this little boy to you; he is yours since he is eternally begotten from you; and mine, because by you he was given to me for the remission of sins, may the glory be yours! He is yours, I offer him to you. The best offering that has never been offered and more pleasing to the eyes of the Father was that which the Virgin offered today; and if God looked at Abel and his gifts, (Gen 4:4) how will he not
look better at the Virgin and her lamb and Son that she offered? “Father, I offer you your Son.” Fathers, priests, learn from the Virgin how you are to offer her Son to the Father; “I offer you your Son for your service, so that he may be pleasing to you and for the gain of the poor and so that he may preach to them, show and teach them, work for them and die for them?” Oh what an example for you mothers who have sons! Offer your sons at the Temple. The one who loved God more than anything offers him for the honor of God more than his offspring, offers him for the honor of the Father; and thus he exalted the Virgin over the choirs of the angels, since she offered him the best offering.

And Lady, do you not remember us? Yes, certainly. Oh how much we owe to the Virgin! How much would it cost you to say: I offer you Father this little boy that he may suffer for men; that he may be beaten, spit upon, die for them so that by his death they might live in your eternity forever.”
Sermon 65[1]
This Matter is all about Love
Annunciation of our Lady March 25

Introduction

Today is the day of good news: If we had been silent, it would have been our great fault. Today God became man for men. Believe me, if he had become a stone today, the stones would speak giving thanks for such great gifts.

The good news that was brought to the world today was first given to the most holy Virgin, our Lady and true Mother of God. And because each day that we preach we speak the greeting asking grace from the Virgin, it is good that we speak it today, since it was said on such a day as today. Hail Mary... 

The Gospel of the Annunciation

The holy gospel recounts this holy greeting and happy news. Guided by it, let us go and greet the Virgin.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God. (Lk 1:26) “When God determined to have mercy on the world, when he wanted to show where his love reached...” I went looking for what day this was, what to call it and I could not find it or know what name to give it. What day is today? The day of such news is called the day of the mercy of God. Let the heavens bless you Lord! (cf. Dan 3:59) If we call it the day of the healing of the world, it is; if the day of the redemption of captives, it is; if the day of marriage, it is; if a day of giving great alms, it is also that. May He who offered mercy help us understand what day today is and help us understand...
how great is the grace that the whole world received today and place it in our hearts so that we may know it and be grateful.

"When the time came for God to pour out his mercies onto the world, the time of showing the men how far it reached, and to what extent it was extended . . .",

St. Ambrose says, "You who read this gospel, look at the letter and note the most holy mystery. Married and pregnant; married with man and made pregnant by God; married and made pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Note the sublime mystery. Each one of our Christian churches is married to one and made pregnant by another; married to the prelate, with the pastor and made pregnant by God; married to man and made pregnant by God. Who is the prelate, the preacher? They are the souls married to him, but there Jesus Christ enters into the depths and makes them pregnant with his power and with his Word so that they may have saving fruits. I will not know how to talk about this holy mystery.

_I will present this to your eyes_, (cf. Is 6:10) says God; this thing that I am doing today, this secret so great that no one will know how to speak about it; no understanding of the flesh will attain it. We know well that on that day _I will remove the evil of the earth_, (Zac 3:9) I will remove the sins of the world; I will wash all your blemishes. Glory to you, Lord, forever! This very day the prophet Daniel said: _The collusion will be finished, and he will accept the end of the sins, and iniquity will be destroyed and justice will be brought forever, the vision and the prophecy will be fulfilled and the Holy of Holies will be anointed_. He said that at this time _the malfeasance would be ended, sin would be taken away, eternal justice is to be brought, and the visions have been fulfilled when the Holy_
of Holies would be anointed. (cf. Dan 9:24) Today sin is removed and is to be removed, and justice is given. Thus if in this sermon we greet the Virgin today, it is very reasonable more so now than at some other time.

When the time came in which God desires to give his mercy and proclaim the fullness of his love for man, God sends his messenger, an angel, an archangel with the mission that he goes to bring to the Virgin. So Abraham died after he sent for a wife for his son Isaac. God calls a great one of his house, an archangel; he gives him a message to bring to a maiden betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, and her name was Mary. (cf. Lk 1:27) Oh may God be blessed! What is there in Nazareth? It is a very low province, according to the honor of the world. God gazes, there his archangel came, and the archangel knew the reason well. He would take the figure of a man; he enters into the house, finds the Virgin alone and in prayer, he kneels before her there very near to her, that until today the signs are seen; a little marble room is where the Virgin is and the other where the archangel arrives. The archangel speaks to the Virgin and tells her his mission and says: Hail, Full of grace; the Lord is with you (Lk 1:28); may the Lord be with you that all is well. He greeted her as one was accustomed to be greeted: May peace be with you. The Lord commanded him so: When one will enter into a house, say: “Peace to this house.” (cf. Lk10:5) The text says “he who says peace wishes all good things.” “May peace be with you, Lady.” St. Luke says joy; everything is fine: “Joy be with you, may peace be with you because he who will pacify, rejoice and give joy to the world is to come to you; it is the right that you rejoice; it is right, Lady, that you taste of the fruit that you are to give to the
world. May God keep you, *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.* This was a great greeting; this was good news.

Blessed maiden! She was not fickle in her beliefs as was Eve; she would raise her eyes and heart to God and did not respond to this greeting. She has a virginal modesty that was soon troubled. The Virgin saw a man before her; he said that she was full of grace and was gracious and being praised, she is troubled, there is nothing about which her humility is so troubled and the worst sound to her is to be praised. “What might this be? If it is of God or is not of God?” Good warning. What a harsh trick would it be to think that the Holy Spirit came to a person and that an evil spirit would come? Therefore, when you see yourselves in doubt, ask the Lord for light in order to know if what comes to you is a good or evil spirit. And so the Virgin does not say anything.

And as the archangel saw her so troubled, he anticipated her confusion and said to her: *Do not fear Mary, for you have found grace with God.* This grace that I speak about to you is not evident to the eyes of men; I do not bring a mission from men, I do not come from an evil place; the grace that I bring to you is not of men but of God. Then God assured her. The angel proposed his mission, the greatest mission, the greatest and highest mission that has ever been given. Blessed is the woman who heard such news and the womb that received such a gift.

Be attentive, maiden; the Lord commands you to speak: *Behold you will conceive and give birth.* Lady, hear these great things: You *will conceive and give birth to a Son and he is to be called Jesus,* which means “Savior:” *he will be great and he is to be called Son of the Most High,* and he will reign, and his reign will
not have an end. O blessed is the one who gave us such a Son, she who gave us such a kingdom! He will be great, and he will not have that little kingdom of Judea of one hundred leagues. His Father is to give him the throne of a king; a figure of the kingdom of David; the kingdom of David was very small, this is very large; the kingdom of David was temporal; this kingdom is spiritual; the one of David is finished, the other one will never end. He is to give him the kingdom of David and he will reign in the house of Jacob forever.

Why did he say more in the house of Jacob than in that of Abraham or Isaac? This is because those who descended from Abraham and Isaac were faithful and unfaithful. Isaac was faithful, Ishmael unfaithful; Jacob was faithful, Esau was evil, unfaithful and separated from God; but every person in the house and family of Jacob were faithful believers. He will reign in the house of Jacob, namely, in those who know God, in good people. And his Kingdom will not end. What a remarkable Messiah we would have that he will reign one hundred years and his kingdom would end and soon another would come! Our King and our Messiah is to reign forever and his kingdom will not end; that whereas he is in heaven, here he reigns and rules, here he sustains you and defends you and feeds you and obtains grace and pardon from sins; and he frees you from demons, consoles you in trials and finally gives you every good thing.

The archangel continues his mission to Mary and says: and he will be called, this, your Son, Son of the Most High. This phrase, he will be called, is a Hebrew phrase; it means he will be. What woman, without thinking or doubting, would not receive such a Son willingly? The happiness that the Virgin has for her virginity and purity is so great that she responds, "Angel, how will this be? This
announcement makes me fearful.” Oh purity, that you are so beloved by the Virgin! Oh, the purest depths that the love of virginity is stamped in your heart! Not without reasons do you ask: “Angel, how can this be, since I do not know man?” This is not a word of unbelief. Look at how great is the love that the Virgin has for her purity that she does not exchange her virginity to become the Mother of the Son of God. She does not say if she will or not; she does not doubt him but says: “Show me how it will be; since I have intended and determined not to know man.” Already I have said at other times that I value what we say here so much: “I do not eat flesh;” “I have the intention of not eating flesh in my whole life.” “How am I to conceive?” How is that to be? I would not want to destroy my purity nor disobey God. Give me an answer; if I keep my purity, I know well that all will be possible to God.” What an example for maidens! In everything she desires to please God. O blessed maiden who does not dare to exchange her virginity for being the Mother of the Son of God! How can this be?

The angel responds that he does not know since he is not the one who is to be in charge of the matter; he is the messenger who comes to announce it in the name of God. The one who is to do it is the Holy Spirit, who alone is holy; moreover, the power and strength of the Most High will overshadow you, he will empower you, he will teach you, he will sustain you since this event is above your powers, but the power and strength of the Most High will overshadow you (This is a Hebrew phrase) and therefore the one who will be born from you will be called Holy. Not masculine, but neuter; in order that you may know that he did not take on a personhood, but rather took on our human nature. He will be a Son, not of Joseph, not of man, but Son of the Most High, conceived by the Holy
Spirit. Since he will be holy and cannot do anything that is not holy, he will be called Son of God. Look, maiden, so that you may praise God, give him thanks and see his mercies. The angel says, your cousin Elizabeth who is old and clever because you are not frightened of what I have said to you, in her old age has conceived a son, so that you may know that there is nothing impossible for God; and therefore I am telling it to you; since that is possible, this is also possible.

This is the mission. I await your response and the Most Holy Trinity hopes for your consent; what is your response?

When the holy Virgin hears the great gifts that the angel promises her on the part of God, assured from God that he will do what he promises, she kneels down, with her eyes and heart turned to heaven, and says humbly and reverently: *Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.* And at that moment the Divine Word entered into her womb and remained the greatest work that ever as been done or will ever be done forever. Well, why does she call herself a slave and humble herself? God wants it so and it is right that she who was to have such a Son and who lowered herself so much that they might exalt her and proclaim her as Lady, and men and the angels and archangels will honor her (Lk 1:30-38) and they will regard and revere in the heavens and on the earth the Virgin who knew so well how to humble herself and receive the mission from God.

Today the Virgin received the greatest joy with this mission; and since now each time that we say it to her, she rejoices and so that we may know how to greet her and relate these mysteries, let us beg her that she may obtain for us the grace and so that she does it, let us say to her with devotion: Hail Mary....
What is this blackberry bush that burns and is not consumed?

Behold the handmaid of the Lord, etc, (Lk 1:38) as stated previously. The holy evangelist speaks the words which through the divine favor will give a basis for our sermon in the Mass that is said today as you will hear. Who will be able to speak of the powers of the Lord, having heard them he will sing all his praises; who is the wise one who will keep all of it? Who will speak the powerful deeds of the Lord? (Ps 105:2) Who will understand his mercies? Have you found some book in which you have read the mercies of God? Have you seen a book that tells them?

Moses is walking, grazing his herd and he leads it to the most interior part of the desert; and walking carelessly, he saw a blackberry bush that was burning; he was fearful at how it was burning and yet not consumed. Certainly I have to approach it and see this great marvel. Is there nothing more, Moses? Is there nothing more? He goes there and since he was coming close, he discovers that God was in the blackberry bush. Be careful of your life. Who sees God in the blackberry bush? And he says to him from there: Moses, do not approach me; truly, come swiftly; see that the land where you are is holy. Is there nothing more but to come and see? Take off your shoes; was he holier for being without his shoes? Do not bring your wisdom, your reason, your power, nor your knowledge; leave it behind, it does you no good; another spirit is necessary, another power, another understanding; take off your shoes, you are nothing, you are worth nothing. Do you think that that there was not anything more? Observe that you are near to God, at whose majesty the angels tremble.
God speaks from the blackberry bush: *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.* Wondrous God are you in the blackberry bush? What does your majesty command? I have ears to hear and eyes to see the hardships that my people suffer. *I have heard the voices that they address to me from Egypt and I have seen their affliction and seeing what is happening, I have come down here to free them.* (cf. Ex 3:1-10) Understand that I command you to go to Pharaoh and tell him this and this for me. *Wonderful indeed is the vision, but more wonderful is its fulfillment.*

*Who can understand the mercies of the Lord?* (Ps 106:43) Who is his counselor? What is this? If we enter into the desert, if we bring our sheep to the most secret place, if we withdraw to the most interior part of our hearts we will see the vision of God. What blackberry bush is this that burns and is not consumed? Your eyes see a pregnant virgin: God is within her and she is not consumed, she is pregnant and a virgin. If we approach this mystery, they have told us to go as people who are ignorant. Remove your reasoning, faculties and instincts, remove your shoes of animal skins and remove the knowledge and understanding of the flesh: *Depart, daughters of Zion, and you will see King Solomon crowned with a crown with which his Mother crowned him on the day of his enthronement.* (cf. Cant 3:11) Let us beg the grace from our Lord to know how to receive and rejoice and understand something about this mystery.

Do not approach with a worldly heart and eyes nor with a profane and impure heart; get rid of your reason, come near with bare feet, distrustful of yourself, detached from yourself approaching and seeking help from God. What is this? Come a little bit closer: What does this maiden have? What fire is this she
has inside herself? They have responded to you: Not an angel nor an archangel, but it is the same God that is within her: *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.* Oh Lord, may you be blessed and glorified forever and may the angels revere and adore you forever! What does the great God do, enclosed in a maiden? It is the name of the city of God, *the Lord in the same place* (Ez 48:35); the name of the Son of the Virgin and of God, *Emmanuel.* (Mt 1:23; Is 7:14) You approach the city; you approach the Virgin thinking that there is no more: God responds in her, I am here. What are you doing here Lord, in a maiden? *I saw the trial and hardships of my people and the trials and anguish that they suffer, and I have come down to free them from it.*

Oh wondrous God! Men and every prophet call out that he who was to come has already come. The world was captive in the power of the devil and in great anguish; the powers of the devil were great and it was great sorrow to see that sin worked in the hearts of men with efficacy. “There is no other help, says the Lord. I know what happens to my people; I know their sorrows, I have had compassion on them, of the holy fathers in limbo, of the dioceses that need renewal; I have descended and come to free them.”

Oh Lord, may you be glorified. What goes forth from here to there? He sent Moses so that he might free his people from the slavery of Pharaoh and God remains God without costing him anything. Is it the same here? No. I descended so that I may free my people. What will it cost you? When Moses freed your people, you sent many plagues to Pharaoh; already the dog flies were cast out, now the frogs, now the other things that caused them so much pain and trial, but to you, what is it going to cost you? What thing is this, Lord? *--On account of us*
men and because of our salvation, he descended from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man. Men, there is no longer a reason to have a heart of stone but of flesh, since the Word of God assumed flesh for us men and for our salvation. God was incarnated and became man. Over there he remains in the blackberry bush and they do not touch him; here he descends from heaven and is made man.

There is nothing more; it was a wedding through love

What has God to do with man? He joins to me those extremes. Give me today the desire (if I did not have it with one who knows so much) to say: Lord, do you know what you are doing? What is higher than God? What is lower than man? God and man! After Adam sinned, man is the name of dishonor; that man and sinner are the same thing. And when St. Paul desires to scold one, he calls him man. You are man, aren't you? (cf. Rom 9:20) And the Psalmist says: Let the nations know that they are but men, (Ps 9:21) that they are wretched sinners. Who could never think such a thing? Heaven united with soil? Height united with depth? Rich united with poor? The pure united with the filthy? Gold united with the mud, man? What is this, Lord, that you have so truly been joined with man? They will be two in one flesh. (Gen 2:24) What does it mean to become man?

He became man and did not cease being God; two natures and one person, so that one can say God-man, and the Man-God, and that what is said of the one can be said of the other and that the blessings of the Word are communicated to man and the works of man to the Word. They were married: O marvel of God even to the emptiness of man! O marvel of man even to the exaltation of God!
God descends unto man and man goes up unto God. What depth and what height! So that you may know how much God in his goodness can do, he lowers himself to become the God-man, even joining humanity and giving it existence with the personal existence of God. And there are not two persons, not two totally separated natures; the human and the divine natures united and the human nature appears; it is assumed and united to the Divine Word; not two persons, but one in order to make you understand that because the goodness of God, without any merit on our part, was able to raise up that humanity and let it exist in God and adorn it with such excellence and grace so as to make him his Son in conformity with our nature, so that he who had the goodness to do this will do it to raise you from the dung heap so that you may be a son of God by participation; therefore he did it that you might see in the head what was to happen in the members. Just as it came to him without human merit so it will come to you without meriting it. Augustine: "The Lord Jesus is presented to us as a wonderfully illustrative example of predestination." The model, the confidence of predestination; if you are predestined, if God calls, justifies and saves you, it is because you are predestined by grace.

Today the Word is married with that holy soul and body. —Married, Lord? Therefore he said that I would tell you if you did not know so much. Married: That equality surprises me! Are there some here that understand marriages? That equality of lineages overwhelms me here! Are they for the purpose of being in one? What goes from lineage to lineage, knowledge to knowledge, riches to riches? The difference is so very great that the angels are afraid to hear it. Who would see God come down today and be humbled? (I say come down, God never
changes place, but I want to say: to take a human nature) It was an unequal thing; but at the end, that soul and body were the purest and holiest.

Is he not poor? Since you want to be married to her, it is not bad that you enter into the womb of one woman and exalt her. Oh great good! Oh great honor! Do you think that there is nothing more than to marry this human nature? If one would come from the Indies with much money and they knew that he gave alms, how the poor relatives would demand things and bother him! Look, Lord, your spouse owes you nothing, she never sinned, she was most pure in her conception; look at how much we, the relatives, owe, how burdened with debts we are, how sick, how exiled, condemned to death and enemies of God, with a thousand debts and traps and all are to be charged to you. Lord, if you had not been who you are, I would have told you: Lord, do you know what you are doing? All the sins of men have to be laid upon on your shoulders, you have to pay it; all things are to fall on you, because they are not to free you from anything. Do you know with whom you are married? Are you not dishonoring yourself by the relatives of the newly married bride? As the Son of the Father so rich in heaven, do you come here to the earth to marry and live among such a poor people? Lord, if you had some greed that the needs of the others would not move you, there would not be so much in that; but you Lord, being so loving, so merciful that you give everything to the one whom you see with such a need, how can you put yourself among so many poor? What have you done? That the needs of all have to fall on your shoulders; and how one sinned in his flesh, the other in his insanity, and the other in his adultery and blaspheming. What have you done, Lord?
Lord, I have to say it; let the heavens and earth bless you! "I will do it so that you may love the ugly and it may seem more beautiful to you." There is nothing more, it was a marriage of love. The Father desired good for us so that he gave us such a marriage and Son. God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son. (Jn 3:16) The Father desired good for us; the Son desired good for us, so that he consented to becoming man; the Holy Spirit desired good for us so that he ordained it so. Why did the Father give the Son? In order that he might die and be flayed, in order that they might marry him to a slave: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. He who is born of a slave is a slave although he may be a free Son since childbirth follows the womb. Is it not so? The Virgin is called a slave and he who is born from her is called a slave: Oh Lord, I am your servant and the son of your handmaiden. (Cf. Ps115:16) You were a slave Lord, who affixed you on a cross with nails? The Son of God did not come to be served but to serve. (cf. Mt 20:28) You were a slave of men since you served them and with difficulty they desire to thank you for it. Oh, you are blessed goodness and we are wickedly evil! God sent his Son to the world to intercede for men. What was this, Lord that moved you? Clemency overcame you so that you would erase our crimes. Would it not be enough to send one like Moses? Not an angel, not a delegate. I have done it, I will bring it, I will carry it for you; I will save you. Hear me, my people, I carry you and nurture you in my womb, says the Lord. I did it for you, I will suffer for you, I will carry you on my shoulders; I will save you even in old age; until you are gray I will wait for you. (cf. Is 46:3-4) Blessed may you be, Lord that the one who made the vessel came to weld it and the one to whose mold it was made, came to heal and to shape it.
I desire to come down, God says. What was this? May God keep you in his love! The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit intended good for us. This event is all about love. Do not seek equality, nor get involved in that kind of work; do not seek a reason to love; it is love. I wonder if you had eyes to see this that by the great love that he had for us, he humbled himself and enclosed himself within the womb of the Virgin, determined to pay ransom and suffer and die for men, and pay all of their debts, although it would cost him his life?

Christian, Learn

He is a slave. What is the reason for us to learn it? You knew well that he did it. We do not want to give him thanks even in his coming and suffering what he suffered! Why do we not at least give him a room? What would you do if he had not come? What is the reason that we may do so? What? St. Paul says: If you have consolation, if you know the depth of my mercy, then complete my joy: Have you seen what I have done for you? If there is some consolation, if there is some love that you have for me, if you are not stones, I beg you that in this you will fulfill my desires. Complete my joy: enjoy the same things, have the same charity, be of one mind. Keep this in mind: because in Jesus Christ; he who was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal to God a coveted prize: but he emptied himself accepting the form of a slave, and made himself like man and in the same condition as man. (Cf. Phil 2:1-7) Have you heard what I said to you and understood the reason that you have to suffer? Well, I pray that you will feel what Christ, our Lord did for you — How much did he humble himself? How much? Have they not told you that being the natural Son of God he became a
foreigner? And do we not have some gratitude? I pray that you feel in yourself what he felt in himself; that being God, though he should be treated as God, he suffered; he humbled himself and abased himself even to die a death on the cross. Not because he was unequal to God; he did not want to utilize his greatness, nor his height, but he humbled himself, humiliated himself. Oh the immense goodness of God! How he lowered himself, taking the form of a slave. Not only like any slave, but also as an evil slave since he was thought to be evil. They whipped and beat the evil slaves. As an evil one he was whipped and slapped and sent to and nailed on the cross. He became man, he got tired, he ate and, he drank, he slept, he suffered: Look at how great was his humiliation! And if God humbled himself so much, is it right that man is so presumptuous? While Christ emptied his majesty, is man going to be proud?

What will we say to those who sin? What will we say to those who have fantasies? What will we say to those who walk rightly with their neighbors? "Is he to say this to me?" "Was I to consent to this for him?" What will we pledge when we swear honorable oaths? I humbled myself- says Christ- Is it right that the slave is praised? I humbled myself in order to raise man up; do not go around envious; may each one consider the other as better. The one who will humble himself more is the greater. He who would consider himself inferior is worth more in resemblance to God, who being God and in the form of God and in his glory came and adopted the form and attitude of a slave and whereas he could not die, he took a mortal form. Because love does great things and suffers much; love causes you to suffer punishment so that the other may rest, you may be sick so that the other one becomes healthy, he was lowered in order to raise the other;
love does not seek what is his own but what is of Jesus Christ and those of the others.

This love prevailed so much in God that you have him today as God and man; love does not seek its rest, but that of the others. Feel this among yourselves. Do not fulfill yourselves, but others. God had so much love that he became man and made himself suffer for so much. Well, it is reasonable to give up your peace so that your neighbor may have it; that you take on his burdens; that you die by giving your life for him since this love overcame Christ to die for you. If you see God who gave up his rest for men, why do you not humble yourself in order to exalt your neighbor? You do not fulfill yourself by helping the others; the need for helping the others passes. Instead take the example of Jesus Christ who being rich, lowered himself and became poor; being high he became low; being honored he accepted dishonor. He is married to mankind; he disregards his greatness, he hid his divinity. Learn, Christian! Learn! God became man out of love! The reason is that as the Virgin says: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord,* (Lk 1:38) just as Christ says: *I have been your servant,* so you may say “Behold, I am a slave, *not my will be done but yours,*” (Mt 26:39) as he said to the Father: “I am your slave, may your will be done.” In a prosperous and unfavorable time, in life and in death, now and forever he openly calls you a slave of God since the Virgin called herself that.

**What does Rebekah have to do with Mary?**

Lord, what do you see in her that you have been pleased? *Run and see*- says Abraham to his servant- *look for a wife for my Son.* Eliezer went to the land
of Abraham, placing himself near a well. He is hoping that the maidens may come out for water there. He raises his eyes to God and says: “Lord, show me the one who is to be the one that I ought to take for the wife of the son of your servant Abraham.” He later says, “Lord, give me this for a sign: that the one I would ask for a drink would say: Drink and I will give water to your camels, I take this for a sign.” Said and done; behold Rebekah comes, a very beautiful and veiled maiden, that although she was hidden, they all went out for water (there was not so much evil as there is in the world today). He picked up his water pitcher, he approached her and greeted her and said: “Give me a drink, young maiden.” She came and with great care she took away the pitcher from her head and gave him to drink and said to him: I will also give to your camels to drink. She quickly pours the water and gives the camels water. Eliezer was astonished and said: “Truly this is the one whom God has destined for my master.” He asked her whose daughter she was; as he knew she was a daughter of the brother of Abraham, he rested to a large extent; and he opens his coffers and brings out so many bracelets and rings and he places them on her arms, hands and ears. And finally the son of his master married her. (cf. Gen 24)

What is the sign in which he may see the one he is to take for the wife of the son of his Master? The sign is that which is given: “That woman who I ask for a drink will not only give me a drink, but also water my camels; that is the one that God has for the wife of the son of my Master.”

The angel comes to the Virgin with the mission of God; they give her for a sign “that one may not only give me what I ask of her, but more than what I ask her, that maiden is the one whom God has for the wife of the Eternal Word, his
Son.” What does Rebekah have to do with Mary? Rebekah is wise, Mary is much more; if Rebekah is beautiful, and Mary is much more. What does the love of Rebekah have to do with Mary? What a great thing was that sign that she would give a drink to whoever reached the well thirsty? One is to be the bride of the Word that she is so full of mercy, full of love, full of the depths of charity that you may not ask her for a thing that she does not give you; that the pitcher is taken away and the water of grace may be given to you so that in your tribulations you may feel her help.

Good heavens! When this book goes out from this plaza, all that is done through this Virgin and her prayers will be read! When will be the day that one will go out and say: “I had a foot in the fires of hell, and through the prayers of the Virgin, God freed me and pardoned me.” When will one go out and say: “He freed me from many sins.” Others: “from such dangers in my life.” We may see that, besides calling to the Virgin, she helps and aids and not only gives what we ask for, but more.

Conclusion

The subject of the will of God: Let it be done in me according to your will. I am a slave for the consolation of all. If Christ is called the slave of the Father, and the Virgin is called a slave, who are you, Christian? How long will you stray with pleasures, fickle daughter? Because the Lord created something new throughout the land: a woman will surround the man. (cf. Jer 31:22) Now, we have God for our brother, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones (cf. Gen 2:23; 37:27); today he has been begotten. So Moses said to the people. He is our
brother, our friend, our head and our every good; he came here to sanctify you and remove all evils from you. Maiden, Christian soul, if you have separated yourself from God, that is not your land; your city is heaven; the service of God, it is love; your den is heaven; return, return to God, repent and be sorrowful one and two and three times and thirteen thousand times.

-Oh that they may not desire to receive me!

-If they desire that God has done something new on the earth: The Virgin surrounded a man. Who is dismayed that although one may be at the gate of hell, there God draws him out of his sins and out of hell, for did not the Word become flesh? Why do you fear? Did not God become man so that men may become God by participation? He is prepared to give you peace and to pardon you and give you grace and afterwards glory, to which Jesus the son of Mary may conduct us, who with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen
Sermon 65[2]

This work is purely about grace

The Annunciation of our Lady March 25

Introduction: The blackberry bush that was burning and not consumed

When God saw the affliction that the sons of Israel endured as slaves of Egypt, he desired to free them from their captivity. He appeared to Moses in the desert: *who was guarding the flocks of his father-in-law* in the desert. And he saw a blackberry bush that was burning and was not consumed; and he was afraid of seeing the fire so red in a bush so frail that was not being consumed. Moses said: *I want to go and see this marvel. And God said to him from the blackberry bush: The land on which you are, by my being here is holy; if you want to come near, remove your shoes. (cf. Ex 3:1-5)*

Marvelous is the vision of the prophet, but more marvelous is its fulfillment. What is the fire in the blackberry bush and it is not consumed but God in the womb of a maiden to free the human race from sin and make them complete? If some day the preachers have the need to speak about purity, this is the day. If some one unclean comes to speak about this holy mystery, the Son will say to him from the womb of his blessed Mother: *If you wish to reach here, take off your shoes because the place where you are is holy ground.* The shoes are made from the skins of dead animals. If you want to reach here to speak about this holy mystery, remove your affections that are at the feet of your soul, the mortal things of the earth. And since to speak of it we have the need of purity and
grace, let us ask for them from the same Lord and let us place them before the Virgin as our intercessor, saying, *Hail Mary.* . . .

**Today is the day of good news**

*This is the day of good news; if we will have been silent let us be accused of a crime. Today is the day of good news; if we would be silent, if we would not manifest it, we would be accused of treason.* How could the tongue be silent on the day that God became flesh for the love of the human race? Today is the day of greatest joy, the greatest that ever was or will ever be. The day on which God did the greatest work that he ever did or ever will do. The day on which he took our flesh with which he became man. Say: *If God is with us, who can be against us?* (Rom 8:31) Today is the day, which, if the angels could have envied us, they would have done it. And there are teachers that say— and it seems very good to me— that Lucifer was thrown out of heaven because of his envy of this mystery. He had made his account: “If God had to be joined with some creature he is to be so united with the best one. Since the angels are greater than men and possess a better nature; and I am the best than the angels. If he is to be joined with someone, I am to be the one.” As Lucifer found out afterwards that God was to be united with men, he was jealous: “How can God be joined with sinful and miserable man and abandon me? Am I to adore a piece of mud? Since he knew that the angels and the seraphim had to adore that most holy humanity, united with God, here he took the occasion to revolt. And the Lord came and cast him from heaven to the deep because it is written that *Great is the Lord and he looks at the lowly things in the heaven and on the earth.* (cf. Ps 112:6)
How the bride had desired this happy day when she spoke in the Song of Songs: *Whoever would give me to you, my brother, nursed at the breasts of my mother who found you outside around those plazas and he kissed you and embraced you so that now no one would scorn me!* (cf. Cant 8:1) Whoever would see you, my brother, saying with desire about this day “God is made man, made a little baby, nursing at the breasts of a maiden?” Whoever would find you here Lord, outside of eternity, walking around these plazas clothed with our clothes, made subject to sorrows and trials, would hug you and kiss you since no one scorns my knowledge of this event? Since you, Lord made man, joined with men, who will scorn me? Will men? No. Will the angels scorn me, seeing you, who are Lord of all of them, made man? No. Will the demons scorn me seeing you, Lord, of whom they tremble in hearing you mentioned, made my brother? No. Will the Eternal Father scorn me since he gave you who were man to heal men and by honoring them because of you? How will the Son scorn me since, for love of me, he became man and our brother so that in his holy gospel he called men brothers? How will the Holy Spirit scorn me since he dwelt more in him who is my brother and for love of me became man? So is the holy Virgin going to disdain me? How will she scorn the sinner since we were the cause of her dignity; that to serve sinners God took her for a mother and we are brothers of her blessed Son and she is our mother and so we sing: *Show that you are our mother?* If you did not Lord, as the church said, etc., no one will scorn me.

Scotus says that the more appropriate work of grace that God has done with men has been this: that no one deserved salvation. If God pardons you your sins on your part, it is a work of grace; however on the part of Christ, it cost him
dearly. If he gives you glory there is grace for you; but it cost him his life dying on a tree with great anguish. This work is purely one of grace alone, since no one deserved it. Your blessings, although you may not deserve them, may be grace on your part, on the part of Jesus Christ, it cost him trials and bitter death; but no one deserved this, Jesus Christ himself as man. Since in the same instant that he was conceived, his soul, created immediately, was personalized with his Godhead. Since before he took on our human nature, man could not merit redemption; the work was purely of the grace of the Lord, without any merit. Jesus deserved the name above every name because he was humbled unto the cross (cf. Phil 2:8-9); but this is purely a work of grace. So great is today’s feast that one day nor many is enough to celebrate and preach the Virgin’s dignity and, for this reason, the holy church appoints a month of Advent so that all of it may be celebrated; and if the totality of this feast that is celebrated is nothing more than a recounting of how it happened, the joy of the blessed Virgin is celebrated.

Today the desires of all the patriarchs and prophets are fulfilled. The Messiah was sought with such desire and with such great sighs: Send out your hand from on high, receive me; and free me from the many waters and from the hand of foreign sons: Send out Lord, your hand from on high, holy David said, and free me from the many waters. (cf. Ps 143:7) The “hand” that David asks for is this holy day, this holy mystery he asks for is Jesus Christ; because with our hands we accomplish what we desire and the Eternal Father with Jesus Christ does all his works, all things are done by him and therefore the Son of God is called “hand” and “arm” in the holy scripture. Send out your Son, Lord, so that he will free me. How have I, Lord offended you who are infinite? Neither
consolations nor the help of men are enough to console me, if you yourself do not console me. Send out, Lord, one who is God, neither angel nor saint, nor seraphim, nor limited thing, but God himself, the richest, most loving and all-powerful One.

You may not give rational bread to one who is starved of hunger. Give him bread that exceeds it and soon he will be filled up. Lord, do not send a saint or another than yourself, no finite thing; send the Infinite One, your hand, who is to pay for all our sins and he will be greater than rational, finite bread. On the part of Jesus Christ- blessed is he- By his passion he redeemed more than ten thousand worlds or one hundred thousand worlds that might go astray, if some one is going to hell, it is because he did not wish to rejoice in the ransom of Jesus Christ. The ransom has been paid and it is more than sufficient. It is as if they had ten captives in the power of the Moors, a trader pays the ransom of them all; one of them comes and after being freed does not want to leave captivity. On the part of the trader, he has been ransomed; the ransomed one may not attribute his staying to his liberator’s evil. Lord, send out your hand, the blessed Jesus Christ so that he may free me from the many waters of my sins (cf. Ps 1:17) that grow so great that they want to drown me, and so that he may free me from the hand of another’s sons, of the demons and the world.

Today is a day of good news, a day of joy, of the mercies of God; if we will be silent, if we will not preach them, others are to infer treachery on our part.
Rebekah, a type of Mary by her charity

When Abraham wanted to get his son married, he called his chief servant who is called Eliezer and told him to look for a wife for his son Isaac and had him take an oath to him and said: “You may not take a wife for my son from this land of the Canaanites in which I live, but from my own land and relatives; go to Mesopotamia and find a wife for him from there.” Eliezer responded: “And if she whom I consider as a wife does not want to come, shall I bring your son there?” Abraham said: “Go, so that the Lord my God, who led me out of my homeland, will send his angel with you so that he will present you with a wife for my son. If she does not want to come, you will be free of the oath. Be careful of this that you do not take my son there by any means.” Eliezer takes ten camels and goes up to Mesopotamia. He arrives late in the afternoon when the maidens have the custom of going out for water, near a city called Nahor and ordered the camels and servants stop by a well. Eliezer prayed to the Lord and said: Lord, God of my master Abraham, help me and have mercy on my master Abraham. I am at this well where the daughters of his people come for water. I take this for a sign: I will say to the maidservant: “Give me a drink” and she would respond: “Drink and I will also give your camels to drink,” this one Lord, is the one that you prepared for your servant Isaac and by this I will know that you have heard my prayer and today you have shown mercy to my master Abraham. I take this for a sign: charity. He had not even finished the prayer when Rebekah came with the water jug on her shoulder, a daughter of the brother of Abraham, and a virgin and very beautiful and she did not know man. She was a very pure virgin. And she said that she did not know man and that she was a virgin in deed and in
thoughts because there are virgins who, although they do not know a man, are not virgins in their desires and thoughts. Rebekah was very pure. Upon arriving, he asked her for a drink; she responds, "Drink with much pleasure and I will also give your camels water to drink." When he saw this and knew who she was, he praised the Lord who provided for him the one he was looking for and opening his coffers he gives Rebekah many bracelets and two bracelets for her arms and a ring for one ear. She takes Eliezer to the house of her brother Laban. Eliezer gave his message to Laban and he gave Rebekah to him and he takes her for the wife of his master Isaac. And the text says that the joy that Isaac received was so great joy that when he saw Rebekah, the sadness that he had from the death of his mother left him. (cf. Gen 24:1-67)

Abraham implored Eliezer to find a wife for his son and not from a foreign land, but his own. The most blessed Virgin is from the very land of God. God is the purest, without sin. The Virgin is the purest, without sin; although not by nature, she was freed by grace of all sin. She is from the land of God. Rebekah gave Eliezer and his camels a drink so that he took this as a sign of who would be the spouse of his master; she who possessed charity. The Virgin had very great charity. God would not take her for a mother if she did not possess great charity. Therefore I desire much, each time I speak of the Virgin, so that there would be a book so that her love could be seen; and what we ought to say about what the Virgin has done and does with us it could not fit on paper. How many things have you seen there that God has freed you through the prayers of this Lady without your knowing it? If we have good things, if we are free of evils they come to us through her blessed prayers; She frees us from the danger of soul and body, that
is our beast; she gives a drink to the soul, she prays for the just that they be preserved from sin and for the sinners who are beasts, that they may be freed from their sins.

The True Devotion to Mary, a sign of predestination

Do you wish to see a very great sign if one is good, if he is to be saved? See if he is devoted to the Virgin: *In my chosen ones send out roots.* God says: “Lady, Mother, *in my chosen ones I have struck roots.*” (Sir 24:13) Is it a sign of the chosen ones of God? That the Virgin Mary may have devotion to her roots in you; not a light, but deep devotion. Be devoted to this blessed Lady, and serve her. If you show kindness to a man, he thanks you. And do you think, if you greet the Virgin and pray or do some service, that she will forget you? She will not forget you, but for the blessing that you give her she will ask her blessed Son to give you ten. She will say: “My Son, bless this one who blessed me.” True devotion of the Virgin that may have roots, not from above but by devotion to her, you will strengthen your will and your passions; so that because she was the purest, by your devotion to her, although your passions incline you to other things, you will be pure through her love and turn away from evil and say: “This is because of the love of the purest Virgin.”

God provides Eliezer with Rebekah, the same that he was looking for and as he desires her for the wife of his master because before the negotiations began he put it in the hands of the Lord and he prayed that he direct him; that to those who call on the Lord and place their affairs in his hands before they have them, his majesty always does it as they desire, at least if it is suitable for them.
Two Bracelets and an Earring

Eliezer gave Rebekah two bracelets for her arms and a ring for her ear (cf. Gen 24:22); the ring signifies the faith and the bracelets hope and charity since with those arms God is embraced. He gave her two bracelets and an earring for the right ear; that she does not because there is to be only one ear. Daughter, hear and see- says David- and incline your ear. (Ps 44:11) Not both ears, one ear, no more: believing God. The Virgin believed God, she had a very great faith and so St. Elizabeth said to her: Blessed are you who believed that the Lord's words would be fulfilled in you. (Lk 1:45) One bracelet is hope. The Virgin had hope in the Lord, she trusted in the Lord. There are some desperate men, so distrustful of God, that if you say to them: “What is to become of you? Are you to go to heaven?” They will say: “Well am I to go?” And because of whatever happens to them, they soon lose hope. All right, because the hope was not true, the truth is, there is an unfeeling person who suffers as much of a burden as she did. If your hope were true, if you had assented and truly believed: “From here shortly, I am to go to heaven to rejoice, I have to go to God quickly,” what would be given to you that they would insult you here, since you hope to be honored there by God forever, nor lack what he lacks, if there you are to have so quickly an abundance forever? You say that you have hope and if they take a silver coin from you, one day you lack something to eat, soon you are desperate.

Job had true hope, because with his children dead and his property plundered, after a thousand trials, he said: I believe that my Redeemer will raise me up on the last day and I am to see God with my flesh and with these eyes I
am to look at him and I have this hope kept in my breast and in my heart. (cf. Job 19:25-27) As this blessed one had hope, everything was made light for him and with true hope he has assented in his soul: “I am to go to heaven, I am to see God”- everything became light for him even though there are heavy burdens. The Virgin had true hope and true charity more than all pure creatures and therefore she deserved to be the Mother of God.

Paraphrase of the Gospel of the Annunciation

The Gospel begins here. The angel Gabriel was sent by God. God sent an angel who was named Gabriel, (Lk 1:26) the greatest of the angels. While St. Gabriel may not be the greatest of the Seraphim, he is the greatest of the messengers of God. The angels and archangels are the ones whom God sends with messages about his plans and accordingly, the teachers say, St. Gabriel is the greatest of the angels.

To a city of Galilee that was called Nazareth. To a poor land. Judea was an honored land, Galilee was lowly and poor.

To a Virgin espoused to a man who was called Joseph. He gives the name of Joseph to denote a duty, as if he had said: “To a Virgin espoused to a carpenter.” May you be blessed, O Lord, that you have humbled yourself so much! She was espoused to a carpenter. If you had to get your son married and could choose, would you have him marry the daughter of a carpenter? Well, you see, the all-powerful King, Emperor who could take whomever he wished for a mother, chose a poor woman and wife of a carpenter. There are men and maidens who although the Lord gives them the mercy today that he gave to this blessed
Lady, they would not be carpenters, nor would they get married to carpenters; and father, that if you say to them that they might lower themselves a little, since they are poor and their daughters marry officials, they will say to you that before they will give them away, or will throw them into a well. From here, they decide to make them nuns by force and become so holy that they come to what God knows and the one who serves him. Since they do not enter with devotion, carried by God, but by fantasy and by not humbling themselves, they are not religious; and instead they possess rather vain fantasies and live as prisoners with continual discontent. God chose lowly persons.

*The name of the virgin was Mary.* Mary means in one language "sea of bitterness" and in another "princess" or "star of the sea." Each one is appropriate for the Virgin Mary: she was the sea of "grief" in the Passion of her blessed Son and "star" of the sailors for this great and spacious sea of this world, the "north star" of the sinners and "princess" of the seraphim.

*And the angel entered.* The angel entered into the room of the Virgin in the figure of a very honest man. He knelt down and said to her: *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.* Some declared this greeting in the present and others in the future. Some said: "The Lord is with you"; others: "May the Lord be with you." And this seems more in agreement with the greeting: "May the Lord be with you."

*And she was troubled.* The Virgin feared and was disturbed. Lady, why are you disturbed? Seeing angels? Certainly not; she was accustomed to seeing them and communicating with them. She fears seeing the figure of a man in front of her. This is good for the bold, overly confident maidens. The chattering maidens
do not seem good to me nor do they seem good to God. The most pure maiden, modest, fears overconfidence. She is not to trust either her own father or her brother. St. Ambrose says: *It is for the virgins to be afraid. Fear belongs to virgins.* She is to avoid seeing men as well as demons. “Give me the bold maiden and I have ruined her by giving her to you. And as the incarnate demons have the custom of saying: “Give her to me that she may hear me and I have subdued her by giving her to you.” I call the incarnate demons the bachelors of the marketplace who walk around to deceive virgins; they are worse than demons. The Virgin was afraid.

And because this word “gracious,” “full of grace,” has two senses, and can be applied to one or to another: grace of the world, beauty, grace before the eyes of God as the angel said to her “full of grace,” she wondered about what kind of greeting this was. Not like the virgins of the miserable marketplace, who are glad when men say beautiful things, and are vainglorious about it, and they desire it and are attired and place themselves where men will see them so that they will say it. I think about this a lot. If the other maiden, our mother- that maiden was where the angel greeted her and said to her: *Why did God command you not to eat from this tree?* (d. Gen3:1) - She will wonder what kind of greeting that was, he would not deceive her; and such great evil would not come to us from his deceit if she said: “One must not question what God commands; it is enough that he commands us not to eat it.” She stops reasoning with him and he does not deceive her. And if we, when the devil, the world and the flesh greet us, let us ponder and examine what such a greeting might mean so that it would not deceive us. The blessed Virgin: What was the meaning of such a greeting? If he
said to her “gracious” of the flesh, beautiful, she would not desire it because she knows that the wise man said that: *Vanity is beauty, that beauty is empty. That woman is praised* (Prov 31:30); if he says to her “gracious” before the eyes of God, her humility would not consent to it because she had been nothing in his eyes.

The angel, seeing that she is in doubt said to her: *Do not fear Mary.* And he spoke her own name in order to assure her more. Do not fear, Lady; do not think that the grace I speak to you about is vain.

*You have found grace before God.* Lady, the Lord has been pleased with you. You have found grace before his blessed eyes and so much so that you will conceive a Son in your womb. This is against the heretics who said that our Lady has no role in the conception of her Son, but that rather the Lord had entered into her womb and went out.

*You will conceive,* the angel says to her, in your womb and you will bear a Son; they are to call him Jesus, Savior of the world. He will be very great and they are to call him Son of the Most High and God has given to him the kingdom of his father David; and his reign will be forever, there will be no end. This is against the Jews, who said that the Messiah was to reign temporally. *And of his kingdom,* the angel says, *there will be no end.* The spiritual kingdom will not end, which is the kingdom of souls.

*However, Mary said to the angel:* How will this be, since I do not know man? The blessed Virgin loved her virginity so much that she puts off being Mother of God; and she says: How can this happen, since I have promised not to know man? ” This means “I do not know;” a Hebrew phrase that wishes to say “I
have promised not to know man in any way as when one says: "I will not eat meat in Lent," although it may be the first day, she wants to say that she has promised not to eat it for the entire Lent. What would you do? Cast yourself off. —Lady, will you not exchange your virginity, without sin and with great merit, by being Mother of God? —I do not have a reason to know man. How sad is the maiden who, by one gift that they give to her for marriage, loses her virginity.

And when the angel responds: "Do not fear Lady; it will be done that you will be Mother of God and keep your virginity; how he does it I do not know. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. This work is to be by the Holy Spirit; the work is of God alone. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." (Hebrew phrase: He will overshadow means: the Holy Spirit will empower you and will comfort you, he will give you power so that this may happen.); but Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word. You ask me to be a mother, behold the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as the Lord commands. And at that same instant the most holy soul of Jesus Christ was created and he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin and he joined body, soul and divinity, and the greatest work was accomplished that has never been done before nor will not be done again.

**Conclusion: Let us give thanks to the Lord and to Mary**

Today is the day of greatest joy. It is the day of the joy of joys. It is the day of good news. It is the day of all our good. If we were silent, if we were ungrateful, if we did not give thanks to the Lord for this day, we would be guilty
of treachery. Let us give thanks to the Lord for such a great good that he has
given us on this day, and to his Mother, by whose hands he gave it to us. That if
we reach a very beautiful tree and you see a pear or very beautiful apple, say:
“Blessed is that tree that gave such fruit.” When you see Jesus Christ in the
consecrated host, when you take communion, when you receive our Lord give
thanks to the Eternal Father who gave it to you; say: “Blessed is the tree, that is,
the most blessed Virgin, who gave such great fruit.” And the Lord has given us
grace and glory, to which he brings us along.
Sermon 66

Happy is the Person whom Mary Visits:

Visitation of the Virgin

Introduction

It is a thing to marvel at that, words being of such little importance and so light, since they pierce the air, that they may have such great importance that they may be nails and very painful. They are light in substance, but they are of importance in the evil that they do, if they are evil, or in the good, if they are good. By your words you have been justified. Life and death are in the hands of the tongue. (Mt 12:37; cf. Prov 18:21) There are times that houses or a city, a town is lost or gained by a tongue; and with an evil tongue you can take away the property, honor and life from a person, and above all, Woe to that one that takes God away from his neighbor with evil counsel or persuasion!

They are not your words, Virgin, in that way, but words of wisdom. (cf. Eccles 10:12) The words of the Virgin brought to God when by her Behold the Handmaid (Lk 1:38) God became incarnate in her; and by her words God came to us. If not, look at the Visitation of Elizabeth, when she speaks, the baby boy received the hastening of free will and received grace, as he who does not say anything! Then he knew Christ and rejoiced and adored him and received grace and was cleansed of original sin; so that when he left the womb, he left it holy, and for this reason his birth is celebrated; and so those words are his: From the womb you will call me and from the womb of my mother he remembered my
name. (cf. Is 49:1; Lk 1:13) What is your name? John, that is, grace and that is given to you by the speech of the Virgin.

If your words are so profitable and strong, Lady, that grace is given with them, remember, Virgin Mother, when you will stand before God that you may speak good things for us and turn away his indignation from us. If being on the earth, the Holy Spirit descends on the baby boy when the Virgin speaks, much more will he descend on her praying, who is already in heaven. If the great precursor of Christ, St. John, the first who will come out to preach, takes with him the blessing and greeting of the Virgin, how will I dare to preach if she does not speak for us in heaven? Elisha, although a prophet did not feel himself worthy enough to prophesy, if they did not bring to him one who might sing (2 Kgs 5:15) to him, “How can I prophesy if I do not hear this great singer who today sang the great hymn of the Magnificat? Visit us, Lady, with your intercession; speak for us to God so that I may speak well of you and this audience may hear. And because you have mercy for everyone, may be all be humbled before you, saying: Hail Mary....

The Humility of Mary in visiting St. Elizabeth

The example and teacher of all men that have been saved and will be saved is Christ, and he is called the Light of the World, (Jn 8:12) and consequently, the Sun. And how much one is near to him in holiness, he participates so much more in his light and so much more clearly the path to God. And since, among all those near to him, there is no one as great as his mother, no one shows us the virtues with which we are to be pleasing to him as she does. The one who will look closely
at the life of the Virgin, will see in her the greatest similarity to her Son, our Lord, since it was proper that just as there is no relationship as close as that between mother and son, and they are in the habit resembling each other so much in the face, and it was particularly so between our Lady and her Son, and as it is proper that in the spiritual way no relationship or similarity had been so great between men and Christ, nor between angels and Christ as between him and his mother. Many daughters gathered riches for him: your surpass them all (Prov 31:29); and these daughters are all the daughters of the Church not only from the beginning of the world to the end of it on earth, but in all the daughters of the Church in heaven which is one with that on earth and has a head, who is Christ. (1 Cor 11:3) They call her the Lady in heaven and even the seraphim know her superiority in love and grace. There is no union with God so great as the personal union of being Mother and no union as great in grace as between that Mother and her Son. That, that Blessed are you among women (Lk 1:28) that the angel from heaven said to her, and that which St. Elizabeth said to her today, a woman of the earth, thus says to us: that she has a blessing over men and angels and more grace than they and consequently more glory.

Look closely and you will see that Christ is a virgin, the Mother is a virgin before he preached that virginity was greater than marriage, already she had been proposed to and even promised. (cf. Mt 19:12) He preached poverty and she did it, giving to God what the kings gave to her. What about the times the Lord preached humility and charity and how many times the Virgin did it first, as the teaching of that Son who was in her womb. We marvel much that the Lord washed the feet of his disciples that teaches us humility and charity; and it is that
one admirable thing that Christ at the end of his life intended to do for our example; but look at the morning star that came first before the sun and you will see her deep humility and love in visiting St. Elizabeth today.

And just as seeing how great was the humility of the Son of God in humbling himself, as St. John first says, how much was his sublimity: *When the Father had handed over all things to him in his hands*, (Jn 3:35) so as to know how to ponder her humility, look first how sublime she is. Lady, do you not remember whom you carried in your enclosed womb, that is such that by being his Mother, you are the highest creature of the earth and heaven; and it is the reason that all serve you? If she was so sublime before conceiving such a Son that he gives you a name above every name that is owed to a pure creature who is to be called the Mother of God, it was not like the humility with which you humbled yourself, since she did not have as great a height that you had; but being so high, God exalted you with the title of such greatness, to make you small in humility, her humility after the humility of your Son is the highest of all.

The scripture says: *The Lord hates the arrogant poor person* (cf. Sir 25:3-4); for God gives him poverty so that he may come down from his arrogance and be humbled; and not doing it, his ugliness is very abominable since it is pride without occasion, against all reason. And as the pride of this one is most abominable, so the humility of the rich is very kind; because as the other had the occasion of being humble and was proud, so this one has the occasion of being proud, and is humble. It is not much to humble ourselves and since we have such great poverty; the poverty invites us to humility; but in the Virgin, who is all pure and whiter than snow and there is no stain of sin, there is great humility, it is a
quality worthy of great admiration, with the one who became lovable to God who attracted her to himself; the words of the Virgin are: Because he looked on my lowliness. (Lk 1:48) Now it may be as the original says, “littleness,” now as the Latin saints reveal it by virtue of humility, everything comes to a person. And it is a quality to ponder that neither asserting faith, nor hope, nor charity which is the greatest of virtues, but rather he looked upon her lowliness, since although humility is not the greatest virtue, it is the basis and the cause of the preservation of the others. To the humble ones the Lord gives grace, and if he gives it to them, he will not take it away from them; so that for the one who loses grace, it is a sign of having lost humility. May the foot of the proud not come to me and let the hand of the sinner not move me. If you do not have that evil foot, do not fear this evil hand, for they destroyed all who worked iniquity. (Ps 35:12-13) And not only in losing grace, having been freely given, but in losing the taste of grace. And so St. Bernard has this rule, which is hard work, that when devotion was absent, he said: Pride was found in me and the Lord turned away in anger from his servant.

It is important to see that God loves man to be humble so much that although it may be in exchange for mortal sin, he permits him to fall so that he may be humble: God punished the hidden pride manifested by violent desire, as St. Augustine says. And it is seen in Nebuchadnezzar, who by pride was expelled from among the men to dwell with the beasts; and so he walked seven years, until he knew and adored God and said he wanted to give the kingdom to that one and he reflected on what he said, that by the strength of his arm he had built Babylon. And how truly this is fulfilled in the proud, that God takes away from the proud
what he had given to them since they did not know that he had given it nor were
they thankful for it, and he allows them to fall into sins, and become not humans,
but animals, until he confuses them and makes them distrustful of their
knowledge and power and says to them: Seven times passed over you! (Dan
4:29) Oh, what about the things that happened in those seven years until
humbles himself to God and man! What about the blows, what about the
temptations and the falls until arrogance is destroyed; and then the man is
capable of being raised up to help raise up others. There is an example in Peter.

Not only does humility obtain and conserve grace, but it is the sign that
helps us to understand that grace is there; as to the lack of humility which is
pride, it is the sign of the absence of grace: The beginning of all sin is pride, and
he who will possess it will be filled with evil deeds. (cf. Sir 10:15) The gloss says,
By faults. The great ones are not accustomed to walk alone nor does pride walk
alone either; Thus, humility is not only found. Humility is the most evident sign
of the chosen ones and pride of the rejected ones, said Gregory.

And this was declared to us and explained that the Virgin, in conceiving
the Son of God later made an act of humility in going to see and serve her who
was lesser. Oh a marvelous thing, that the one full of God is humbled more to
serve her neighbor and is scorned more in their eyes and the more God raises her
up, the more Mary humbles herself! The workmanship of this one is from heaven,
that this is not made on the earth; but the Virgin did it as taught by God and we
ought to marvel at it greatly, but not count it among those works which St.
Gregory says must be admired, not imitated; if the humility of the Son commands
us to imitate it, so also the action of the Mother. Let us all imitate the humility of
the Virgin since she is the model of all. *Imitate*, says St. Jerome, *that which you love and let us honor with imitation her whom we honor with reverence*. Learn,-says St. Ambrose-*from the maiden in serving the old, honoring them and esteeming them; because it is reasoned that as much as the maiden is more pure, the more she is humble*. And thus they can and must learn the greater things and to take advantage and be humbled by the lesser ones. *Be obedient to every human creature and institution in order to learn humility*, Peter said. (cf. 1Pet 2:13) If this advice is taken, there would not be the evils that there are. From the arrogant come all the evils, from the humble are all good things. *Learn from me and you will find peace.* (cf. Mt 11:28) On the contrary, two evils some from pride: vengeance and vain luxury. Woe to the proud who lose God and rest.

He who has God, experiences humility; as the pressed-together grain of measure goes down deeply, the insubstantial things swim to the tope of the water, and the tree full of fruit is bent down low with the measure, that tree with only leaves, is straight and vigorous. Do not believe that you can have holiness without humility even though you are lifted up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2), if you do not consider yourself worthy of hell with respect to your role; that for lack of this, the world is full of heretics having more of them than the past saints and than the entire Church had. Oh the fearful thought that a people so profane and carnal consider themselves better than superhuman saints who in comparison with some beasts are like angels! *Do not stop*- says St. Augustine- *mutually believing in the things of God but because one is considered better than the other*. Well, who now dares to compare himself to the past saints, since the stones call out how much of a difference there is between them? And since those were friendlier.
God revealed his secrets to them; that each one reveals his heart to his friend better than to one who is not: *I called you friends.* (Jn 15:15) And in the affairs of God, the major part is not talent, nor study, nor tongues but the teaching of God; and as God has said this better to his church, saints, virgins and martyrs, and those of the greatest life, than to a lost people; because if there is knowledge of God on earth, the friends of God have it. But so great is the blindness of the proud, that he does not allow them to see it more clearly. God, whose spirit is humility and mildness, is not there but the spirit of the proud Lucifer and the king of the proud.

Let the one who seeks to make some conjecture about what he has before God, be humble and imitate the Virgin, who being pregnant with God, goes to serve the one made pregnant by man. She does not go to talk, or to ramble, or to show off her clothing and beauty, but for serving the old and pregnant woman. Her visit and the entrance are for service. She did not relate the news, she did not speak evil of the absent ones, but it was a service of work and the edification of word, profiting the mother and the son. They sing two songs to God. Remember this, ladies; when you go to visit the healthy and sick, let it may be for edification, not for causing more sins.

**Mary visits one who is remembered by God**

Oh, happy is the person to whom you visit, Lady! Oh, how truthfully will she say: *your visitation preserved my spirit!* (Job 10:12) Since she gives it anew, it is not hard to preserve it. Oh, happy is the house where you enter to visit it. I wonder what can there be that is good that you do not bring with you since you
carry God with you? The Virgin never walked alone; what about the virtues that
accompanied her, that beautified her better than all gold? Angels accompanied
her as their Queen and Lady; but look at the good that she carries in her womb
and you will see how rich and accompanied she goes for herself and for giving
him a dwelling that she enters. What good will she who carried God within not
give?

And so that the Catholic men might know and the heretics be confused
which is the beneficial thing, the intercession of the saints and that by her prayers
God does good things for us, God intended that the spirit of grace be given to the
little boy by the Virgin speaking and the spirit of prophecy be given to the
mother. Because, tell me, who said to Elizabeth that that Lady was blessed, the
same thing that the angel said to her? Who showed her that she was the Mother
of my Lord? (Lk 1:45) Who spoke to her: Blessed are you who believed, since
those were things that happened between the angel and the Virgin? God told
them to her; and he could tell her the things before the Virgin came so that the
old woman went out to visit her or to receive her; and it was not served because
we had not understood this truth, but she waits until the Virgin enters and greets
the old woman so that she might say: as it happened at the sound of your
greeting. (cf. Lk 1:41) By the Virgin’s voice, this blessing came to them, and so it
appears how useful her intercession is for us and his entrusting us to her and
with how much reason we ought to beg her to visit us.

Oh happy the house where you visit, Lady. And another time I will say it:
All good things came to me equally with her. (cf. Wis 7:11) St. Andrew and
another disciple questioned your Son: Where do you live? (Jn 1:39) Lady, we
your unworthy servants ask you: "Where do you visit? How is the house called? What sign does it have? What will we do to bring you to our house so that you may console us, and our child may rejoice and our heart be enlightened?" The house where the Virgin visits is the house of Zechariah, and she greets Elizabeth. Zechariah wants to say that he is remembered by God. Blessed is the man that is remembered by God since the Virgin knows his house. Remembered by God, what he will be, since it is such a great good, it ought not to be a thing for many. The memory of God, says St. Jerome, expelled every sin. The memory of God consoles in trials: To me alone, my soul has been disturbed, on account of these things, I will be mindful of you. (Ps 41:7) It is such that he who does not sin is remembered by God in this way, so that the Virgin may come to his house. And David declares this when he says, I have been mindful of your commands to do these things. (cf. Ps 102:18) To remember God is to remember his commandments, it is to practice them; and as he who forgets the commandments forgets God, and he does not keep them forgets them, although he may know them from heart.

This then is the reason why we are not visited by the Virgin, the one who does not keep the commandments of God and the church; since both are necessary. And God declares this through the prophet Hosea: Because he has been forgetful of the law of God, I will be forgetful of his own sons. (Hos 4:6) Woe to him who is forgetful of the law and of God! How threatened he is that it will be paid to him in the same way that God will be forgetful of him as one who says nothing! From here he comes to call and is not heard, since: He who stops his own ear may not hear the law, his prayer will be detestable. Whether the
woman is able to forget, etc. (cf. Prov 28:9) my people have indeed forgotten me for countless days. (cf. Jer 2:32) With as much reason as God complained: I have been forgotten like the unremembered dead. (Ps 30:13) He fully entrusted us: Remember me. And for this he remained here in the sacrament of the altar; but you did not take advantage; we have forgotten him and his benefits. We have forgotten God and his law, and therefore we have not been visited by the Virgin. She feels it since she says: Do whatever he tells you. (Jn 2:5)

Oh such advice of a mother and such a mother! Do whatever tells you, etc. As a result, sadness is turned into joy, water into wine, doing all that the Lord commands us; so Elizabeth is visited who wants to say, fulfilled, that good will with which God is filled and with which man is filled; although the house is called the one who is remembered by God; the visited one is the pregnant woman. The remembering by God pertains more to the understanding of the one who remembers God and reflects on him; but also to the fullness of the will which is love. The understanding, the man; the will, the woman, and this one is the visited and blessed one, an overflowing vine on the bricks of your house. (Ps 127:3) To this one, the Virgin brings joy for her good intentions, that the few become many, that the older boys may be offered more to God; they may adore and reverence him.

The blessing of God finally comes with her as in the other time God blessed Obededom because he received in his house the Ark of God, and what God gave him was so great that David, with the desire of those graces, brought to his house the Ark of God. (cf. 2 Sam 6:12) Oh if we would know what good he has who has the Virgin! Let us desire and endeavor to bring her to our house, in order
to be more and more blessed by God. And the one who has the Virgin is one who has her Son or desires to have him, he who is in the grace he gives her. And he who bemoans and confess his sins will also have her who not only is the Virgin, the Mother of the just, but she also makes pleas for obtaining pardon for sinners. She is the one who when God is angry and comes to kill the foolish and evil Nabal, she goes out to the way with her word, she throws her self down at the feet of David and offering gifts to him, calms him. (cf. 1 Sam 25:23) She certainly does this better than the other Abigail, and she has better gifts to present to him than the other; because Abigail offered him so much bread, but the Virgin brings to him the memorial that she gave him human flesh, that she carried him in her womb, that she gave him milk. What does he marvel at, since Christ is so grateful even for a jar of water that they give on his behalf, that she may be the one who gives him not only water, but the flesh and what he has need of to be clothed? Does he pay the one who gives out of love of him and not to the one who gives him to himself? From here is born the reason that she manages to calm God.

Oh, who would see you, Virgin, plead for the sinners to ask that God to pardon us, that we do not know what we are doing! Let this iniquity be on me. (cf. 1 Sam 25:24) And if it is not heard it is because we do not hear her in the sermon that she preaches to us: Do whatever he tells you. If she is praying for me kneeling before God, and I am upright in my will strong with dislike, abominable with impurity. My tongue was to be praying but it is complaining. Her prayer for us is hindered by our sins. Let us help the Virgin with our prayers, with penance, and let us reflect about the profit of her visitation and say: “Who am I that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” Let us be thankful to her and she will
give thanks to God for the things that he does for us, and she will be with us until our child is born, helping the good purposes so that they may come in deed, her by grace and afterwards in glory, to which he may lead us. Amen.
Sermon 67

“To whom shall I compare you, Daughter of Zion?”

The Loneliness of Mary

Introduction

The apostle St. Paul says: The law of love asks for this: it wants us to cry with those who cry and that to rejoice with those who rejoice. (Rom 12:15) The customary thing between those who love each other is to have joy and sadness in common; it is in such a way that if you love someone a lot and something happens to him about which you should rejoice, then you rejoice as if the same thing happened to you; and, on the contrary, you are sad if something terrible happens to him.

The present day is disposed to accompany the Most Holy Virgin in her sorrows and trials; the devotion of this day is attributed to her and it did not cost her a little. Certainly, a son would be worthy of reprehension who when coming to his mother who is very distressed, weeping and troubled, would not be by her and help her weep in her trials; how much more if he had been the cause of what the mother suffers. We are the cause of the Passion of Jesus Christ and the sorrows of his mother. Lord, not your sins but mine hurt you; you were afflicted, you have became weary not by what you did, but by what we committed. Since Jesus Christ did not sin, or a reason on his part to suffer, he owed none of it to himself. If a mother had a son who had died for love of me, and she saw that I
was laughing and that I was not helping to weep for her son, what great grief
would I cause her?

I do not know what evil fortune this is; no longer is there a “season of the
passion,” these feasts are not celebrated as they used to be. At another time there
was feeling of the Passion of Jesus Christ; in the primitive church the Office and
the Mass lasted until the morning that Jesus was resurrected. No longer is there
anything of this, but after Friday, halt, it is already the Pasch. Rise up, let us
attend to what we are to eat and to what we are to wear. What a pagan way to
cultivate the Passion certainly! And thus it was to be done? Will not the devotion
of these holy days last for a moment? Spend now this day in accompanying the
widow for the reverence of God, and each one give her his little corner to help her
weep and be there with her, since you are the cause of her sorrows. Celebrate the
passion of Jesus Christ if you wish to feel the joy of his resurrection. Every
Christian ought to spend this day in accompanying her who today was offended
to a great extent so that she will obtain for us the grace of speaking well in this
present sermon about her sorrows. Let us say the “Hail Mary.”

“What Have This Sheep and Her Lamb Done to You?”

To whom will I compare you and liken you, daughter of Jerusalem? To
whom will I equate you, Virgin Daughter of Zion? Your grief is as great as the
sea: who will give you medicine? (cf. Lam 2:13) Jeremiah sang this song many
times before, seeing the evils that were awaiting the city of Jerusalem; and we can
say this same thing now, seeing the Most Holy Virgin so afflicted and her soul put in such great anguish; that of her it is also said in a figuratively: *To whom will I compare you, etc.*

The sword of the justice of God went around in the time of David, making havoc in the people of his army, without having the fault of punishment that God had sent him, since David has stopped to count the people; God punished them, not for what they had done, or better said, he punished David in them. The prophet, not being able to suffer to see that people without fault suffer for what he had done wrong, began a dispute with God and said, *I am the one who has sinned, and these who are the sheep, what did they do? May your hand be turned against me: I am he who has sinned, Lord, I am the one who has offended you and I am the one who deserves punishment. But they, what fault do they have? The sheep are without sin. They have not done anything to suffer such great evil; Lord, turn your hand angrily against me.* (cf. 1 Sam 24:17) Carry out in me, Lord the fury of your punishment. Lift the hand of your anger from over them.

It is a harsh thing indeed, that the sword of God was hurting Jesus Christ and the most holy Virgin, his mother, and that we would not oppose it: “Lord what is this? What have this sheep and her innocent lamb done, the most innocent, the pure, those without sin, the just ones? What fault do they have? These sheep are completely innocent. They did not do anything. We are the traitors. We offend you, we who sin; turn you anger against us.” It is certainly a serious thing!
They go to seize Jesus on Thursday on the night of the meal, and he is the first one who, forgetful of himself, says: Do not take these! (cf. Jn 18:8) They seize the free man and you command that they do not take the servants? What justice is this Lord? They seize the innocent one and you command that they leave the guilty ones? They bind the first-born of God and they let the slaves go free. They bring the prisoner Jesus Christ; they leave the evildoers in the house. Oh blessed be your mercy! Let no Christian intervene and say: “Lord, what is this? What justice is this? Turn your sword against me; carry out in me the anger of your justice because I am the one who deserves punishment! What is this, Lord? Why do you kill your first-born Son and torment your handmaid Mary?”

The response of Jesus Christ is clear; that of the Virgin Mary, our Lady, is not so clear. *The punishment fell upon him; by whose stripes we have been healed.* *The punishment fell upon him, the one who has obtained peace between God and us.* (cf. 53:5) It was not we who reconciled ourselves to God but it is because of the death of Jesus Christ. The anger of the punishment fell on him to heal us.

He does not know how to proclaim that death sentence! If you ask Pilate, he said: *I find no cause in him.* (Jn 18:38) Therefore he died, because it was his will to save mankind; there was no reason for this, there was no one who constrained him to do what he did, except only the love he has for us. If he makes the proclamation: “This is the justice that Pontius Pilate commands to be done to Jesus of Nazareth, because he says he is the Son of God, and for being a troublemaker and an evildoer,” he does not know what he is saying. Pontius
Pilate did not have any power over him; that power comes from above: You do not have any power over me, etc., (Jn 19:11) Jesus Christ said to the same Pilate.

—Well, why did he die? — I have struck him because of the wickedness of my people. (cf. Is 53:5) That indeed, “for the sins of my people, because men offended me, therefore I punish him,” says the Eternal Father so that they would not be lost forever in hell.

Since it is the fault of men that they have sinned, they are the cause of the death of Jesus Christ; later, “what justice is this, Lord, that you punish the just one for the sinners, and that the innocent one dies for the guilty?” Lord, it seems there is a flaw in your justice, since you have punished him who has no fault and you freed those who did evil.

If he desired it, what will we do? If he desired to die for us, if he loved us so much even to giving away his life for us, what will we say? Soon he had to make the proclamation: “This is the justice the Eternal Father commands to be done to Jesus his Son, because he loved mankind. He who loves so much and so greatly that he would do this.” —Why did you die, Lord? It was because of the love that I had for you. —Who has tired you so greatly, Lord? Who has afflicted you? Who made you hungry and thirsty? Who made you toil? Who prepared you for dying naked on a cross? —It was the love that I had for mankind. — Why, Lord, did you afflict the Mother of your Son so much? What fault do they have? The sheep are most innocent. —The love that Jesus Christ had for mankind; that is the reason.
Why was the Virgin, Our Lady, so afflicted?

But, what does the Virgin Mary, our Lady, have to do with this? Why did the Eternal Father cause her so much distress today? Is it not written: *If you come upon a nest of birds in the field and the mother was in it, take the birds but not the mother; take the offspring, but leave the mother?* (cf. Dt 22:5) Was not God commanding this in Exodus: *You may not boil the kid-goat in the milk of his mother?* (Dt 14:21) Lord do you take care of the birds? Do you take care of the animals? *The care of the sheep is not God's concern, is it?* (1 Cor 9:9) What is this Lord? Is it not enough to kill the Son and put him on the cross without also killing the mother? Why is Jesus Christ boiled in the tears of his mother? If you want him roasted, he is roasted in the fire of so many torments; the flame of love that burns in his most blessed heart has roasted him while he was suffering on the cross. And if you see him boiled, he is boiled in the tears which came from the eyes of his Most Holy Mother, seeing what he was suffering.

O blessed is your mercy, Lord! And what has this blessed Virgin done to you? What has she done to you except that she served you all the days of her life? What has she done to you, except that while she was in this life, she was not familiar with anything except pleasing you and spent her time in this way? What has she done to you except walk so vigilantly every night and day pleasing you? What has her pure and virginal heart done, that there was not in it even the smallest thought ever that might offend you, that you have hurt her today, that you have saddened her today? What did this purest Virgin do in whom there was never a sin do to you? Why have you afflicted her so greatly today?
Many daughters gathered riches, but you have surpassed all of them together; (cf. Prov 31:29) which means: “Many saints, many chaste martyrs, many virgins, many have loved Jesus Christ in a great way, so much that they left riches and honors and being spouses of kings and all that flowers in the world, and went after what men lost by having worldly things; but you bring all to your advantage, holier than all the virgins, more chaste than all the chaste ones, you loved Jesus Christ more than all who left the world and their garments by following him, by loving him. No one is equal to you. Many daughters gathered riches, but you Lady, are richer than all.

Two things are in conflict today, Lady; let us see which one goes first: your holiness, your sorrows, your privacy, your anguishes. You are the holiest of all and the most wounded, the most desired and the most anguished, the highest and the lowest. Two things are in competition today: which of these, Lady, which we have spoken of, goes first? O Lord! And how costly is your protection of this Virgin? If you loved her a lot, you afflicted her greatly; if you made her very holy, you have given her much anguish; according to the measure of the love you had, what she suffered was doubled.

To whom will I compare you, to whom will I equate you, with whom will I compare you and console you, O virgin so wounded? Your grief is as great as the sea, who will give you any remedy? O may you be blessed, Lord, that you have grieved this blessed Virgin today! There is not now on the earth one that consoles; there is no one who dries her tears; there is no one who brings her
lamentations to an end; there is no one who accompanies her loneliness. Who will soothe your sorrow? There is no consolation for you now.

The mother of Tobiah, the youth, was waiting for him after his father had sent him to the city of Raguel, and as he was so delayed, she could not rest, thinking what had become of him, whether he was dead or alive, if something had happened to him. And the Holy Scripture says that, not being able to suffer the loneliness and his absence, she went out to the roads and lamented with unending tears and said: *Alas, my son! Why did we send you to travel by those roads? Light of our eyes, staff of our old age, counsel of our life, hope of our final days, and why did we send you from us? If we were poor, we would not notice it if you were present; if we suffered having you, it would not be anything; in you we have everything: and in you alone we will have everything.*

(Tob 10:4-5)

O Blessed Virgin! And he who would ask you: in who was your consolation? For whom were you waiting? Who was the one that you loved most? Perchance, was it not Jesus Christ? The one and only was your consolation and your spouse, your Son, your joy, your remedy; he alone was all these things for you; you were content with him alone, Lady, and you boasted about nothing less; having him, you lacked nothing; lacking him, you have lost everything; you will not exchange him for heaven and earth.

She is the one who lost the most, is saddened the most, grieved the most, is afflicted the most of all there was or will be. When she saw that now he desired to die, when she saw those shining eyes, waning, when his chest heaving so
rapidly with the anguish of death, what would the mother who had seen such life do? There is no heart that knows how to feel it, there is no tongue that knows how to explain it. Neither consolation nor protection remained for you on the earth; you had all things in your holiest Son had died.

To whom will I compare you? God commanded Abraham to go up to the mountain and sacrifice his son, but afterwards, God was pleased with only his obedience of heart and he gave him a ram to be sacrificed. (cf. Gen 22:13) He went up the mountain with his son Isaac, and he came down the mountain with him, but it was not so for the Virgin, our Lady. She went up on Mt. Calvary with her Son, but he did not return with her; she left him there.

To whom will I compare you, Daughter of Zion, or to whom will I liken you? Am I to compare you perhaps with the mother of the Maccabees, whose seven sons were killed before her eyes one day and king Antiochus kept her alive until the end, so that she would feel greater sorrow at seeing the death of her sons? No, if they would die, the mother had the permission to comfort and encourage them; they consented that she be there, inspiring and helping them to die well, but for our Lady the Virgin, they did not even give her a place and they did not permit her to see near her Son, Jesus Christ, from close by since the blasphemies were so great, the evil words and the voices of that unknown crowd, that they did not give her a place to praise him. There, in the first case, they praised the Maccabees because they died for the Law of God, for which their mother was consoled. Here, they say that Jesus Christ dies for blasphemy against
the Law and the commandments of God. There was no one to whom to compare the sorrows of the Virgin Mary.

Today she was greatly afflicted; there was no consolation for her on the earth. There was no remedy to cheer her up. There is no one who equals her in sorrow; there is no one who approaches her in holiness. *Your grief is as deep as the sea.* It is not enough to say like a fountain, but as the sea because Mary and the sea have a relationship. What is this, Lord? Do you now make the world again? Look, you will see it today. As when God created light at the beginning of the world, so you will see him make fire again, and as there he commands all the waters to gather in one place, and he called it sea, so here all the virtues are gathered in one place that are distributed in many places meet in one place, all the holiness, all the chastity, all the faith and hope and charity unite in this Blessed Virgin, much more perfectly than in any other person, and also all the sorrows, wounds, sadness and tears, are joined today in this Virgin and he calls her Mary. *Do not call me Naomi that is, beautiful, but call me Mary that is bitter, since the Almighty has filled me with intense bitterness.* Do not now call me Naomi, says the Virgin, which means, “beautiful;” that word does not suit me, *but call me Mary, which means “bitter” since in a great way the Almighty has made me bitter because I entered full and left empty.* (Ruth 1:20) So our Virgin Lady left, as you will hear presently.

*Your grief is as great as the sea, who will give you any medicine?* Let us return to the subject- What did this Virgin do Lord, that you have made her so full of sorrow today? Who is at fault, and who deserved it, that you have afflicted
her so? What has this innocent ewe done, Lord? Where was the world lost? For there it is to be collected again. Man and woman are to collect it again. Black apple and black delights, what expenses you have cost the Son and therefore the Mother? Adam and Eve lost the world; Christ and Mary recovered it.

What did this blessed ewe do, why have you distressed her, Lord? Say: If the Virgin Mary did not suffer this, what consolation remained for virgins and widows in their trials? Now all have consolation, since, if some trial came to a maiden, she might have a model of patience in the most holy Virgin and say: “Well, my Lady, the Virgin Mary, was more troubled.” If the married lady would lose a son who she loved greatly, she may be consoled by looking at the Virgin, and thinking about Mary’s sorrows; and with thinking about how sad the day was, she is consoled and encouraged and says: “Since if I lost a son, my Lady, the Virgin Mary, lost the better one; her anguish and sorrow was greater than mine, as much as her Son was greater than mine.” Therefore, for the love of you, the Eternal Father grieves the Virgin today, in order that you may find consolation and profit; out of love for you he torments the mother and the Son today; learn through their love to know and give thanks. Know how to take advantage of it.

Now the Mother and the Son have not suffered such great trials and torments in vain; it will be in vain there was no one to profit from their fruit.

**Sorrows of Mary in the Passion of Christ**

It would take a very long time to speak now about the death of Jesus Christ; it is late and we have a short time. This day is dedicated to contemplating
the sorrows of the Virgin. May your heart feel sorrow over the Passion of Jesus Christ from Thursday to Friday evening, every day of your life, and the sorrows of our Lady, the Virgin Mary, from Friday afternoon through Saturday. Let us not forget to remember this coming Saturday in a particular way; without missing a day, the sorrows that the Virgin Mary suffered.

Who will treat your anguishes? Who can measure your sorrows? Who can tell your grief? Who will tell what you suffered on such a day as today? As love is great, so the sorrow is great. How great is the love that burned in your heart; so great was your anguish. If you understood how great the love is that this most holy Virgin had for her Son, you would know the sorrow that transfixed her today. But since no one is able to understand the love, so neither can you understand the grief she felt.

Have you not seen the love that a mother has for her offspring among the animals? As a cow will not allow a calf to kill itself, or allow someone to approach it to take it away! Even a hen has been seen to die for her chicks so that they might not be harmed. Even now, think about the Virgin who loved Jesus Christ as her Son and loved him as God. That reverence with which she treated him, that reverence with which she was before him, I believe that she did not dare to raise her eyes from the ground. Well, with what love she treated him when he was a baby, when she nursed him with her virginal breasts! For me, I have to believe that while the baby slept she knelt, adoring him and seeking grace to know how to treat him. In the mothers here there is a measure of love that they have for their sons, even though they may love them very much; here there is no measure, but
rather the Virgin loved Jesus Christ as much as the Holy Spirit inspired her; and this was very much; and thus it cannot be spoken of. It cannot be measured. There are no words that can extol it.

O may you be blessed, Lord, that you were served because the great love of this Virgin was a judge that tormented her so greatly, that St. Jerome says that each wound that they gave to the body of Christ was a lance that pierced the heart of the Virgin; each slap, each lash, each wound that they inflicted on Jesus, was a lance that pierced the heart of this Virgin. O, may your mercy be blessed that you had so many arrows wound and pierce the heart of the Virgin; since if on the body of Jesus there were distributed 5000 lashes, his most holy head pierced with such cruel thorns, his hands and feet pierced by such cruel nails, all the blood flowing, his most holy whiskers plucked, spat upon, slapped, that delicate body disjointed and his tender members dislocated, how does it seem to you what the heart of the Virgin would be like, that she had this before her eyes? O virginal heart! You depict her with seven knives. You are to depict her with 700! You cannot count the drops of the sea and its sands; you cannot relate the stars of the sky to the sorrows of the Virgin Mary.

To whom will I compare you, O Virgin most holy? What was your heart like? What did you feel on this day drinking the water of sorrow, the waters of torment entering into the interior of your heart? The stormy waves of the waters have gone up until they plunge into your heart. (cf. Ps 68:2) Special help was necessary in order to suffer and receive what pierces you today. O great pity, mother, that he who was adored as God heard so many insults, so many blasphemies spoken! O offended heart that you heard such an announcement
proclaiming the Son of God and yours as an evildoer and to insult him so. What about the sorrows that entered through your ears? What about the sorrows through your eyes? Think about this, and ask for grace, and let us all ask her for the grace to understand it.

The death and the thrust (of the lance)

The first mother Eve raised her eyes to see the tree which God commanded her not to eat. The Virgin Mary raised her eyes to Jesus Christ on the cross. It greatly wounded the Virgin to see Jesus Christ just as he was because it pleased and delighted the first woman to see the tree that was forbidden to her to eat. Where are your eyes today, Lady? The most holy Virgin desired to see Jesus Christ. She raised her eyes to look at him. The sorrow that she received at seeing him was so great because he suffered so much, that the one to whom she raised her eyes she soon lowered them not being able to suffer the sight. She spoke to the Eternal Father: “Lord, I do not ask for life for my Son; now, I see Lord that he is very close to death; receive his death, Lord, in payment for the sins of men. Now cease your justice; do not punish your servants since you have punished your first-born Son, so that they would not be lost. With joy, receive him, and with great sorrow I turn to you. Great was the joy that my soul received that day the angel me brought the news that I was to give birth; but I feel the greatest sorrow in my heart, seeing him leave me in such great tribulation.”
To whom shall I compare you? When the hour arrived that he died, what did your heart feel at seeing him dying the death of mortal anguish? The Son dies, the mother would remain his holy one on earth. Jesus Christ died on the cross. The mother remains in great sorrow on earth. You see the scales, one going down, the other rising; the Son high, the mother low; one dies on the cross and the other sad and broken-hearted at the foot of the cross.

What would the companions feel? What would St. John do? What sorrows were aroused in the other Marys upon seeing such excessive sorrow, of seeing Jesus Christ suffer? They are greatly troubled at seeing the Mother half-dead. The most holy Virgin began so many lamentations that the hearts of as many as heard her broke. O Lord, you are dead on the cross and I am alive on the earth. Is it possible that this heart is so hard that it has been able to see you die without dying with you? This is my great indifference; I thought, Lord, that I loved you much more. Therefore, what do you want to create in me, seeing me alive and you dead? Would you not consider it good to take me with you? What would the poor companions do in seeing the Virgin in such grief? They were to respond to her in the same manner: the sorrow in their hearts would move their tongues to speak their sorrow by the words that came from within their souls.

Mary and St. John and the other Marys remained alone. It was already late, the hour of evening; already the people had gone and they did not know what to do; they were weak and the crosses were very high, the nails were very big and they did not have the tools to remove the body.
Being in this state, Mary, John and the other Marys see Pilate's soldiers come to break the legs of the crucified, since such was the custom in order to complete the crucifixion. Think what they would feel. Have you not maltreated him enough? Are the torments not enough, without breaking the heart of his mother again? With what petitions would they beg all those soldiers! The Virgin would say: "Do not break his legs, for the love of God. If you are doing it to further torment him, he will not feel anything now; why complete the procedure now, when he is already dead? If you yourself do not suffer concerning him, have compassion on me; that if you break the legs of the dead one who no longer feels anything, you will wound my heart that is still alive, even though it is pierced by feeling such terrible sorrow." What would they do? What is one to think of such a cruel people? Instead of complying with the request of this blessed Virgin, they said to her: "Take her over there." They were to hear her and turn away from her with scorn. But she asked them so much, she nagged at them so much, that God put in their hearts not to break the legs.

To whom shall I compare you? Then one of those, whom they called Longinus- he was not blind, as they say around there and I do not know what the fable is: it is a mockery- and he took a sword and in spite of Mary's pleas, he pierced Jesus Christ on the right side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. (Jn 19:34) Now what happened long ago is fulfilled; that from the side of Adam, from a rib, God made Eve. They flow out the church from the side of Christ. Do you not see the ransom of our redemption? No? So you see here the blood with which our sins were washed and the blood with which the justice of
God is satisfied? You see heaven opened here, which until that hour had been closed through the sin of Adam. Now they have opened the window of the Ark of Noah, through which all those who entered were saved. Now the cherubim who are at the gate of the earthly paradise are gone; they have already taken away the sword that was there; the fire that burned there is now extinguished. They have now ended the sorrows of Jesus; now he will finish the work which he was sent by the Father to do, that he was to redeem men and take them away from the slavery of sin. But the trials of the Virgin begin even now. How does it seem to you that she might feel to see the virginal flesh which came from her womb so cruelly broken? Everyone who sees the pierced heart of Jesus becomes a new creation.

The Descent: Christ Crucified in the Arms of the Mother.

All were so sorrowful that they did not know what to do. The Virgin says: “O Lord, Father of Orphans, consoler of the soul, healer and mediator of needs! Be content now, Lord, with having punished your only-begotten Son so rigorously and having saddened me so much. Enough now, Lord; give us in your mercy a grave where we may bury him. Since he lacked a place to rest and a place to recline his head (Mt 8:20) in this life, let him not lack now a place to rest his body, so tormented and wounded. They see Joseph come, the one who was a disciple of Jesus Christ, but until then he had been surrounded by the Jews, and he had gone to Pilate and had sought the body of Jesus Christ, (cf. Jn 19:38) since they were not able to take him off the cross without his permission. He thought: “What can they do to me? Kill me? Take away my life and property?
All is of little importance; it is not the time to hide any more; now in adversity it is necessary for men to show themselves to be in the group of those who love him.

He goes to Pilate. He asks for the body of Jesus Christ. Pilate responded: “Is he dead already?” being astonished that he was dead so quickly. “Is he dead, you ask?” It seems good that you do not know what a delicate body it was; the least pain of all that he suffered was enough to take away his life, if the divinity did not sustain him. Do you not know what he suffered at the pillar when, they flayed that tender and blessed body with whips? It seems good that you do not know what he suffered carrying the cross on his weak shoulders and afterwards when they put him upon it; you might not be amazed at how quickly he was dead.” In the end, Pilate agreed to what Joseph asked and gave him permission to take Jesus from the cross to bury him.

Joseph was a good man and bought a treeless plain (tomb or plot); he brought a very good cotton cloth, he bought myrrh, he bought spices to anoint the body, since it was customary to do so at that time; he brought a pair of ladders, and finally, all that was needed to bury the Lord. A good man came with him, a Pharisee, a friend of Jesus Christ whom they called Nicodemus; they brought some good men to help them and they came to the place where the Virgin was, beside her blessed Son. It was Friday evening, a little past four in the afternoon since Jesus Christ hung three hours on the cross.

While those people saw it fitting to come, the Virgin was afraid that they were coming for another reason. St. John said to her, “Do not fear Lady: I know these people, they do not come to do evil, for they are friends of Jesus Christ your
Son and they must be coming to console you and see if you have some need." The men arrive with very good manners and much shame. They say to her: "Lady, if until now we have not served and accompanied you in this very terrible trial, forgive us; we have been pusillanimous in not having risked our lives and properties by confessing your Son; we are full of repentance about it. From now on we will amend our lives. See Lady, we will do what you presently command; we come to give a tomb to your Son and our Master, and we bring here all the necessary things for it; therefore Lady, give us permission to do so.

The Virgin thanked them for their kindness and God because he had provided men to help her bury his only-begotten Son. Let us now come close to see how this happens. There is no reason for the Christian to be absent from the burial of Jesus Christ. Whoever approaches the bed of the one who is dying, so much more we are those who gain and will derive great profit if with devotion and attention we may see what happens there. Now, look how it happened.

The cross was very large, some fifteen feet in length. Do you already have them measured in your parlor? Blessed may you be Lord that such weak shoulders carry such a weight! The cross was placed in a rock, in which a hole, two or three spans deep, was made. They placed a ladder in front of and on the other side; some went up to remove the nails from the arms, others to hold up the body. The nails were very heavy and they took them out with much work so as not to tear his hands any more. I have read that they put a rope around the chest and under his arms, when they crucified him so that the body would be held up because the hands are torn if the body had been held up by only the hands. The
blows that they gave sounded in the heart of the Virgin, and they made her remember those that the blows they gave when they crucified him. In the end, with the nails removed from the arms, Nicodemus embraced the bloody body. They took away, little by little, the nails in the feet which were harder than the others and were very tight.

The Virgin gets up to take Jesus in her arms; with the sorrow she was not able to rest: - “Give him here to me!” - “O Lady, you do not know what you are asking. Look, you will not rest with that dead and bloodied body; rather your sorrows will be doubled.” They take the body and place him on her lap. St. John takes the head and Mary Magdalene the feet; all begin to weep so severely, on one hand seeing that the blessed body was so wounded, on the other hand of seeing the grief that the Most Holy Virgin was feeling. Oh great sorrow! To whom shall I compare you?

The Virgin begins to bring her hands to his head and runs into the thorns that had remained after taking away the crown; all his hair full of blood. She did nothing but embrace his body; she needed to keep looking at him; on the other hand she grew weak from great sorrow. She takes his pierced hands, keeping vigil, she gazes on the face of her Son. She opens her mouth and begins to speak; her heart was breaking to the ones who heard her: “What is this, Lord? My Son, my God, my consolation! How have you abandoned me, knowing how much I loved you? Why have you kept me for such great sorrow? Is this the body that I so tenderly carried and wrapped up? Who, Lord, has treated you so badly? What heart was able to do you such great evil?
Oh beauty of God spit upon! Oh such beauty disfigured! Oh light of heaven
darkened! Oh face that makes the blessed ones in heaven rejoice! And who has
disfigured you in such a manner? Oh tongue that consoled so many, that you did
not know who to say a bad word to anyone. Where are you that you do not answer
me? How has my harp been turned into weeping and my music into tears? (cf.
Job 30:31)

St. John begins: “Oh my Master, to whom will I go from now on with my
doubts? Who, Lord, will advise me? Who will console me? Last night I rested my
head on your chest; now Lord, your head is on mine.” (cf. Jn 21:20) Mary
Magdalene also said, “Merciful Lord, who will protect me? Who will defend me
when the Pharisees murmur about me? (cf. Lk 7:44) You defended me when my
sister asked me why I was not helping her; you responded for me. How can you
say that I love you, since I am alive seeing my joy dead?” (cf. Lk 10:41-42) It was
sad to hear this good woman and meanwhile she bathed the feet of Jesus Christ
with the tears of her own eyes. The mother weeps, and as many who are present
weep. The angels weep there; as for me I want them to take the bodies in order to
begin the burial of Jesus Christ. And it is not unreasonable to believe that it was
such, since they took the others bodies to do other less important things. Thus it
is believable that they join the Mother in weeping over the death of the first-born
of God and to be at his burial. What weeping there would be! Oh blessed is your
mercy, Lord, that there is no heart that has thought about it without being
destroyed and crushed with sorrow. What would happen if we could see what
happened there with our own eyes?
The strength of stones is not my strength, and my flesh is not like metal.

(Job 6:12) I do not have the strength of a stone, nor is my flesh of metal. Think that hers was the most tender heart, of as many as there had been in the world, and it is said about her, from my infancy my misery grew within me, and from the womb of my mother God guides me (cf. Job 31:18); upon seeing a poor man, she wept. Job says: From the beginning, God created me compassionate and merciful; the tenderness of my heart left me from the womb of my mother. The same is said of the Virgin. Hers was the tenderest heart of the world, and upon seeing a poor person, she weeps. What would she do upon seeing her Son to suffer, seeing the same dead one in her arms and so wounded as he was? She is so tender, that if she saw some evil or some trial befalls the same ones who crucified her Son and treated him so cruelly it would make her suffer. So tell me, how does it seem to you that she might feel upon seeing her only Son and such a Son suffer so much? She consoles you, Christian woman and man, when you are in trouble; know that you have a mother in heaven that undergoes grief from your anguish more than you yourself suffer, and thus obtains healing for them. The greatest sorrow of the tenderest heart of all there are in the world: How does it seem to you that she would suffer?

Lady, here is fulfilled the Behold the handmaid (Lk 1:38) of the Annunciation; St. Augustine says that the same day he is incarnate, that day he died. Compare, Lady one day with the other and temper the joy of one with the sadness of the other. Remember, Lady, the joy that your soul felt when the angel said to you that you are to give birth to the Son of God, who was coming to heal
the lost world; that you were to be the mother of God while remaining a virgin, so
that your heart would not be dispirited by what you have now before your blessed
eyes. Remember, Lady, the joy of that day, so that you may not grow weak in the
trials of this day. Your fiat comes here, Lady; here comes your submission to the
will of God; Lady, lift up your eyes to the Eternal Father and conform yourself to
his will in order to suffer these anxieties as you earlier conformed yourself to the
same will to accept what the angel on his part said to you.

The Virgin said, “Father of Mercy, **behold your handmaiden; let your will be done in me.** You gave this Son to me. With great joy I received him. You see
him. Here, I return him to you; you gave him to me, you took him away from me,
let your holy will be fulfilled. I am a maidservant for all that your majesty would
desire to do with me. On the day of my joy I sang to you: *Let my soul magnify
the Lord, and let my spirit rejoice in God my salvation* (Lk 1:46-47); on the day
of my sadness and sorrows, I beg you to receive a pleasing sacrifice for the sins of
men.”

“Oh sinners, how dearly you have cost me! How for the love of you my
heart has suffered a critical moment as bitter as this has been, to see my Son
Jesus Christ suffer such a cruel passion and death! He has paid for what you have
done and my soul has felt it: it has borne fruit, although he has endured so many
trials because you have received its fruit and you obtain pardon from God.” Oh
Lady, may you be blessed, that even though you have endured so many trials for
men and we have such little gratitude, you speak the words of your Son: *Pardon
them!* (cf. Lk 23:34)
I forgive them Lord, and by my part that it is fitting for me to say “Pardon them, Lord, for the trials I have seen you suffer for the love of them. Do good things for them, console them, hear them Lord when they call to you. Cheer them up; be good to them for me Lord.”

*Behold the handmaid.* Here she did well and conformed herself to the will of God. Oh model of mothers! Pardon; May you not wait for them to come to you to pray. Do you not see this Lady Mary, blessed Mother, who willingly pardoned the death of her Blessed Son, and even while blood was flowing, from his head body; and she does wait for them to come to her to pray, before she prays for those who had given him over to death, and for those who had been the cause of it?

**The Holy Burial**

It was already late. St. John arrives: “Lady, consider it a good thing to bury your Son immediately, because the Passover approaches. Let your grief cease; Lady, put an end to your tears now; end such sorrow, my Lady; because there is no heart that can suffer to hear you, so that he might not be crushed by the pain.” They take the burial cloth and begin to cover his body after having anointed it. Oh, what would she do after seeing him covered? “Oh high priest, now that you have truly entered into the holy of holies, you have gained eternal redemption for men, not by the blood of animals, but by your very own blood! (Heb 9:11-12) Oh life now dead, Oh clarity so obscured! Who has exchanged my trial for yours, you, who are all my rest? You were the one who cheered me up. Who has given you my
sadness? When I saw only your blessed and resplendent face, it removed all my trials; but when I look at you now, all my sorrows are doubled. What exchange has been so great? They cover you with a shroud, they cover me with sorrow.”

She took the shroud with her own hands and put it on his head and wrapped it carefully around him, and gave him kisses of peace. She turned toward that blessed face of her holy Son, all full of the blood; how red! And how would it appear to her?

I see here how they carried Christ: some held up his body, others the legs, others the head. They did not do this with much pomp, any more walking around or more mourning clothes; no more torches, no more pride. How does the Lord of the heavens and the earth go? Oh hearts not of flesh, but of marble, since you are whole, not crushed at hearing and considering these things! They arrive at the tomb. What will the Virgin say? “Oh tomb, they give you the one to whom I gave birth! They take him away from me and give him to you! Oh, who are you? They place the Lord inside, soon they will roll the stone over the door of the tomb; the heart of the mother is covered. Oh what new crying would begin here! What wringing of hands! How thin and disfigured is his face by great sorrow and anguish! “Where will I go,” she would say, “so that I may have more rest?” What do I want more than to be so close to where my dearest one is buried? Here will my station be all the days of my life; here will be my joy. This will be my consolation.”

In the end, St. John arrives and implores her to leave since it was late. They begin to leave little by little. He sent Mary Magdalene to get mourning
clothes for the Virgin and a headdress for the widow. Then Nicodemus asked the permission of the Virgin to leave by another way before someone might see him, that some evil would not befall him. They were good men. The Virgin remained alone. At this time the attire of the widow arrived, and they put the black shawl and black headdress on her.

**The Loneliness of the Virgin: The Apostles go to the Cenacle**

How lonely is the once crowded city, the mistress of nations has become a widowed Lady. Formerly, Jeremiah cried out: How lonely is the city! How sad is she who lived so Joyfully in this life with her Son. The mistress of the nations has become a widow; the innocent one has become a slave. (Lam 1:1) They begin to go to their quarters; the Virgin went almost by force; her body was moving away from the tomb, but her heart remained within the tomb. She passes by the place where the cross was laid; she kneels, adores it; she was moved with great pity. They brought her to the Cenacle where Jesus Christ celebrated the Passover the night before. Who would be going through the streets? Some good women who knew the most holy Virgin, who knew who Jesus our Lord was, that now the fact was public and they knew that they had put him, one without fault, to death, because of the envy that many had of him. And those good women said that they saw the most holy Virgin leave so alone, so sad, and so distressed: "Oh grieving woman! Alone and abandoned, what will you do? Who will console you? To whom will you tell your sorrows? What heart would be able not to grow weak, that lost such a Son without fault and had seen him suffer such torments with
their own eyes? No one complained about you, rather they all said a thousand
good things; who did you so much evil? The Lord God consoles you and
encourages you and gives you patience.”

Thus, they arrived at the house and then St. John remained at the door in
order to dismiss the people and thank them for their kind courtesies. He said to
them, “Sirs, the Lord for whom you have done this will repay you for it and will
always help you in your trials and show favor to you. Now you see how this Lady
is in grief; they leave her alone to weep about her sorrows, since there is no
consolation on earth for her.

The Virgin enters the house and goes upstairs to the room where they had
eaten the night before. What an outpouring of tears she had there! “O Son, my
Lord, and my companion, where are you? Is it possible that I come, leaving you
buried? Last night you were here with your disciples and now I leave you
underneath the earth. What has happened, Lord from this time yesterday until
now? Where will I go to find you? Where will I go to rejoice, not having you?
How much more joy my soul would feel, accompanying you than in being here,
separated from your presence!”

She calls to St. John: Tell me, my son, where are my sons? You brothers,
where are they? The clusters of my heart, the pieces of my heart, where are they?
Bring them to me here. Leave that alone, Lady, we have too much now to
understand with Jesus’ death, now let the living be. – No, no, said the Virgin; my
sorrow is enough, do not add sorrow to sorrow; my sorrows are enough for me.
Bring them to me, because I will not rest until I see the disciples of my Son. – do
not say that, Lady. Who will dare to come? We all fled when they seized him.
Peter denied him. They will not want to come because of their shame. – Do not say such a thing; bring them to me, that I may promise pardon to them from my Son.

St. John went to the pool of Siloam; he discovered one apostle in a cave and another in a tomb. He stops to listen; he heard the voices of a man who was lamenting- Oh betrayer, coward, treacherous money changer! And thus you were to flee and leave behind your Master in the hands of his enemies? Oh evil man! – St. John arrives: “No more, no more brother; come over here because our mother the Virgin calls you, and all of us.” Go away and do not speak to me. How can I appear before other people and especially the mother of my Master? A man chose to flee; do you want me now to appear to her? – Be silent brother, she is to pardon you; do you not already know her mercy? The mother has promised to obtain pardon; come here, do not be ashamed.

John goes ahead; he heard that they were weeping in a cave; he stopped to listen and he knew by the voice that it was Peter. –Oh white-haired traitors, employed in evil, he was saying. Oh treacherous sinner, coward, liar! And thus were you to deny your Master? Three years of such close conversation that in an hour I separated myself from you; you did so many favors for me, you showed me so much love, and I swore that I neither knew you nor knew who you were? Did they put a knife to your throat, you evil man? The torments prepared in advance, to see if you did not want to deny your master? Did some strong man attack you or was there some great army? Did the voice of a little slave girl make you tremble? Oh evil man! What did you do? – No more, St. John says, come here, brother; our mother calls you. Peter says: “Go away from here! What are you
saying? Do not lie to me! I will finish the days of my life here. This tongue that said that I did not know him, here I will punish it for speaking evil of him; these eyes will become a pool of tears; these hands will be executioners and I will take my revenge on myself. I did evil; I will pay for it. Go with God, brother; leave me to weep for my sins.” John then says: “Come here, Peter. Do not speak in that way. Do you have so little confidence in our mother? Why do you say that? Do you not know how tender and loving she is? Come here. His mother and ours calls you. Now make yourself her friend and soon she will obtain pardon for you. Come. Let us go. Do not be ashamed.”

He looks for the other apostles and he finds them all. They go to the Cenacle. They find the Virgin; they lower their eyes: “Lady, behold here the evil ones, the cowards, we all fled and left him. You alone did not flee, Lady. We were all unfaithful; you were not; obtain pardon for us, Lady.” All are together here; all day and night they were thinking about how they crucified him; their talk was about nothing else. St. John said that he saw it all, “Oh Brothers, if you had seen him on the pillar, at the crowning of thorns; if you had seen him with such labor carry the cross upon his blessed shoulders, while they proclaimed him a traitor, with so much dishonor, with as much weariness, if you had seen him on the cross with no color in his blessed face, the tears in those eyes, his head flowing with blood, his feet and his hands also made pools of blood and handing over of his soul to the Father with such great labor.”

Thus they spent the night. In the same way, let us accompany and console the Virgin, weeping with her in such great sorrow since for our sake he came to her; and this Lady in whose honor you came here today and is so afflicted here on
earth will repay you by praying for you when you call upon her. She is to console us in our sadness, help us in our trials; she is to bring you grace, and later on, glory. Amen

Sermon 68

There is no reason for the Blessed Virgin to pray alone

The Virgin of the Snows August 5. Preached in Córdoba after 1547

God works through weak instruments

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-Why do you say it? - *Because strength is perfected in weakness.* (2 Cor 12:9) The glory of chastity is being assaulted and not conquered. It seems clear to call it patience, since while more weighty things and the forces of reason are against it, it remains standing. And through the evil that they do against you, the love that you show to your neighbor for the sake of wanting good for your enemy is perfected; and so it was the art of God seems on that occasion desired to take evil away from you so that your virtue would grow and become enlightened. And so it happens in the Lord that on occasion of our evil his goodness is shown since as much as one shows himself good, he is pardoned more. And as St. Paul says: "*God proves his own love for us in that his truth abounds in my untruth.*" (cf. Rom 5:8) And so his power seems stronger while he performs great works in weak beings. And therefore St. Paul said "*strength is perfected in weakness*" (2 Cor 12:9); since while he is more persecuted and enslaved, they could not overthrow him, so much more excellent the virtue of Christ appears so that he keeps standing firmly against so many. This was the way that God desired to show his power, working his victories against sin, death and the devil, not with weapons of power, but weapons of weakness, by means of lashes and death, doing the greatest deeds that had ever been accomplished. This is "*because weakness is of God.*" (Cf. 1 Cor 1:27) And thus he conquered and ruled through the cross, by means of weak and poor men, without knowledge, he converted the world in order that the more the glory of his greatness appears, the more he acts through weak instruments, and all of his power may be wondered at and his praises may be spoken, as David says.
-To what purpose are these things? -Not without purpose, since the Gospel has been sung to us in simple words that are very useful and great in quantity; that it encloses in itself the summary of all that is proper to do to be blessed; and we think how this came about through the occasion of a lowly person with whom God worked his greatness, we will say with admiration: “Who will sing of the power of the Lord?”

The Lord preached to many diverse peoples, women and men, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, high and low; and it happened that while there was a reason that those elders should be most pleased by his teaching and put it into practice, they not only did not follow his teaching, but they did the opposite. Although the reason that they knew and revered the Lord was for performing the miracle of healing a blind, deaf and possessed man, they believed it to be so evil that instead of being done by the power of God, they attributed it to an evil spirit, and they said that because the Lord had a friendship with Beelzebul, the prince of the devils, (cf. Mt 9:34) he had power to control the demons. Oh, the mighty wisdom of God, that those who seem able to see are blind and those closest to God in treating his law and performing sacrifices, who dwelt and taught in his Temple were farthest from him and least pleasing to him and possessed him the least! Their wisdom puffed them up and clouded their spiritual vision as a man who has so swelled his face that it hinders his bodily seeing, who, St. Augustine proclaimed, say, “My face was swelled and I was not able to truly see.” The light and grace of God fled from them since his conversation is with the humble and simple, (Prov 3:32) and through his just judgment he does what he said: “I came in judgment to this world so that those who do not see may see, those who see
may be made blind.” (Jn 9:39) He came to enlighten all, but he who thinks that he knows and is not surrendered to the Word of God as a child to his teacher, flees from the light of the Lord because he obtains his wisdom by himself.

Since those Pharisees and elders blasphemed the Lord and the miracle that he performed, the hand of the Lord was upon a woman who heard the sermon; a poor woman- and perhaps she had a torn cloak- and was one of the commoners of the village. She listened hard with simplicity, with the desire of profiting from it, with reverence of the Lord and his word, she was pleased with the doctrine of the Lord so much, and she received so much light from the Holy Spirit to know that one was who was, in a humble way, preaching to all those people how great was his sublimity and how humbly he conversed with men and being their teacher; and finally, such insights were given to the women to understand and she possessed so much reverence and love that, that all fear that the woman had because she was among so many people was subordinated and forgotten. Without respect for the elders who blasphemed Christ, she enters with faith, with true love and the determination of dying for the love of God if there was need. She raised her voice, so as to suggest what great affection of heart she had received from him: and she said to the Lord these blessed words in praise of him and of his most Holy Mother for whom this Gospel is sung on this feast; words worthy of admiration that invite us to imitate them. Let us hear what the woman says. Let us learn from her to praise the Virgin saying: “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!” (Lk 11:27)

The Lord spiritualizes the praise of the good woman
Who will tell of your power Lord, that through a vessel so weak you have worked a thing so strong and on a plot of sand you have built a house that neither fears neither rain nor wind, (cf. Mt 7:26) and when others exclude you, she receives you in her heart with the determination to suffer all the evil they intended to do to her for you and your mother. O woman, tell us for the love of God what things you saw in the Lord that set your heart on fire for him without being able to hide what you felt? Who taught you to honor and praise his mother with words which the entire Catholic Church afterwards has continued to imitate? You sing the song of the praises of the Mother of God and you began to fulfill and draw out the true prophecy of the Virgin Mary, in which she said: “All generations will call me blessed.” (Lk 1:48) You have accomplished much, woman, and we owe it to you to be very thankful about praising the Lord within yourself or about praising you in the Lord. Because, if the angel Gabriel called the one whom you now praise as “blessed among women,” (Lk 1:28) that one who was alone and did not have to feared to speak to her. Elizabeth also praised her and with a great voice, as you, but she was in her house and without the fear of anything (Lk 1:42); but in you God our Lord has worked such a great marvel, that before the Holy Spirit had come with that power that, casting off all fear, made the apostles and martyrs proclaim who Christ was and his most holy mother, before the children and before the great ones, you, weak lady, take hold and now you do what they did later on.

You are a weak and a woman, but you are a figure of many people and are very forceful; because through you the church is represented so that with a determined heart you proclaim the most holy Virgin Mary to be blessed, gathered
from the diversity of peoples in one faith and in one baptism, and to have conceived and given milk to the true Son of God; and if she carried him in her womb and gave him milk, she is the true mother and he is true man; cutting off the head of the heretics who said that he had a phantom body and is not natural. The Virgin is the mother of true God and true man; and although she is not the mother of God is as much as he is God, but mother of God in as much as of man; but God and man, two natures but one person. He is God and Son of the Virgin Mary; but he is not two sons but one, and therefore she is the mother of the One who is God and man. Who will tell what dignity this is, Lady? Who will declare the sentence that this woman said: “The womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you?” Dignity above all dignity, name above every name that in heaven nor on earth can a pure creature be joined to her! Do you wish to honor the Virgin? Call her the Mother of God made man; because the one who says this to her gives honor above all honors to her and will not be without reward because she is very grateful and loves the one who loves her and honors the one who honors her.

But there is much to notice here, and it is that the Lord so honored his mother in reverence, love and obedience as an example for all the good sons of whom it is written that he was subject to her. (cf. Lk 2:51) Why does he not thank this woman for the praises that she spoke to his mother? Why, since the foreign woman exalted his mother, did he not respond in the same tone and say: “You speak a great truth in what you say and understand even much more?” Lord, how secret are your ways and how profound is your wisdom that you, appearing to deny it, agree and teach us in everything you do! “You call my mother blessed, the
Lord says because she carried me in her womb and nursed me at her breasts; but I tell you they are blessed who hear the word of God and keep it.” (Lk 11:28)

You are praised Lord, for such words; and we thank the woman on the occasion of such a teaching that you gave to us that frees us from such great blindness if we desire to receive your light! “Woman, the one that you praise deserves to be praised and much more than what you think; and since you do not know how to praise her for what which she principally ought to be praised, I will show you that there is another reason for the greater blessedness by which you call her blessed. You speak in an ordinary way that, seeing a very good son, you are accustomed to call his mother blessed because she gave him birth and gave him her milk. But that praise in the eyes of God is a thing of very little value and if my mother did not have in her soul the virtues with which she conceived me and did not keep the Word of God, it would profit her little to be my mother according to the flesh if she were not so according to the spirit."

May every creature be rid of false ideas, who, since by a bond so close as it is to be a mother and to have so lofty a Son that would justify making a woman blessed, as is the God-man, it is not enough that are there other relationships if she did not have a blessed relationship with Christ that consisted in true faith and obedience to the commandments of God and of his church. And because the Son saw that many were to be deceived by holding families in esteem and others for doing some good works; without having obedience to his commandments, each time that they dealt with affairs of kinship, and then he appealed to the Spirit. Here are your mother and your brothers, he said to them one time when he was preaching and extending his hand toward his disciples, he said: “Who are my
mother and my brothers? (Then they called the relatives brothers) The one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven; he is my mother and my brother.” (cf. Lk 8:20-21) Oh, the blindness of the sons of Adam! And why do we not look at how honorable and how happy it is to be related by marriage with a king so exalted and of kinship so close as it is to be mother, brother and sister? Perchance, in comparison to this royal and divine lineage, is not the mere lineage of the flesh a despicable thing, even if it is a royal lineage?

**Blessed is the Mother of God**

What great good is found in hearing the word of God and keeping it, that if one did this he would be more blessed than the Mother of God was if she did not have more than being the mother of God? But no one is; nor will be such as she because no one else was his mother nor will be according to the flesh as she was nor according to the spirit as much as she. Oh mother truly blessed that you gave birth in soul and body to Jesus Christ, God made man. And in such a way you are mother according to the flesh, because God gave you such graces so that you would be a worthy mother. And so as there is no one so joined to him, according to the flesh as you are, so neither is there one according to the spirit. And for this, giving him flesh, giving him milk and protecting him from the cold, sheltering him in your arms and serving him with the duty of mother, even to the smallest thing you did for him was done with such great love and grace that you were most precious in the eyes of God and in each thing, as lowly as it was, she offered him your heart, ready to give your life for him. Who will tell, brothers, how much the Son received from his mother since he received flesh by being conceived of her,
and in being sustained in her womb and outside of it; in a way that that most holy life with its trials and death we were redeemed we can say that it was the flesh of the Virgin since she gave it and sustained it?

Oh Lady, how much we owe to you! And how terribly we thank you for it and serve you in an even worse way! We usually give thanks to the one who cooked the stew that they give us at the table; we give him thanks from our hearts for the sheep that they have fattened so that we may eat it; not so much for the generosity as much as for the love and care with which they prepared for us. How can we not give thanks to the Virgin for such a dish and such a good stew that she gives us as she gave it to him? He is no less than God. Do you know how she gave him to us? She gave him to us by giving him flesh. And with him in her hands she is inviting us: "Come and eat my bread and drink that wine that I have mixed for you." (Prov 9:5) Who could endure the justice of God before he enters the womb of the Virgin and comes from her womb to deal with us?" What was God except the pure wine that no one was able to drink? What is he after taking flesh but a tempered wine, that at first while important men approached him trembling, afterwards children are brought to him and he embraced and blessed them and he reproached his disciples (cf. Mk 10:14) because they did not permit the children to approach him? God is the strongest bread and too much for the weakness of our stomachs; but the bread that the child could not eat, the mother eats and changes it into milk and so the child can eat it. So the Virgin gives us God because she gives the child to us, placed in the manger, humble and meek so that one who desires to be helped may not fear to approach him; he gathers the sinners that approach him, saying that he came for them and died for them.
What possesses us that we can not speak the words which the woman spoke: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you?"

Why does our heart not feel how great and sweet Jesus Christ is and we thank and serve his most holy Mother for the good that she did in giving him to us?

Why are they so lukewarm in their praises, in not properly celebrating her feasts, in hearing her Masses, in imitating her virtues in our hearts being glad and softened in hearing the sweetest name of the Virgin Mary? Why do we have hardness of heart to deny the poor one who says to us: "Give me alms for the love of the Virgin Mary?" Do you desire him to speak to you for that? But it is necessary that you help me with a reason to weep.

**Blessed are those who keep the word of the Lord!**

O Blessed Woman, you felt him who was the Christ in you and for you!

Blessed woman, you believed Jesus Christ to be the Redeemer and you rejoiced at his redemption! We by our sins content ourselves with believing with a dead faith what you believed and many of us do not enjoy what you enjoyed. You believed and you loved; you heard the word of God and kept it; and some even say that the woman was St. Marcella. But we are far from hearing and keeping the word of God with her; we proclaim Jesus Christ as the Redeemer from sins and we are captives of our sins; we call to God our Father and by an evil life we are sons of the devil; and Christ having won pardon of our sins, the strength to be good, adoption as children of God, grace for pleasing him and keeping his holy commandments, glory forever in heaven, there are many who are not receiving any of these things as if Jesus Christ had not come nor brought any of this.
I believe, certainly, that the man who has felt bitter sorrow in his heart for having offended God and has made a true and sincere confession, and who has satisfied God and his neighbors in agreement with the counsel of his prudent confessor and has been given such good skill with the grace of our Lord although he may not have clear evidence that his sins have been pardoned and that he is received by the Son of God (because in this life one cannot have this without a particular privilege), but at least, he has joy of heart, a change of purpose from evil to good, a new confidence in God, a deep love of God and his neighbors, a hatred of sin and the things so that he who receives them, knows them, that they conjectured that God has drawn him out of hell and placed him on the road to heaven through the merits and blood of Jesus Christ, Son of the Virgin Mary.

How can this be? Seeing himself so helped by the Son of this Virgin, he allows himself to say with heart and tongue: “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts that nursed you?” If by eating from the fruit of the tree it seems that you give thanks to the tree and bless it and if by eating from that fruit you escape from some mortal poison, how many times would he say: “Blessed be God, who created that tree?”

This is not my discovery; it has been depicted for many years in the town of Bethulia that seeing itself freed from death by the holy Judith, the people said to her: “You are a blessed daughter of the Lord; and: your praise will not recede from the mouths of men.” (cf. Jdt 13:23-25) As you have the Blessed Virgin Mary as your Lady, and you who have received life from the fruit of her womb, Jesus Christ, you are obligated serve her. Do not allow her memory to depart from your heart nor her praise from your lips; and at times alone as with St. Gabriel
or St. Elizabeth, you bless her; and if it is necessary you will praise her before all the infidels even though it my cost you your lives. But those who do not rejoice in the fruit of her womb, they do not live with the life that she carried, nor receive pardon nor grace, these do not praise her or if they praise her, they do not love her; and if they love her, it is not true because the that person truly loves her who hears and keeps his word. Do you want to hear it said personally? “Come to me all who desire me and be filled with my virtues.” (Sir 24:26) What is “Come to me, except: imitate me? What is to be “full of her generations” except of her virtues? This is what she desires for us; that we imitate her chastity and humility.

“And now hear me sons; blessed are those who keep my ways and follow to the doorway of my entrance.” (cf. Prov 8:32) No one thinks about prevailing upon her except by the way that she prevailed upon God. She kept the word of the Lord. Let us follow her “along her paths” and then we will be blessed, “keeping vigil at the gates” of her mercy and we will be heard; that to call her and offend God and Mary is not the thing that satisfies. “He who will call the name of the Lord will be saved,” (Rom 10:13) but in another part he says: “May each one who invokes the name of God depart from iniquity.” (cf. 2 Tim 2:19) And to those who call to the Lord in truth, he is near and so is she. Do you desire to see him? Look at the feast of the snows that we celebrate today. (Give a short history of the feast)

The story: Why snow in the time of August?

Those two Romans, Patrick and his wife were good Christians. Since they did not have children nor greed for the things of this world, they were united in goodness of life, and they prayed together, sang hymns and gave alms and they
were heard by our Lady and she was heard by her Son and snow fell in the month of August. Oh Virgin forever blessed! Why did you choose this miracle as the sign that you wanted to be the heiress of these two good persons? Why snow in a warm season? Because it is very good for her since at the time she conceived the Son of God there was no concupiscence in her. Snow in a warm season: Virgin and Mother. It is not necessary to say here: “In the heat of the sun my mother conceived me” (cf. Ps 50:7) as David says. -Why snow in August? – In order to show the whiteness of her virginity, the purity of her life, this is signified by the whiteness of the snow. –Why snow in August? –In order to give us hope and that if she were called on faithfully by us, she will obtain for us water that may moderate the warmth of the earth for bearing fruit. The power does not remain for her, no; nothing is lacking to her as a good advocate. She can manage a lot with God; he has a great love for us. She is the mother of God and the right of the mother with the Son is lawful; she is our mother, and the tenderness of her maternal heart is great for us. (cf. Ps 50:7) It is not forgotten that at the foot of the cross, her Son commended her to the Christians in the person of St. John saying: Behold your son. (19:26) He does not choose her role carelessly; she does not have a lack of concern in what God commanded her. She prays to him with humility, she beseeches him with perseverance. And she is accustomed to calming the anger of him who is in heaven, as she quieted him on earth when he cried as a little baby. She knows very well how to represent to him what she did for him and then asking him that he gives us favors through her; and God received from her and received so much, he is so thankful, that he will not stop listening to her.
The Virgin intercedes for us

Remember that woman from Tekoa, the one to whom Joab said: *Play the part by mourning* (cf. 1 Sam 14:2); and look how she interceded before David for Absalom who had killed his brother and she obtained what she sought. (Tell the story) And the text says that Joab did this because he understood that the heart of the king was turned and softened toward Absalom; and the commentary says what he was heard to sigh for his son. We have sinned against the commandments of God, but his paternal heart pities us, since his Son died for us; and although he scourges us, he says: *Alas, I will be vindicated concerning my enemies.* (cf. Is 1:24) At first it hurts that he is forced by our sins to punish us. He would prefer to be merciful to us; *it is his nature to be merciful,* but we, as St. Jerome says, *turned to the merciful in bitterness.* And as the Virgin knows the depths of his mercy and that he *does not keep his mercies in anger,* (cf. Ps 76:10) she reached out to Him; it is not necessary to pretend that she weeps; she has deep compassion for us in her heart, even being in heaven.

Because St. Bernard says: *Mary, even if she forgets passion, she does not forget compassion.* And with the heart of a mother she says to the Lord, “Lord, I have two sons and they were fighting in the field and the one killed the other. Now, Lord, you know that I am your mother and the mother of Christians; they, through their sins, killed you before my eyes, on the hill of Calvary; you have been crucified for their trespasses with your great sorrow and mine; I saw you die and I held you dead in my arms and as many wounds as you had on your body I had so many knives in my heart. Lord, you and no other know what your death cost me,
and where it touched me; and if it were not for you helping me miraculously then I would have died, I would not have suffered the pain of such great sorrow since other persons die from lesser sorrows. My Son, you have experienced the sorrows and sadness of death many times, because if it were not for the supernatural comfort of your divinity, I would have died many times and in order to suffer more I did not die. And you also arranged that I would not die, not because I am lacking the sorrow of compassion which was enough to kill me, but because I loved you that I suffered more and more for you and with you. Remember, Lord; remember what I suffered there, seeing you die for the sins of the sons that you gave me. Console me for the sorrows that in your death I suffered, so that these other sons of mine will not die whom in your great goodness you took as brothers. May I not see that you, having died for them, beat and afflicted them, since it will be sorrow upon sorrow; but for alleviating that for me, do good to them, and for them I offer your passion and my compassion."

Oh Virgin forever blessed! Oh Mother of mercy! Oh wisest and most efficacious intercessor, how many times you have pacified your blessed Son with these and similar reasons! And when he said to Moses, *Leave me that my anger may be unleashed*, (Ex 32:10) you have appealed for us and you had held his hands and made him return his sword to his sheath so that he may not punish us. How many times we would have already been destroyed if it had not been for you! If not, let the stories tell it, that there were three-hundred years that God was ready to destroy us with three swords: hunger, pestilence and war and you have been powerful in calming him; and you presented St. Dominic and St. Francis to the Lord in order that they might preach penance with which your
justice was placated; and so it was this time, that you saved us from damnation. We know and see and through this we conclude that you will have done this many other times as well.

What is this, Lady, that being called upon by some good married couples in Rome, you sent snow in the month of August and at other times you have obtained mercy for us and now you do not obtain it? It is certain that you seek it and we see that you do not obtain it. What does this mean? Why does God not shower it down; why does he not hear his mother? —Because it is not good that woman is alone as it is not good for man to be alone. (Gen 2:18) God created woman in order to help the man, and the first woman certainly accomplished very badly, since she helped her husband so badly that she led him to sin. But our blessed woman was created so that she might help the second Adam, Christ, to restore what the first man and woman squandered. With him I had been joined be one whole, is said in her person. (Prov 8:30) And if St. Paul says that we preachers and priests, are co-workers with God how much more will the Virgin be one, giving flesh for redemption and most efficacious prayers, so that what is gained in redemption may be effected in us? It is not good that the man, Christ be alone; let her pray to him for us and calm him in his anger caused by our sins; and so the Virgin does it.

It is not good that we leave her alone to pray

—Well, why not now? —Because there is no reason for her to be alone. — How is she alone? Has she not been accompanied by the angels and the saints? — Yes certainly, but I say alone in the praying and seeking mercy. —Well, how? —
And the angels and the saints do not help her? (cf. 1 Cor 3:9) – Yes, that also. – How is she alone? – Because he who created you without you will not save you without you. The passion of the Lord is not profitable for you if you do not dispose yourself to it. Why do you marvel at the fact that the prayer of the Virgin is of no profit to you if you do not prepare yourself with penance, praying, and good works?

Lady, we leave you alone to pray, and while you pacify God, we make him angry: One praying, another speaking evil; whose voice will God hear? One building up and the other destroying; how is that labor profitable to them? (Sir 34:28-29) If she is praying for me and I, who ought to be weeping for my sins, am sinning, how is she to be heard? I destroy what she builds up; she is blessing and I am blaspheming, complaining and offending; my evil words and works are heard more so as to be punished than the prayer of the Virgin is enough for her to be heard. And this comes to such a point that at some time God says: You may not pray for this people, nor assume praise for them, because I will not hear you. (cf. Jer 7:16) What is gained to walking at a good pace if we are walking in our old sins? These are the ones for whom we were to weep, these were not to make us suffer much more than the lack of temporal things. Evil slaves and not sons, we feel our lashes more and not the offence against our good Father. God understands this well, he knows well how to say: You seek me not because of me, but because you have seen things. (cf. Jn 6:26) And as St. Augustine says in his person: you seek me . . . you do not know this language but rather that about which it is written: Over wheat and wine they ruminate; and in their own beds they will howl because they were not turned to the Lord. (cf. Hos 7:14) Your
punishments are: “We do not have wheat.” And the sighs that you make on your beds because of this are: “And they were not turned to the Lord. How do you return to God if you are an enemy, if you are against the foreigner, if you are in an evil state, if you speak wickedly? This is why the Virgin is not heard by God, or we by her. This is why it does not rain.

There had been three years without rain because King Saul violated an oath that his ancestors had made to the Gibeonites, and he broke it in his zeal. (cf. 2 Sam 21:1) (Tell the story Second Samuel 20 and 21) If you go through here, Lord, you will delay the rain since more than once we broke our promises and more than ten times we pledged lying oaths. Why does it not rain? For our sins, that we do not withdraw from them; because if we had corrected ourselves, God would have already consoled us. If the people did penance, then I will do penance. (cf. Jer 18:8)

**Do you ask for rain? Let us repent from our sins**

What will I tell you? That it is so much to our shame as in past ages, when Elijah, angered against those who offended God, prayed to God that it would not rain and so God obliged. –And what do you say, Elijah? “Lord, let it not rain? But because you do not think that he would do this out of vengeance or malevolence, or by his own spirit, he says: as the Lord lives, in whose presence (cf. 1 Kgs 18:15) or as the original says: Before whose face I stand. His saying was not on a whim “Do not rain,” but the thing that he said having been in homage to God, in the height of prayer communicating with God; from there he drew out this zeal in honor of him to whom he said: “Lord, do not let it rain.”
It is a serious thing to see God offended and when he did more good for us, the more we offended him. How does it profit you that God opened the hands of his mercy if you therefore did not stop swearing, lying and doing evil? Did you say: *Let us fear the Lord who gives us seasonal and late rain and the fullness of harvest of the year watching over us?* (Jer 15:24) Did you stop your evil deeds? No. Why did you do so? What those others did. What? *I have satisfied them and they have committed sin, and in the house of a prostitute they were being luxuriant.* (Say even the total: *I will not visit upon them and on such a people.*) (cf. Jer 5:7-29) You see here brothers, what has provoked the eyes of God to anger and why Elijah asks for a drought because if the abundance is to harm your soul, it is more valuable that God does not give it to you. Do you want God to make it rain? Let us leave our public and private sins and let us all examine look at his consciences and get rid of the evil that is in it; he who forgetful of this, that one is the one for whom God sends rain?

The sailors who took Jonah on board were in a great storm and they wept and called out to their gods; and they did not know for whom the storm rose up but it was for that one that was in the lower level, sleeping and snoring. They go to him: He got up from his sleep. And what do you say? Is now the time to sleeping since we are about to sink? Call to your God as we do if perchance he will save us. Jonah gets up and knows that it is because of his sin that the storm has been raised up and he confesses it and he says that as a penance they can throw him into the sea so that he who sinned would die and the others would not be drowned because of him; and with the guilty one and his penance in the stomach of the whale, the others were freed from death. And soon the fair weather came.
Oh brothers, how many Jonahs will there be in this town, to whom God has commanded something and they have not done it; that have broken his commandment and God has raised up a storm not of water, but of dryness; and we are all afflicted and perchance the one for whom it comes, is careless and sleeping in his sin so neither does he weep for it nor confess it, nor does he do penance and he is the cause for God lashing out at the others? Why do you sleep, sinful man? Is now the time of sinning and of not the time for penance? Because the storm comes for the one who flees from God and is sleeping. If you sinned, lift up the sin; call to God for pardon; say what David said: *Lord, I am the one who sinned, these are the sheep.* (cf. 2 Sam 24:17) Be moved to compassion to see the innocent children and good persons who suffer. Will it not be better for you to say: "I am the one who sinned, throw me out into the sea?"

Let us all fear that each one may not be the one for whom God lashes out. And although you do not know yourself to be in mortal sin now, perhaps you have committed it and the penance for it is not well done; and as St. Augustine says: "God punishes the evil ones that sin and the good ones because they did not set them straight."

Who will dare to say: I have not done anything that deserves to be punished? *Let us change our ways and let us return to the Lord.* (cf. Lam 3:40) If the sinner sleeps, wake up your brother and say to him: *Get up and pray to the Lord.* (cf. Jon 1:6) But if this is not enough, let the elders use their position and let them examine what sins there are and take them away; let them not be thrown upon another’s sins so that God will not say to them: *Bring before me the chiefs of the people.* (cf. Num 25:4) Let each one look out for his soul and that of his
neighbor; let us remove our sins so just as Elijah prayed and it did not rain because there were sins, so when he killed the priests of idols, and it rained. (cf. 1 Kgs 18:40-45) Thus prayer is efficacious when their sins are taken away. Let us give alms, let us do good works, let us help the Virgin; so that if we experience the justice of God in punishing us, we may experience his mercy in being heard and consoled, let us obtain what fulfills us more for eternal life here with grace and afterwards with the glory to which he may lead us. Amen.

Sermon 69

You will rule over all those things your soul desires

Assumption of Mary- August 15

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God gives to Jeroboam the kingdom of 10 tribes

The fount of all light is the sun and the rivers are born of the sea; and the highest good that creates these things is the Author and Giver of every good; and without him, not even the smallest thing can be understood. He gives heaven and grace to merit it; He gives the kingdoms of the earth to those who have them, and he passes them from one to another according to his holy will; and though he did not know this, Nebuchadnezzar had his kingdom taken away and wandered seven years in the fields as a savage beast until the mercy of God looked upon him and made him lift up his eyes to heaven, learning that the Lord is King of Kings and he distributes and takes away kingdoms according to his will. (cf. Dan 4:29) The punishment of arrogance and ingratitude is to be deprived of the goods that God had graciously given to him. And the cure for this evil is to do penance and understand that the good that he received came to him from heaven and not from himself.

And in accordance with this mercy, God spoke words that dealt with a particular and common man: I will take you and you will reign over all those things that your soul desires, you will be king of Israel (1 Kgs 11:37); so that he might understand that the kingdom he had received did not come through his cleverness or his strength but because the supreme Lord of kings and kingdoms wanted to divide the kingdom of the twelve tribes of Israel, and leaving two to the descendents of King David, he wanted to take ten and give them to this man who is called Jeroboam, in order that he would reign over them as a punishment for the sins that King Solomon committed, who gave thanks to God by doing committing evil in response to the good that God had done for him. He came to
such great blindness that, God, having given abundant wisdom to him and had mercy on him so that he could build a Temple for the true God and Lord, *his heart was cursed with an excessive love for women* (cf. 1 Kgs 11:3); and in order to give them contentment, he put idols in the same Temple that he had built for the Lord and he knelt down and worshipped them unhappily. And if it had not been for the love of David his Father, whose services the Lord bore in mind, Solomon, with all his descendants, (1 Kgs 11:12-34) would have totally lost the kingdom; but God did not act thus so as to fulfill what he had first said: *I am God, who has mercy on those who love me and to a thousand generations of those who descend from them.* (cf. Ps 104:8) So that through mercy, he left him two tribes and in order to realize his justice, he took the ten and gave them to Jeroboam, speaking through the mouth of the prophet Ahijah the words of the theme already spoken of; and warning him that if he keeps the commandments of God, in the manner of King David, he would be with him, and he would have mercy on him as he had on David.

Oh human misery, Oh weakness of the sons of Adam! That as a people of little intelligence and great haughtiness, they saw themselves placed in high positions of prosperity and as a result, they lost the little intelligence that they had, intoxicated with the false wines of ruling, riches and pleasures; and as their virtue was placed in danger and trials, they grew weak; as a very small candle that gives light in the house; and when the candle is taken out and placed in the wind, it is extinguished. It has been the most customary thing in the world among ethnic groups and Christians, that high position often makes good people bad; or none or few of the bad, good. In order to prevent this corruption, the king first
practices virtue, so that he may be perfect and not lose it even with the many temptations that there are to do so. It is not a quality of prudent men to think of leaving without virtue, since they wish to regain, even in the midst of temptation, the one that was lost.

King Solomon and King Saul are witnesses of this. They were chosen by God because of the virtues they possessed in themselves when they were private persons and they were punished by God for the sins that they committed in their public role as king. And among them, Jeroboam of whom we are speaking can be counted; about whom scripture does not relate any fault before he was chosen by God, and we ought to presume that he was virtuous since God had chosen him; and he was so evil after he reigned that he made all his kingdom commit idolatry and he placed before them idols to worship so that they forgot the Temple of God and did not adore the true God whom they were in the habit of worshipping; and as he planned it, so it happened. Idolatry lasted in Israel until King Shalamnezzar took them captives. (cf. 1 Kgs 12:29-30)

Where is the one who may have a little intelligence and who may not be entirely deceived by the exterior façade of the kingdoms and dominions, who will not fear to possess them, seeing that those whom God chose for being good ended up evil by not using the goodness and sublimity that God had given them for their salvation? There have been ethnic men like Romulus and Diocletian, who were infidels, the first being invited to reign over Rome and then ruined it as much as he could; and Diocletian, being Emperor of Rome, abandoned the Empire and chose the lower life of a private man; and no matter how much they begged him,
he was not able to leave it in order to take back the neglected Empire, nor did he leave his fate and the poor life that he had assumed.

But, what need do we have to bring examples of men who were not Christian, since Jesus Christ our Lord, whose words the Eternal Father commanded us to hear, and whose life he commanded us to imitate, is offered by his own free will on the cross, and when he was sought out by people to reign over them, he fled from being King? (cf. Mt 7:23; Jn 6:15) Well, the Lord was surely God because he was impeccable. He did not make use of the evil of that small kingdom, although he will take it since he manages well all that is the Lord's; the kingdom of heaven, earth and underneath the earth; but he fled from the kingdom that he could have had with security in order to show that none of his Christians are to be so bold as to stop fearing that they can err and sin through their evil weakness, seeing himself in a place so full of dangers that, in order that we might believe and fear it, the Lord fled from it.

This wisdom is contrary to that of the deceived world which thinks that great dangers are its security; and if he has a position and dominion, he gets another and another if he can; and intoxicated by the false and momentary sweetness of what is visible, he neither turns away from nor is given anything nor does he fear the dangers and traps for the soul. There is a very strict accounting that is to be measured out to those who command as God has witnessed and warned saying: A very harsh judgment will be made on those who govern. (cf. Wis 6:5) Then, although late and with great sorrow and without fruit, they will know what they did not want and they will know that the highest mountains are fighting with great winds, and are more wounded with lightning from heaven.
than the lower places; and that the highest place, as St. Gregory says, is the storm of the soul and that he ought to flee as soon as possible. And in as much as he is to control himself, he is to have grief, great fear and solicitous care in order to avoid the many dangers that with difficulty knock down even the warned and they seriously destroy the negligent and careless; as it happened to unhappy Jeroboam for not being so well rooted in virtue as was reasonable nor did he have that true discernment about what is precious and what is vile, in order to value and desire the one and despise the other. That perchance, if he will not greatly esteem the sublimity of ruling along with what is attached to it, he would behave prudently and although he would possess it, he would hold it in low esteem; and so he would not come to lose faith and obedience to God through it. What is derived from the words of the subject about what God commanded him to speak: *You will reign over all those things that your soul desires* (1Kgs 11:37); it means: the desires of visible things, in conformity with the animal and sentient part of man that we live out.

**Choice for temporal and spiritual goods**

Because if the spiritual ones were desires of the Holy Spirit and those of solid belief then they would be rooted in his heart, and while he would rule as he desired, he would not therefore be lost before he got better. Therefore, the greater the abundance of good things that he does, the greater the better things will go to man, and the fulfillment of his desires will be a greater grace and security. And these are the souls who, satisfied by the riches of the banquet are called blessed by the prophet David when he says: *Blessed is he whom you chose and took so
that he would dwell in your palaces. (Ps 64:5) And since David was grateful to God in the person of all of them for the great mercy of God who held them to himself, cared for them, defended them, guided them and did all the things that restored them in a good and suitable way in order to reign in heaven, he said:

*Mercy and truth will run before your face. Blessed are the people who know interior joy! Lord, they will walk in the light of your face, and in your name they will be glad all day long, and in your justice they will be exalted because you are their power and in your joy our weakness will be exalted; because our protection is from the Lord, and the Holy One of Israel is our King.* (Ps 88:15-19)

What comparison can there be between the ones chosen by God for temporal goods although they may be empires and kingdoms, since the greatest of these is pure baseness in comparison to the great goods for those whom God chose as good Christians, with those who the God of mercy used from eternity, having ordained them for the glory of heaven? And what God, who mercifully proposed to give ahead of time, truly fulfilled in due time, since he created them, called them, justified them (cf. Rom 8:30) and magnified them. And while they may not rejoice in temporal pastimes and bodily delights, which are true poison, they know through experience the interior joy that fills the heart that is born of God when they keep his holy commandments, and possess the good hope of going to reign with him.

These people appear to be sad and possess interior difficulties on the outside, but interiorly they always walk around joyfully. But the worldly are just the opposite. They appear on the outside to be joyful, rich and restful, and they carry their hearts, broken with worries, tormented with affliction, and thirsty
because they are worm-ridden with sadness and lacking in what they have as much as in what they do not have. They govern themselves by their own prudence; they have their confidence in their arm. The Lord does not take them and they withdraw into themselves and thus everything becomes evil, because it is the plant which the heavenly Father did not plant and whether they like it or not, it is to be uprooted. But David says that these others will walk in his ways and order their life in the light of the Lord. (Ps 118:1; 88:16) And when they look at themselves, they weep, because they see the divine goodness in which they trust they are beloved, and that if they desire God, they are desired by God. They banish from themselves every distrust and affliction of vain sadness, and not only do they rejoice, but they rejoice all the day long, which means in everything that happens to them is not in their name, but in the name of God (Ps 88:17); understanding it is not from their deeds, but that these gifts come to them from the great mercy of God. These people are elevated from being sons of men to sons of God, and they hope for the inheritance of heaven and eternal life so that they may deserve it. All this sublime grace comes to them by being participants in the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord, who is true justice and the cause of justice for each one who is just. These people confess that the glory of every good that they possess is from God, and that it is not by their own merits, but according to God's good pleasure, that their force and the strength will be exalted so that they can conquer sin and the devil and the world and that they may pass through the moment of death and not remain dead, but it will serve as a bridge for them to pass to immortality. They give God the glory for all that he does for them and they are grateful to him for the gifts, because they know that the root of all of
them is the goodness of the boundless God and our King, having taken them to himself. (cf. Ps 88:18-19)

The Virgin is chosen for the Kingdom of Heaven

Do not be afraid of the long introduction which we have done before entering into the praises of the most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, since for such a sublime thing whatever step and the number of steps which are taken are small and few.

Who can tell of the ineffable love with which God speaks to the Virgin: I will take you? And who can tell the greatness of the kingdom for which he takes her today? And neither will we know how to speak about the purity, excellence and greatness of the things that the soul of this most holy Virgin desired. She says that from the beginning and before the ages (Sir 24:14) she was created; because, although being royal she was created in time, but in the divine mind she was before all time. Although she was before all the rest that God created in time, this Lady was also preferred to all in being more beloved and chosen for a greater dignity and for greater goods; and therefore she is called first created before every creature (Sir 24:5) because in the eyes and heart of God she is more endowed with grace than all the rest of creation. And of that ineffable fire of love with which the Virgin was loved, it resulted in her being created and preserved from all sin. She lived such a life that with the grace of the Lord she deserved to go up today to heaven to reign with greater excellence than any creature or angel, according to what the holy church sings: Exalted is the holy Mother of God above all the choirs of angels and the heavenly kingdoms.
It is far from us to know how to speak about such a lofty thing. The angels and the saints who were present at the solemn feast of today, when the richest crown of queenship over all things that there are in heaven and on earth was placed on the head of the holy Virgin, would know how to say something some day; and God, who keeps her and honors her, will know how to say everything. But in this exile, with limited vision, we can see very little; and we can say even less about what we understand.

**The Desires of the Virgin living on this earth**

And it is no wonder that we do not know how to talk about what goes on in heaven, since we do not even know how to talk about the soul of the Virgin while she lived on earth. Oh, how different are the desires of the soul of Jeroboam and the desires of the soul of our Lady, the most holy Virgin! There is a great difference between the heart of the sons of Adam who remain in their own misery, and the purest heart of that Lady, whom the sin of Adam did not touch and was so possessed by the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that she can be called more divine than human! The great concern is to know the heart of man which, according to God's testimony is evil, twisted and with so many holes and confusion that the man himself can not entirely know them, *and only the one who created him knows him.* (cf. Jer 17:9-10)

We read in the prophet Ezekiel that God commanded him in a vision to enter into the Temple and see the evils and idolatries that were committed; and he commanded him to enter further into those visions and he saw worse things; and at the end of the many abominable things, God commanded him to *dig into a*
wall and through the hole he saw a certain number of people *turning their backs to the Temple and their faces to the idols*, (cf. Ez 8:3) and they adored and offered incense to them; that evil is noted in the book of Ezekiel for the greater vision of all the others. And in it is declared to us the great evil of our heart and the roots of all the evils that proceed from it, since, according to what the Lord says, *from the heart are born fornication and theft and evil thoughts, etc.* (cf. Mt 15:19) It is an evil work that goes on outside; that is, to do evil in the outer atrium that Ezekiel saw. But entering more inside and looking at what roots preceded this evil work, we will find a vice of interior fornication, or of ill will or other similar thing, which made us commit the exterior evil deed in conformity with this evil root. And if we dig more into the wall of our heart, we will find that this fornication or interior ill will has for a cause self-love which turns our back to God and our face to temporal things, loving them for themselves more than God himself.

A man delighting in an evil deed is an evil thing, but it is far worse to turn his back to God and say to him: *I do not want you!* (cf. Job 21:14) And as with exact justice in the place where sin is punished, which is hell, man is given the suffering of his senses because he delighted in creatures, and is given horrible pain, because he is lost to God forever, since, living in this life, *he turned his back on God*, scorning the infinite good. These are the works, these are the desires which happen in the soul of the sinner desiring evils or vain things; and dwelling in the evil, is a true disaster; and in the vanity of life, true danger; and it was thus for Jeroboam, since when he ruled in that condition he became a slave of sin and of the devil and he caused innumerable people to offend God and to go to hell.
Oh Virgin forever blessed! How secure will be the one who might see your holy soul, where there is no desire of an evil thing in it, neither of the vain things nor in all your life, a thing that has no trace or odor of these things! The prudent Virgin had read well that her father David has desired at one time to drink a jar of water from a cistern that was at the gate of Bethlehem (cf. 2 Sam 23:15); and giving an account of it to his companions, three of them went with great danger to their life, passing through the army of the Philistines in order to seize the water and they brought it to their king so that he might drink as he desired; but he did not want to drink it but he poured it on the ground, offering it to God; because it appeared to him that it was not reasonable to drink water that came to him as the result of so much danger, since they had risked their lives by bringing it. The Virgin had learned this cautiousness from the divine scriptures; but the Holy Spirit has shown it to her much better, teaching her that although things and temporal kingdoms of themselves may not be evil, the possession and use of them is very dangerous and may cost of the life of the soul of many; and that he who desires to guard it well, ought to put aside even what is lawful if it is dangerous so that he may not to fall into what is illicit, harmful and fatal. And there is a very small distance between loving and possessing; because on the one hand we are inclined to these visible things and on the other hand, because they enter little by little in the heart with their presence; and as much space as they occupy, they lose that much room for God's presence.

And in agreement with this doctrine, the most holy Virgin was formed so that she fled from all the pomp, riches, prosperity and from everything that worldly souls desired, because she feared that those things would be an
impediment, no matter how small, in giving herself totally to God, whom she loved more than she loved herself; that the fire of her soul, which burned on the altar of her heart, would be extinguished, made lukewarm or hindered in her honor of God. And so her deeds were holy in order to glorify the One who created her; and these deeds grew out of the most excellent virtues that she had in her soul in comparison to those works, which, while good, were small; and the one who probes the heart of the Virgin, will find inside of it a abundant sea of grace and love, from which virtues flow like rivers. And she would not see backs turned to God nor eyes to the world, but she would be totally dead to the love of the world and detached. All things are considered as nothing in the eyes of the Virgin and she alone would behold, consider, love and appreciate the highest good, saying with much truth: My soul magnifies the Lord, (Lk 1:46) so magnified that all things as considered as nothing in comparison with God. And afterwards, she magnified him with all the powers that were given to her by the Holy Spirit. She would proclaim all that she believes about the God whom she serves and magnifies because she would not desire to praise or value or love anything else or something very little in comparison.

Oh purest heart! Oh love, most true, that you forget the interest and gain of this most Holy virgin, who does not even look at herself because she does not want to be apart for a single moment from the divine beauty. She loved God first, and she will not love anything or even herself more, but God in all things and herself for the love of him who is all one.

She desired to revere, serve and love God

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This was her practice; to behold and love the Lord her God and say to him with greater truth than anyone ever said to him what is written: I gave you my heart: my face has sought you; your face will I seek! (Ps 26:8) From the heart and not from the tongue alone, the Virgin says to her Creator: My face has sought you! Oh most prudent Virgin, vain women take great care in adorning their bodily face with colors and different oils in order to appear beautiful and to be seen by some men, but that the eyes that men behold and the faces they look at will be quickly in the tomb, full of stench and decay. The holy Virgin with better counsel changed her concern to adorning the face of her soul, that is, her conscience, with a diversity of virtues and with the gentle anointing of the Holy Spirit which completely fulfilled what David said: The beauty of this Queen is all within, where the eyes of God look. (Ps 44:14) The foolish virgins are not known by God because they do not possess the anointing of the oil of the most holy grace in the vessels of their consciences (cf. Mt 25:12), but rather are adorned with other works and lack charity. And since we know one through his face and that an evil conscience is not pleasing to the eyes of God, it is said that God does not know such a person since the conscience does not take advantage of the beauty of the heavenly grace which was absent.

And the Virgin had one concern, as St. Paul commanded it (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34). Her concern was particularly aided by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who succeeded so well in his work that as a result, her very beautiful soul was without either stain or wrinkle (cf. Eph 5:27) and she found such grace before the eyes of God that God was glad to see her face and hear her voice. His words spoken to her are: Show me your face and let your voice sound in my ears, because you
are sweet and your face is very beautiful. (Cant 2:14) Happy Virgin, who possessed such a well ordered plan, first in adorning your conscience rather than talking about it! Since those who at first presume to speak rather than do well, before the dawn they rise (Ps 126:2) and they are not witnesses of the way of God that they teach to others; and therefore they neither please God nor will they escape the terrible threat that God spoke to the sinner: \textit{Why do you speak about my justices and take my law in your mouth?} (Ps 49:16) The Lady with her beautiful soul said that she looked for God because with her recollected thinking and good works, which are the beauty of the soul, she begged, sought and knocked at the gate of God and focused all her attention on him and so hand over all things to him, so that now she could eat, drink or do some other thing, all of which as St. Paul says, \textit{is done for the glory of God} without taking from it her own glory, but truly seeking in everything the glory and pleasure of God.

This was the concern; the face was that of the Virgin with which she says that she is searching and describes what she was seeking, saying: \textit{I will seek your face O Lord!} The holy Virgin makes no mention here of either the feet of God or of the hands of God, but the face of God. His face is what she sought. She knelt many times at God's feet which are his justice, and we sinners prostrate ourselves there, begging pardon for our sins. The Virgin considered what she would be able to do if God did not watch over her and this thought caused her great fear, which served as a reverence for God, and not servile fear; then at other times she considered the works of the hands of God, and by them, as by stairs, she climbed to the knowledge of God and in her gratitude, she kissed the hands of the divine freedom with perfect knowledge of the great mercy that God had shown her, and
for all people she sang with perfect humility: *He who is powerful has done great things in me and holy is his name.* (Lk 1:49) While she reflected on God and dealt with these divine aspects from feet to hands, her principal and almost continual practice was to seek the most blessed and most beautiful face of God.

Gratitude for all the general and private mercies are justly owed to God and no one, no matter how humble he is, wants to remain unknown and thanked; since what remains can be lost. And in order to teach us this, the Lord, after having filled the multitude of people with *five loaves and two fish* on the mountain, he ordered the crumbs that remained to be gathered, although they were small, so that they would not perish. (cf. Jn 6:12) Thus it is; but when a love is very perfect, which becomes a perfect union between the one who loves and the one loved, and as he makes them *one spirit* as St. Paul says (1 Cor 6:17), this loved one knows that his beloved does not seek him with gratitude for the gifts that he has given as much as true love that more and more may join the beloved to the lover. It is clear that when considering whether one has been a good husband for his wife, the husband does not so much seek gratitude as much as the love of a loyal wife, because if a philosopher said to his friend: "Do not thank me for what I do for you because it will seem that you and I are two" because a true friend is "another I" and no one wants thanks for what he does in his own person; the husband will observe this much better with his own wife, with whom he is united; and God observed it much more with his most holy Mother because she was in the dignity Mother and Bride. Because of the most perfect love that there was between God and the Virgin, he possessed her for his very own; and the favors that he did for her were done for her honor; and she had embraced him
with such a great love of her heart that she loved him a hundred thousand times more than herself.

And as she knew that God sought this from her, she stopped kissing his feet not out of consideration for the creatures; since, although it may be a good staircase for the imperfect to go up to the Creator by a round about way, those practiced in the exercise of perfect love can, in one flight, place themselves directly in the contemplation and love of the highest good, that is God; and they fall so truly in love with him that they seek the face of God and having forgotten their own interest, they want to be completely for God more than for themselves. And having burned with the fire of divine love, they offer themselves each moment and all their things in tribulation or prosperity, life or death, in this world and in the next as burnt holocausts, so that God may take his good pleasure from them; and their only desire is never to offend him and to be pleasing to him in all things and at all times. And if this happens with the many lovers of God, if this happens with the angels of heaven, who will tell the greatness of the divine love that there was in the virginal heart of the holy Mother of God, that set her heart on fire, that consumed but sweetly burned her soul, and desired with greater desires than men and angels the service, pleasure and glory of God. She offered herself as the sweetest holocaust to the will and honor of God. As much as her heart was less occupied with the love of creatures, as God commanded that the altar of holocausts (cf. Ex 27:1; 38:1) be, the greater her godliness - and her soul more detached from all love of creatures in order to receive in herself the fire of heavenly love that was sent to her from above, and his blessed Son desired that earth would be set on fire even though it would cost him his life. (cf. Lk 12:49)
These were the desires of the soul of the Holy Virgin, above those whom God says to her that *he will make her rule.* (cf. 1 Kgs 11:37) If she desired to revere, thank, serve and love the Lord very much, all things were given to her with as much advantage over every creature as the queen has in lordship over her vassals.

**She longs that all creatures praise and love God**

But what will we do with this virginal heart? While it serves God and is more pleasing to him than all the rest of the universe, her desires are not content with such great services. But in comparison to the love that she has for God, everything that serves the immense goodness of things seems small to her and she loves him above all things without measure. And therefore she desired with all her heart that all creatures that God made in the heavens and on the earth would know, revere, obey and love God, and she invited them many times, from the highest seraphim to the smallest ant-hill and the herbs of the field, that all creation would jointly exalt God with her and praise his name together with her. (cf. Ps 33:4) The Virgin took it all for kindling, the high and the low, in order to fatten and sustain the liveliest and lavish fire of divine love that burned in her heart. And as a help for downheartedness and bodily weakness that these burning desires caused in her, she said many times what was spoken about her before she was born: *Sustain me with flowers, surround me with apples, because I am sick with love!* (Cant 2:5) *The perfect love of God is the bravest thing, more than death* (cf. Cant 8:6); and so her continual thought to possess the Beloved through her burning love and desire of seeing God, consumes the flesh and exhausts the
marrow and destroys the love of all other things in such a way that it takes possession of her whole person where she is, so that it weakens and sickens, wounds, seizes and captures her so that all that she has will be used for the infinite goodness and beauty of God who deserves to be loved with an infinite love.

And the relief that is gained by this great fire is to see the lover of God, or hear or remember that there are people who have desires of serving God, which are signified by flowers; and people who truly serve him with significant works are signified by the apples. This was the epitome, this was the fresh air that the Virgin breathed as a remedy for the loving torments of her heart; and by remembering the services that are done for God our Lord on earth and principally in the heavens, and that God receives glory from all either by the way of justice or by the way of mercy, she had the power to defend herself from death which her strong love would cause many times. And what God promised her is also understood, that she would rule over all the things that her heart desired, since even in this life he raised her many times above herself upon knowing that her thirst would be quenched by drinking from that water of the services that were done for God in heaven and on earth.

**The desires of seeing God face to face**

I wonder who is so daring, holy Virgin, that he will go ahead in that exercise to know and declare what the things are that your soul desired above all things which God promises you that you are to rule. The Lord asks Job: *Have you entered, perchance, into the treasuries of the snow?* (Job 38:22) In order to suggest to him that he should not presume to know, since even about such a
small thing among the works of God, he still would not know how to give a good reason. "How can I, poor in talent, give it to you, says St. Augustine, when he spoke of the most holy Virgin Mary that, if all the limbs of all men would be converted into tongues, even they would not be sufficient enough to praise her?"

And if St. Augustine and the other tall giants in the things of God are found to be such small dwarfs in the praises of this lofty Lady forever blessed, what ought I to feel in speaking about her since I am a dwarf in comparison with those saints and wise ones? There is a need, Lady, to beg you at the end of this sermon, as at the beginning, to obtain for us the favor of the Holy Spirit that made you so holy and so high, that he put in your heart such a great fire of love that flashes of lively and great desires leap from it, that are much greater than from the Prophet Daniel (cf Dan 10:11) so that this same Holy Spirit may teach us not all your desires now, but some part of them that he gave you for the glory of God, we may fulfill the honor of preaching on your most holy feast. Lady, who am I to enter into the treasures of the snow, that are the unthinkable and innumerable riches of holiness and purity, whiter than snow, of your heart? But give me much confidence since the good Lord sent a meal to Elijah, his loyal prophet, by means of a black raven. (cf. 1 Kgs 17:6) Behold, Lady, these people gathered and devoutly celebrating the day of your joy and praise, and give them the knowledge of the desires of your heart, without looking at the unworthiness of the tongue that is to speak to them.

Tell us, Lady forever blessed; are the desires of your heart satisfied, since from the time you were conceived until you left this life, you never got angry with God in anything small or great? And in all things you pleased him with greater
pleasure that there was or will be Lady? And the services that you did for God made man, giving him human flesh, formed from your purest blood, carrying him nine months in your womb, giving birth to him and serving him when he was tiny and he was older; does this, Lady, not satisfy the desires of your heart? And if that were not enough, was not the work enough, greater than all that you did, more worthy of praise than can be spoken when, being at the foot of the cross of your blessed Son, (cf. Jn 19:25) you loved the world so much that as a remedy for the world, you offered your most beloved Son to death on the cross in your heart, obeying the will of the Lord as a maidservant (cf. Lk 1:38) when he took him away from you as when he was served in giving him to you in the Incarnation?

And if, when all your deeds are united to the services done for God by all men since the beginning of the world, and that will be until the end of it, what love is there that is not contented with this? And if the services and praises of the angels and if all those who are saved and give praise to God in heaven are joined with this, it does not seem that there is anything more for the one who loves God to desire. And if this is not enough, Lady, we have much reason to be ashamed that our love is so weak and so scanty that with one I do not know whether we please ourselves by what we do or suffer without having lively desires of doing more and more for our Lord so that all may serve and praise him.

Oh, the blessed Virgin says that all the services that all the heavenly and earthly creatures do and can do for God most high are a small grain of sand in comparison with the grandeur of heaven, and that all the services that can be done are a great trifle for what he who is goodness without measure deserves. There is no proportion between finite and infinite; and therefore the desires of
my heart are not happy with all that the creatures can give him. And to the one to whom it appears that it is not so, it is probably because it has a false weight; and by having little love in the balance, it seems to him that it has much weight, which makes God put it in the other. If I rule over all that my soul desires, I resemble God who has all that heaven and earth can give him.

The fulfillment of the desires of seeing God

Good news! Good news virginal heart, which God honored and therefore the smallness of creatures does not inflate her! Good news, that the Lord commands you to say: I will take you, my mother, and you will rule above all those things your heart desires! And he, who said all things, gained nothing. And if your desire, as the scripture says, is every good thing, now the day has come when you see every good thing and the face of the Lord who you seek (cf. Ex 33:13) is revealed to you, the one whom in this life two seraphim had covered with their wings, (Is 6:2) even when the Lord speaks with the prophets, his own friends. He will be shown to you and he will give you the desire of your most loving heart.

Who will relate this? Who will say what it is to see God clearly, the altarpiece of infinite beauty, and the immense sea of most infinite perfections? He who, when he is clearly seen, robs the hearts of those who see him, and inflames them in such a great fire of love that no one can utter anything and in whose comparison the greatest love of the earth seems lukewarm. Since, as Isaiah says, the fire of the Lord is in Zion, and the furnace is in Jerusalem (Is 31:9); suggesting that the fire of a large furnace exceeds another small fire; so the love
of God that results from seeing his most beautiful face in heaven, signified by Jerusalem, surpasses the love, no matter how great it is, which is able to be possessed here on earth, signified by Zion.

God’s most beautiful face is the one that ignites love in the seraphim and in all those who see it, and it engenders in them a desire so lively, a thirst so deep to possess goodness, glory, dominion, wisdom and, in a word, they desire with unspeakable desire that God may have infinite riches; and since all creation is finite, they pay so little attention to it because it does not extinguish their thirst, caused from the vision of his most beautiful face. And if the highest God does not fulfill this desire for them, they will remain in great sorrow and seeing God would be a torment of love. But now the time is passed and the place in which God tortures his own with love giving them pain for their own and another’s offenses which they commit against him and giving them consolation and fulfillment in proportion to their holy desires.

God does that on the earth and during the time of mortal life, but in heaven he dries the tears of his own people and banishes sorrow and weeping (Rev 21:4) and all that can cause pain; there is no place of torment, nor does he fail to quench the holy thirst of those who go there; because God removes it by letting them drink from that river as resplendent as crystal that St. John saw in the Apocalypse, that flowed out from the throne of God and from the Lamb and flows through those streets of fine gold of Jerusalem (Rev 22:1), whose impulse gladdens that entire city of God (Ps 45:5); since as David says, God gives them to drink from the river of his delight. (cf. Ps 35:9) How will they be thirsty, those who have a river for a glass and what they drink is the delight of God? Oh your
immense goodness, Lord, that you wound them with the arrows of your love
which go out from your most beautiful face, and forgetful of themselves, they
desire your infinite riches, and you heal their wounds as you remove the hunger
and thirst that you caused in them. If your face awakens such desires in them,
your same face gives them fulfillment, and you silence them by giving them all
that they desire, as a mother to the child who nurses at her breasts.

When persons see God according to what we have said, they desire infinite
richness, and this is their hunger and thirst; and seeing the same God, they see
that he has so many riches of wisdom, courage, goodness, beauty and joy and a
blessed life, that he did not have a beginning nor will he have an end, nor can he
increase more by being infinite nor decrease a single hair, by being all powerful;
and since as in him is found all that they desire, and much more, they remain
happy and restored. As great as the desire was, the joy caused by its fulfillment
was even greater.

The one who carries the larger vessel of love rejoices more in the goodness
of God. And if one who is smaller takes it, his joy is so great that it is not possible
to be pleased with himself, because he loves God without comparison more than
himself. How does it seem to you that such will be the joy of this Virgin and
Mother who today goes up to heaven and clearly sees the face of the Lord whom
she was seeking, since the vessel of her love for the desired One, caused by the
vision of God, was bigger than that of all men and of all blessed spirits?

_Rejoice with Jerusalem_, who is Holy Mary, and _be joyful all of you who
love her_, because the Lord has clothed her today with his most excellent glory,
_ flowing over her as a brook of peace and a very powerful river_ (cf. Is 66:10-12),

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with great waves of sweetest honey. She looked for God, she has found God without the fear of losing him, as long as God is God, and forever her soul will praise the Lord and her spirit will rejoice in God her salvation. (Lk 1:46) She desired the riches of God and renounced her gain and she found God and herself; God has given it to her so that she would rejoice in his riches, and he has given them to her so that she may rejoice in the glory and pleasure of God; and she is totally enclosed by the sweetness of God, engulfed in the abyss of his blessings, transformed in him more than any other creature, and therefore she has been made Queen and Lady of every servant. With good reason the church sings: Mary has gone up to heaven, the angels rejoice and bless the Lord; and with great reason the church says to us: The Virgin Mary has gone up to heaven; rejoice because she rules with Christ forever.

Virgin forever blessed, we, your most unworthy servants, are very joyful about how faithful you have been in serving the Lord and he is so abundant in mercy for rewarding you, and about your fulfilled desire to see God face to face. Come down, Lady, and as Isaiah says, show us the place of your dwelling, (Is 54:2) that is, your heart, because there is much that God has given to you, and he will never take it away from you. (Lk 10:42)

She desired to be joined anew with her body

Lady, does anything more remain that you desire remain? Does something more remain for you over what your soul rules? And although this question seems ignorant, it is not. Since God joined the body and soul of every human person with such an intimate knot of love that, although the soul may be outside
of the body and it may be in heaven rejoicing in God, it has a natural desire to see itself joined with the body, in order to give it life as it did; since she knew that in heaven her body was not to possess the imperfections and grief of this life, it was not to be an obstacle for her, but a beautiful, subtle, incorruptible and agile instrument, and such other things that are fitting for the soul that rejoices in God. And if the blessed souls desire to have their own bodies with them so that they may be participants in glory since they did good works, with how much more strength would the soul of the holy Virgin desire to possess her own most holy body with her in heaven, since it so faithfully helped her to serve God while she was in this life without having any evil activity or inclination, like the bodies of the other saints?

Certainly, it is a just thing since in body and in soul the blessed Virgin was the seat of God in a very particular way. On the day of her death, this chair is now divided in two parts and that soon, or on the third day, God may choose to reunite his chair and most holy Ark so that all who were in heaven would see that most holy body from which the Divine Word took human flesh and which is so resplendent may be enough to enlighten all the heavens and fill all who are there with a new joy. And so it is from their belief that the angels asked for it and that God granted it and that the Virgin, body and soul, rules in heaven over all the things that her soul desires; and one of them, as we have said, was to have her most blessed body with her, resting forever blessed.

Our Mother desires to have us with her in glory
-Blessed among women and above angels and men! Give us permission to ask you if all your desires are fulfilled, since it seems that besides your glory there is neither more to have nor to desire, you can say with great truth: *The Lord fed me; nothing will I lack, he has placed me in his very abundant pasture.* (Ps 22:1)

-There is great truth, says that Virgin, that I do not have more to desire in what pertains to me; because *I have entered into the joy of the Lord* (Mt 25:21) more interiorly and with greater abundance than any pure creature entered or will enter, nor what anyone can describe. But I have sons in the world, whose salvation I desire with a very loving and maternal heart. And while I cannot take on the suffering or punishment of their trials and evils, since with the joy of heaven one cannot suffer anything, I have not lost compassion for them or the desire of their salvation that I had in the world, rather it has increased in me because the Lord has increased charity in me. I will have this care until the world is finished, I will have this duty: to be a loyal advocate of the needs of others before the throne of God; and when I see him angry with them, I will place myself before him, and if there is a need, I will kneel down and throw myself at his feet and I will bring to his memory the services that He gave me because of what I would do for him and he received it willingly, and I will do all that a most loving mother does for her sons, without getting tired or angry from pleading for the just and for sinners.

Do you hear this, Christians? Certainly we are happy that we have God for a Father and his holy mother Mary for a mother! And if we wish to consider it, a great trust has been given to us today in order to save us, since a Lady has gone up from earth to heaven, one who was so great with God, as a mother with a Son
and who is much more merciful to us than any other mother has been, nor will be
with her own sons that she conceived and bore.

Lord, who will tell the great mercies that are in those very sweet words you
left behind through your mellifluous mouth: Do not seek to call anyone father on
the earth, because one is your Father who is in heaven? (Mt 23:9) No, because
you, Lord, forbid us to call and honor as fathers those who engendered us
according to the flesh, but rather you have commanded it in the fourth
commandment, and it is very pleasing in your eyes, as St. Paul says. (cf. Col 3:20)
But you want us to discover the secret of your Father’s heart because we did not
know it was so important for us to know that the fatherly love you have for us
surpasses so much more than what our fathers who engendered us possess. In
comparison to God, no one deserves to be called holy, nor good, nor high,
because He alone is the holy one, Lord and most high and his goodness
diminishes the goodness of creatures because he has an infinite superiority over
the earthly fathers who engendered us. No matter how much love our earthly
fathers have for us, the name of father does not make them vain, nor do they
deserve to have it, but God, whose love and care for us most justly deserves this
name, fulfills all its meaning, making the role of father most sublime. We bless
you Lord, for your mercy so full of grace, the root and cause of many diverse
goods that proceed from this mercy that as our true Father you have for us in this
world and in the next.

And we also bless you because you gave us your very holy mother for our
mother; she is the one most united to you in the relationship of the flesh, as it is
in the fire of love. And as a brand thrown into the fire is engulfed in it so that it
appears the same as the fire, so this blessed Virgin, thrown into the furnace of
divine love, is so engulfed and similar to it so that she is truly mother of the
Christian people and in comparison with her, mothers do no deserve the name of
mother.

Who will there be that does not awaken from the dream of sin, if it is in
him, and who is not inspired to continue the good works that he has begun with
having the favor of such a most powerful Father and the gifts of such a loving
Mother? Let us begin a new group to praise the glory of heaven on the day that
the Mother of God and our Mother enters into the glory of heaven. Let us stop to
consider how great part our blessedness will be when we see her in heaven, and
thank her for all the favors and mercies that she did so that we might go there.
Let us truly understand that with the great love that she has for us, she wants us
to go where she is and for this reason she is very prepared to help any person at
any time and need in which he will call upon her. She is very rich for all whom
she holds dear; sinners obtain pardon through her, the just, more grace, the
angels, glory and the Son of God has human flesh from her, and the blessed
Trinity greater glory than of all the rest whom he has created. And the greater
generosity is that she has shown to her spiritual children, the greater her richness
will be for her ability to give.

Conclusion: Let us imitate her. Let us obey her.

What is left except that we do what is written: *Do not abandon, son, the
law of your mother?* (Prov 1:8) And she says the same to us: *Blessed are those
who keep my ways.* (Prov 8:32) And if we love her, let us imitate her. If we have
love for the Mother, let us obey her. And what she commands us is that we do all
that her blessed Son commands us. (cf. Jn 2:5) Since the way that she gained
what she has was her obedience to God. And if she did not have this, she would
gain nothing by being Mother of God according to the flesh; and each person
who will keep the holy will of God will be mother of God (cf. Mt 12:50) according
to the Spirit. And may there be many mothers among these who do not envy the
Virgin and Mother but rather desire God’s will and attain it; and she, as head of
all, has been given to us as an example so that by imitating her humility,
meekness, purity and charity and all the other ways that she walked in obedience
to God and since she helps us not only by her examples but by her fervent prayers
before the throne of God’s mercy, such grace will be shared with us that on the
day of our death it may be said of us from the place of God: I will take you and
you will rule over all the things that your soul desires, (1 Kgs 11:37) rejoicing in
the company of this most holy Virgin in the eternal glory of heaven to which you
lead us.

Sermon 70

The Virgin goes full of glory. Will we not rejoice with her?

Will we not weep?

Assumption of Mary, August 15

The day of freedom for our blessed Mother
There is no end to those things that are measured by time. The evil man is not happy with the pleasures and prosperity that he has, because the day will quickly come to his house where they will remove from his mouth his intoxication with his vices and he will surrender to the harsh and just judgment: "As much as he glories, so much torment and weeping is given him. (Rev 18:7) The seven years of fertility that he had in Egypt passed, and seven other years of greater barrenness succeeded that former fertility. (cf. Gen 41:53) And because they enjoy some small delights and sins for seven days, which signifies this entire life, it follows for them not only seven years of great torments, but seven thousand million years as long as God is God. This life was limited; her end came and death came after her, which will not end. Those who in this world have prosperity are not joyful. Let not your heart reach out to riches, although they may abound; Do not be joyful when you make purchases (cf. Ps 61:11); Do not weep when you lose your wealth; Use this world as if you do not use it, because as St. Paul says (1 Co 7:31), the shape of this world passes quickly. And the rich men slept the dream and death, whether they may want it or not is to come, and they found no riches in their hands, as David says (cf. Ps 75:6). He does not consider rejoicing in evil or in what is vain, because he said what gave him pleasure here: it is bitterer without comparison than the delight that they received.

If you desire to rejoice, I will tell you what you are to do for it. I tell you to consider yourselves foreigners (cf. 1 Pet 2:11) in this world and be careful about your life so that you may rightly hope to enjoy the life to come. Those who keep the commandments of God rejoice, since their services end, but the reward will last forever. You who weep for your sins console yourselves and you who carry on
your shoulders the difficult cross of the penance and mortification for your passions are obedient to God in the hardships that he sends you. Do not complain about them as the worldly do, but give thanks as good Christians, since all these things are temporal, and have their end and they will work afterwards an eternal weight of glory in you. (cf. 2 Cor 4:17)

Be happy, be happy all who truly love the Lord, whose love you possess in this life while you dwell in this difficult exile and are loyal to the love of the Lord. Do not console yourselves in anything earthly, but as a chaste turtledove your song is a groan, and you have been seated by the rivers of Babylon, despising all that flourishes in the world, because it passes as the water of the river and your duty is to weep, remembering that heavenly Zion (cf. Ps 136:1), in which God is seen with very great and eternal joy, not hidden by a veil, but rather face to face. Do not lose strength in your trials, because the Lord has sworn to take the cup of bitterness away from your mouth (cf. Is 51:22) and give you eternal consolations. And the day will come- it will certainly and quickly come- when God will give you the desire of your heart, open your jail, break the chains of your mortality, place in your mouth a new song and you will sacrifice to God (cf. Ps 39:4) in heaven a sacrifice of perpetual praise. (cf. Ps 115:17)

Know well to consider the present day and most solemn feast on which this greatly desired and sought end was reached by the most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Lady, and rejoice that such a great gift came to her, since today she entered into the celestial city with such rejoicing and celebration that she causes admiration in the angels who were amazed that in the miserable exile there was such a precious relic which has been carried with great honor and
pomp to the heights of heaven and established by the Lord as the Lady of those who are there and here, who ask saying: "Who is this one who goes up from exile, abundant in gifts and leaning on her Beloved?" (Cant 8:5)

Good sons, rejoice in the freedom of your Blessed Mother, and hope that, by resembling her, the day of your freedom will come in which, freed from the corruption of this life, you will enjoy the gift of perpetual incorruption, fulfilled glory and the joyful vision of God with her in heaven; and understand that this blessed Virgin is not only given to us as an example for our life, whom we may follow and imitate in her virtues, but also in her we have an example and motive to hope that if we have been here along the path where she was, although not so quickly nor with such great holiness, we will go where she went, although with less glory.

Let us be very attentive and not lose sight of this Lady, so faithful in her ways and such a true star and guide for us who sail in this dangerous sea. And in as much as on other feasts, since she was conceived in the womb of her mother, there is much to look at and learn how she consoles us; we have the obligation today to say something about this one who does not have less value than any of the others. And let us begin here.

**Great was the witness of the Virgin in this exile**

Lord, I love your most blessed Mother with a deep love that is proper for a son to have. Since Mary is loved as such a Mother, what was your reason, although just in itself, and though it was painful for her, that your ascended rich and prosperous, accompanied by the angels and holy souls to reign in heaven,
seated at the right hand of the Father, where there are never ending delights (cf. Ps 15:11) and you left this lady in exile on earth, where although by your grace she led a sinless life, your absence was a difficult exile for her? Who, Lord, will understand your ways? Who would say that you desired more trials for the blessed Virgin than those which she suffered at the foot of the cross, when she saw you die in such great pain? You, Lord, are the Sun and she is the Moon, and since she is eclipsed when you eclipse yourself, why, then, when you go full of light and glory, does she not also participate in what you have in such great abundance? The shadow follows the body, and the Virgin follows you, and she depends on you, as your most faithful servant. Why- since in the time of your tribulation she accompanied and followed you, - do you go to heaven with such glory and you leave her on the earth?

Now, I see, brothers that you are responding to me in the way that God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah: “As exalted as the heavens are above the earth, so great do my ways surpass your ways.” (Is 55:9) O Lord, we believe it to be true; all your ways are just, full of wisdom and goodness; and when we praise them as such, we desire them, since we seek to understand them for your glory and our edification. But the first thing we notice is that no matter how much we open our eyes to consider how great the martyrdom was that this holy Virgin suffered every day that she lived in this exile, from the day that her most Blessed Son and our Lord went up to the sovereign city until today, when she attained what she desired by being carried there, we will not be able to understand even the least part of her difficult martyrdom.
**Love is her Executioner**

Love caused her to desire to see her God face to face. When love is greater, the desire is more increased and the delay more painful. If there were someone who could weigh the huge burden that the Virgin Mary had, he would be able to know her burning desires when they approach and how much the delay of her fulfillment tormented her.

Oh glorious Virgin, sweetness and bitterness flow from the same font, which makes you pleasing to God and torments you! Love, and the greatest love, that surpasses all knowledge, that you had for God, makes you great, pleasing and blessed in your compliance; and the same love that measures your greatness, torments you as an executioner. That *sword* prophesied by the holy old Simeon which was to pierce your heart (cf. Lk 2:35), when you saw your Son crucified and dying on the cross, was a sign to the living. But if there was not a *sword of love* in your heart, with which your most holy soul was sweetly wounded to its very depths, it would torment you to see your son, whom you loved so much, abandoned. This sword, this most lively love made you care about what was agreeable to your most holy Son; it made you fear that something bad would happen to him, the third one, it made you weep when he came to you and feel the pangs of death in his death. And when it seemed to human judgment that this love was to give you rest and let you rejoice in heaven with him whom you loved so much on earth, the loss of your Son began anew, by God's permission, to torment you as before, so that the torment will last all your life, and even increase while life continues.
We have it by experience that the friends of God were present at the death of the Lord and suffered together with the Virgin at the foot of the cross. They pleased God with the witness of interior compassion, which they underwent and suffered there, without permitting the hand of the executioner to torment those whom their interior love tormented so greatly. But, as I see you Lady, who suffered more there, they give you again the cup of bitterness to drink in the absence of your most blessed Son which is more difficult for you than the death which the cruel executioner could give you.

This Virgin had the greatest understanding for knowing and disposing of blessings that God had given her; she had a very gentle heart to be grateful and think about the blessings many times; and blowing continually on the firewood so ready to ignite, she had in her heart a flame of love that burned and made her desire with all her strength to see that he had given her such singular gifts. And if there are men who remember that God has pardoned their sins, they are neither able to restrain the gentle tears nor cease to love the one who had such great mercy for them, for the Lord says that the one to whom more sins are forgiven, has more love for his pardoner. (cf. Lk 7:43) What would that blessed Virgin feel when she remembered such a great gift, received from the loving hand of God, that neither in her conception nor in her whole life did sin befall her? Because she knew very well that it is a greater gift for God to grant innocence, not permitting one to fall into sin, than to pardon the fallen one. And for this, all the sins that she could have done, and that others did, were put to her account and she pleased God as if she had committed them and was pardoned, and even much more than what we have previously said. What will I say to you? Love effected gratitude in
her heart for the grace and holiness that she had received; that, as a humble and faithful maidservant, her soul magnified God (Lk 1:46) and not herself for all of it.

Even when she thought of the ineffable and never considered the grace that God had given her in taking her for a mother, the love that would be shown by her would be so great that it caused her dismay and a lack of strength and she was made to say from her heart what is in the Song of Songs: That I am sick from love. (Cant 2:5)

Love has degrees; it hurts more than an arrow

Love has its degrees: it harms, it binds, and it is never satisfied. The heart of the love of God is wounded when it is taken possession of so much by man, that this love surpasses and completes all the other loves that the Lord required in the Gospel: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me (Mt 10:37); and: if someone comes to me and does not abhor father and mother, wife, sons and brothers and even himself, he cannot be my disciple.” (Lk 14:26)

The law of divine goodness demands and with much justice, that just as love is in itself an infinite thing, so it is valued by men and angels above all things, so that one is made to say with St. Paul: “Who will separate us from the love of God? Neither tribulation, worry, hunger, nakedness, danger persecution nor the sword may destroy; but we surpass all these things through the love of the one who loved us. Since I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present things nor those to come, neither strength nor
height nor depth nor some other creature will not be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 8:35-39)

What arrow of love so great that can harm a body with so much violence is as this love which God pours into the heart and wounds the soul even to its innermost part? The wound of love is what gives salvation; and the one who does not have this wound, is wholly evil. And although he has the name of the wounded, it is the sweetest thing. And the Lord shoots this arrow without anger and his creature receives it without anger; formerly it was valued by the bride in the Song of Songs, saying: “I am wounded with love.” (Cant 5:2) It is a blessed wound for the creature, since the same God, all-powerful and unconquerable, is not defended from this arrow, if he had one who would shoot it, according to him who gives testimony, saying: “You wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, with one of your eyes and with the hair of your head.” (Cant 4:9) Who will tell the mysteries of love that passed between God and the Virgin, he wounding her with the contemplation of his beauty and goodness, and she wounding him by loving him and thinking about him with the greatest fidelity? Because the right eye is the love of God; and the hair on the head is the continual thinking about the same God.

From here it seems that not only was the Blessed Mother of God wounded with a strong and unconquerable love, but she was also determined to die a thousand deaths rather than commit a sin, whether small or great; her thought was so focused on God, that she would never forget him. Blessed be God forever who had the Virgin Mary on earth who with a loving and continual memory of God became a counterweight to the many who, when they received each hour and
moment the mercies of God, spent the days and the hours without remembering
the one who never forgets them; and if they are remembered, it is a dry and cold
memory; since that is the truth that just as one remembers God and his
commandments, so he puts them into practice. And those who forget about God
are the ones to whom Lord complains, speaking through Jeremiah: “Perchance can
the maiden be forgetful of the sash with which her bosom is encircled? But my
people have forgotten me for countless days.” (Jer 2:32)

Oh maiden, the honor of all the people of God, what great care you always
took by encircling God in your heart since no other maiden took care of your sash
or your ornaments! Those women, who are concerned about their appearance
before men, are neglectful of holding God in their heart; but you, Lady, whose
purpose was always to scorn all the perishable things and seek the beauty of the
virtues that please the eyes of God, your every thought, while praying or not
praying, and at all times and places was attentive to God, fulfilling and surpassing
what the prophet David said: “The thought of my heart is always before you.”
(Ps 18:15) Blessed Virgin, God’s constant remembrance of you seemed to be a
great treachery and your not forgetting him a single moment, bringing about a
holy competition with him and an understanding of what he did with you in order
to make you one with him. He loved you with a generous love, without respecting
his own interests; because you are far away from the infinite riches of God who
sells his love to no one, nor hopes to profit since his goodness can neither grow
nor decrease. You, Lady, with that generous, magnificent and disinterested
heart, similar in your love to that of God and received from his hand, had
forgotten yourself and gave God a selfless love and a continual remembrance so
that the words of the Song of Songs would be confirmed by you better than by anyone else: “My Beloved is mine and I am his,” (Cant 2:16) which contain more affection of the soul than the full explanation of the saying since they do not say who your Beloved is (for you nor you for the Beloved). But when you do not say in particular what the one is to the other, it is implied that it is such that no one can say it. God is everything to you, O Lady; and you are all that a creature can be for him; you give the greatest contentment that the pure creature can give to him. The Holy Spirit was right by not declaring a particular meaning in those words, since it would say little about what is much, and it is better to talk about the higher things by honoring them with silence than saying the least thing about your greatness.

**The benefits of God are bonds of love**

Who will tell the story of this war so sweet and without anger between God and the Blessed Virgin, in which his beauty wounds her and her beauty wounds him, the prey and the one bound by those ties, by whose strength he is glorified saying: “Will I draw them to me with the cords of Adam and the bands of love?” (Hos 11:4) We understand by the first the natural benefits that he does for men and by the second those benefits which are supernatural.

And if you see that any benefit from God is valuable, although it may be the least of them, and principally the love of his divine heart with which he gives it to us, there is no benefit so small that it may not be enough in itself to fasten itself to man, and to bind him to God through love and to offer him every service. And if one benefit alone is enough to do this, the many great favors God does and
has done for us each moment ought to make us prisoners of love! Let the man look at himself, let him look at the sky and the earth and see that everything is the kindling of gifts for igniting in man the fire of divine love, and all are the strongest cords for lovingly binding him to the holy will of God and his law, that they may make him love the bond of salvation, which is obedience to God and abhor the evil looseness of his own will, causing the man who followed it here to be bound hands and feet into hell where he is a prisoner, a captive of the demons and the one here who refused to subject himself to God in order to conquer the devil and sin to be his slave. Who will find it enough to be amazed at the great sickness of the sons of Adam? They will not recover their health with many poultices full of efficacy and softness, since while all of them rejoice and are happy in receiving the gifts of God, they will not raise their eyes to consider that it is reasonable for the benefactors to be loved and served continuously. God does not stop bestowing his mercies for a moment, and he gives them so abundantly that no one can speak of the innumerable abundance of his mercies. God gives them so lovingly that only for love and goodness does he do what he does; desiring that men aroused by the benefits that they received from his hand, would love him and have the disposition to receive what God desires to give them which is himself. O the lamentable blindness and treachery of a wife, who when her husband sends her many beautiful jewels so that she remembers him continually and not become cool to him. Before long she is so inflamed in her love with the many precious gifts, that she uses this in the opposite way: she is so fond of the jewels, and finds so much comfort in them that she forgets her husband, who sent them as incentives to lovingly remember him.
And if these benefits of nature ought to be enough to hold men in the love of the Lord, what shall I tell you about the strength that the benefits would cause in our hearts, the ones we received of a supernatural nature? If the gift of my soul and body from God obligates me to love him and to serve him with it, what obligation does God put on me in giving himself to death on a cross to heal what he had first given to me and what I had lost through my sins? If I owe him love for what he gives me for livelihood and the gift of this miserable body, what will I owe because of the grace and sacraments which God ordained to cost him his life so that my soul may be healed and encouraged on the path to heaven? By natural favor he made me lord of this world, and by supernatural grace he made me heir of heaven. These supernatural gifts are so much greater than the natural ones, that they surpass them without proportion. And therefore, the divine scripture calls the first gifts cords and the second gifts fetters; the first ones are invited, it seems that the second ones are infused; since who will be defended from the violent arrow of God, an arrow without sin and one removed from our sins, who is Jesus Christ, placed on the cross? He is sufficient to wound us by love by placing himself on the cross alone, although he was without shame. But in order that he may wound us more strongly from every arrow, sharp nails are placed in the extremities of his hands and feet, because a nail may be such a strong arrow shot from the hand of God, that there is no one who is protected from the warmth of his love. (cf. Ps 18:7) Neither a weapon nor steel can resist it. But woe to us! that our hardship is greater than that of iron or stones and we make the inventions that the wisdom of God seeks to heal our evil looseness useless, and while God is invincible and all-powerful, it seems that we conquer him in the
continuous war that there is between God and us: God gives us gifts and draws us to his love, while we shamelessly receive what he gives us and refuse him our love and obedience. We stop speaking about him since it is a sad matter and worthy of tears and because it is not suitable for the joyful celebration that we have made with our own hands. The scripture says that “in the time of weeping music is an annoying thing,” (Sir 22:6) and outside of time, so also in the time of joy weeping is an annoying thing.

Let us turn our speech to the Blessed Virgin and our heart will receive consolation when it sees how well she who possessed the bond that the grace of God worked in her, as we have said, so wounded her with his love, that his love was the law of her heart, and he placed in the higher part of her soul, and her thinking was so attached to him that she did not allow him to be forgotten for a single moment. A wounded man can think about other things and with that diversion forget the pain that the wound gives him; but he who has attached his thought continually to the one who wounded him and to his wound, what help remains for him since he cannot escape what causes the pain for him? The Virgin was wounded and the prisoner of divine love more than any other creature; she had wounded and preyed upon her Lord and her God, more than any other creature. Neither she nor the Lord desired to resist the wounds and fetters of love; rather they gave themselves willingly to the Lordship of the one who worked in them as much as he wanted. The exception was that in God no penalty could be received. Each penalty fell upon the Blessed Virgin since God is not able to suffer anything and she is very prepared to suffer a martyrdom of love.
Love is insatiable, without measure

And it is so admirable that this Virgin was so loyal to the love of God and possessed all of it that she considered taking comfort in something that was not God as a type of treason against God’s love. She had read what David said: “my soul refuses to be consoled.” (Ps 76:3) And she fulfilled it much better than he; and she said to the consolations that she was able to have here, although without sin, what Job said to his friends: “As consolers you are annoying!” (Job 16:2) Since she had the obstacle of true divine consolation, to find consolation in creatures was no remedy for the wound of love in her heart. And while she was not in heaven, where she could see and possess the Lord who wounded her, she lived a life of martyrdom. Everything in this earthly exile was very full of the cross. And so, she was not rejoicing about what she could rejoice in here, nor was she able to ascend to heaven which she desired. And similar to Job who said: “My soul has chosen to be suspended,” (Job 7:15) the Virgin was between heaven and earth, suspended from where the desire of her heart was.

Her life was a pure torment. She could not rest from weeping, nor did she receive what she desired and so she spoke with an anguish of heart greater than that of the prophet David: “As a deer desires the founts of water, so my soul desires you my God! My soul thirsts for God, the fount of life. When will I go and appear before the face of God?” (cf. Ps 41:2) And since we have been certain that while she was not present to the God whom she desired, she was not inclined to be consoled; she declared to us afterwards what her occupation and exercise was, saying: “My tears were my bread day and night while they say to me, ‘Where is your God?’” (Ps 41:4) She shed tears through this long exile, saying with David:
“Woe is me, since my dwelling in this exile has been prolonged! I have lived in the dwellings of Cedar and my soul has been a dweller in this land for a long time (Ps 119:5-6): As a day laborer desires the end of his work, and the servant the shade where he rests, so I” —said the Virgin, “have had empty months and have counted difficult nights.” The Virgin did not live a single moment without receiving new mercies and in this way she never lived empty months; but for what she desired, which was to see God in heaven, she considered time as an empty thing, and she pondered through difficult nights why she did not obtain what she desired. Let no one be astonished that the Blessed Virgin may say with sighs leaving her heart: “Woe is me, because my dwelling has been prolonged!” Because it is no small cause of sorrow for her who had a perfect love of the love, to live in the land of Cedar, (cf. Job 7:2) signified by this world, a place in which God is offended. And as the Blessed Virgin had the love of God without measure from which was born the brilliance of spiritual experiences, sins smelled worse to her than they did to the world, and they became more bitter for her more than any other corporal thing, however the filthy and sour the thing may be which can give sourness to the bodily feelings.

And with the sourness which living on earth gave her and invited her to flee from such a place was joined as well to the desire for the presence of God in heaven, there was such a great impulse of her heart for heaven, that many times she raised her eyes to heaven, where her treasure was with streams of tears that flowed from them; with sighs, she said much better what David said: “How lovely are your dwellings for me, Lord God of hosts! My soul desires, and is dismayed with great desire to be in the courts of the Lord. (cf. Ps 83:2)
Let no one think that this enflamed desire of the Blessed Mother to see her blessed Son in heaven was caused by nature, as other mothers are accustomed to desire the presence of their sons. Since, although natural love was not absent in her because it is not contrary to grace, the supernatural love with which she loved was so great that she loved her Son as man and, in comparison, much more as God, which surpasses natural love and the desires of all the mothers to see their sons, just as a very great fire surpasses one small spark. It was the Spirit of God who moved her heart toward these desires and made her seek the fulfillment of them with groans that cannot be expressed. (cf. Rom 8:26) There is nothing in the heart of the Virgin that was not covered with gold, and fine gold, as it was in the Ark of the Covenant, which was a type of her: because her love was supernatural alone, or the natural love so surrounded and encircled by the grace of the Lord that in the one and in the other it was moved by the Holy Spirit. And she understood that this movement and divine breath which blew and ignited the desires of seeing her God came to her from heaven; it freed the restraints of her heart so that she desired heaven with all her strength, since her intention was to obey and please God in all things.

**Why did God leave his Mother in this exile?**

Who will not be astonished at seeing an episode of serious tribulation that dismayed Mary so beloved of God; and because the eyes of God looked at her and allowed her to suffer so many years! And what is more amazing is that the same God enkindles the desires more and more, and did not give her what she desired nor take away what tormented her. Incomprehensible are your ways, Oh Lord! “You walk upon the sea and” as David said, “your footsteps are not known.” (Ps
76:20) Deep is your wisdom and we will receive your great mercy if you watch us
to understand, or at least, to inquire why such a Son delays such just desires to
such a mother. This delay is the cause of her great torments. Make sure of one
thing, brothers: that so special a thing in a person so qualified is not trivial, but
very important if there is light from heaven to see it. Then the Lord looked at this
greater benefit for his Blessed Mother; he looked at the benefit for the church
which it had then and also for those who were to be born later into this church
even to the end of the world.

First, for her benefit

From eternity, God has determined the height of the glory which he was to
give to his most holy Mother. And in order to fulfill it with his justice, he wanted
it to be by means of the great services she did and the great burdens she suffered.
And although her predestination was unmerited and for the glory of the divine
goodness, he intended that her mediation would be costly and very costly,
proportioned to the greatness of the glory that he was give her. Let no one
consider God cruel in arranging that the life of the Virgin was a pure martyrdom
both before and after the Passion of Christ. There was love and no malevolence;
and as his Father treated Jesus Christ, who was his most beloved Son, so he
treated his most beloved mother. And for those who cannot see the greatness of
the glory and rest which this Virgin possesses in heaven, let us follow her through
the great trials and the sharp blade that wounded her in many ways and pierced
her most blessed heart, so that we might know that she suffered on earth, since it
was written that "we will be glorified together with Christ if we suffer united
with him.” (Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12) And one who suffers more is glorified more; since Christ is the model, in holiness as in suffering trials, to which the Eternal Father intended that we men whom he chose on earth would be conformed. (cf. Rom 8:20) For no one complained of how Christ was treated by his Father, and as the holy Mother was treated by her Son; more importantly, if one considers every trial that he is able to suffer here in comparison with the glory that will be revealed (cf. Rom 8:18) in those who here bear his cross, in imitation of and obedience to Christ our Lord, as St. Paul says: “The trial that is in this world passes, although it seems very long and heavy, for truthfully it is a moment of little measure and in heaven it will work to the eternal measure of glory. (cf. 2 Cor 4:17) But in order to have this true estimation, it is proper to hear what St. Paul then says: “Contemplating not the things that are seen, but those that are not seen; because the things that are seen are temporal and those that are not seen are eternal.” Open our eyes, Lord, that we may consider the marvels of your glory which no eye has seen, no ear has heard nor heart thought; nor tongue able to say what you have prepared (cf. 1 Cor 2:9) for those who have sets their hearts on you in this indifferent earth, as you command. If what is there is the mean, if it is but one little part, if the glory of one day alone could be seen, it appears that we purchased it very cheaply in exchange for being in torments from now until the last day.

Do not think that God, who loved his mother so much, would sell for an expensive price what was not of little worth nor that he would distress her, if it was not in exchange for giving her eternal rest, which without comparison surpasses all that she suffered here. The Lord truly loved her and true love does
not concern itself with giving presents to the beloved as with giving her what fulfills her; she suffers a little and it is quickly finished in exchange for his having the occasion of giving her what is endless. The martyrdom suffered by the Virgin who was not able to see her Son was painful for her, but it was also very beneficial. And if the *hope which is delayed and which troubles the soul* (Prov 13:12) has for a counterweight that, while the good is delayed longer, when they give it to her she will receive more of and with greater honor- because the greater glory is to receive the reward in payment for the good works that she did not receive without merit; and the greater good is the virtue of obedience and love that is practiced in patience and which makes man just, so that the rest that he loses by being formed in these trials- the Lord proclaimed his greatest achievement in his most holy Mother, and therefore he tried her as we have said.

He also wanted to prepare her for the great day of this feast in which she was to enter with the most excellent glory to see and rejoice in the beautiful vision of the most blessed Trinity; which is so great a good that if one would spend years or thousands of years preparing for it, it would be very little. In order to hear the sound of the trumpet and the voices shaped in the air by the ministry of angels, God commanded Moses to prepare the people. Approaching to see the Lord in the blackberry bush (cf. Ex 19:10), he was commanded to *take off his shoes* (cf. Ex 3:5) as a sign of the interior purity that he was to possess. And before the entering into the land of promise, God commanded Joshua to *circumcise his people.* (cf. Jos 5:2) And Queen Esther prepared herself with prayers and fasting in order to enter before King Ahasuerus to intercede for the people of God. (cf. Est 4:16) And for these things, and even for much lesser other
things, God asks us for preparation. Who will be the one who thinks that great preparation is not necessary for the Mother of God? And the greatest matter is for a man born on the earth to be raised to possess the kingdom of heaven. A happy day and hour is that one in which freed of the bonds of this mortality, he is raised up to see the most beautiful face of God, and to rejoice in him without fear of losing him forever.

Oh brothers! May God help us to understand that the life which he gives us here is not for another purpose- but rather at this time which although it may seem long, in the end, it is not more than this- that we prepare ourselves to reach the purity of soul in order to rejoice with the one who is all pure and not to hear trumpets or voices of angels, but rather the same Creator of the Angels, the Infinite Good. That land, without a doubt, is the true land of promise and those who are to enter it are to be circumcised of their passions and enemies of their own will; and those who want to appear gracious before the true King Ahasuerus, Jesus Christ our Lord, are to prepare themselves with prayers and fasting and other good works. Do not marvel, then, that God may prepare his mother for this happy day on which she was taken up into heaven to begin a joy and glory that never, while God is God, will be taken away from her; since such a great good as he had given her, he asked for great preparation; and such a precious crown, after the great victory was to be given to her; and he intended that the victory be won with a great deed, so that he would have so much more honor and delight in her, the more it had cost her.

But because the Lord intended his blessed Mother to be prepared to see God in heaven, it is a worthy thing to ask what this preparation was to be, since
she had no sins to weep for nor to complete the unloading of a conscience, nor was it necessary for them to say Masses for her, nor was their anything to do in her life except prepare for this great day. Lord, what you give in heaven ought to be especially what you had prepared for your most Holy Mother because even though she was so prepared, you requested still more preparation for her, as since the blessing which you are to give her surpasses what you give to others. The greatest virtue, which more is pleasing to God and without which nothing pleases him is the virtue of love. And love, which is the queen of the virtues, like gold among the other metals, is what corresponds to what was most rooted in the blessed Virgin who surpasses every pure vessel as a queen her vassals, and in this she was more practiced throughout her life. Love was her constant companion; *and as they loved each other in life, so they did the same in the hour of death* (cf. 2 Sam 1:23) and in the time of preparation for a good death.

Love was the preparation of this Blessed Virgin which made her desire in a new way new to be united with the One whom he loved. Since the result of true love is to seek to live together with the one whom is loved, and not so much for his own interest and rest- as some evil ones can desire to rejoice in God and his goods, moved by their own self-love- as much as because they see the presence of God more closely and with a clearer light, so as to glorify and love him with greater depth. And to this end, he desired what he had and what he hoped for and desired. With that love and desire, the Virgin Mary who was prepared was even better prepared and her heart was expanded more so that more glory would be contained in her, and that divine banquet would be so much more delightful for her in heaven, as much as the hunger and thirst had preceded it, in conformity
with the promise of the Savior: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice because they will be satisfied. (Mt 5:6)

For these and many other reasons that relate to the benefit of this very beloved mother of God, who God knows and of whom we are ignorant, He desired that she remain in this exile and be martyred with the desire of heaven, so that with the greater delay she would reap greater riches and be made worthy to sit on the throne of glory, take possession of and rule over every creature.

**Second: For the benefit of Christians who lived then**

Now, hear how much gain followed for the Christians who were still living since Mary remained, and how much harm was done when his disciples saw the Sun of justice, light of day, ascend to heaven. His Blessed Mother was also present and remained as the light which shines on the dark night so continually in this world.

Who will comfort the apostles from the sadness and weakness that they experienced when their Teacher brought them close to him and they saw him taken up to heaven accompanied by many servants and friends, and they remained in this miserable exile and among miserable and cruel enemies? Certainly they would be dismayed and would not even wait for ten days. They were comforted by the speech, faith and prayer of this most blessed Virgin, and by the efficacy that her words had for men and her prayers for God, who gave her to them to hope for and receive help from heaven. This aid was attained and brought to them through her prayers.
Who will tell the desire that she gave to those who converted to the faith of blessed Jesus Christ, of seeing the mother of the Son who was their Redeemer and God? They adored and praised the Son, they rejoiced in his works and redemption; and as grateful people they desired to see and be grateful for the tree that gave such fruit and sprouted thousands of blessings. If the people of Bethulia thanked Judith for the liberty which they attained through her mediation (cf. Jd 13:23) and the benefit that Esther did for her people did not pass without their gratitude (cf. Est 8:17), and that both were temporal, then what gratitude, what songs and praises would Christians give to that Lady, through whom Holofernes was beheaded and Aman hung, who represent the demon and sin, whose head the Virgin crushed (Gen 3:15) and whose death brought about life, and the prisoners were freed and the dead raised by the death of Jesus Christ our Lord? And when the Holy Spirit united himself to this gratitude and love that they collected for the Virgin, Jesus Christ, as one who honors his Mother, inspired and moved them so that they would honor her and desire to see and serve and know that through her they had rejoiced in the fruit of life, and that from her as from a very high mountain, the stone was cut out, that is Jesus, who broke the statue of idolatry (cf. Dan 2:34); he cannot think except that the gathering of Christians to see this precious ark of God which was enclosed in itself was so great, that the roads to her house were full of people, and not only those of the city of Jerusalem, but outside of it, some who ran to her and others who were moved interiorly by the Holy Spirit and exteriorly by the sweetest fragrance of their anointed ones, (Cant 1:3) which was the odiferous reputation of her virtues, the great love with which she received those who came to her, her great mercy
that rejected no one, and that great marvel and miracle and highest dignity that she was the true Mother of God.

Who will say with how much good will, how full of confidence and devotion they came to her, since when they saw her they overcame their doubts, were comforted in their trials and profited from everything that was agreeable to their souls? Truly what Isaiah had prophesied many years before was fulfilled when in the Spirit the great crowd of people who were to go to hear the word of God, came to see marvelous works of Jesus Christ our Lord, and after his death, those who were to go to see his holy Mother and rejoice in his teaching and in that of the apostles. "Go here, they said to each other." Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he is to show us his ways, and we will walk in his paths; because the Law will come forth from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem." (cf. Is 2:3) As it was prophesied, so it was fulfilled when they came to see the Lord, a mountain higher in holiness and in worthiness than all the saints. And afterwards they came to see the house of the God of Jacob, which was the holy Virgin, the Holy Temple of Jesus Christ in order to be shown the ways of the commandments of God and the path of his counsels; that for one and the other and for all the many needs they brought, the most prudent and most holy Mother gave them sufficient counsel and help.

Three Exercises of the Virgin: charity, memory of the Passion, reception of Holy Communion

But if we can tell about the great difficulty, desire and devotion with which many people came to her, how much less can we declare the good grace and
inflamed depths of her charity with which she received them? St. Paul says that "he gave milk and he indulged all his little ones" (cf. 1 Cor 3:2) and that "to gain all things he became all things to all;" (cf. 1 Cor 9:22) how much more truly would the duty of this holy Virgin Mother to help others since without comparison she had a greater love for them than St. Paul? How did the blessed Virgin look at that people converted to the faith of her Son and came to her, since she had desired the salvation of their souls and the grace of the Lord which they had received through holy baptism? These people possessed the good that they had and lived in grace before the eyes of God, because Mary offered her only-begotten Son to death on the cross. And therefore her innermost being was swelled by the consolation of seeing that the fruit of the Passion of her most blessed Son was not in vain, since by her merit so many people were converted to him. And it seems to her that to receive and to give, to show and to encourage those who came to her was to receive the blood of her blessed Son, which had been shed for them before her eyes. She praised the divine goodness, gave thanks for the good things done for her, and sweet tears flowed from her eyes, drawn from the tenderness of her heart, and no burden appeared to be heavy to her, and no hour was outside the hour to receive that flock who understood that the Lord sent her in order to feed it in the grace of the Lord.

The Lord knew very well what he did when he left his mother on earth, and what was written of the good wife was fulfilled very well, "that the heart of her husband confided in her." (Prov 31:11) Because of what her Spouse and Son Jesus Christ had gained on Mount Calvary by shedding his blood, she cared for and guarded and tried to increase as the love of Christ in their hearts, for whose good
she had made so many pledges. Happy the sheep who had such a shepherdess and who received such a pasture by means of her! A shepherdess, not a day laborer who would look to her own interest, since she loved the sheep (cf. Jn 10:12) so much that, after having offered the life of her own beloved Son, she would willingly give her own life if they had need of it. Oh what an example for those who have the responsibility for souls! They can understand from her the saving science of the government of souls and the patience to suffer the trials that are presented in feeding them. And not only will she who shows them be their teacher, but if she were called upon by them with devotion, she would obtain strength and light for them in order to do their duty well.

This then was the practice of the most holy Virgin after her Son and Lord went up to heaven: to teach the people and also their teachers, although they were apostles. They learned from her many things about which they were ignorant, and the holy evangelists wrote things which they learned from her. And although this is much to marvel at, it is much more that even the angels could learn from her things that, since she was a witness who saw and knew all the particulars, she gave better support for them than the others. And since St. Paul says that “the principalities and powers of heaven learned from the church” (cf. Eph 3:10) what they did not know, they had learned it better from this holy Virgin since she is the most important person of all the body of the church and more taught by God than all.

This practice already spoken about, of charity toward men from whom God received service, was some consolation for her so that the pain of exile would not kill her. And she also practiced this charity by visiting the holy places where
her Son began, continued, was in the midst of and ended his sacred Passion. These were the places which she watered with an abundance of tears as she remembered what her Son had suffered in all those places that she had seen with her own eyes. In this devotion she showed maternal love for her Son; the memory of what happened there hurt her; she gave ineffable thanks to God for the great good which had come to the world through the precious price of his holy Passion, and begged him that such a trial and shedding of such precious blood was not in vain. Her devotion became an example for Christians so that they would try to visit those holy places; and her example was not in vain because, from then until the end of the world, people with a devout heart may go to kiss the land where the Lord placed his feet and shed tears in the place where he suffered and shed blood for them.

The teacher of the world is speaking, the teacher is working; the mother is giving and pleading before the reverence of God. Oh Virgin and Mother forever blessed how much we owe you! And what a sorrow it is not know your great favors or thank you for them or even serve you. We beg to you obtain grace for us from your most blessed Son in order to be loyal children at least in some things and imitators of your great love and loyalty with which you are a very compassionate mother for us.

With these two exercises already spoken about, one about the charity to one's neighbors and the other about compassion for Jesus Christ her Son and her God, a third devotion is added which she also had, and it was to receive the holy Body of her blessed Son, consecrated by the words that he ordained. Her blessed Son and the priest St. John the Evangelist said Mass for her and both received
communion; and happy is the one who deserved to be acolyte and to serve at the Mass and to give the host to the Lady who received the Lord. Oh, if something strikes us upon hearing of such devout communion, how much more it was for the Virgin! What reverence that most humble soul would have, that when she looked at herself, she did not consider herself to be worthy of a little piece of bread that she ate nor of treading upon the earth that he walked! With what gratitude and love she would receive the Body of her most holy Son, since by being man he was one flesh with her and by being God she was one spirit with him, and from the one and the other an incomparable and ineffable love resulted which united God and her and converted her each day more and more into that Son whom she received! And more than any other practice, it encouraged her to endure her exile since she could be present and receive the Desired One of her heart in her heart. And although she did not see him face to face, as she desired him and hoped to see him in heaven, but he, as the pious Son and Lord showed himself to her in the sacrament, at times as when she bore him in her sacred womb, at times as when she held him in her arms giving him milk, and as according to the different condition in which she had seen him in this life, she desired to see then.

And so that we Christians may not forget that great act of the communion of the Virgin and so that we ourselves may take advantage of it, the place of the chapel spoken about lasts until today and also that of the cell where the blessed Lady dwelt. All of it is in the sacred cenacle where the Lord instituted this ineffable mystery; and there is at times a fragrance in that cell, as those who had been there said, which has nothing to do with earthly fragrance from here, but
rather as a heavenly thing. And to enjoy the consolation and comfort that he gives
to those who smell it, many people go to the place spoken about not only from the
city of Jerusalem, but also from the surrounding towns.

Third, for the benefit of future believers

Now I understand your sighs and by them I draw out your heart: that
considering as blessed those who were living at that time and rejoicing in the
visitation and consolation of the Virgin, you wept over your fate because you were
not there those times to enjoy what they enjoyed. May God be forever blessed,
since he gave those who rejoice such a beneficial and delightful presence of the
Mother of God and may we also be blessed because, though we do not see it, we
believe and enter into the number of those that the Lord said: “Blessed are those
who did not see me and believed!” (cf. Jn 20:29) Let us awaken our eyes and
make progress in the light of the faith that God has given us; and if we do not find
ourselves present to such a good with our bodies, let us be present through the
spirit, remembering those happy times when the Virgin, as a shining sun,
illuminated and warmed the earth. And if we look attentively at the reasons for
her stay on earth and we know how to make good use of them, perchance we will
gain more than some of those who then communicated with her, since it is well
known that there have been many in the church who, not seeing our Lord Jesus
Christ in the flesh, not hearing his sermons nor seeing his miracles, are given
such good security, that by means of faith and love have availed themselves of
Him more and there were more saints than many of those who rejoiced in his
bodily presence.
Let us understand for certain, that our Lord not only left behind his most blessed Mother on earth so that her merit would grow and for the benefit of those who were living then, but also for those who were to be born as long as the world lasts. Let us take advantage of the divine ordering: while God gave the Virgin the glory of heaven for the trials that she had suffered, he also wanted her to endure more so that we might not be deceived, at her cost, about not hoping for glory in heaven if we seek gifts on earth. And God said this to us with greater efficacy so that we would truly believe it and act. He intended that it be said to us, not only by words, but by the trials and death of Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother. They are the most beloved ones of God, and if some were to be dispensed from trials and would go to heaven without them, it was right that it was so. But we see that the law of suffering was not taken away from them but rather that it was kept with them with greater severity. The more they were loved by God, the more trials they endured. There was no excuse and the cause of ignorance stays with those who are less beloved, for they think that if they do not make efforts themselves, and if they are not careful in keeping the commandments of God and vigilant in prayer, seeking help, patient in their trials and each one carrying with due obedience the cross which the Lord placed on them, they may not plan to enter into heaven. And our understanding and consideration of this work is a great benefit that accrues to us from the Virgin who remained on earth when her Son went up into heaven. And perchance it will then be a greater benefit for us if we will rejoice in his presence. The one who has understood what St. Paul said has accomplished a lot: “That by many tribulations it is suitable for us to enter into
the Kingdom of Heaven. (Acts 14:21) And that no one will be crowned except the one who will fight legitimately. (2 Tim 2:5)

Preparation for Death

We can also take advantage of the fact that the Lord wanted to prepare his most holy Mother with a new preparation for the day when she was to enter into heaven; from which we understand that, if she was already so well prepared, they still prepared her more and more, with how much more reason is it that we who are badly prepared, will try to obtain a proper disposition so that on the day of our death, we can be at the foot of the judgment seat of God and hear the verdict in our favor from the mouth of the sovereign judge? He, who many times and for many people, as the most pious Father, prepares them by his hand to die well and even some times without their understanding of it. Have you ever seen a man come to a new desire to confess, generally from looking at his books and accounts, paying what he owes, to forgiving and seeking forgiveness and doing quickly all that he would do if they said to him that it looks as if he is going to die and when he has just completed it, or a little afterwards, he falls sick on his death bed or something else happens to him to take his life? And then he says that for all the world, and another thousand worlds, he would not want to have stopped doing what he has done; and he understood that what he did was not born of him, but of the kind inspiration of God, with which God wanted to prepare him so that before his judgment he would be just and have something with which to respond on the day of strict accounting.
You will see others who are in the mortal sin of ill will or of an evil love that has hardened; and God commands the means and moves the wills so that they will leave the captivity of the devil and be in a state of grace, and after a little while death comes to them. And we see others being good persons, and they do not have these dangers of an evil state; and they feel in their heart a new desire to save their lives, to practice more prayer, to give more alms, to do more penance, to receive the holy sacraments of Confession and Communion more often, and to lift up their heart and desires to the glory of heaven and at the end of four or five months that they endure this, the Lord calls them to himself, and they go very willingly, trusting in him who, since he improved them and prepared them to die, will be favorable to them in that fearful hour and he will repay in heaven the good that they did here with his grace.

All of this, brothers, means that the passage to death is such that, in order not to be swallowed up in it, it is suitable for evil and the good people to be prepared, each one in his own way, being aware of it just in time to depart, that if each night the Lord might say: “Come to me to give an account of how you have lived,” the man may not say, “Give me Lord, a longer life in order to amend it and to do this and that which was to be done.” And then it is suitable for us to know that the glory which we desire is not received except by virtuous men and who stay obedient to God by trampling their own will and conquering themselves. As they do these actions, they do feats; and thus when they become pure and clean, they are made worthy of dwelling in heaven, where nothing stained will enter because the public squares are pure gold (Rev 21:21) and its Lord is purity, and
the just dwell before his face. But darkness and impurity do not have a share in
divine light and purity. (cf. 2 Cor 6:14)

And so that we will take courage to prepare for the day that we will leave
this world, we take as an example how the most holy Virgin lived, and in this way
we will attempt to imitate her and not only in preparing ourselves, but in the
quality of preparation. Because of our great sins and excessive indifference, there
are so few who consider this life a painful exile and sigh and weep, desiring to
leave it to see God in heaven, and certainly the blessed Virgin has little disciples
who imitate her in this. In those times, there were indeed: the first one by the
abundance of grace that God rained on their hearts so that they developed in
themselves a disgust of what flourished on the land and instead lifted up their
hearts to the desire of the eternal goods, where he was their desire and their
heart; and the other one, he helped many to rise above continual persecutions, by
taking from them property, banishing them to other parts, and hoping each day
for martyrdom; so that even though they might want to, they could not rejoice in
this world. And because of this lack of desire for earthly things, they sailed toward
heaven lightly with sails and oars, and desired each day to be free of such a
painful prison and rejoice in the inheritance and freedom of the sons of God in
heaven.

These who prepared for death imitated the blessed Virgin, who with them
asked with an urgent request what the Lord showed them saying: "Lord may
your kingdom come!" (Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2) But we asked him orally and as a people
who are without the grace of the Lord or with a little, and as a people who have
been settled in this world and have here the seat of honor, riches and
contentment, who have full stomachs and do not wish to leave here and they
might even decide that this life should be longer. Oh the unhappy state of such
people! These times are miserable when men willingly renounce and seek to go
through life without such wonderful things as there are in heaven, the least of
those which is more valuable than anything earthly around here; and so that men
may rejoice in heaven, the Son of God suffered death, and death on a cross!

What greater sign that the married woman has lived badly in the absence
of her husband than she does not want him to come, or even that she lies about
his arrival? It is a terrible word for a terrible woman: "Your husband comes and is
informed of the treacheries that you have done to him and you cannot deny
them." And it is sweet to a good woman to think and to speak about the arrival of
her husband, and even sweeter to see him enter his house, well informed of the
loyalty that his wife has kept in his absence. Thus are Christians to be since they
are to speak truthfully from their heart what they pray and seek in life: "Lord,
may your Kingdom come!" And St. Paul was one of these when he said: "I have
fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; as for the
rest a crown of justice is prepared for me which on that day the Lord, who is the
Just judge, will give me and not only will he give it to me, but to all those who
love his coming." (cf. 2 Tim 4:7-8) And as St. Paul gives testimony that among
Christians there are men perfect in charity, who cast aside all servile fear. They
are uprooted from the love of present things, moved by the Holy Spirit to desire
the vision of God, and as sons desire to see their Father, and as a faithful wife
desires to see her husband, and considering that since they were servants, each
day and each moment they have received many mercies from the kind hand of
God, and before they were born, he had glory prepared for them. In order that they might reach this glory, he became man and gave his life for them and they desire to be freed from this earthly prison in order to see and enjoy the presence of God in whose goods and mercies they had rejoiced on earth. And the miserable state of this life helps them a great deal in this desire. This earthly life is very painful for them, not so much for the trials that there are in it since they do not feel them at all or very little because of their great power of love, but because while they live in the flesh they can sin and squander the grace of their Lord, and they desire to flee one hundred thousand leagues from the place where so much evil can find them because they may anger God and lose his grace; and abhorring this and loving that, they desire, they long for and they weep to themselves in that sovereign city.

The benefits already spoken of and others continued during the Virgin’s stay in this world, which she, as taught by God, knew very well. They cooled the flame of her burning desires of going up to heaven; and although they were not totally taken from her, they helped her so that without dying, she could bear them.

The Virgin, sick from love

But when the time came that Divine Providence had ordained that the blessed Virgin would go up to heaven, her heart was so inflamed to desire what she desired with greater anguish that neither the good fruit that she did for the living nor was to do for those coming, nor with visiting the holy places, nor with
receiving the Body of her most holy Son, who used to be her greatest consolation, could give her rest; and her life was such that naturally it could not last, and with the great power of love of her soul, the powers of her body became weakened and she was in need, as a sick person casting herself on the bed according to what usually happens to others. And seeing herself so overcome with love and desire of God, without having power to live nor suffer that weight of love, which was stronger than death, so by being filled with it she desired to die (cf. Cant 2:6), she sent to God new cries, sufficient for provoking the Lord to mercy. And she said “Draw out Lord, my soul from this prison to praise your name. (Ps 141:8) And until when, Lord, are you going to forget me? (cf. Ps 12:1) Until when, will you turn your face to me? (Cant 2:14) Show me your face and I will be content; because without it I am dying each moment and day with desire for you.”

And the blessed Virgin is not contented with begging God for the fulfillment of her desires; but with her great humility and desire of being helped through all, she prayed to the angels and all the blessed souls who were in heaven who sympathized with her and were intercessors before the reverence of God; and since they saw him face to face, they said to her that she was overcome and sick from her love and that her only help consisted in seeing him. What will I say to you? Such speed was given to pray to those who dwelt in heaven, who moved by compassion for her and by the justice of what she begged and by the dignity of her person and also by the desire which they had of seeing her in heaven, all were prostrated before the reverence of God with deep humility and they begged him saying:
Prayer of the Angels and the Saints

“All-powerful and most merciful Lord, in your mercy deign to hear the cries of the breed of turtledoves that you engendered. Since you said that “blessed are those who weep, for they will be consoled,” (Mt 5:5) and nothing can console her without seeing herself with you in heaven; grant her this consolation, since she has given up everything for you. No reason explains why two persons so joined in the flesh and spirit can be so distant, one in heaven and the other on earth. Remember, your majesty, the zeal of King David your servant, when he said: “The Ark of God is under a tent while I live in a house of Cedar, (cf. 2 Sam 7:2) and do not allow that you, being in glory, the most Holy Ark that enclosed you in herself, be under the tents of mortality; Samson ate of the sweet honeycomb that he found and gave part of it to his mother (cf. Jg 14:9); Solomon commanded that a chair be placed for his mother and she sat there near him. (cf. 1 Kgs 2:19) Your majesty is greater than that of both; you surpassed them in giving rest and honor to the one who engendered you. May your blessed Mother rest now, since from the time you created her, she has known nothing else but to serve you and work for you with the humility of a slave and true love of a mother. And since she has accompanied you, Lord, in your trials, may she accompany you in your happiness. Look, Lord, how she is prostrated before your feet moaning and weeping, and the most profound humility with which she asks us to intercede for her with such fervor and continual prayer that although her services would not deserve what she asks for nor would she respect herself for who she is, the persistence of her prayer, the knocking at the door of her good friend who got up, opened the door and gave her all the bread she needed, deserved it as your
Majesty said when you were in the world. (cf. Lk 11:5-13) Hear her, Lord, and *place her tears in your flask* (cf. Ps 55:9) because she did not close her eyes to your law, neither did she close them to the cry of the poor, but as it is written: *her hand and much more her heart reached out to the poor*, (cf. Prov 31:20) in which there was never evil and therefore ought to be heard, as David said.” (cf. Ps 65:18-19)

All your court also desires to have your queen with them; because a kingdom without a queen and a house without a lady of the house do not seem complete, since such a principal person is missing. And since she is it and the sight of her will be enough to give us new joy and to honor all heaven, do not deprive us of such a great good since the time she has enjoyed on earth ought to be enough and it will not be right of they are offended by taking her on ahead since she is so full of mercy and so worthy before your majesty, although you take her up to heaven, her kind heart will not forget those who are on the earth, nor will she stop doing the duty of a mother pleading for them before the throne of your mercy, nor will you, Lord stop hearing her nor doing favors for the world through her.

“We beg your mercy that as in times past you saw the tears of King Hezekiah, and heard his prayer, and commanded your prophet Isaiah saying: “*Say to Hezekiah, the head of my people: I have seen your tears and I have heard your prayer; you will not die and I have added fifteen more years of life for you,*” (cf. 2 Kgs 20:5) so that, looking at the tears and hearing the prayer of our Queen and Lady you command one of us to go to give the good news of fulfillment of her desire, not that she will live fifteen years of life, because she has
already lived them full of sorrow in your absence; but, according to the greatness of your goodness and the great love she has for you and you have for her, grant her, Lord, that she may leave this mortal life and that she may live in heaven with you forever."

**New Mission of Gabriel: Sentiment on the Earth**

How was the Lord to respond to such just supplications that touched his most holy Mother, whose honor and rest he desires and obtains more than anyone and whose prayer is more pleasing to him than that of men and angels, except to concede very willingly whatever she begged him and to command that all be prepared for the most solemn feast that he wants to have for his Mother, and that some blessed spirit would come down from heaven to give this good news to the most holy Virgin?

Although we may not know who the messenger was, we know that each one in heaven wanted to be the one; and apparently it was suitable that it was the Archangel Gabriel because he was more acquainted with the most holy Virgin. He would delay a little by walking along the path; and entering into the room of the Virgin, he knelt down on the ground with his accustomed and appropriate humility and said: “I am Gabriel, Queen and Lady, your servant who by the command of God brought you in past years the joyful news that the Son of God *had loved the beauty of your soul* (cf. Ps 44:12) and had chosen you for his Mother, and had wanted to come down from heaven to rest and take flesh in your womb. Now the same Lord sends me again and commands me to say that since he descended from heaven to the earth and you gave him a very pleasant
dwelling place, he wants to bring you from earth to heaven and give you the best
dwelling that anyone has been or ever will be given. This, Lady, is my mission:
tell me, how do you respond?"

The joy of the Virgin was so great when she saw such a messenger and
heard his mission that her heart burst with joy, and at first she shed many tears
and could not say a word; and when she spoke, what was she to respond except
the words that she repeated in all her sad and joyful events? When the Son of God
became incarnate in her, what she said was; behold the maidservant of the Lord;
let it be done in me according to your word. (Lk 1:38) And she also said this at
the foot of the cross; and in this same way she would now respond to St. Gabriel.
With the fullness of grace, she said: You have loosened my chains, O Lord; to you
I will offer a sacrifice of praise. (Ps 115:16-17)

Then the angel returned to heaven, and later the news spread on the earth
that the Lord wanted to take his blessed Mother to be with him; and there was
such great feeling and commotion among the Christians, which had never been
witnessed at any death of a loved or great person in this world. The Virgin was
more beloved than father and mother and more esteemed than a queen, and was
everything for Christians. The loss that Christians felt was to be conformed to loss
of the Virgin Mary, since there was no one who could take the place that she left
empty. You see people coming and going again to the room of this common
Mother and with bitter tears, more than with words, they showed her the pain
that her absence gave them; they showed her the need that they had of her; they
begged her not to abandon her little children whom she had engendered with her
prayers and whom she had nurtured with her teaching and example; and if she
wanted to depart from this world, then she should take them with her because they did not dare to remain without her among so many dangers; nor could they suffer the absence of such a beloved mother.

The holy Virgin did not hear these things without great compassion; and with the tenderness of heart with which God endowed her, she sympathized with them, wept with them and promised them that although her body was separating from them, she would not forget them in her heart, and as long as they lived she would be a faithful intercessor for them, and they could call her in their needs and would certainly feel that she was taking care of them, and that, since this life passes so quickly, they might wait a little and persevere in the faith and the good life they had begun, so that soon they would go where she was going, and all would be joined together without ever being separated.

The apostles who were still living came, as St. Dionysius says, and she would tell them the account of the favor that God wanted to bestow on her; they did not listen to her without tears because of the tender love that they had for her. We read about some holy persons that, when they wanted to die, they left behind some particular advice as an inheritance to those who were present so they might better serve our Lord; and there is no believing that those who were there, since they had her for a teacher in life, stopped asking that she would do so in death, leaving them some word that would be for them a remembrance of her and advice for better serving the Lord. But what would the blessed Virgin say to them, except that as humble people they would keep what the Lord commanded them! And if importuned she would say with what things in particular she had found herself better, that for a body, virginity and for a soul, humility and meekness, finds
grace before God and men, and a deep love and mercy for all the neighbors, even to the point of praying to God for those who crucified her Son before her eyes.

**Jesus Christ assists at the death of his mother**

Already the happy day, August 15, was approaching and her holy body became weaker every day, and a power grew in her soul with the joy of the good news that soon she was to see her God. And when the hour determined by the Lord came for doing this great deed of rewarding the Mother in accordance with the great magnificence and for the services that he had received from her, a voice sounded in the heavens, that the Lord is descending to earth to take his most blessed Mother with him, and commands that his court accompany her, and that each one rejoice on the feast the best he could; because every honor that they gave his mother, was received by Jesus as if it had been given to himself. Oh how happy and how festive they all are, and the Son and the Virgin even more so! And he and they descend from heaven and enter into the room where she was laying down, she who in her depths gave a pleasing dwelling to God. And since in the death of other holy persons, it is read that the angels and saints have come and brought a very sweet fragrance that stirred her up and comforted the heart of those who were present, it is clear that the Lord would give a sign of his blessed presence and of such a blessed group that came along with him, and all those who would feel a very great consolation in their hearts and certainly know that it was caused by the presence of those who had come from heaven.

We do not know if the Lord was clearly shown there or if the angels and the saints took a body in order to be seen, or if there was audible music in which
the ears of the Virgin and of those who were present rejoiced. But since the Lord has done many of these favors to persons less beloved, it is not unreasonable to believe that he did the same or greater favors for his mother, who is more beloved than all. It was very reasonable that Jesus himself was there in person at her death, and not just on the third day when her most precious soul left her body and reclined in his arms without him entrusting her to anyone else since he was served that she had been present with so much sorrow in that terrible hour when he died on the cross and which after having been taken down from the cross, was received in the arms of the Mother and washed with her tears. The Lord had not forgotten this service since it was remembered among the other lesser things to reward in death, and he himself visited her, consoled and encouraged her doing in everything his duty of a very obedient and loving Son.

And when the moment came when that happy soul left her virginal body, then her blessed Son said what was earlier prophesied for this hour: “Come to Lebanon my beloved and you will be crowned. (Cant 4:8) Come to my garden, my sister, my spouse. (Cant 5:1) Rise up and hurry, my dove, my beautiful one; because the winter of trials has already passed, and the joyful summer flowers of the glory which is prepared for you have come:” (cf. Cant 2:10-11) Come to me so that I will receive you in my humanity which I received from you, and in my divinity with which I formed you, and I will have you with me always, making you blessed forever. To this sweetest voice and invitation which will be the last that the blessed Virgin heard in this life, she responded with her customary word: “Behold I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me as you say.” (Lk 1:38)
And since in life and in death her Son was her teacher and model at whom she was amazed, and she heard him say when he died on the cross: “Father into your hands I commend my spirit, (Lk 23:46)” she had kept those words in her heart for the hour of her death and said with great humility and most perfect love: “My son, into your hands I commend my spirit.” And after this word, that most blessed soul left the dwelling of her body, free of sorrow as well as sin. The Lord did not want her to have birth pains, or from death when she was reborn in glory, but who will recount the tight and sweetest hug that Christ gave that most blessed soul and the rejoicing she felt when she saw clearly her Son’s divinity and humanity with which all her desires were fulfilled and her tears dried as the little boy, who when his mother holding him to her breast, stops crying and has no more to desire, since he receives milk from the breast of his mother?

**The Assumption**

Oh, who might see that most beautiful soul made beautiful with the beauty of glory, whiter than the snow, more resplendent than the sun, purer and cleaner than all whom God created or will create, after that of his most blessed Son? And I am of the opinion that since St. Anthony saw the soul of St. Paul, the first hermit, whiter than snow, go up to heaven, accompanied by the angels, who also would be served by showing many of those who were present there and even those who were absent, the beauty of the soul of their most holy Mother, and the glory in which she rejoiced, and the great honor that had been done for her on that most solemn assumption to heaven.
Since the blessed Virgin was brought near to her beloved Son and Lord, 
full of unspeakable delights, (cf. Cant 8:5) all began to walk toward heaven with 
such great rejoicing, with such great harmonious music, with such sweet alleluias, 
with that “holy Immaculate Virgin by whom praises, etc.” that they will sing in 
honor of the holy Virgin that “Glory be to you Lord, that you were born of this 
Virgin;” singing in honor of him and her not to four, but to four thousand and 
more voices with other songs so heartfelt, so joyful and harmonious as it is 
suitable to the feast and greatness of the persons about whom they were singing 
and if a man had heard them, it would be enough, outside of its amazing 
sweetness that cannot suffer such a measure of sweetness, that his soul would 
have left the body and gone up to heaven with such an assembly.

My Mother, My Mother, Chariot and Leader of Israel

Elisha saw the taking up of Elijah in a chariot of fire toward heaven, and 
欲望 greatly to go with his teacher, he said in a loud voice: “My Father, My 
Father, chariot and guide of Israel! (2 Kgs 2:12) St. Anthony complained to the 
soul of St. Paul and said “Why do you go up to heaven without first dismissing 
me?” and St. Lawrence complained to Pope St. Sixtus since when he went to die 
for Christ he did not take him with him for the same purpose. “What will we do 
today?” Let us rejoice because the Virgin goes full of glory and joy or will we weep 
because we are left behind here?

Oh Virgin most prudent! Where are you going as a most resplendent 
dawn, all beautiful and sweet, beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun, 
beautiful dove washed with milk, whom the lilies of the valley, the flowers and the
roses encircle, accompanied by the holy souls and the blessed angels and in the arms of your Son? Where are you going most prudent Virgin, and where are you leaving us? What will we, your unworthy little ones, do but run after you, and, seeing you go up to heaven, say with the voices of our heart: “My Mother, My Mother, the chariot which sustains the tiresome sinners and the guide of the good!” Elijah, moved by the voices of his disciple threw him his cloak with which Elisha could pass through the river Jordan without drowning or even getting wet. (cf. 2 Kgs 2:13-14) Let our cries and our need and loneliness move you and cast into our hearts your memory, devotion and obedience with which we see our nakedness, and favored by you, let us pass through the dangerous river of this world without being drowned with the sinners who are in it.

You Lady, go up to be seated on the resplendent throne of glory which your blessed Son has prepared for you at his right hand from eternity, where you will experience with great sweetness that there are great and pure delights at the right hand of God, not for limited years, but until the end as Scripture tells it. (Ps 15:11) Then you will drink from that river, clear as crystal, which goes out from the throne of God and from the Lamb (Rev 22:1) who is the most excellent divinity and sacred humanity which with your joyful and satiated sight of that holy city of the heavenly Jerusalem, whose waves to you, Lady, more than anything, may invest, fill and make you blessed, without having to ask for or desire anything more. We, your little children, give thanks and many thanks to the divine goodness, rejoicing in your wonderful fulfillment, so that we can call you ours since you are our mother; and looking at this, we celebrate the day of your departure with happiness and rejoicing. But with all this we cannot stop
feeling lonely and unprotected, seeing ourselves so full of needs and our mother so far from us. We beg you, Blessed Virgin that in no way may you forget us; but since you can do all that you wish with God, give alms to the poor who remain here. And as it is written of your blessed Son that going up on high, he gave gifts to men, (cf. Ps 67:19) so you Lady, since you go up on high, so similar to him in glory, appear also in this that you may ask favors for those who remain here; and may they be many since our needs ask for it in all that we are to run to you as a most beloved Mother.

Help us, Lady. attain what we ask from God and when we offer you some service, receive it as a good thing; give us what we ask; excuse what we fear because after God, you are the only hope of sinners and through you we hope for pardon of our sins and the favor of every good and our hope for the reward which we have hope for in heaven is in you. O holy and most holy Mother! O Lady, help the miserable, comfort the weak of heart, console and delight the weeping, pray for the people, intercede for the devoted family of women. Lady, all, young and old who will celebrate your most holy feast will remember you and they will call to you from their heart. And may they feel your help and relief attaining what they asked from you.

O blessed Lady, you who discovered grace engendered in life! Mother of salvation, we beseech you most humbly that he who through you was given to us will through you receive us. May your holiness and integrity before him excuse the faults of our corruption and may your humility, pleasing to God, obtain for us pardon for our pride; may your abundant love shelter the multitude of sins, and may your glorious fruitfulness make us fruitful with merits. Our Lady, our
Mediatrix, reconcile us with your Blessed Son, obtain for us his grace so that having departed from this exile, you will bring us where we may rejoice in your most holy glory.

Sermon 71

She Chose the Better Part

Assumption of Mary- August 15

479
Introduction

The Virgin Mother of God, forever blessed, was always holy both in her conception as well as throughout her whole life; moreover, while she was full of grace (Lk 1:28) and holiness as the angel said, she also endured many trials in this life, as it was shown through the stories and through the holy Gospel. And if you look at her feast days well, you will see her holiness and some hardship to share with her. She was holy in her conception, but it is a pitiful thing to enter into this miserable world and go about nine months in the narrowness of the womb of her mother; her birth was holy, but she was born crying like other babies. When she gave birth to her most holy Son and on all the remaining feasts, you will always find something about which you can sympathize with her. But today is the feast of another kind, since just as difficulties in her life are joined with holiness, and because she was the holiest, she was also the most burdened, so today she who is holy as she always was, is far from all other trials and so full of joy, that just as her holiness is greater than that of everyone else, so in glory and joy no one can be equaled to her; and the trials which she suffered in this life are surpassed without comparison by the goodness and pleasure which are given to her today when she entered into heaven.

Great is the glory that is given to her today; and therefore, great is today's feast since it is as much for her as it is for all who wish her well. And she asks for divine mercy so that we may prepare ourselves for this great feast, and that by the mercies that we receive today we may know that the most holy Virgin is not greedy with the riches that God has given her since she has entered into the heights of heaven, but that she remembers to send the poor ones of the earth
some drop of that abundant river that goes out from the throne of God and from the Lamb, (Rev 22:1) which gladdens the City of God (Ps 45:5) and from which she drinks with greater abundance than everyone. And if she desires to give you a drink of this water, which takes away thirst forever, it is appropriate that you always prepare yourself to celebrate this feast with the disposition similar to the feast spoken about; and since our mother, the church, who has the Spirit of God, knows our ignorance, she shows us in the secret prayer of the Mass of yesterday what is suitable for us to know and to do about this feast. She wants us to know that there is a need to prepare ourselves for the feast and we are to ask for this preparation from God and declare that one must come to this feast equipped, delighted, comforted and also joyful. Since on the other feasts of our Lady the disposition to celebrate them well was to come with holiness and with sorrow, so it is suitable on this feast to come comforted and prepared with holiness and happiness in order to be like the holy Virgin who, as we have said, is holy and full of joy today.

I do not know any greater means to come prepared for the feast than to have confessed and received in your hearts him whom the Virgin carried in her womb and who received her today in heaven. He is the strength, supply, and comfort of the soul as well as its joy and its every good. Let him rejoice who has confessed and taken communion today, and for the one who has not, let him feel it as a great loss and try before he leaves behind the octave of this most holy feast to rejoice in this good so that he may be a participant of the mercy that God gives men for the honor of his most holy Mother. And certainly consider that to possess these gifts are neither small nor insignificant.
Since King David, when he put the Ark of God in its place, invited all the people who were at the feast to eat and gave them bread and meat and fritters (cf. 2 Sam 6:19), so may our Lord be blessed forever that the Ark of God, which is the most holy Virgin Mary, who today is in heaven, surpasses without comparison the dignity of the other Ark; and our King Jesus Christ, who today places this Ark in heaven, surpasses King David in infinite value, goodness and riches; and then the highest and most glorious place in which the holy Virgin Mary is placed today, surpasses without comparison the other place where David set up the Ark! And while this feast surpasses the other one in all these things, it is very reasonable to say that it also surpasses it in the gifts that are given to those who attend the celebration. There David gave bread, meat and fritters, earthly things that possessed little value, since the kings of the earth can give only earthly things; but our heavenly king will give celestial gifts of substance and fruit to our souls, by giving them holiness, the fruit of consolation and joy so that we may celebrate the feast in the proper way and we may glorify God for the good that he did for his most blessed Mother and for us through her today.

Nothing is left except to open the depths of our heart and think about heaven; with bent knee on the ground in testimony to our unworthiness and lowliness, let us beg gifts from Jesus Christ our Savior and let us name as an intercessor the most holy Virgin Mary, saying with much devotion: Hail Mary.

What is: “she chose the better part?”
She chose the better part. (Lk 10:42) The things that are said in praise of
the most holy Virgin Mary have to be precious and of such great weight so that
with much reason she may be worthy of praise since she was the summit of
holiness and is given as an example for us. She is praised here by the mouth of
the Lord because she chose the better part and it appears that this is such a
common thing that there is no one who does anything else. The one who can
obtain riches does not choose poverty; nor one who can have health, sickness; nor
trials; nor will anyone who can gain 20% in a deal settle for 10%. And it is in this
way as it is so often done in many other things that they do not consider the one
whom they recognize as worthy of praise, but they would consider the one who
would do it in another way, a lunatic.

Brothers, there is another reason why the Lord praises his Mother, and
possesses so much goodness and knowledge that she chose the better part.
Another reason that is called “better” in the school of God and in his royal court
that not without cause the Lord spoke those words that are the light of our
ignorance and the condemnation of those worldly errors: That which is
important before men is an abomination before God. (Lk 16:15) God said these
words and therefore they are very true but I am more afraid that there are many
people who do not believe them with the firmness which the truth of God seeks,
or is required for them to profit from it. Oh miserable worldliness, not only the
unbelief of God’s words but even of his works and whatever is burdensome and
very costly to him so that we might understand through them that the doctrine
that costs him so much is not spoken in jest that he wants to be believed and lived
out.
Decide for us Lord, when you come from heaven to earth so that when you come you may show us by word and deed the way to go up to heaven. Do you choose, perchance, the better house, the better garment and the better business profits, the honors and relief and all the rest that the world chooses and calls better? Certainly, brothers if what the world chose was better, then, Jesus Christ was deceived and he chose the worse part. He cannot be deceived. The world may look at what it does and how it feels about things, and with God’s truth, Jesus Christ corrects their ignorance and understands that since he cannot err and he chose poverty, trials, and the cross that that is the better part, and its opposite, no matter how much the world may choose and value the opposite, is the worse part. And as the holy Virgin was shown the truth through the Spirit of his Son, even before he was incarnated, she did not err in what she chose but followed the truth of God and not the lies of the world. Now you know, and the thing is well known that Christ who was rich, became poor and since he never had to suffer because he never sinned, he suffered more than any other creature who was a sinner. And if I will ask how he had the heart to chose poverty, trials, the cross and to sacrifice to God the pleasing things that the world considered gods, I say to you that the knowledge and love that God had was so great, the esteem so great with which he valued it, that when we obtained it and when we obtain much from him, not only does Jesus Christ not desire the things of the earth, but he would not even take them, even if they were given; certainly when one considers that as much as he left behind for God, he had so much more from him; and he therefore considered, much better than St. Paul all things as garbage (Phil 3:8) because God was precious in his eyes and very beloved of his heart. And no one takes offense that
the goods of this world are called garbage since the world was not created as a
dwelling for men, but rather for beasts, and such a place is called a stable and
there is dung in it. O dejected people, contemptible and small hearted, you walk
wide awake, lazy and dead in order to fill your coffers and laps with the vilest
dung. Then tomorrow or another day, you leave Christ behind since you do not
love God nor recognize that his eternal goods are greater than your heart can
comprehend.

The better part is the love of God

Virgin forever blessed, smallness of heart is not possible for you because
even effort to be a virgin is a greatness of heart since it is to profess, kick, and
step on the strong enemy that is our flesh, by which many small and great people
are miserably conquered! This is a great undertaking and the first woman who
undertook it is the holy Virgin Mary for which she is called Virgin of virgins; and
as she undertook it with greatness of heart so she kept it and conquered it
victoriously. But her greatness did not end there, since she not only scorned the
flesh and all the world- and if heaven would speak to you, I will not lie- and she
set her eyes on choosing the better part of everything, as the holy evangelist says,
it is God. Good above all goods, Cause of all good things, whole and completed
Goodness and so good that in comparison with him, the holiness of the saints is
not holiness, the height of the high ones is low, light is darkness; beauty is
ugliness and all the good things joined together are nothing in comparison to the
great and infinite Good. Men, set your eyes here so that you may be enamored of
such beauty; set your heart here so that by participation in the greatest good, it
will go well with you and you will always be happy. Learn from this holy woman, 
she who was so well taught that she chose the better part of all, and is given such 
good skill that she obtained it and will possess it forever without it being taken 
away from her. David saw all of that fidelity in the spirit. In praise of the most 
holy Virgin Mary he sang of the greatness and loyalty of her heart, when he said 
these words in her place: \textit{What do I have to desire in heaven and what do I ask of you on the earth, Lord? My flesh has been weakened and God is my heart forever.} (cf. Ps 77:25-26) O loyal love, O loving loyalty invested in that One, who as the Greatest Good is worthy of love that the love of all other things may be taken away and placed on him! \textit{What do I have to desire in heaven?} says the Virgin, since although there may be things of great excellence in heaven, without comparison they surpass the great things on earth, and the excess with which God surpasses them is so great that, for the one who understands it as the Blessed Virgin understood it, they are counted as nothing and unworthy because they may hinder the torrent of love that flows from God continually; and if the holy Virgin neither turns her head nor even look to the things that are in heaven (in order not to obscure her vision with which she looks at God, nor impede her heart, even a small part of it, because she considers it a great evil not to give God her entire heart) how much less account will be made of earthly things, since they are of little value in themselves and in comparison to what there is in heaven. Free, emptied of all earthly things and truly poor, was the heart of the Virgin when she freed herself for God who truly deserves to possess her. 

She had read and put into practice what the Lord had said: \textit{You have wounded my heart, my beautiful Bride; you have wounded my heart with the}
glance of your eyes and with a hair of your head. (Cf. Cant 4:9) God is all-powerful, he is invincible and of infinite strength, but there are some weapons that will conquer the Invincible One if he knows how to wield them and he will catch God and capture him as if he were a very weak thing. Oh blessed eye that wounds God, blessed hair that being so weak can tie up the All-powerful One. Supreme Wisdom, says St. Dionysius, allows himself to be conquered; and the holy Virgin, who knew this very well, freed her love from everything and, with very united and enflamed heart, she brings her love to the Lord as an arrow and wounds him with this intention and loving vision. When she focuses her thoughts and contemplation on him, and when she always brings her heart to the reverence of God, as David says (cf. Ps 24:15) she binds God with her soul so that he can never be far away from her. The thirst that she possessed for God was so deep that it was not only in her soul, but in her flesh. While David says (Ps 62:2) that his deep desire for God disheartened his flesh and heart (cf. Ps 72:26), the Virgin Mary, who is better than any other creature, fulfilled what is written: Daughters of Jerusalem, if you see my beloved, tell him that I am sick with his love. (Cant 5:8) But this sickness is healthy and one is very unhealthy who does not suffer from this sickness.

The love which takes possession of the Virgin suggests that many times she was said to pant and to cool the most burning flame of her heart in the following words: God possesses my heart and God is my portion forever. (Ps 72:26) Oh, let us imitate the sweetest words in the ears of God that are worthy to steal our hearts since they are of such great benefit. God of my heart, the Virgin says, my heart loves you with all its powers with that love which is the reason why
God may be loved; my heart considers you God and I obey your law and follow your holy will as a shadow follows a body; my heart is closed to all things and open to you alone as her true spouse and master. To deal with all creatures, I placed a veil between them and my heart; and to deal with you I removed it so that you may see my face and I may look at yours. Finally, my heart feels that you are its true God with such a great power of love that my heart also possesses you for its God. I have placed beneath your feet my understanding, my memory, my senses, my flesh, my blood, my bones and all that I am and have and can have and desire, so that your holy will may be done in all of it and you, as its true God and master, may place it where you want; and even though the world and heaven may offer many things to desire, and some may choose some things and others may choose others, I, Lord, choose you for my portion with the intention of serving you forever and with the hope of possessing you for my portion forever.

Oh how pleasing it is, my brothers, to hear the Virgin speak and to express the loyalty of her heart and her great prudence with which, having despised all things, she chose the better part, who is God; and how much shame and sorrow it ought to cause us in our hearts to see them so deceived and knocked down by the vilest things that we stop choosing the greatest good which is infinitely valuable! Some are content with having God as the God of their tongue, praying to God; others by having him as a God of their eyes, keeping them sheltered and chaste; others kneel down to God; others do good deeds; but they lack the best thing about which the Lord complains saying: This people honors me with their tongues but their heart is far from me. God of my heart! (Mt 15:8; Mc 7:6), said the holy Virgin, which means God of my love. And this is the heart that makes a
person one with God and treats God as God, and after this union with him- which is real- the rest follows; God will take possession of each heart since he took possession of love which takes possession of all.

**My part, to keep his law: avoiding mortal and venial sin**

And so that you may understand this, David says, and it refers more reasonably to our Lady: *I take, Lord, the keeping of your holy law for my portion.* (cf. Ps 118:57) God is called the *portion of the soul* and the portion of the soul is called *law*, because he who truly loves God shows it by *keeping his commandments* (Jn 14:21) and would take them as his own portion. David has chosen God as his portion and as the God of his heart; and if he will persevere in it, he will possess him forever. But one sees that the holy Virgin was not contented with choosing only the commandments of God as her portion, in order to have an account of not committing mortal sin- because of the greatness of love that she had for the God of her heart, to keep the law alone appeared to her a small step of love since there are many people who live without mortal sins and it is not particularly praiseworthy to do what many do- but that spur of perfect love which urged her on toward God made her to take as a goal- by the grace that the Lord left with her- of not offending him with neither mortal nor venial sin, because her holy heart was so tender and soft towards God that neither an idle word, nor even an useless thought, nor anything outside of God, was given entrance into her heart, expressing what St. Jerome said: that offending God is never a slight thing, even in smallest things; and that that man is very prudent
who does not look so much at the quantity of what is commanded as much as the majesty of the one who commands it, who is God.

Listen, sons of men: God is the one who determines which one of the columns of heaven trembles, and did you dare to offend him in much or in little? He is the greatest good, he is perfection without limit and do you have a heart to love him in a limited way saying: I do not want to offend him in this way but in that way I do? He gave everything for you; no blood remained for him to shed for you, not only in this life, but even after death; he has bestowed countless benefits on you and you place a limit on serving him, by angering God to whom you owe so much with a little sin? From this evil, of which the blind and the lukewarm possess a small amount, the great and miserable flood of mortal sins and unfortunate falls that there are in the world, has come and is coming even to those who do not desire to commit them because, as they do not try to avoid the smaller ones, it confirms in them in what the highest wisdom of God said: that he who has lesser faults, will little by little fall into the great ones. (cf. Sir 19:1)

The vineyard of the Lord, which is the soul who keeps the holy commandments, and does not fall into mortal sin, is not to be without a fence; if he wants to be preserved in the grace that he has received, his soul is to be enclosed with a fence, which is makes him careful of not falling into venial sins; and if this care is lost, at first some little gates are opened that later become large gates, where the thieves and wild beasts of mortal sins enter; that he unhappily exchanges God as God for sin which bore earlier fruit, and the enemy the devil enters and possesses his soul, the one who serves and produces evil fruits with which he sustains himself. And those who did not want to believe those who
warned them to avoid small evils; having an imprudent boldness about guarding their vineyard, although they were not careful in avoiding venial sins, proved with the greatest harm that what the scriptures said is true: *He who destroys the fence*, which is the care of not falling into venial sins, *is to be bitten by the serpent*, (cf. Sir 10:8) which is mortal sin.

Examine it well, ask your elders, read the divine scripture and even the stories of those who are not Christians; ask God and men and all will tell you that great evils are rarely born except from little evils, and they had very harmful purposes and produced the slight beginnings so much so that scarcely were they known as evil and no one thought that such a small spark was to light a fire so large that it harmed so many and so badly and was so difficult to extinguish it, that neither his own diligence nor another’s was enough. But I do not want to give you a burden of asking anyone about this; I do not ask you except that you remember how many times a vision, a hearing, a walk and lighter things than these have become such great temptations for you that they have made you fall into mortal sins, or at the least placed you in danger of committing them. I said: Have you ever seen or heard that two men playing a very little bit has resulted in their being injured, desiring evil, wounding and even killing each other? Who would believe that by leaving Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, to calm down and look at the land that her father and brothers had separated, such a great evil was to happen to her, that they had taken away her virginity and that in revenge for this, her brothers killed the one who dishonored her and her father and to all who were in that city? (cf. Gen 34) And no less evil happened by Paris looking at Helen who was the cause of the deaths of so many notable people and the
complete destruction of the famous city of Troy. Who will not tremble when he hears this and sees what he experiences in himself and in what others see and hear that very reasonably it is to be sufficient cause to look where we walk and try to avoid any evil, no matter how small it may appear to be?

O holy Mary, how far you were from falling into venial sin and consequently into mortal sin, frightened by the holy fear of God and comforted by his great love that he kept sin from entering your soul, although very slight, was consumed and conquered by that great love as small and light straw is consumed by a very strong fire! Many saints desired this and there were many and now they are those that will not deliberately and resolutely commit venial sin although it may cost them their life or a thousand lives. But the sins of inattention, of neglect, of those that are born of our own flesh that are almost natural to our human weakness and without which one does not live in this miserable life although they desired to avoid them, they did not succeed, because the corruption of original sin although pardoned by holy baptism, does not allow living without venial sin which he committed under his power. But since the most holy Virgin Mary, by her singular privilege, was preserved from original sin, she possessed the purest life and was free from all sin: a pure body through virginity and a pure soul such that it is called by God all beautiful and in which there is no stain in her. (cf. Cant 4:7)
She not only avoided sin, but searched in everything for the greater glory of God

There is great excellence in that she did not have, nor has, nor will have an equal among all the saints; but this most blessed Virgin and esteemed eagle that flew so high chose the better part when she was determined to desire God, by not committing any mortal sin against him; and the best part was when she chose not to offend him even venially, even though she might die a thousand deaths; and a much better part when her loving and generous heart chose not only to avoid all sin, but to look in everything for what would please God, from what would please him more to what would please him most. Her love was so courageous that it compelled her to look in all things for the greater pleasure and greater glory of the God of her heart. As St. Paul says that one ought to look for the will of God very willingly and avoid mortal and venial sins, and from the good choose the better in the way this Virgin did it. (cf. Eph 5:3-4) At first, there were many similarities because they did not commit mortal sin; in the second, she surpasses all the men and women who come from Adam in the ordinary way of generation; but in the riches of her love with which she had the summit of grace and virtues she surpasses the angels and all the heavenly spirits even if they are the highest cherubim and seraphim, those who with much reason can recognize the benefits and be disciples of this holy Virgin in the school of the love of God, since she is richer and wiser in this practice of love and surpasses them all. Many daughters, God says, gather riches for themselves, but you, holy Virgin, you have surpassed them all. (Prov 31:29) And in another place the souls say to her that they love God: Where did your beloved go, most beautiful of all women? Where did your
beloved you? And we will seek him with you. (Cant 5:17) The daughters who gathered riches and the women who asked this are all men and women. And all the angels proclaim that the Virgin is richer than they are in the richness of grace and virtues and more driven by the spiritual beauty that results from this because not only is there esteem for her as regards the body in the eyes of God but rather she considers herself small, able to fall into danger and of little regard, and so he commanded the scripture writer to say it so that it will come to the attention of all: Good grace is empty and beauty is deceiving; but the woman who fears God will be praised. (cf. Prov 31:30)

For the services of Mary, we will obtain the reward that God gives to her.

Perchance it might seem to some that I have forgotten today’s feast, since on the day that the blessed Virgin was rewarded by God in heaven and he gave her great gifts of glory, he who is mighty and holy is his name, (Lk 1:49) I have ceased speaking of this great reward which she received today from the most generous hand of God, and I have spoken of her holiness and of how much she served the Lord while living in this life. But it has been said, not without cause, since we are to go up to the things less known as by steps through the knowledge of things better known. The angels who are in heaven and are present at this blessed feast will know clearly the greatness of the glory that the Lord gave to his Blessed Mother today, and as the church sings: The Virgin Mary has gone up to heaven, let the angels rejoice and bless the Lord together; but we who do not deserve for ourselves the reward that God gives to his mother on this feast, we
need to know something about it by the examples of her holiness and services. God is so very generous that his payment surpasses all services; and since he has said: \textit{I love those who love me} (Prov 8:17); \textit{I will glorify the one who honors me} (1 Sam 2:30); \textit{and where I am, there my servant will be} (Jn 12:26); with those words God gives the certitude that offers those who would serve and love him that they will not labor in vain, although a jar of water may be given out of love, who will tell the greatness of the reward that he gave to this Virgin today? St. Anselm says that since the Virgin shined with such purity and holiness of life as much as it can be understood as greater but still less than God, that consequently, it is suitable that they give her the greatest glory after God.

\textit{O most blessed and most prudent Virgin! Where are you going today, daughter of Zion, all beautiful and sweet}, having reclined in the arms of the most beloved of your heart? Where are you going except to receive the crown of glory over every servant and those who are still to be nurtured, and that \textit{every knee on heaven and earth and beneath the earth is bent}, by will or by force, and that \textit{a name above every other name} is to be given to you so that only your Son surpasses you? (cf. Phil 2:9-10)

\textbf{Joseph of Egypt, a type of Mary}

King Pharaoh was very grateful for the services which the chaste Joseph did for him and the benefit that he provided for the entire kingdom of Egypt when he protected their wheat so that they might not suffer from hunger, and he said to him: \textit{You will be the head of my house and all the people will obey your commands and on a throne of the kingdom I alone will have precedence over}
you; and I will establish you over the whole land of Egypt. And after the king said these words, he acted and he took off the ring which he had on his finger and put it on the hand of Joseph and gave him clothes of very rich linen and put a necklace of gold around his neck and he made him go up into his chariot in the second place, and go through the streets accompanied by the chiefs and an announcer went before him speaking to the people that all should kneel down in front of Joseph and they knew he was placed by Pharaoh as vice-king of all the land of Egypt. The king who spoke said more: I am Pharaoh and without your command, no hand or foot will be moved in all of the land of Egypt and he named him in his language, Savior of the World. (cf. Gen 41:40-45)

The history of much gratitude and tenderness is this, that although Pharaoh carried it out, the principal author of it was God who wanted to reward holy Joseph for the patience which he had had in his difficulties, which he had suffered without guilt, and the chastity and holiness of his life that he had maintained by the grace of God. With how much more reason ought one to believe that Jesus Christ our Lord, more grateful and powerful than Pharaoh, would today reward the services that his most holy Mother did for him and the many good works which she did for her neighbors. Since if Joseph kept the bread with which the land of Egypt was sustained, he did not do more than use his skill because he did not make it rain on the land nor did he make the wheat bear fruit, nor did he make it grow until it formed kernels because this dignity was not his own but only a figure of the most holy Virgin Mary, who fulfilled it many times over in a way never heard nor seen, and which appears different in heaven and on earth. She was the one who engendered by her own wisdom, purest blood and the
Holy Spirit not the perishable bread of the earth, but to the eternal heavenly Bread, the God-man and the support of man, *he who was, is and will be* (cf. Rev 4:8) God forever; and she who engendered him, gave birth to him and cared for him so that he might grow in the same way as when she had him enclosed in her most holy womb as after his birth, she kept him for us much better than Joseph in order that we might not suffer from hunger but instead we might live for him and not only for a kingdom, but all men who were, are and will be if she stays with them.

**Mary, universal beggar of all graces**

Most blessed Lord, what will you give to your most holy Mother today? What will be the advantages that you will do for Pharaoh in rewarding your Mother, since your excellence is greater than his without comparison and your most holy Mother greater than Joseph? Oh there is no tongue that can explain the services and holiness of the Virgin or the reward that he gives her for them! Every tongue is silenced, every understanding is lacking in the praises of her holiness and of the greatness of the goodness of God. Both are deep abysses and the abyss of her deeds *calls to the abyss* (Ps 41:8) of the divine goodness so that he might give the reward in accordance to them and to himself. But tracing it by the story already stated, being figurative for Mary and fulfilled today with very great excess, let us hear how the blessed Lord speaks with great sweetness to his most holy Mother who taken up to heaven today: “My mother, you will be over all my household forever and all the people of my heavenly court and of the earth and under the earth will be obedient to what your mouth commands; only I will
precede you on the throne of the kingdom because I am the Creator God and you a creature and my mother.” After those words he took the ring from his hand and put it on hers so that she would have power and authority to intercede for all the mercies which God would do for the world and that which was countersigned by her hand would come through her mediation would not be considered authentic or come from heaven; and she is made universal beggar of all the graces and alms that God gives to men as St. Bernard says: “That all may honor her and may be devoted and grateful; and they may know that she took possession not only of the land of Egypt, but all the earth and heaven; and that she is such an absolute and powerful lady that nothing will be done without her will.

And after having received her ring, which makes a part of the body beautiful, her most blessed Son clothed her in the vesture of very white linen which is the color that he uses in heaven and signifies grace, without which the soul is naked and blackened as Christ says: *I advise you to clothe yourselves in white garments so that your nakedness will not appear.* (cf. Rev 3:18) And it also signifies glory which is the final grace and precious garment of the soul that will be given to those who live well, as Jesus Christ our Lord has promised, saying: *They will walk with me and with white garments.* (cf. Rev 3:4) And like the angels who appeared to the holy apostles on the day of the Ascension of the Lord, *they wore white garments.* (Acts 1:10) And when the Lord wanted to declare his glory on Mount Tabor, *his garments became white as the snow* (Lk 9:29; Mt 17:2; Mc 9:2) with glory. Thus, represented by the purity of linen and earned by trials as the whiteness of the linen, the most gentle Lord clothed the soul of his most holy Mother and then today, or on the third day, he raised up her
most holy body and when he clothed it with glory, he unites it to the soul that has more glory; and he commanded that his Mother, body and soul, be placed upon his second chariot, giving her the second place of glory and universal dominion after Him. No one except our Lord Jesus Christ, as man, travels in the first and principal chariot; it is by the hypostatic union that Jesus Christ is true man and true God not by grace but by nature; after this dignity, which no one but Jesus Christ reached is the dignity of the Virgin, by being mother not of man alone but of the true God-man. This dignity was given to her when she conceived the Son of God, and today she is placed upon the second chariot of glory, appropriate for such a dignity.

Today she entered heaven and went through it, carried in a chariot with great honor and she goes accompanied by the greater and lesser heads of all heaven and a voice sounds before her, and not a soft one as what went before Joseph, but of the most excellent angels who with fond devotion and heart-felt praises speak with a very loud voice: "Kneel down, kneel down all of you, the Virgin and Mother of God passes to whom no one has been or will be equal; and all you who honor the Son, honor the Mother and know her and possess her and serve her as your natural and true Lady; because just as the Son, by being obedient to his Eternal Father, was exalted and given a name over every name, so this Virgin, his Mother, was obedient to the will of God until death and death on the cross since she offered her Son by obedience to God so that he might die in her; this obedience was for her so much more sorrowful than if they commanded her to die on the cross; and so today she is exalted above all since she humbled herself more than all, since the word of her most blessed Son was fulfilled, who
said: *He who humbles himself will be exalted*; and consequently the who humbles himself more, will be more exalted."

This angelic voice sounded in the ears of that most sublime and honored court and heavenly knighthood and they quickly obeyed her and they will always obey her, and revere this most holy Virgin with deep reverence and love her with a deep love. And God desires that just as this glory was proclaimed in heaven by means of the angels, so it will also be preached in his church to the Christians by the mouths of her preachers, who are also called angels because they are messengers of God. In order that the great honor and dominion that the Mother of God receives today will be known by all, let us praise to God because he is so generous in rewarding her; and let us thank him for the many favors that he gives to our true Mother and Lady today; and also so that we may know to whom we are to go to beg a favor in our needs and to whom we are to entrust our affairs so that they will be well taken care of by God. And there is much reason that, since he is determined to give men what fulfills them, through the prayers and intercession of this most holy Virgin, that they may know Him and in this way go to God through her and will beg through her what they need and give thanks to her when they have received it; that if Pharaoh, when those of his kingdom came to him suffering from hunger, he responded to them: *Go to Joseph and do what he would say to you* (Gen 41:55) with much more reason Jesus Christ our Lord wants us to go to the most holy Virgin Mary in our need and do what she tells us, since without a doubt, God will do what she begs from him; and he who obtains from her a yes will have it through obtaining it from God since it is written that God will do *the will of the ones who fear him and will hear those who beseech*
him. (cf. Ps 144:19) What request can be denied to this Virgin since she feared the Lord with a deep filial fear and loved him with all her heart, with very abundant love?

Joseph and Mary, Saviors of the World

And certainly, if Pharaoh gave Joseph that great and honored name of Savior of the world, (Gen 41:45) with much more reason it has been given to the Virgin since she gave to God human flesh which was the way in which he saved and redeemed the world from its miserable captivity. She assisted in the redemption which Christ accomplished on the cross with body and soul as the first woman insisted that father Adam ruin the universal world and disorder what God made through sin. But it is said of the Virgin that she was with God fixing all the things (Prov 8:30), helping with works and with her intercession so that the unfaithful may know God and the Christians may love and serve him, having the seal of his mercy opened to receive all and particularly, to be able to obtain from God what she asks of him; and the Virgin is placed there in heaven in the heights of glory above every creature, revered by the angels, honored by God, centered on always beholding the most beautiful face of God and rejoicing in him with unspeakable joy. But therefore, she does not forget the poor little ones on the day of her great honor who are Christians and she desires that we call her and beg for mercy because we will know that she has power to obtain it for us from her blessed Son.

Joseph said to his brothers: run very quickly and tell my father every honor, richness and power that I have and that Pharaoh considers me a father
and he has made me lord of all the land of Egypt. Go quickly and bring him and his entire house here to me because I will support him and you in the harsh famine that still exists, and take my father a pair of garments and three hundred coins and all prepared to join him to come and take some for yourselves and what is necessary for the road. (cf. Gen 45:9) The men go to give the good news to the patriarch Jacob that his son Joseph, whom he thought to be dead, was living and in possession of all the land of Egypt; but the patriarch Jacob did not believe such joyful news until he saw with his own eyes the clothes and the money that his son Joseph sent him and the other tokens that his sons brought, and then, as scripture says, He awakened as from a dream and said: It is enough for me, that Joseph is living, I will go and see him before I die. (cf. Gen 45:28) He did so and the consolation that he and his sons had when they saw him was very great.

Oh if God would give us the desire, Christians to go and to see this most holy Virgin, we would say: “It is enough that my Mother is living, and although she died bodily today, she is alive in heaven and she is in the possession of all the kingdoms and dominions of God!” Sinner, if perchance you have fallen asleep in the mortal dream of sin, if you think that there is no one in heaven who remembers you, can help you, nor wants to help you, open your ears to the great news that the most holy Virgin Mary sent to tell you from the heights of heaven where she reigns and commands that we preachers may tell you in her name: “Tell my children how I am good and greatly honored by God and that I have not forgotten the poor and needy who live on the earth; tell them to come to me so that I will feed them in famine and I will help the needs of their souls that still
remain." This is so. The Virgin has the heart of a mother for you and if you do not believe that message, behold the clothes and the riches that the Virgin has sent to her poor children on earth, gaining the pardon of sins for some, no matter how serious, freeing others from weighty and grave temptations, consoling the sorrowful, comforting the weak of heart and even freeing the men that had offered themselves to the devil and renounced their faith and made contract of it, even with their own blood. She reconciles you with these and many other favors that she has accomplished for those who truly call to her, of which some time she will have a fitting part for you and will awaken you from the nightmare of your forgetfulness and little devotion, and as Jacob went down from the land of promise to the land of Egypt, go up heartily from the lowliness of this miserable exile to the land of heaven which is promised to us (Lk 18:14); and if you have good eyes and vision, you will see the greatness of the glory of the holy Virgin Mary and you are to rejoice in her and you will say, as another Jacob: "God has not only bestowed this favor upon me of seeing you alive and healthy, but he has also done me another in wanting me to see your two sons." (cf. Gen 48:11)

What will be the joy of the man who enters heaven and sees the beauty and greatness of the most holy Virgin Mary and sees her most holy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, having been prefigured by Manasseh, the one whom his father Joseph said when he was born: God has made me forget all my past trials. And when the other was born who was called Ephraim, he said: Has God made me grow in the land of my poverty? (Gen 41:51-52) I forget the trials of the holy Virgin and all those who went to heaven; it is Jesus Christ her Son and our Lord, through
whom we have such an increase of good things, that our poverty has been changed into the highest and greatest of spiritual riches.

**Conclusion**

But while that blessed day is coming in which we go up to heaven to see the most holy Virgin and her blessed Son clearly, let us go up with our hearts; let us send her messages of sighs and tears and devout prayers; may each one serve her the best that he can; let us present our needs to her begging for help; and so that our petitions may be pleasing to her, and she may willingly grant them to us, let us not beg for vile earthly things since she has scorned them as having little value; but let us beg her that she may obtain for us the virtues to imitate her in choosing the better part as she chose it.

And so, most holy Virgin, in the name of the people here, I beg you to obtain for us true repentance, confusion and shame for choosing sin and scorning the most high God at some time. We ask pardon, Lady; pardon for our serious sins; and since we call you *Mother of grace and Mother of mercy*, let us feel in good works what you truly are; make us friends with your most blessed Son and may he forget all our sins; and obtain for us such a strong love for him that from now on we may choose him for our better part, that we may not sell it by greediness for temporal things, as Judas did (Mt 26:14-15), nor for gluttony as Esau did (Gen 25:29-34), nor for the favor of the elders and the great ones as Pilate did (Jn 19:12-16). And, in conclusion, that he may not allow us on such a day that, placing ourselves in the presence of God and sin, to choose sin and shun God as the Jews did, choosing the life of Barrabbas and the death of Christ. Lady,
may such a thing never happen. Obtain for us this gift of the Lord: that we may
die, Lord, if it is necessary and that he will remain alive in our souls.

Help us to choose him for the better part, not committing mortal sin; help
us to love him so much that we may be very careful of not even venially offending
him; help us detest evil and choose the best of what is good and what pleases
God, choosing the best so that by following in your steps, Lady, so that while not
as quickly nor with such great holiness as you, we may choose God and his holy
will so that the better part and portion, which is the glory of heaven to which he
leads us, in your holy company, will be given to us and never taken away. Amen.

Sermon 72

Lady, what do you desire?
Mary is seated at the right hand of her Son

... The third thing that we have to contemplate on this feast is what throne they gave her, where the Virgin was seated in heaven. And where was Bathsheba seated? At the right hand of her son. (1 Kgs 2:19) — Where was Deborah seated? It is written in the book of Judges that God made her so wise and gave her such ability that he chose her from the people of Israel in order to determine its legal cases, and as she judged them, and with her skill and force she was also to free the people of Israel? Deborah dwelt between Ramah and Bethel. (Jg 4:4) The name Deborah is translated as “bee” and this is also the most blessed Virgin who as a hard-working bee, gives us such honey and wax as the Son of God. And this Lady dwells between Ramah, which means, “height,” and Bethel, “house of God,” that is, between God and the heights, between him and his blessed ones, for as the church sings: The Holy Theotokos has been taken up to the heavenly kingdom above the choirs of angels.

The Assumption in Body and Soul, represented in Martha and Mary

— What do you desire, Lady, that you gave such an embrace today to the Son of God, that since he is God, you will not lose him? What can you ask of him, being seated with him, which may not be accomplished soon? What can you demand from him that may not be granted to you? Lady, what do you desire? — Well, since Mary is here in heaven, rejoicing in the beatific vision of God, let
Martha also come and stop ministering on earth; let her not be changed into corruption and ashes; let my body also come to give perpetual glory to the soul, let the body come to reign with the soul, since the soul has its natural desire for the body. And although the body may not have so much perfection nor be conscious of craving union with the soul, it is not inconvenient. –Since it is attributed to the rocks and trees and things that do not speak- that we may sense this about the body of man, and especially of the most holy body of the Virgin that had been embalmed with such fullness of grace. It is clear that in its own way the body says: Just Lord, it is not a concern for you that my sister leaves me alone, (Lk 10:40) since I was always subject to her and in total agreement and I helped to serve you with so many tasks. And she left me alone to serve. She left me here on the earth while going to heaven to rejoice in you. To which the Lord resolved, commanding that the most holy soul be joined with the body. 

Augustine: That flesh, from which God took flesh, in what way could it be handed over to the worms, since I am not feeling in good health, I am afraid to speak. He is not to think that the body of the Virgin would be a meal for worms, since we compare her to the myrrh that had the power of killing the worms and preserving her from corruption. O Star of the sea! How good to have heaven as your throne! For if she must be similar to the place where she was placed, such a chair is well suited for you Lady.

Mary, Our Intercessor
-What do you desire, Lady? – To do good to men. – Mother, ask for what you want: *Make your request, for I will not refuse you.* (cf. 1 Kgs 2:20) Oh Blessed Mother! You are mighty in the eyes of God and do great works. How do you want me, Lady to repay you for the trials that you have suffered for me, which were: creating me, clothing, in feeding me from your breast, taking me to Egypt, remaining with me at the foot of the cross? – How will you give me a people in whom your glory is manifest whom you help with prayers? – *From the East I will call your seed; from the West I will gather them. I will say to the North: give; and to the South: do not restrain them; carry it to the sons at the farthest distance.* (cf. Is 43:5-6) – What you desire, Lady and my Mother, I will fulfill it so completely, that I will speak to the people that come from the East, and I will bring from the West a great multitude of people. All these people honor the Virgin: to the East, her children; to the West, the elderly; to the North, the middle-aged, the young men. Young and old, men and women, those who produce and those who will leave what is produced behind, all will have devotion and will call upon your name. Every family of sinners, the proud and the greedy, those who are prefigured in the north, by the cold and frozen heart so that they do not give alms nor help their neighbors, but, hearing the name of the Virgin Mary, they may be softened; and the carnal things, prefigured in the middle-aged, embraced by the temptations of the flesh, I will make them leave that evil carnal love behind and they will be purified by their prayer to my most pure Mother. Lady, a man who attempted impure love with women desires to leave them because of your purity. This is the compensation to the Virgin: to see us progress in the service of God by her intercession. If you saw yourself in sin and you see
yourself outside of it, it was by the intercession of the Virgin; if you have not
fallen into sin, it was by her own prayer. Be grateful for it, man, and give thanks
to her.

The true devotion of the Virgin, sign of predestination

If you have devotion to her, when you see that she remembered you, you
will weep for having made her angry. If you have become attached to her love in
your heart, it is a sign of predestination, because God said: Among my chosen
ones I will send out my roots. (cf. Sir 24:13) Our Lord gave this reward to him:
that those whom his Majesty has chosen will have a great devotion to his Mother
implanted in their hearts.

Serve him with a good life; be pleasing to him with good works. Do you
owe so much to her? We do not entirely know the amount nor can we speak about
it. By means of her the sinner is raised up, the good do not sin, and we receive
other innumerable goods through her. But since she is completely pure and there
was neither sin nor any other stains in her, she wants us to serve her in purity;
and so she favors the pure. One was very devoted to the Virgin, for whom he did
many services, fasting, begging, prayers, and, with all that, he was dishonest and
carnal. The Virgin appeared to him one night, offering him with a very beautiful
plate fruit, covered with very foul and stinking bread. And as the Virgin gave it to
him that he might eat it, he said: "Lady, that bread is so foul, that it is disgusting
to eat of the fruit that is beneath it, although it is very beautiful." –The Virgin
said, "The services that you do for me are covered in the same way." So that,
serving her purely, having a deep devotion and calling on her in all our needs, she

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has favored us and by means of her, we will obtain grace here, and afterwards, which I wish for me and for you.... Amen.
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