

# THE LIFE OF UNION WITH CHRIST

(...ET SECUTI SUMUS TE)

## XIII. – THE *OPUS DEI*, Divine Praise

SUMMARY. – God has made all things for His glory; how the Divine Office procures this glory for God: St. Benedict rightly calls it the *Opus Dei*. – I. Ultimate basis of the excellence of the Divine Office: the canticle of the Word in the bosom of the Divinity and in creation. – II. The Word Incarnate has bequeathed to the Church, His Bride, the mission of perpetuating His canticle. – III. The Church confides a more important part of this mission to some chosen souls. –IV. The Divine Office becomes, through the heart and voice of man, the hymn of all creation. – V. It forms a particular homage of the virtues of faith, hope and charity. – VI. This homage is invested with a special splendour when it is offered in suffering: *Sacrificium laudis*.

### GOD HAS MADE ALL THINGS FOR HIS GLORY; HOW THE DIVINE OFFICE PROCURES THIS GLORY FOR GOD: ST. BENEDICT RIGHTLY CALLS IT THE *OPUS DEI*

When we would judge of the absolute value of anything or any work we ought to try to do so from God's point of view. God alone is the Truth; truth is the light in which God, Eternal Wisdom, sees all things; these are worth what they are in God's estimation. That is the sole infallible criterion of judgment, outside which we expose ourselves to deception. It is a truth familiar to us that our holiness is of the supernatural order, that is to say above the rights, exigencies and powers of our nature; all then that relates to this supernatural order, of which God alone is the Author, surpasses by its transcendency, all our human conceptions. God's thoughts and ways are not ours; He Himself tells us so: *Non enim cogitationes meae, cogitationes vestrae: neque viae vestrae, viae meae, dicit Dominus* (Isa. 55, 8). Between our ways and God's there is the infinite: *Sicut exaltantur caeli a terra* (Isa. 55, 9). This is why, in order to know the truth about things of the supernatural domain, we must see them as God sees them, that is, with the eyes of faith. Faith is the light that reveals the Divine thoughts to us and makes us penetrate into God's designs. Lacking this light, there is but darkness and error in regard to spiritual things.

Now one capital truth God has granted us to know touching His designs is that He has created everything and done everything for His glory: *Universa propter semetipsum operatus est Dominus*<sup>1</sup>. God gives us all things; He gives Himself in the person of His Well-Beloved Son, Jesus, and with Him He gives us all good things; He has prepared for us for all eternity an infinite beatitude in the fellowship of His adorable Trinity. But there is one thing that He reserves jealously for Himself, that He neither will nor can give us: that is His glory: *Ego Dominus; gloriam meam alteri non dabo* (Isa. 42, 8).

This being so, things are of value only in the measure in which they procure this glory for

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. 16, 4; see what we have said on this subject in the conference on humility.

God. There are some works which, of their own nature, have no direct relationship with this glory; for example, in the intellectual order, to devote oneself to literary work, to teaching; and, in the manual order, to sweep the cloisters or work in the garden or kitchen; transformed by the love wherewith they are done, these works become pleasing to God; however, they procure His glory indirectly, not of themselves, *fine operantis*, that is to say by reason of the right intention of the one who performs them in view of pleasing God<sup>2</sup>.

Other works go to procure this glory directly; they are agreeable to God not only on account of the love of the one who accomplishes them but in themselves: *fine operis*: their direct end, like the elements that compose them, are supernatural: such are Holy Mass and the administration of the Sacraments. It is quite evident that in themselves, abstraction made of the interior dispositions of the one who performs them, these works surpass, from God's point of view, all other works.

The Divine Office belongs to this second group. Not only in our intention, but by reason of its nature, its composition, and the elements of which it is constituted, it relates entirely to God; of itself, *fine operis*, it has God in view. With the Holy Sacrifice, around which it gravitates, it forms the most complete expression of religion; it is by excellence "the work of God", *Opus Dei, Opus divinum*: that is the beautiful name by which our Holy Father calls it.

Doubtless, the Divine Office contains petitions, prayers of impetration, but this is not its dominant element; before all, the Divine Office is praise, and this praise is perfectly summed up in the doxology which ends each psalm: *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*. The direct aim of the Office is to confess and exalt the Divine perfections, to delight in them, and thank God for them: *Gratias agimus tibi, propter magnam gloriam tuam*<sup>3</sup>. It proceeds from this principle: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour": *Dignus es, Domine, Deus noster, gloriam accipere et honorem...* (Apoc. 4, 11). This is the cry of the elect in heaven: contemplating God's infinite perfections, they are necessarily lost in praise and adoration: *Magnus Dominus et laudabilis NIMIS* (Ps. 47, 1).

Now we, as religious, are seeking God; it was for this we came to the monastery; what is more natural therefore than to adopt the Divine Office as our principal work, by which we especially devote ourselves to God's service? How are we "to seek Him truly", *—si revera Deum quaerit*<sup>4</sup>, unless we occupy ourselves first of all with Him, with His perfections and His works? *Et laudabunt Dominum qui requirunt eum* (Ps. 21, 27). But in return, the more that we find Him, and that He reveals Himself to us, the more we feel the need of celebrating His perfections and works: *Quaerentes enim invenient eum, et invenientes laudabunt eum*<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, after having pointed out the purpose of our life, after having established the authority of the head of the monastery and defined the cenobitical life, after having shown how humility and obedience achieve the work of removing obstacles from the path of perfection, St. Benedict speaks to us of the Divine Office. He devotes numerous chapters to regulating it; he makes the Divine Office, not the end nor even the exclusive nor characteristic work of the monk, but the principal work to which the others, in the order of estimation and action, are to be

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<sup>2</sup> We are speaking, of course, of the *supernatural* order; it is evident that every upright act, morally good, gives of itself a certain glory to God, from the fact that it enters already into the natural order willed by Him.

<sup>3</sup> *Gloria* of the Mass.

<sup>4</sup> Rule, ch. LVIII.

<sup>5</sup> S. Augustin. *Confess.* l. 1, ch. 1. P. L. 32, col. 661.

subordinate: *Nihil Operi Dei praeponatur*<sup>6</sup>. He establishes a school of the Lord's service: *Dominici schola servitii*<sup>7</sup>, and the Divine Office constitutes, in this school the first "service of our devotion": *Devotionis servitium*<sup>8</sup>. Doubtless, as we have already said, St. Benedict does not exclude other works, and history as well as tradition for which we ought to have a humble respect, shows us that in the course of ages our Order has filled many missions in the varied domain of Christian civilisation; but it remains none the less true that the work which first of all claims our attention and energies is the Divine Praise. This same Divine Praise is also, apart from the Sacraments, the surest means for us monks of entering into contact with God. The Divine Office which gives so much glory to the Lord becomes for each of us an extremely fruitful source of sanctification. We will reserve this second point for the next conference; let us now endeavour to see how the *Opus Dei* constitutes an infinitely pleasing homage of praise to God.

To comprehend its excellence, we have to form a concept of its source, its nature, its elements and its end. We must, of course, come to this study with eyes of faith; faith alone can help us to penetrate into the truth. St. Paul says that only the Spirit of God is capable of searching into the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2, 10-11); while the natural spirit, not going below the surface of things, falls frequently into error.

Our love of the Divine Office depending moreover on the esteem we have for it, and on our faith in its value, it is supremely useful to us that this faith should be enlightened and this esteem well and solidly grounded.

## **I. ULTIMATE BASIS OF THE EXCELLENCE OF THE DIVINE OFFICE: THE CANTICLE OF THE WORD IN THE BOSOM OF THE DIVINITY AND IN CREATION**

It is in lifting up our minds by faith—a faith full of reverence—even to the heights of the Adorable Trinity, that we shall find the very fountainhead of praise. We have the right to seek our examples thus high, for by grace, we are no longer strangers but sons belonging, through Christ, to the family of God: *Non estis hospites et advenae, sed estis cives sanctorum et domestici Dei* (Eph. 2, 19).

What has Christ granted us to know of this ineffable life of God in Three Persons?

The Word, says St. Paul, is "the brightness of His (Father's) glory, and the figure of His substance" (Hebr. 1, 3). The Word, the Son, is essentially, the glory of His Father. From all eternity, this Son in a single infinite Word which is Himself, expresses, the Father's perfection, and this is the essential glory that the Father receives. The Eternal Word is a Divine canticle singing the Father's praise. *In princio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum* (Joan. 1, 1). From all eternity He gives, has given and will give, in this infinite and unique act which is Himself, eternal and adequate glory to His Father. This glory consists in the infinite knowledge that the Son has of His Father, of the perfections of His Father, and in the infinite appreciation that He utters concerning them: an appreciation equal to God, worthy of God; God has no need of any other glory.

The Word sees also in His Father the eternal decrees of His Wisdom and Bounty, all the merciful designs which are wrought in the creation, in the Redemption, in the institution of the

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<sup>6</sup> Rule, ch. XLIII: "let nothing be preferred to the Work of God".

<sup>7</sup> Prologue of the Rule: "A school of the Lord's service".

<sup>8</sup> Rule, ch. XVIII.

Eucharist, and realised daily in the sanctification of souls: *Quod factum est in ipso vita est* (Joan. 1, 3-4); He contemplates all these objects and glorifies His Father for them: *Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine! omnia in sapientia fecisti* (Ps. 103, 24).

This is the infinite hymn that ever resounds *in sinu Patris* (Joan. 1, 18) and ever ravishes the Father. The Word is the Canticle that God inwardly sings to Himself, the Canticle that rises up from the depths of the Divinity, the Living Canticle wherein God eternally delights, because it is the infinite expression of His perfection.

The mystery of the Divine Life which we have just searched into with all reverence, bears in itself the fundamental reason and value of the Divine Office.

“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”: *Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis* (Joan. 7, 14). But never let us forget this truth that we sing at Christmastide: *Id quod fuit permansit; quod non erat assumpsit*<sup>9</sup>. In taking a human nature, the Divine Word is not lessened; He remains what He is –the Eternal Word, and consequently He remains the infinite glorification of His Father. However, as He has united a human, nature to Himself, in the unity of His Divine Person, this Sacred Humanity enters, through the Word, into participation of the work of glorification. Christ’s Humanity is like the temple<sup>10</sup> where the Word sings the Divine canticle which glorifies the Father; or rather, the Sacred Humanity is carried along in the current of the Divine Life. Did not the Word Incarnate, Christ Jesus say: *Ego vivo propter Patrem* (Joan. 6, 58), “I live by the Father”. All His activity tends to procure His Father’s glory. This theandric activity remains that of a human nature; it glorifies God in a human fashion; but, as it emanates from a Divine “Person”, as it depends upon the Word, the praises it supplies, human in their expression, become the praises of the Word, and acquire on this account an infinite value.

When Christ prayed, when He recited the Psalms, when, as the Gospel says, He spent the night in prayer: *Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei* (Luc. 6, 12), these were the human accents of a God; of an absolute simplicity in eternity, the canticle of the Word was multiplied, detailed, upon the lips of His Manhood. Thus this same canticle which, from all eternity, the Word causes to resound in the sanctuary of the Godhead, was prolonged and sung upon earth when the Word became incarnate.

Henceforward it will be prolonged for ever in creation. For ever, Christ’s Humanity will therein sing, to the glory of the Father, a canticle of human expression but of incommensurable price and consequently alone worthy of God: this is the *Opus Christi*. On the last day of His life, Christ summed up all His work in saying to His Father: *Ego te clarificavi super terram* (Joan. 17, 4). His whole life was but a continual praise to His Father’s glory. This was His essential work; for Him, nothing came before the glorification of His Father.

Certainly, He glorified Him by all His actions, in spending Himself for souls, in giving Himself to them as no apostle has ever done, in going about doing good everywhere; but these were secondary forms of His praise. Above all, Christ, the Word Incarnate, praised His Father in exalting the Divine perfections in ineffable communings. Who shall tell us how Jesus worshipped the Father and how full this worship was of profound adoration! What incense of praise was that

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<sup>9</sup> Antiphon of Lauds for the Feast of the Circumcision.

<sup>10</sup> This image is evidently only an imperfect comparison, for the union of the Word with a human nature is not accidental like that of the temple and the adorer; it is a personal and substantial union.

which went up unceasingly from His blessed soul to God His Father! Jesus contemplates the Divine perfections in all their splendour and this is the source of ineffable praise. He rendered to His Father, in the name of the human race to which He authentically belongs, all the duties of adoration, praise and complacency which we owe to God. The perfect knowledge, the sublime comprehension that He had of the inspired canticles made His praise infinitely worthy of God.

Christ also contemplated the creation: in Him, the Divine Word, the creation was full of life: *In Ipso vita erat*. It was needful that the whole order of created things should be for once perfectly comprehended by a human soul; Christ Jesus exulted in looking upon the wonders of nature, as the Triune God in the days of creation contemplated the goodness and beauty of the work come forth from His hands: *Viditque Deus cuncta quae fecerat: et erant valde bona* (Gen. 1, 31). With what joy did Christ, seeing in creatures the reflection of the Father's perfections, constitute Himself their high Priest, in order to bring all things back to His Father! Hence was born in the soul of Jesus that perfect worship which it behoved Christ to offer as the supreme High Priest in Whom the Father finds all His delight<sup>11</sup>.

## II. THE WORD INCARNATE HAS BEQUEATHED TO THE CHURCH, HIS BRIDE, THE MISSION OF PERPETUATING HIS CANTICLE

But, as you know, Christ does not separate Himself from His Mystical Body. Before ascending into Heaven, He bequeaths His riches and mission to His Church. Christ, in uniting Himself to the Church, gives her His power of adoring and praising the Father; this is the *liturgy*. It is the praise of the Church united to Jesus, supported by Jesus; or rather it is the praise of Christ, the Incarnate Word, passing through the lips of the Church.

Seeing her, the Angels ask each other: "Who is this that cometh up from the desert flowing with delights leaning upon her Beloved?" (Cant. 8, 5). It is the Church, we reply, her beauty and charm come to her from the Bridegroom Himself, Whose arms uphold her; her voice is ever sweet and her face comely (Cant. 2, 14).

Dowered with the riches of Christ, the Church, His Bride, is introduced by Him into the palace of the King of Heaven, into the Father's presence, and there, united to Jesus Christ, she sings—as she will do until the end of ages—the canticle sung in *sinu Patris* by the Word, and brought by Him to earth.

The Apocalypse shows us the elect adoring "Him that sitteth on the throne", and exalting His ineffable perfections: *Dignus es, Domine Deus noster, accipere gloriam et honorem et virtutem* (Apoc. 4, 10-11; cf. 5, 12-13); that is the choir of the Church Glorious. Here below is formed the choir of the Church Militant, called also to take her place one day in the ranks of the blessed; but this choir is united, by faith and love, with that of Heaven, and resounds too before the throne of God; for the Church is *one* in Christ, her Divine Head. In Heaven, says St. Augustine, satisfied love sings the Alleluia in the plenitude of eternal enjoyment; here below, yearning love seeks to express the ardour of its desires; *Modo cantat amor esuriens tunc cantabit amor fruens*<sup>12</sup>. But it is the same choir in two parts, the choir of *one* Church, singing the unparalleled canticle of Divine glory animated, both here on earth and up in Heaven, by the same supreme High Priest, Christ Jesus.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mgr. Gay. *Elevation* 99. *Sing to the Lord a new song for He hath done wonderful things.*

<sup>12</sup> *Sermo* CCLV, 5. P. L. 38, 1183.

The office is the official voice of the Bride of Christ. The Church, by her faith, confidence and love and by her union with Jesus, bridges the space that separates her from God and sings His praise, like the Word Incarnate, in the bosom of the Divinity. She sings, united to Christ, under God's very gaze; because of her title of Bride, she always merits to be heard. The great work, the triumph of the Divinity of Jesus, is to raise us, poor mortals, even up to His Father. God has given to the Sacred Humanity of the Word the power of drawing us with It where this Humanity Itself is: *Ascendo ad Patrem Meum et Patrem vestrum, Deum meum et Deum vestrum* (Joan. 20, 17), "I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and your God". And again: *Pater, volo ut ubi ego sum, et illi sint mecum* (Joan. 17, 24): "Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me". After death, we shall be –we truly hope to be– in a real and immutable way, where the Saviour is; but even now we are there by faith. The Word dwells in us by faith: *Christum habitare per fidem in cordibus vestris* (Eph. 3, 17). We are especially united to the Word Incarnate when we join ourselves to Him in order to sing, through Him and with Him, the glory of His Father.

Such is the fundamental reason of the transcendence of the *Opus Dei*; such is the incommunicable and untransferable privilege attached to this prayer, the Work of God, accomplished with Christ, in His name, by the Church, His Bride.

### III. THE CHURCH CONFIDES A MORE IMPORTANT PART OF THIS MISSION TO SOME CHOSEN SOULS

The Church associates all her children in this praise. There is a part of the public worship which ordinary Christians themselves must perform if they are to be counted among the disciples of Jesus. However, the Church has not contented herself with this worship common to all. In the same way as she chooses some from among her children to associate more particularly and preferably with the eternal Priesthood of her Spouse, so she confides to some chosen ones a more important and special share in her mission of praise: this phalanx is formed of priests and religious orders invested with the functions of the choir. The Church, in her name and that of her Bridegroom, deposes them as her ambassadors before God's throne.

An ambassador does not present himself in his own private capacity, he stands in the place of his sovereign or of his country; these are involved when he speaks in virtue of his mission. Therefore he has a right to all the honours and privileges which would be given to his sovereign, and there is a juridical obligation that these should be granted to him. The reasons and arguments that he brings to bear in his diplomatic interviews have not only a private value resulting from the qualities and talents of the man, but they acquire a special weight, more or less powerful, according to the greatness of the country or the rank of the sovereign represented by him. This is not a simple fiction, but is a moral and juridical reality which defines the very role of the ambassador.

It is proportionately the same with those whom the Church, the Bride of Christ, deposes in her name to bold her place before God, that is to say the priests and religious obliged to the Divine Office in virtue of the rules approved by ecclesiastical authority. They stand before the Father as ambassadors appointed by the Church, whose homage they offer, and whose interests they represent. And as the Church is Christ's Bride, these ambassadors share in the privileges conferred upon the Church by her supernatural dignity, as the Spouse of Jesus. When we are in choir, we bear a twofold personality: our own individual personality, that of our misery, our frailty, our faults, but also that of members of Christ's Mystical Body deposed by the Church. In this second

capacity we have to guard the numerous and varied interests of Christendom. If we know how to use our power, we are sure, in spite of our imperfections, of being pleasing to God and heard by Him. For, when we are acquitting ourselves of our official functions, all our miseries are as it were veiled by the prestige with which the Bride of Christ invests us. The Father sees us, during these hours of the Divine Office, no longer as souls coming before Him with their private interests and personal merits, but as ambassadors of the Bride of His Well-Beloved Son, treating of the cause of souls with every right to do so; we are officially invested with the dignity and power of the Bride of Jesus, and with those of Jesus Himself. Moreover, Christ Himself is in the midst of us; He has formally promised to be so; He is the supreme Hierarchy Who receives our prayers and gathers up our praises to bear them to the throne of God: *Ad thronum gratiae* (Hebr. 4, 16). Therefore, in God's sight, this praise surpasses, in value and efficacy, all other praise, all other prayer, all other work<sup>13</sup>.

This truth is absolutely beyond doubt, and the saints, who lived in God's light, so understood it. St. Magdalen of Pazzi put assistance in choir before all the private devotions that pious persons can make; and when one of her nuns asked to be dispensed from choir in order to give herself up to mental prayer, she replied: "No, my daughter, I should certainly deceive you in giving you such a permission, for it would be making you believe that this private devotion would honour God more and render you more pleasing to the Divine Majesty, while in comparison with this public office which you sing with your sisters, private prayer is but a small thing"<sup>14</sup>. St. Alphonsus Liguori relates, while making this opinion his own, the saying of a wise religious: "If time is lacking to us, it is much better to shorten mental prayer, and give more time to the Divine Office that we may be enabled to recite it with the devotion due to it"<sup>15</sup>.

Such is the opinion of the saints, such is the language of faith. There is no work that comes anywhere near the Divine Office. All other works are *opera hominum*. This is truly "the Work of God" pre-eminently, because it is a work of praise that comes from God through the Word Incarnate and is offered by the Church, in Christ's Name.

#### IV. THE DIVINE OFFICE BECOMES, THROUGH THE HEART AND VOICE OF MAN, THE HYMN OF ALL CREATION

Another reason of the transcendency of the Divine Praise is that it directly tends to procure God's glory.

Doubtless, as we have said, God finds His essential glory in Himself independently of any creature: *Deus meus es tu, bonorum meorum non egēs* (Ps. 15, 2). But from the moment that there are creatures, "it is truly meet and just" that they should praise God, magnify His name and give thanks to Him; this is in the right order of things, it is justice; it is from this principle that the virtue of religion is born: *Vera dignum et justum est, aequum et salutare, nos tibi semper et ubique gratias agere*<sup>16</sup>.

Now, in creation, there are many beings who do not know God. They assuredly praise Him after their manner by the simple fact of their obedience to the laws that He ordained for them on their coming forth from nothingness *Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei et opera manuum ejus annuntiat*

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<sup>13</sup> Evidently supposing that the degree of love be the same, and setting apart the Sacraments.

<sup>14</sup> *Life* by P. Ceparì, S. J.

<sup>15</sup> *L'Office méprisé; OEuvres complètes*. Paris, 1836, t. XI, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Preface of the Mass.

*firmamentum* (Ps. 18, 2). However the heavens do not know their own canticle, any more than they know their Creator. Whence is the song of inanimate creation to take life? Upon our own lips, the lips of humanity. Hear what Bossuet so admirably says; the text is rather long but it renders the idea very clearly. “The inanimate creature cannot see, it is seen; it cannot love, it urges us to do so; and this God Whom it knows not, it does not allow us to ignore. Thus imperfectly and in its own manner it glorifies the Heavenly Father. But in order that it may consummate its adoration, man must be its mediator. He must lend a voice, an understanding, and a heart burning with love, to all visible nature that it may love, in man and through him, the invisible beauty of the Creator. This is why he is placed in the midst of the world, himself the world in brief... a great world in the little world, because although the world contains him, he has a mind and a heart greater than the world; in order that contemplating the whole universe and gathering it up in himself, he may offer, sanctify, and consecrate it to the Living God”<sup>17</sup>.

We acquit ourselves of this sublime role each day at the Divine Office. The Church wills that every creature should take life upon the lips of the priest or religious, so that every creature may praise its Lord: *Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino, laudate et superexaltate eum in saecula*<sup>18</sup>.

Upon our lips as in the Word, *in ipso vita erat*, all these creatures become animate that they may sing the Creator’s perfections. “Come”, we say to all these creatures, “come; you know not God, but you may know Him through the medium of my understanding, and sing to Him through my lips. Come, sun, moon, stars that He has sown in the firmament; come, cold and light, mountains and valleys, seas and rivers, plants and flowers, come and magnify Him Who created you. O my God I love Thee so much that I would have the whole earth adore and praise Thee”: *Omnis terra adoret Te et psallat Tibi!* (Ps. 65, 4). Through our lips, all the praise of creation rises up to God.

It rises up to Him because Christ, the Divine Word, makes His own this praise which we, guided by the Church, offer to Him. Man is the mediator of creation; but, says Bossuet again<sup>19</sup>, man himself needs a mediator and this Mediator is Christ the Word Incarnate. We lend our lips to Christ, so that, through Him, our praise may be accepted in the Bosom of the Father: *Per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso est tibi Deo Patri omnipotenti in unitate Spiritus sancti, OMNIS honor et gloria*<sup>20</sup>. All things are ours, and we are Christ’s, and Christ is His Father’s: *Omnia vestra sunt, vos autem Christi, Christus autem Dei* (1 Cor. 3, 22-23). “Rejoice, O human nature, thou lendest thy heart to the visible world that it may love its Almighty Creator, and Jesus Christ lends thee His own Heart wherewith thou mayest worthily love the One Who can only be worthily loved by another Himself”<sup>21</sup>.

Through the Divine Praise, we associate creation and ourselves, as intimately as possible, with the eternal praise that the Word gives to His Father. This participation in the eternal, thrice-holy canticle is realised above all in the doxology of the *Gloria*, repeated at the end of each psalm, and again in many other parts of the Office. As we bow down to give “glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost” we unite ourselves to that ineffable glory that the Holy Trinity finds in Itself from all eternity: *Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum*. It is like the echo of the infinite mutual complacency of the Divine Persons in the plenitude and bliss of their

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<sup>17</sup> *Sermon for the Feast of the Annunciation*, 1662, 3<sup>rd</sup> point. The great orator has taken up this idea again and developed it in his *Sermon on the worship due to God*, April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1666.

<sup>18</sup> Canticle for Sunday Lauds; Dan. 3, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Continuation of passage quoted.

<sup>20</sup> Canon of the Mass.

<sup>21</sup> Bossuet, *ibid.*



adorable fellowship.

What work equals this in greatness? What work is more pleasing to God? None; let us be deeply convinced of this. The *Opus Dei* is what is most precious in the inheritance of our Order: *Funes ceciderunt mihi in praeclaris, etenim hereditas mea praeclara est mihi* (Ps. 15, 6). There are no other hours when we can do more for God's glory than those we spend in choir, in union with the Divine Word praising His Father; *pernoctans in oratione Dei* (Luc. 6, 12). There is no work more pleasing to the Father than that whereby we join, in order to glorify Him, in the canticle sung *in sinu Patris* by "the Son of His love" (Col. 1, 13). There is no work that better pleases the Son than this which we borrow from Him and that is like the extension of His very essence as the Word, the splendour of infinite glory. Neither is there any work that glorifies the Spirit more: for by the formulas that He has Himself inspired, we express our love under its most delicate forms, admiration continually renewed, and unending complacency. *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*.

When this work is performed with all the faith, all the heartfelt confidence and all the love whereof our soul is capable, it surpasses every other work, and therefore our great Patriarch "filled with the spirit of all the just"<sup>22</sup>, wishes nothing to rank before this work: *Nihil Operi Dei praeponatur*<sup>23</sup>; without being exclusive, it comes before everything with us. Although we are not Canons Regular, we cannot put this work in the second place, because it concerns God directly and we came to the monastery especially to seek God. Ardent love of the Divine Praise is one of the most indubitable signs that we "are truly seeking God" *Si revera Deum quaerit... si sollicitus est ad opus Dei*<sup>24</sup>.

## V. IT FORMS A PARTICULAR HOMAGE OF THE VIRTUES OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

What further renders the Divine Praise extremely pleasing to God is that it constitutes a homage of those virtues of faith, hope and love which are the specific virtues of our state as children of God.

Everything here –let us repeat it– is to be judged from the point of view of faith. To gather together several hours day by day to praise God is a homage of our faith; we thereby confess and proclaim that this Unseen God is alone worthy of adoration and praise. The acts of reverence, thanksgiving and complacency that we accomplish in the course of this work consecrated solely to extolling God, are, above all, acts of faith. Faith alone gives its meaning to the Divine Office. Those whose faith is null, pity men who pass a part of their life in chanting God's praises; they do not comprehend how people can, at certain hours, occupy themselves solely with the Infinite Being: *Ut quid perditio haec* (Matth. 26, 8). Where faith is weak, the Divine Office is undervalued and other works are preferred before it. Souls which, like that of our Blessed, Patriarch are bathed in "the deifying light"<sup>25</sup> of faith, give the first place to Divine Praise; they do so at least in their estimation, even if, in consequence of their state in life, they cannot devote themselves to it. Divine Praise becomes uninterrupted when the eternal light of vision succeeds the obscure light of faith: *Sine fine laudant*.

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<sup>22</sup> S. Greg. *Dialog*. Lib. II, c. VIII.

<sup>23</sup> Rule, ch. XLIII.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* ch. LVIII.

<sup>25</sup> Prologue of the Rule.

In the second place, our praise is a homage of hope. During the divine psalmody we rest upon the infinite merits of Christ Jesus. We hope for everything from the satisfactions of our Divine High Priest. In fact no prayer of the Office terminates without explicitly seeking its support in Our Lord: *Per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum*. We make our claim through this All-Powerful Mediator Who “lives and reigns for ever with the Father”, and pleads with Him unceasingly in order to render Him propitious to us: *Semper vivens ad interpellandum pro nobis* (Hebr. 7, 25).

In leaving everything in order to hasten to the choir, it is like saying to God: “There is nothing of which I am more certain than of Thy goodness; I come to praise and bless Thee, leaving in Thy hands the care of all the rest. I have nothing more at heart than to praise Thee, being persuaded that if I leave every other work for this, Thou wilt know how to take better care than I could do of my dearest interests; I want only to think of Thee, knowing that Thou wilt think of me”. To go to the choir every day, and several times a day, in this disposition of soul; to put in practice the “one thing necessary”, *Unum est necessarium* (Luc. 10, 42), to lay aside all our cares, all that regards our personal work, so as to occupy ourselves during several hours with Him alone, what an evident proof of our absolute confidence in Him!

Finally, our praise contains above all a homage of love. In it every form of love finds expression, especially in the Psalms which form the most considerable element of the Divine Office. Admiration, complacency, delight, the love of benevolence, contrite love, grateful love, all these affections find a place in an almost uninterrupted manner. Love confesses, admires, exalts the Divine perfections. Complacency whereby we rejoice in the joy and beatitude of the person beloved is one of the purest and most perfect forms of love. When we truly love, we find no sweeter joy than in praising and glorifying. St. Francis of Assisi composing his “Canticle”, St. Teresa writing her “Exclamations”, such is the soul overflowing with love, and seeking to express it. Such is also the love that transported the Psalmist. With the sacred writer, the soul passes in review all the Divine perfections in order to exalt them: *Exaltare Domine, tu virtute tua, cantabimus et psallemus virtutes tuas...* (Ps. 20, 14) *Narrabo omnia mirabilia tua* (Ps. 9, 2). “Exalt ye the Lord our God, and adore His footstool, for it is holy”: *Exaltate Dominum Deum nostrum... quoniam Sanctus Dominus Deus noster* (Ps. 108, 5, 9). “Justice shall walk before Him (Ps. 84, 14); the searcher of hearts and reins is God” (Ps. 7, 10). “The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever” (Ps. 88, 1). “O Lord God of hosts, who is like to Thee? Thou art mighty O Lord, and Thy truth is round about Thee” (Ps. 88, 9). “How great are Thy works, O Lord? Thou hast made all things in wisdom”: *Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine, omnia in sapientia fecisti* (Ps. 103, 24). Then the soul turns to God to express its grateful love: “I will sing to the Lord Who giveth me good things *Cantabo Domino qui bona tribuit mihi* (Ps. 12, 6). “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all He hath done for thee. Who forgiveth all thy iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction: Who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion, Who satisfieth thy desire with good things”. Then feeling incapable of glorifying God as He should be glorified, the soul invites the Angels to unite in praising Him: *Benedicite Domino omnes Angeli ejus, benedicite omnes virtutes ejus* (Ps. 102, 1-5, 20-21). At other times, together with the sacred singer, the soul convokes peoples and nations to join in this praise: *Regna terrae cantate Deo* (Ps. 67, 33), for, “from the rising of the sun until the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise (Ps. 112, 3), admirable... in the whole earth” (Ps. 8, 1). Yet again, the soul pours out its joy and gladness before God in being admitted to praise Him:

*Exsultabunt labia mea cum cantavero tibi...* (Ps. 70, 23) *et labiis exsultationis laudabit os meum* (Ps. 62, 6). This joy is so deep and overflowing that the soul asks God for power to praise Him unceasingly: *Repleatur os meum laude ut cantem gloriam tuam...* (Ps. 70, 8) *Psallam Deo meo quamdiu fuero* (Ps. 144, 2).

Where could love find accents as burning and ever new as these? At every instant in the psalms this love is manifested and diffused. A truly extraordinary condescension of Divine Goodness has more than once shown to what an extent these praises are agreeable to God. We see Our Lord deigning with infinite kindness to teach ignorant souls the Latin tongue, so that having this knowledge they may be able to penetrate into the meaning of the sacred texts.

A like trait is met with in the life of a certain Benedictine nun, the Blessed Bonomo. “Often, during her ecstasies”, says a biographer, “she was heard reciting the Divine Office; but a curious thing was that she pronounced the verses alternatively, as if the inhabitants of Heaven were repeating the psalms with her; she recited the whole without omitting a single syllable, whatever was the Office of the day”<sup>26</sup>.

Then, do not let us forget that in the Divine Office the soul exalts these perfections as is befitting, in a manner truly worthy of God, a manner which He has Himself ordained. Left to ourselves, we could not render due homage to each Divine attribute; God alone can tell us how we can and ought to praise Him; God alone knows how worthy He is of being magnified, blessed, glorified; and it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, Who places upon our lips the very formulas we are to use in singing to God. These praises, in their origin, are not of earth, they come to us from Heaven, from the innermost depths of the Godhead and of Love. And when we appropriate them to ourselves with faith, above all when we recite or sing them in union with the Divine Word, our canticle becomes infinitely pleasing to God, because it is presented to Him by the Word in person.

St. Gertrude had the revelation of this truth in one of her visions. As Vespers were being intoned on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, Christ, holding His Heart in His hands like a melodious lyre, presented it to the glorious Trinity. Upon this lyre the fervour of souls and all the words of the sacred canticles resounded before the Lord in a hymn of heavenly delight<sup>27</sup>.

## **VI. THIS HOMAGE IS INVESTED WITH A SPECIAL SPLENDOR WHEN IT IS OFFERED IN SUFFERING: *SACRIFICIUM LAUDIS***

One circumstance often occurs in our monastic life to enhance further this homage of love: it is when we have to offer it to the Lord in suffering.

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<sup>26</sup> Dom du Bourg. *Um extatique du XVII<sup>e</sup>, siècle, la Bse. Bonomo, moniale bénédictine*, p. 11 and 52. We likewise see St. Catherine of Siena asking Our Lord to teach her to read in order to be able to chant the Psalms and praises of God during the Canonical Hours. Often, too, Our Lord walked up and down with her in her cell and recited the Office with the Saint. It was as two religious might have done. *Life*, Bl. Raymund of Capua.

<sup>27</sup> *The Herald of Divine Love*. Bk. IV, ch. 41. St. Gertrude often expresses this idea. See *Ibid.* Bk. II, ch. 23; Bk. III, ch. 25; Bk. IV, ch. 48 and 51; cf. Dolan, *St. Gertrude the Great*. Ch. II. *The Divine Office*.

Suffering gives to love a special splendour and a singular value; to love God in suffering is truly the height of self-oblation; our Divine Saviour loved His Father with immense love at each instant of His life, but this love shone out in an incomparable way during His Passion, when Christ endured His unutterable sufferings for love of His Father: *Ut cognoscat mundus quia diligo Patrem* (Joan. 14, 31).

The Divine Office can become, and even frequently does become for certain souls, a veritable sacrifice. In this case the expression *Sacrificium laudis* (Ps. 49, 23) truly takes on a special fullness of meaning. This can happen in various ways; to begin with we must not spare ourselves; we must give all the energy we have. To use our voice unsparingly, to submit to the manifold and varied details of the ceremonial, willingly to accept and follow the indications of the cantor, even when our opinion differs from his on such and such a point of musical interpretation: all this requires continual attention. We must keep our imagination from wandering, and this requires generosity. Frequently renewed efforts are needed to overcome our natural apathy or levity; these are so many sacrifices pleasing to God.

Next come the sufferings that the common life necessarily entails. Certainly common life is a stimulus; the fact of being together in our stalls excites fervour, but it allows also of a number of inevitable small sacrifices, often repeated: *Sumus homines fragiles... qui faciunt invicem angustias*<sup>28</sup>. The possibility of tiny annoyances jarring upon us is inherent to our poor human nature; this is true even of prayer in common. A ceremony awkwardly performed, false movements of the choir, a melody badly rendered, discord in the rhythm with those around us, all this can set our nerves on edge, especially when, in addition, fatigue or an ailing state of health weighs upon the body and superexcites the sensibility. When we have to hymn God's glory under these conditions there is room for a real sacrifice, a veritable immolation. In Heaven, when we possess God, we shall praise Him in the eternal harmony of overflowing gladness; here below, in the valley of tears, it may happen that we have to praise Him in suffering; but our sufferings add a new degree of love to our praise, and prove the sincerity of our seeking after God<sup>29</sup>. Jesus sang the praises of His Father not only upon Thabor, but on the Cross. St. Augustine says explicitly<sup>30</sup> that upon Golgotha Our Lord recited the Psalm that begins with these words: *Deus, Deus meus respice in me quare me dereliquisti* (Ps. 21). This striking Messianic psalm expressed not only the circumstances of the Passion, but also the affections of Our Blessed Saviour's soul. In the darkness of Calvary, in the midst of indescribable tortures, Christ Jesus recited "the Office", and, at that moment, because He was suffering, he gave, much more than when on Thabor, infinite glory to His Father.

We too, following His example, must praise God, not only when the Holy Spirit replenishes us with His consolations, but likewise when we suffer. Loving souls follow Jesus everywhere, as well and even more willingly to Golgotha as to the Mount of the Transfiguration. Who remained at the foot of the Cross with Jesus? His Virgin-Mother who loved Him with a love into which not the least self-seeking entered; Magdalen whom Jesus had forgiven much because she loved much; St. John who possessed the secrets of the Divine Heart. These three stayed there near to Jesus; they remained "in heir stalls" when the soul of Christ, the supreme High Priest, sang its sorrowful canticle for the world's salvation. The other Apostles, Peter himself, who had so loudly

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<sup>28</sup> S. Augustin. Sermo LXIX, c. I. P. L. 38, 440.

<sup>29</sup> *Laudemus et modo Dominum, quantum possumus, mixtis gemitibus; quia laudando eum desideramus eum, et nondum tenemus: cum tenuerimus, subtrahetur omnis gemitus, et remanebit sola et pura et aeterna laudatio*, S. Augustin. *Enarr. Psalm. LXXXVI*, c. g. P. L. 37, 1109.

<sup>30</sup> S. Augustin. *Enarr. in Psalm LXXXV*. c. I.

protested his love, would willingly have remained on Thabor, where it was good to be: *Bonum est nos hic esse: faciamus hic tria tabernacula* (Matth. 17, 4), but not at the foot of the Cross.

Christ Jesus Who loves us, Who has chosen us in preference to so many others to associate us in His work of praise, allows us sometimes to feel, by the sufferings that prayer in common brings with it, by the desolations and aridities, to which it may subject us, what it is to chant the Office with Him on Calvary. If really you seek God solely, that is to say His Holy Will, and not His consolations, prove it by continuing even then, and even especially at such moments, to sing *ex TOTO corde vestro*; do not run away, stay with Christ as long as He will have it so, near the Cross. The Cross is raised, as a reminder, upon the altar that the choir surrounds. Let us then repeat with the Psalmist: *Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore, semper laus ejus in ore meo* (Ps. 33, 2). “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be always in my mouth”. Whether He fills my soul with the sweetness of His Spirit of Love, or leaves it like a desert land where there is no water (Ps. 62, 3), I will ever praise Him with all the energy of my heart, because He is my God, my Lord and my King, and is worthy of all praise: *Exaltabo te, Deus meus Rex et benedicam nomini tuo* (Ps. 144, 1), *confitebor Domine Deus meus in toto corde meo, et glorificabo nomen tuum in aeternum* (Ps. 85, 12).

Recited in these dispositions, the Divine Office becomes the *sacrificium laudis* pre-eminently, the most agreeable sacrifice to God, because, united to Christ’s Sacrifice, it constitutes the most perfect homage that the creature can offer Him: *Sacrificium laudis honorificabit me*. Moreover, God not allowing Himself to be out-done in generosity, the same sacrifice of praise becomes for the one who accomplishes it the way of salvation and beatitude: *Et illic iter quo ostendam illi salutare Dei* (Ps. 49, 23).

#### XIV. – THE *OPUS DEI*, Means of Union with God

SUMMARY. – Divine praise, the *Opus Dei*, is likewise a means of union with God and of sanctification. – I. It furnishes excellent forms of prayer and impetration. – II. It provides opportunities of practising the virtues well. – III. It constitutes the best manner of being made one with Christ. – IV. Dispositions in which the Divine Office ought to be accomplished: immediate preparation; intentions to be formulated. – V. Attitude of the soul during the Divine Office: to pray worthily, with attention, and devotion. – VI. Final exhortation.

##### DIVINE PRAISE, THE *OPUS DEI*, IS LIKEWISE A MEANS OF UNION WITH GOD AND OF SANCTIFICATION

If the *Opus Dei* were presented exclusively as a homage rendered to the Divine perfections in union with Christ Jesus, it would already, and on this ground, eminently merit all our fervour. In the last conference we tried to show what a lofty work the Divine praise constitutes; it is the *Opus Dei* by excellence, the voice of the Church addressing herself officially to the Father, being entitled, as Christ's Bride, to offer Him her adorations; it is the homage of a soul wherein faith is active, hope assured and love ardent. It is for these reasons that liturgical prayer is so pleasing to God: *Laudabo nomen Dei cum cantico, et placebit Deo super vitulum novellum* (Ps. 67, 31-32).

Worship is also a conversation, an exchange; man, being full of needs, asks at the same time that he adores; and God gives more than He receives. This is why the *Opus Dei* is an abundant source of precious graces for the soul. After having said in the Psalm, that the sacrifice of praise is pleasing to Him, God, Who is magnificence itself and ever bestows the hundredfold, adds that this sacrifice becomes for him who offers it, a way of salvation: *Et illic iter quo ostendam illi salutare Dei* (Ps. 49, 23). It is impossible indeed for a soul to come near to God, to come before Him in the name of His Son Jesus, and, finding strength in the infinite merits of this supreme High Priest, to offer unceasing homage to God, without the Father delighting in this soul and pouring special graces upon it. When He sees in us "the Son of His love" (Col. 1, 13), –and He sees Him during the Divine Office celebrated in the aforesaid dispositions– the Father from Whom comes down "every perfect gift" (Jac. 1, 17), cannot but enrich us with heavenly favours. In one of her collects Christ's Bride herself logically links together these two aspects of the Divine Office: "Grant, O Lord, to the people consecrated to Thee to find the *source of increase* in the affections of pious devotion, that, being taught by the sacred rites, they may be *filled with favours so much the more precious*, according as they become more pleasing to Thy Divine Majesty"<sup>31</sup>. God, being moreover the first Author of our sanctification, the daily and repeated contact that we have with Him in the Divine Praise veritably constitutes for us an inexhaustible principle of union and holiness.

This principle is true for every soul, even for those of simple Christians; the faithful who, although in a more restricted manner, take part in Divine worship with faith and devotion, imbibe the Christian spirit as from its fount. This is what Pius X, of holy memory has so explicitly said:

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<sup>31</sup> *Proficiat, qaeasumus, Domine, plebs tibi dicata piae devotionis affectu ut sacris actionibus erudita, QUANTO MAJESTATI TUAE FIT GRATIOR, TANTO DONIS POTIORIBUS AUGEUR. Saturday in Passion Week.*

“The active participation of the faithful in the sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church is the first and indispensable source whence is drawn the true Christian spirit”<sup>32</sup>.

But is it not manifest that this truth is to be applied still more appropriately to those who, like us, have the happiness of the monastic vocation? Besides the means of sanctification that are common to all the members of Christ’s Mystical Body, such as the Sacraments, there exists, so to speak, in each Order, a special means corresponding to its institution and to which souls belonging to this Order ought preferably to be attached, so as to arrive at perfection. Upon Christian predestination, God has engrafted for us the Benedictine predestination; we must not think indeed that God has left our monastic vocation to chance; every religious vocation, constituting a signal grace, is the fruit of the infinite and privileged love which Christ Jesus bears to a soul: *Intuitus eum dilexit eum* (Marc. 10, 21); and it is only by an act of His sovereign and Divine will that the Word gives us this immense grace. We definitely responded to this call on the day of our profession; but do not let us lose sight of the fact that we have made profession *secundum Regulam S. P. N. Benedicti*<sup>33</sup>. The particular character like the singular splendour of the holiness that God expects of us, should be derived from the monastic code of our great Patriarch. It is not in following the Rule of St. Augustine or the institutions of the Carthusians, however great and lofty they be, that we shall arrive at the perfection that Christ demands of us. To a particular vocation, a special perfection; or rather a special form of holiness, ought to respond.

Now our Holy Father ordains that among all the positive<sup>34</sup> works of piety that his monks are to perform, none is to take precedence of the Divine Office: *Nihil Operi Dei praeponatur*<sup>35</sup>. Doubtless, it is right to repeat that this work is not in our case exclusive of the others; but being the one which, in the Rule of St. Benedict, is given the first place, it becomes by that fact, for us monks, a very sure and authentic means of attaining that form of perfection which God willed for us when He called us to the cloister. Thus if it is averred that we are pleasing to God in the measure that we give our-selves up to this work, it will not be less truly averred that the Divine Praise constitutes one of the most infallible means of realising in ourselves the eternal and special idea that God has of our perfection.

Let us then explain how the Divine Office is a means of union with God and of sanctification; it will next remain for us to point out the requisite conditions in order that this means may produce all its fruits in our souls.

## I. IT FURNISHES EXCELLENT FORMS OF PRAYER AND IMPETRATION

One of the most important truths of the spiritual life is incontestably the necessity of prayer for obtaining the Divine help: “Ask”, said Our Lord, “and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Matth. 7, 7). Our needs are immense, and without Christ’s grace we can do nothing. How are we to obtain Christ’s help? By prayer: *Petite et accipietis* (Joan. 16, 24); *omnis enim qui petit, accipit* (Luc. 11, 10). Now, the Divine Office contains wonderful supplications as pressing as they are varied. Undoubtedly, as we have seen, it is first and

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<sup>32</sup> *Motu proprio* of Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup> 1903.

<sup>33</sup> Ceremonial of Monastic *Profession*.

<sup>34</sup> “Positive” in opposition to works of a rather “negative” character, such as the exercise of the virtues of poverty, humility, etc., which serve above all to remove obstacles.

<sup>35</sup> Rule, ch. XLIII.

before all a Divine Praise, the cry of the soul that, full of faith and love, admires and magnifies God's perfections: *Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis* (Ps. 47, 2). We do not come to the choir primarily to beg; no, we come to praise God, to glorify Him, to think upon His glory, to lend material creation our lips with which to sing, and our heart with which to love God: The first and direct end of the Divine Office is the glory of the Creator *Domine, Dominus noster, quam admirabile est nomen tuum in universa terra!* (Ps. 8, 2). The dominant idea of the *Opus Dei* is drawn from these words of the Psalmist, as it is summed up in the ever recurring doxology of the *Gloria*.

But the Divine Office contains, however, numberless forms of prayer and supplication. The psalms, for example, express not only admiration, joy, exultation of soul in presence of God's admirable perfections; all the needs of the soul are also found therein set forth as it were in God's sight. We can, with the Psalmist, beseech forgiveness of our sins: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin... Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities... Cast me not away from Thy face; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me (Ps. 1, 3-4, 11-13). The sins of my mouth and my ignorances do not remember: *Delicta juventutis meae et ignorantias meas ne memineris* (Ps. 24, 7); *ab occultis meis munda me, et ab alienis parce servo tuo* (Ps. 18, 13-14). Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord... if Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord who shall stand. Hope, therefore, O my soul, hope in Thy Lord, for His Redemption is abundant, and He shall redeem thee from all thy iniquities: *Et copiosa apud eum redemptio* (Ps. 129, 1, 3, 5-8). Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. To my hearing Thou shalt give joy and gladness: and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice... Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit... O Lord, Thou wilt open my lips: and my mouth shall declare Thy praise" (Ps. 1, 9-10, 14, 17).

When the soul is in trouble, in distress, when beset by temptation, when sadness overpowers it; when discouragement takes possession of it, it has but to open the inspired Book: "O God come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me (Ps. 69, 2). Why, O Lord, are they multiplied that afflict me? many are they who rise up against me. Many say to my soul: There is no salvation for him in his God. But Thou, O Lord, art my protector, my glory, and the lifter up of my head... Arise, O Lord, save me" (Ps. 3, 2-4, 7). Why art thou sad, O my soul? and why dost thou disquiet me? Hope in God, for I will still give praise to Him: the salvation of my countenance and my God (Ps. 52, 5). And let all them be glad that hope in Thee... O Lord, Thou hast crowned us, as with a shield of Thy good will": *Et laetentur omnes qui sperant in te... Scuto bonae voluntatis tuae coronasti nos* (Ps. 5, 12-13). "In the Lord I put my trust, how then do you say to my soul: Get thee away from hence to the mountain? (Ps. 10, 2) Hear, O Lord, the voice of my supplication, when I pray to Thee; when I lift up my hands to Thy holy temple... Save, O Lord, Thy people, and bless Thy inheritance: and rule them and exalt them for ever" (Ps. 27, 2, 9).

Does the soul need light? strength? courage? Words wherewith to invoke God flow endlessly to our lips; "My soul is as earth without water unto Thee (Ps. 142, 6). Send forth Thy light and Thy truth, they have conducted me, and brought me unto Thy holy hill, and into Thy tabernacles. And I will go to the altar of God: to God Who giveth joy to my youth. To Thee, O God my God I will give praise upon the harp": *Confitebor tibi in cithara Deus, Deus meus* (Ps. 42, 3-4).

Then, above all, the holy longings of the soul to attain one day to God rise ardently from the sacred poesy, the expression of its thirst for the divine meeting: "For what have I in Heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?... Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever": *Quid mihi est in caelo et, a te, quid volui super terram?...* (Ps. 43, 25-26). "As the



hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after Thee... when shall I come and appear before the face of God? (Ps. 41, 2-3) I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear”: *Satiabor cum apparuerit gloria tua!* (Ps. 16, 15). Thus, the soul’s most intense desires, its deepest aspirations, its most pressing and extensive needs find wonderful forms of expression furnished by the Holy Spirit. And each soul can appropriate to itself these forms as if they had been made for itself alone.

To the inspired texts are to be added the “Collects”, the prayers composed by the Church herself, where are daily gathered up the supplications that the Bride of Jesus offers in her children’s name, in union with her Divine Spouse. They are ordinarily very concise, but contain, in their brevity, the true pith of doctrine. As you know their structure is almost always the same: the Church addresses her homage to the power and goodness of the Eternal Father, then a petition in correlation with the Feast of the day, the whole under a condensed, but often profound form; finally, the invoking of the infinite merits of Christ Jesus, the Beloved Son, equal to His Father, Who lives and reigns with Him and the Spirit, in the heavens: *Per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum Filium tuum, qui tecum vivum et regnat...*

How should a like prayer fail to be powerful with God? How could God refuse His grace to whomsoever beseeches Him according to the words He Himself has inspired?<sup>36</sup> God loves all that comes from Himself or from His Son, and so this prayer which we address to Him in the name of His Son is most pleasing to Him, and efficacious for us: *Pater ego sciebam quia semper me audis* (Joan., 11, 42).

On this head, the Divine Office possesses great power of sanctification. I am certain that a monk who gives himself up to it with devotion cannot fail to obtain from it an abundance of divine help for every circumstance of his life. This is so much the more true in that the devout recitation of the Office familiarises us with these holy forms of prayer: spontaneously then, in the course of the day, these arise again from his soul under the form of “ejaculatory” prayers, short but ardent aspirations, whereby the soul is lifted up to God to remain united to Him. St. Catherine of Siena had a special devotion to the *Deus, in adjutorium meum intende*; she often repeated it during the day<sup>37</sup>. So many verses of the Psalms, after having served us in choir can thus become, outside the Divine Office, bonds of union between God and ourselves, uprisings from the heart to beseech His help or to tell Him that it is our will never to turn away from Him: “It is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God (Ps. 72, 28). Preserve me, O Lord, for I have put my trust in Thee. I have said to the Lord, Thou art my God (Ps. 15, 1-2). When my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me (Ps. 70, 9). My soul hath coveted to long for Thy justifications, at all times ... I have stuck to Thy testimonies, O Lord: put me not to shame (Ps. 118, 20, 31)”.

Each soul can thus choose from among so many formulas those which most aptly express its innermost aspirations, those which best help it to remain united to Our Lord. Often it has no need to seek them. When the Divine Office is recited with fervour, it is the Holy Spirit Who throws His Divine light upon some text of the Psalms or of the Liturgy; this text then particularly

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<sup>36</sup> We evidently do not give the word “inspired” the same sense when it concerns the elements, of diverse origin, of the Divine Office.

<sup>37</sup> *Life* by Drane. 1<sup>st</sup> part., ch. v. – 4.

strikes the soul, and by this vivid, penetrating and effectual action of the Spirit of Jesus, it hereafter becomes a principle of light and joy, and like a wellspring of living water where the soul may constantly allay its thirst, renew its strength, and find the secret of patience and inward gladness: *Psalterium meum, gaudium meum*<sup>38</sup>.

## II. IT PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES OF PRACTISING THE VIRTUES WELL

It is not only in itself and directly that the Divine Office is a means of sanctification; it also gives us the occasion of practising many virtues several times a day. Now this practice, according to the Council of Trent<sup>39</sup>, is a source of union with God and of progress in perfection.

When a soul is in God's friendship, each act of virtue it makes increases grace in it, and this is above all true of charity which is the queen of every virtue. Now, the Divine Office recited with fervour, is a continual exercise of the most varied virtues. We saw, in the last conference, the frequency with which acts of faith, hope, and charity occur in the course of the Divine Office; charity especially shines out in it; it finds the purest and most perfect expression in the *Opus Dei*, namely, complacency in God; and this complacency is manifested at almost each moment in accents of admiration and joy<sup>40</sup>. When, for example, we have recited Matins and Lauds with devotion, we have made numerous acts of perfect love.

To the theological virtues, which are the specific virtues of our state of children of God, must be joined the virtue of religion. Religion has no purer manifestation than the Divine Office gravitating around the Eucharistic Sacrifice which is its crown. The Divine Praise encompassing the altar, where the holy oblation is offered, is the purest expression of the virtue of religion; it is also the most pleasing to God, because this expression is determined by the Holy Spirit and by the Church, Christ's Bride; worship finds its plenitude in the Divine Office<sup>41</sup>.

It is in the Divine Office too that we learn reverence towards God; the Liturgy is the best school of respect; all within it is regulated by the Church herself in view of magnifying God's Sovereign Majesty. When the soul performs all the ceremonies, even the smallest, carefully and lovingly, it is gradually formed to that inward reverence which is, as we have said, the very root of humility. It is impossible for a monk to be devoutly assiduous at the "Work of God" without gaining in a short time a great knowledge of the divine perfections, and without that respect and reverence springing up in his soul from this contemplation.

We have likewise seen how the Divine Office is moreover a school where, on account of the common life, may be exercised the virtue of patience and self-forgetfulness.

Thus the virtues most necessary to our state as children of God, faith and confidence,

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<sup>38</sup> S. Augustin. *Enarrat. in Psalm. 137*, n. 3, P. L. 37, col. 1775.

<sup>39</sup> Sess. VI, c. 10-11.

<sup>40</sup> "It is a great mistake to imagine that a sacrifice is only valuable and agreeable to God if it is sad and mortifying to nature. The Holy Bible gives testimony that God receives flowers and fruits as well as blood and joy as well as tears. There are certainly many tears in the sacrifice of praise which is named the Psalter, but how joy overflows in it and how often one is made aware of a jubilant and ravished soul!" Mgr. Gay. *Entretiens sur les mysteres du Rosaire*, I. pp. 80-81.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Lottin, *L'âme du culte, la vertu de religion*.

humility, love, and religion, find each day not only the means of being exercised, but of being maintained, and strengthened; the Divine Office hence becomes an abundant source of holiness.

### III. IT CONSTITUTES THE BEST MANNER OF BEING MADE ONE WITH CHRIST

The sanctifying power of the Divine Office however goes further than this. Not content with being the best form of impetration for our spiritual necessities and giving us the opportunity of daily practising lofty virtues, this praise constitutes for us the best way of being made one with Christ<sup>42</sup>. We must never forget this capital truth of the spiritual life: all is summed up, for the monk as for the simple Christian, in being united, in faith and love to Christ Jesus in order to imitate Him. Christ being the very “form” (Cf. Rom. 7, 29) of our predestination, is at the same time the ideal of all holiness for us. He is the centre of monasticism as of Christianity: to contemplate Christ, to imitate Him, to unite our will to His will in order to please His Father, that is the sum total of all perfection. The Father has placed all things in His beloved Son; we find in Him all the treasures of redemption, justification, wisdom, heavenly knowledge, sanctification; for us everything lies in contemplating Him and drawing near to Him. For the thought of Jesus, the looking upon Jesus, are not only holy, but sanctifying.

And nowhere can we better contemplate Our Lord in His Person and in His mysteries, than in following the liturgical cycle established by the Church, His Bride, she herself guided in this by the Holy Spirit. From Advent to Pentecost, the liturgy is Christocentric; in it all leads back to Christ, all converges towards Him; it is a representation, but a living representation of His mysteries: His Incarnation, His most sweet Nativity, His hidden life, His public life, His sorrowful Passion, the triumph of His Resurrection, His admirable Ascension; the Mission of the Holy Spirit. The Church leads us by the hand in Jesus’ footsteps; we have only to listen, only to open the eyes of faith: we are following Jesus.

The mysteries of Jesus thus contemplated with faith and love, give rise within us to the affections that we should have felt had we been present at the Birth of Jesus, had we followed Him to Egypt, been with Him at Nazareth, in His discourses, in the Garden of Gethsemani, upon the Way of Sorrows, and at Calvary; as we should have felt if we had been present at His Resurrection, and Ascension<sup>43</sup>. This is what was said by a holy Benedictine, Mother Deleloè: “At Christmastide, during all those solemnities of our Saviour’s Birth, I received great favours; His Majesty often gave me a vivid light so that I knew these divine mysteries *as if they were then really taking place*”<sup>44</sup>.

Indeed, although Christ is no longer upon earth, although the historical reality of His mysteries has gone by, He ever remains our Head and the virtue of His actions and of His life is ever fruitful: *Jesus Christus heri et hodie: ipse et in saecula* (Hebr. 13, 8). It is as the Head of the human race, and for the human race, that He has lived these mysteries: therefore, simply by contemplating them with faith, the soul is moulded little by little upon Christ, its Ideal, and is gradually transformed into Him, by entering into the sentiments felt by His Divine Heart when He lived each of His mysteries. Jesus lives the reality of His mysteries in us, and when we have faith, and rest

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<sup>42</sup> See a remarkable commentary on this thought in D. Festugière. *La liturgie catholique, essai de synthèse*. ch. XIII. *La Liturgie comme source et cause de vie religieuse*, pp. 111, sq.

<sup>43</sup> See the development of this idea in our work: *Christ in His Mysteries*, 1<sup>st</sup> Conference: *Christ’s Mysteries are our mysteries*.

<sup>44</sup> *La Mère Jeanne Deleloé*, p. 247, Collection “Pax”.

lovingly united to Him, He draws us with Him, making us partakers of the virtue proper to each of these states. Each year, as the soul follows the Liturgical cycle, it shares ever more intimately in those mysteries, and is identified more and more with Christ, with His thoughts, His feelings, His life. *Hoc enim sentite in vobis, quod et in Christo Jesu* (Philip. 2; 5). Gradually it is transformed into the likeness of the Divine Model; not only because this Model is represented in each stage of His terrestrial existence, but above all because a divine virtue goes out from these mysteries to sanctify us, according to the measure of our faith, and to make of the soul the living reproduction of Him Who is our Elder Brother. Does not all our predestination, all our holiness consist in being made conformable to Christ for the glory of His Father?

It is this custom of following, under the Church's guidance, the mysteries of Jesus that gives to Benedictine spirituality such a specifically Christian character: the piety of the soul, traced upon the very piety of the Bride of Christ, becomes extremely lucid. It is a fact of experience that with souls, who say the Divine Office devoutly, who let themselves be replenished with the truths of the Psalms and follow Our Lord step by step in each of His mysteries, the spiritual life is very limpid, sane, and at the same time abundant and fruitful; in these souls piety is exempt from all complication, nor is there anything forced about it. If we try to create or arrange our own spiritual life, there is danger of putting much of ourself into it much that is human, and there is the risk at times of not taking the way that God wishes us to follow in order that we may attain to Him. Walking in the footsteps of the Church, there is no risk of going astray. The secret of the safety, as of the simplicity and breadth, of Benedictine spirituality lies in the fact that it borrows not from ever fallible man, but from the Church, from the Holy Spirit, all its elements even to its framework, which is nothing else than the representation of the life of Christ.

This is a point of extreme importance. Our holiness indeed is of the supernatural order, absolutely transcendent, having its source, not in us, but in God. Now, says St. Paul, we know not how we ought to pray, we know not, in this unique affair of our sanctification, what is befitting; but the Spirit of Jesus, Who is in us since our Baptism, Who directs the Church, Who is as it were the Soul of the Mystical Body, prays in us with ineffable groanings (Cf. Rom. 7, 26).

In the Liturgical Office, everything is inspired by this Divine Spirit or created under His action. The Holy Spirit, Author of the psalms, deeply engraves in the docile and devout soul, the truths whereof they give admirable formulas, He fills the soul with the affections that the sacred canticles express. Little by little the soul lives on these truths, is nourished on these sentiments which make it see and judge all things as God sees and judges them; it lives constantly in the supernatural sphere; it cleaves to Him Who is the unique object of all our religion, the One Who is placed unceasingly before our eyes in the reality of His mysteries and the power of His grace.

There is no surer way than this of keeping united to Jesus, and consequently going to God. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, leads us to Christ, Christ leads us to His Father and makes us pleasing to Him: what incomparable security and what powerful fecundity of the inner life this spiritual way guarantees to us 1

#### **IV. DISPOSITIONS IN WHICH THE DIVINE OFFICE OUGHT TO BE ACCOMPLISHED: IMMEDIATE PREPARATION; INTENTIONS TO BE FORMULATED**

The Divine Office will produce its precious fruits in us only if it be well accomplished; it does not act in the manner of the Sacraments, *ex opere operato*; its fruitfulness depends in great part on the dispositions of the soul. It is a divine work, extremely acceptable to God; it is a privileged means of union and sanctification; – on condition however that we bring the necessary dispositions. What are these dispositions?

Before the Office, we must first of all, prepare our-selves. The perfection with which we acquit ourselves of the Work of God depends in great part on the preparation of the heart; it is the heart which God looks at first of all: *Praeparationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua* (Ps. 10, 17). “Whatever good work thou undertakes”, our holy Patriarch says, speaking to us in general, “beseech God *with most earnest prayer* to vouchsafe to bring to a, good. End”: *Quidquid agendum inchoas bonum, a Deo perfici INSTANTISSIMA ORATIONE deposcas*<sup>45</sup>. If this recommendation extends to all our undertakings, how much more expressly is it to be applied to a work which demands of us faith, love, patience, the sense of reverence, and which is for us the “work” by excellence, because it is “the Work of God”? If we do not beg the help of God before giving ourselves to the Divine Praise, we shall never accomplish it well. Not to recollect ourselves before the Office, but to let our minds wander, then begin *ex abrupto*, and imagine that fervour will be born of itself in the soul, is to be under a singular illusion. Scripture tells us: “Before prayer prepare thy soul: and be not as a man that tempteth God”: *Ante orationem, praepara animam tuam, et noli esse quasi homo qui tentat Deum* (Eccli. 18, 23). What is “to tempt God”? It is to undertake an action without being assured of the means of carrying it out. If we begin the Divine Office without preparation, we cannot recite it as is befitting; to expect the necessary dispositions to come to us from on high, without first using the means of producing them within us, is to tempt God.

The first disposition required of us then is that we prepare our soul by most fervent prayer: *instantissima oratione*. It is with this object in view that we assemble at the “station” in the cloister before entering the Church. The silence of the station ought to be inviolable. It is important that each one should respect the recollection of his brethren and not trouble (even by words which are necessary but might be said at other moments) the work of a soul that is preparing itself to be united to God. The moments which pass at the station are golden moments. Experience proves that fervour during the Divine Office is to be very exactly measured by the immediate preparation. Almost infallibly, if we do not prepare ourselves, we come out from the “Work of God” as we entered, with, moreover, the culpability of our negligence.

In what then does this preparation consist?<sup>46</sup> As soon as the bell calls us, *venite adoremus* (Ps. 94, 6), we ought to leave every other work: *Mox exoccupatis manibus, et quod agebant imperfectum relinquentes*<sup>47</sup>; direct our thoughts towards God and say to Him by a movement of the heart: “Behold I come, O my God, to glorify Thee; may I give myself altogether to Thy work!” We ought secondly, if needs be by a generous and vigorous effort of the mind, to put from us every irrelevant preoccupation, every distracting thought, and gather up our energies that all may be concentrated upon the work about to begin: our intellect, our will, our heart, our imagination, in order that our whole being, body and soul, may praise the Lord. We should be able to say in all truth: *Benedic anima mea Domino, et OMNIA, QUAE INTRA ME SUNT, nomini sancto ejus* (Ps. 102, 1); to say like David,

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<sup>45</sup> Prologue of the Rule.

<sup>46</sup> We speak of the immediate preparation, supposing the remote preparation to be understood and admitted. The remote preparation is, in the moral order, purity of heart and the habit of the presence of God, and, in the intellectual order, knowledge of the sacred texts, of the rubrics and chant etc.

<sup>47</sup> Rule, ch. v: “with hands disengaged, and leaving unfinished what they were doing”.

the sacred singer: *Fortitudinem meam ad te custodiam* (Ps. 58, 10): I will keep my strength for Thee, O Lord, and for Thy service; I wish to consecrate to Thy praise every power within me.

Then let us unite ourselves, by a spiritual communion of faith and love, to the Word Incarnate. We must have recourse to Christ Jesus; in this as in all things He is our Model and our Head. Christ Jesus loved the Psalms. We see Him, in the Gospel, more than once making use of the inspired songs, for example, the magnificent psalm *Dixit Dominus Domino meo* (Ps. 109), wherein is exalted the glory of Christ, the Son of God, triumphant over His enemies. His Divine lips have recited these canticles “in such a manner that manifestly His soul took possession of the sacred poetry as belonging to Himself”<sup>48</sup>. We then recited the Psalms in Him, as now He recites them in us<sup>49</sup>, in virtue of that marvellous union which grace establishes between Christ and His members. This is what Our Lord Himself made Saint Mechtilde understand. One day when she asked Him if He had really celebrated the Hours upon earth, He deigned to reply to her: “I did not recite them as you do; however, at these hours, I rendered homage to God the Father. All that is observed among My disciples, I Myself inaugurated, as for example Baptism. I observed and accomplished these things for Christians, *thus sanctifying and perfecting the works of those who believe in Me*”. Our Divine Saviour gave the following counsel to the Saint: “In beginning the Hours, let these words then be said with the heart and even with the lips: Lord, in union with the attention wherewith when upon earth Thou didst observe the Canonical Hours in honour of the Father I celebrate this Hour in Thy honour. Secondly let all our attention be kept for God. And when this practice having been often repeated has become a habit, *this exercise will be so lofty and noble in the sight of God the Father, that it will seem to make but one with that which I Myself practised*”<sup>50</sup>.

We must not forget that if Christ Jesus recited the psalms, it was “not only individually but, moreover, as the Head of humanity, morally identifying Himself with all Adam’s race, being touched at Heart with every peril, struggle and fall, with every regret and hope of men, uttering to His Father, at the same time as His own prayer, the supreme and universal prayer of all humanity”<sup>51</sup>. This truth applies to all the prayer of Jesus, to all His works, and to His sacrifice.

This is why, with its every movement, the Liturgy finds its support in Christ Jesus, the Son of dilection. All its prayers end in recalling Christ’s merits and Divinity: *Per Dominum Nostrum Jesum Christum...* At the Mass, which is the centre of the liturgy and of all our religion, the “Canon”, that most sacred part of the holy oblation, begins most solemnly by having recourse to Christ’s mediation: “O Father most clement, we beseech Thee: accept these gifts through Jesus Christ Thy

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<sup>48</sup> D. Festugière, *l. c.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>49</sup> *Oramus ergo ad illum, per illum, in illo, et dicimus cum illo et dicit nobiscum; dicimus in illo, dicit in nobis psalmi hujus orationem.* S. Augustin. *Enarr.* in Ps. LXXXV, 1 P. L. 37. col. 1082. All this § I should be read.

<sup>50</sup> *The Book of Special Grace*, 3<sup>rd</sup> part. ch. 31. Our Lord deigned still more explicitly to teach the same doctrine to another Benedictine nun, Mother Deleloë. “One day”, this holy nun relates, “the Well-Beloved drawing my heart close to Him, it seemed to me that truly this most lovable Spouse plunged it with warm caresses and demonstrations of love into the recesses of His Divine Heart, us in a furnace of infinite Love. It was then given me to understand how this favour was granted me by the Well-Beloved, in order that my soul which belonged entirely to His Majesty, should not come alone into the presence of the Eternal Father to confess and love Him, but that being accompanied by this Divine Saviour, united to Him, and as it were altogether transformed into the unique object of His eternal delight, it should love and honour the Divine Majesty the more, –with and by the most adorable Heart of His Only-begotten Son, my Beloved–, and be more acceptably received, through this means, by the Sovereign Bounty”. *La Mère Deleloë*. p. 231. Collection “Pax, XVI”.

<sup>51</sup> D. Fustugière. *l. c.* p. 115.

Son and Our Lord". It ends with the same thought, still more explicitly formulated: *Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso*: it is through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ that we can render all honour and all glory to the Father. Why so much insistence? Because the Father has appointed His Son as the one universal Mediator. St. Paul, who penetrated so far into the mystery of Christ, exhorts us in these terms: "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise always to God, that is to say, the fruit of lips confessing to His Name": *PER IPSUM ergo offeramus hostiam laudis semper Deo, id est fructum labiorum confitentium nomini ejus* (Hebr. 13, 15).

In Christ Jesus, we find our best support; He supplies for our deficiencies. Let us entreat Him to be in us the Word that praises His Father. In the Sacred Humanity, the personal principle of every work was the Word; let us entreat Him also to take the initiative in all our praises; let us unite ourselves to Him in the infinite love whereby, in the Trinity, He glorifies His Father, and in that immense love He bears to the Church, His Mystical Body, *Christus dilexit Ecclesiam* (Eph. 5, 25). Let us further unite ourselves to Him, praising Him for the glory that He gives to the Church triumphant, which is without spot or wrinkle in His holy sight: *non habens maculam aut rugam* (Cf. Eph. 5, 27); let us beseech Him to increase the glory of His Blessed Mother, of His Angels and of His Saints; then let us unite our love to His love for the Church suffering, in order that we may help those of His members who are waiting in the place of expiation; let us unite ourselves to Him in that prayer which He made at the Last Supper for all His Church here below: *Pater, rogo pro eis qui credituri sunt in me* (Joan. 17, 20).

As the ages succeed one another, Christ leaves His Bride to accomplish a part of the prayer that He recited when on the point of offering His sacrifice. Although this prayer is of infinite efficacy, Our Lord wills us to join our own to it. One day our Divine Saviour, casting His gaze upon the multitude of souls to be redeemed, said to His Apostles whom He was about to send to preach the Gospel: *Rogate dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam* (Luc. 10, 2), "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send labourers into His harvest". The Apostles might have replied: "Lord, why dost Thou tell us to pray? Does not Thy prayer suffice?" No, it does not suffice: *Rogate*: "Pray", you also. Christ Jesus chooses to have need of our prayers as of those of His Apostles. Let us think, at the moments when we are recollecting ourselves at the "station" that from the depths of the tabernacle, Christ is about to say us: *Rogate Dominum messis*: "Lend Me your lips and hearts that I may prolong My prayer here below while in Heaven I offer My merits to the Father. Prayer first of all: the labourers will only come afterwards and their work will bear fruit only in the measure that My Father, attentive to your prayer, which is Mine, will pour down the heavenly dew of His grace upon earth".

Before beginning the Divine Office, let us then cast a glance over the world: the Church, the Spouse of Christ, is ever in travail of redemption. Let us behold the Sovereign Pontiff, the pastors of dioceses and parishes, the religious Orders, the missionaries who carry the good word to the heathen in order to extend the Kingdom of Jesus; let us behold, in spirit, the sick in the hospitals, the dying whose eternal salvation is about to be decided at this very moment; let us think of prisoners, of the poor, of those who suffer, of souls in temptation; of sinners who wish to return to God but are weighed down by the burden of their chains; of the just who ardently long to advance in divine love. Is it not this that the Church herself does on Good Friday? Remembering the sacrifice for the redemption of the whole world, and feeling herself strong in the very strength of the Saviour, the Church lets her motherly gaze travel over the diverse series of souls who have need of help from on high, and she offers special supplications for each. Let us imitate this example of our mother and approach God with confidence, for at this moment we are the mouth of the

whole Church: *Totius Ecclesiae os*<sup>52</sup>.

I was saying in the preceding conference that, in choir, we are the Church's ambassadors. Now what is the most fundamental quality of an ambassador? To be clever? powerful? to have a large fortune at his disposal? to have influence? to shine by his personal talents? to be *persona grata* with the sovereign to whom he is sent? All this is useful and necessary; all these qualities would contribute without any doubt to the success of his mission, but they would be insufficient and sterile, they would even deviate from the end in view did not the ambassador identify himself first of all, and as perfectly as he possibly could, with the intentions and opinions of the sovereign who sent him, with the interests of the country he represents. The Church deposes us to the King of kings, to the throne of God. We must then identify ourselves with her views and wishes; the Church confides to us her interests, which are those of souls, those of eternity. This is not a trivial matter! Let us then take into our hearts all the needs, all the necessities of the Church –so dear to Jesus since she is purchased by His Blood– the anguish of souls in pain, the perils of those who are at this moment grappling with the devil, the anxieties of those who have to direct us; in order that all may receive God's help. This is what was done by the holy Sister Mechtilde of Magdebourg. She took all Christendom in the arms of her soul to present it to the Eternal Father that it might be saved. "Let be", said Our Lord to her, "it is too heavy for thee". "No, Lord", replied the Saint, "I will lift it up and bear it to Thy feet with Thine own arms, that so Thou mayest bear it Thyself upon the Cross!"<sup>53</sup>. An example of the faith of great souls which constrains them to put the dogma of the Communion of saints into the highest and most perfect practice.

Let us imitate these models, and we may be assured that light, consolation, help, and the grace of forgiveness will flow down abundantly from the throne of mercy upon the whole Church. Remember what Our Lord Himself said: "Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in My Name, He will give it you" (Joan. 16, 23). Rely upon this promise, ask much, ask in all confidence, and the Father from Whom "every perfect gift comes down" (Jac. 1, 17), will open His hands to fill every soul with blessings (Cf. Ps. 144, 16). For it is not we who pray, who intercede at this moment; it is the Church, it is Christ, our Head, the supreme High Priest Who prays in us, and stands before His Father to plead the cause of the souls He has redeemed: *Ut appareat vultui Dei PRO NOBIS...* (Hebr. 9, 24) *Semper vivens ad interpellandum PRO NOBIS* (Hebr. 7, 25).

It is true that men of the world shrug their shoulders when they learn that we stay such long hours in choir praising God. For them, nothing is worth anything unless it is exterior, unless the results can be touched or felt, unless it is something that is talked about, that is successful and brilliant; but, says St. Paul, in his inspired energetic language, the sensual man, whose natural reason is his only guide, cannot understand the things of God: *Animalis homo non percipit quae sunt Spiritus Dei* (1 Cor. 2, 14); the supernatural sense is lacking to him. For him, these hours are lost and wasted hours; but to the eyes of faith, in the sight of God, –and who is just and true as God?– these hours are rich in graces for the Church, and of great weight for souls as regards eternity. It is at these hours we fulfil the most excellent apostolic Work, even towards our neighbour; we obtain for him the grace of God, we give him God: this is the greatest good for a soul. St. Bernard, that great monk and apostle, consumed with zeal, says, "all apostleship demands three things: the word, example, prayer. But of these three prayer is the most important, because it is prayer which obtains

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<sup>52</sup> S. Bern. Senen. *Sermo XX*.

<sup>53</sup> *The Light of The Divinity*, b. II, ch. 12.



the grace and efficacy of the word and example”<sup>54</sup>. Indeed “unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it” (Ps. 126, 1). It is truly God Who holds the eternal destinies of souls within His hands: *In manibus tuis sortes meae* (Ps. 30, 16); and when we fervently recite the Divine Office for the whole Church, in union with Christ Jesus, we labour for the salvation and sanctification of souls in a measure we cannot compass<sup>55</sup>.

The “Work of God” is an eminently apostolic work, although this does not appear outwardly; this character of the Office is perceived by faith alone, but for those who have faith, how much the value of this work is enhanced! A Sister of Charity can count the number of sick persons she has assisted, the number of the dying for whose conversion she has laboured; a missionary can verify the success of his preaching, take into account the good that he does, and therein find encouragement for his efforts and motives for thanksgiving. We cannot keep any such register. It is in the obscurity of faith that, during the Divine Office, we work for souls; it is in heaven alone that we shall see all the glory we have given to God by devoutly singing His praises, all the good we have gained for the Church and for souls; below we cannot gauge it; this is one sacrifice the more that faith asks of us. But although the apostolic efficacy of the Work of God well performed does not appear to our bodily eyes, it is no less deep and far-reaching.

Let these great thoughts occupy our minds at the moment of beginning the Divine Office; they enlarge the horizon of the soul; they increase its energies tenfold, they prevent routine. When we habitually act in this spirit of faith, when we thus forget our personal pain and troubles, in order to occupy ourselves with the needs and interests of souls, we go out of self; we praise God with fervour, in spite of the weariness that may befall us, in spite of the repugnance which God sometimes permits us to feel; and let us be assured that if we think, before all things, of God’s glory and of Christ’s Mystical Body, Jesus will think of us and will pour down blessings upon our souls surpassing all our hopes and desires. Has He not promised this Himself? “Give – and it shall be given to you”: *Date, et dabitur vobis* (Luc. 6, 38).

#### V. ATTITUDE OF THE SOUL DURING THE DIVINE OFFICE: TO PRAY WORTHILY, WITH ATTENTION, AND DEVOTION

After having formulated our intentions, in a few rapid but intense acts, let us ask God “earnestly” *instantissima oratione*, to open our lips that we may praise His holy name; to cleanse our hearts from vain, perverse, or simply irrelevant thoughts; to enlighten our understanding, to enkindle our love, that we may praise Him worthily, with attention and devotion. This is all contained in the prayer *Aperi* which we recite before each Office; we should endeavour to say it, with humility and fervour, for it points out the dispositions that we ought to have during the work of God: *Digne, attente et devote*.

To pray worthily, – that is to observe faithfully the ceremonial, the rubrics, the rules of

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<sup>54</sup> *Manent tria haec: verbum, exemplum, oratio; major autem his est oratio; nam, etsi vocis virtus sit opus, et operi tamen et voci gratiam efficaciamque promeretur oratio. Epistola, 201, p. 3. P. L. 182. co. 370.* A disciple of St. Bernard. Dom Chautard, Abbot of Sept-Fons, has written on this subject a most valuable work translated into English under the title of “The True Apostolate”, which we cannot sufficiently recommend.

<sup>55</sup> See *La Vie contemplative et son rôle apostolique*, by a Carthusian monk.

chanting, all that forms the protocol imposed by the King of kings upon those who present themselves before Him. If, being admitted to the court of an earthly sovereign, we did not trouble ourselves about etiquette, we should be quite reasonably taxed with being guilty of great disrespect. The Church, under the Holy Spirit's action, has arranged the ceremonial of her prayer with extreme care. By this she manifests the reverence she bears to her Divine Spouse. Under the Old Covenant, God Himself gave the details of the worship to be paid to Him, and we see that He shed blessings upon the Jewish people in the measure that they observed His ordinances. And yet, what was the immediate object of this worship? The ark of the covenant, containing the tables of the Law, and the manna. It was but a figure, a symbol, an imperfect shadow – *egena elementa*, to speak in the language of St. Paul (Cf. Gal. 5, 9). Ours is the true tabernacle, for it contains the true Manna of souls; it contains the One Who alone is holy: *Tu solus sanctus, Jesu Christe*<sup>56</sup>. The Divine Office is celebrated around the tabernacle, under the eyes of Christ. The Father lovingly beholds a soul who seeks to procure the glory of His Beloved Son Jesus: *Et clarificavi, et iterum clarificabo* (Joan. 12, 28); therefore all is pleasing to Him that composes or enhances the worship whereof Jesus is the centre. Let us then take care not to exempt ourselves from the ceremonial nor to recite or chant the Office according to our own fancies or caprices; this would be wanting in respect to God it would be exposing ourselves to a wrong kind of familiarity which could only be harmful to us. God remains God, that is to say the Infinite Being, full of incommunicable majesty, even when He admits us to praise Him. Neither let us say that the rubrics are small matters; yes, these things are materially small; but they are great by reason of the love with which we should observe them; great because they so closely concern God's honour; a soul who loves Our Lord shows this love by putting as much fidelity into small things as into great actions, for nothing is really small which is according to the Divine good pleasure.

Let us pray *attentively*. – Attention must be distinguished from intention, although the one is not without influence on the other. We have just now pointed out the intentions we ought to have in the course of the divine psalmody. Attention, too, is very necessary, for the Divine Praise as a human action, performed by a being endowed with reason and will. Failing this attention, we should fill the mechanical role of a series of well tuned phonographs; we should be like the praying-wheels of the monks of Thibet.

But what is the kind of attention required? St. Thomas distinguishes first: the *attentio ad verba*, the mental application to pronounce the words well; it is this that beginners have to strive after first of all; secondly, the *attentio ad sensum*, attention to the meaning of the words; finally, the *attentio ad Deum*; this is, according to St. Thomas, “the most necessary”: *Quae quidem est maxime necessaria*<sup>57</sup>.

Our holy Lawgiver combines the whole in a sufficiently synthetical manner in his beautiful chapter *De disciplina psallendi*. He first of all lays down the principle: *Ubique credimus divinam esse praesentiam, maxima tamen ... eum ad Opus divinum assistimus*: “We believe”, he says, “that God is present everywhere, but especially, *maxime*, when we are assisting at the Divine Office”. From this principle he draws two conclusions; we must sing God's praises with the greatest reverence: *Ideo semper memores simus quod ait propheta: servite Domino in timore*; with understanding,

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<sup>56</sup> *Gloria* of the Mass.

<sup>57</sup> *Triplex attentio quae orationi vocali potest adhiberi. Una quidem qua attenditur ad verba, ne quis in eis erret. Secunda qua attenditur ad sensum verborum. Tertia qua attenditur ad finem orationis, scilicet ad Deum et ad rem pro qua oratur. II-II, 83, a. 13.*

knowing well what we are doing and saying; *Et iterum: Psallite sapienter*. Then at the end of the chapter, he links together the two dispositions with these words: *Ergo consideremus qualiter oporteat conspectu Divinitatis esse, et sic stemus ad psallendum ut mens nostra concordat voci nostrae*<sup>58</sup>: “Let us consider with what reverence we ought to behave in God’s presence, and so assist at the psalmody that our mind be in accord with our lips”. We should weigh this teaching carefully.

We are first of all told that during the Office, we ought to remain interiorly prostrate in adoration before God. God is Infinite Holiness, “the Lord God of all things”, our Blessed Father reminds us in the chapter *De reverentia orationis*<sup>59</sup>. When Abraham, the father of believers, spoke to the Lord, he called himself dust and ashes (Gen. 18, 27). When Moses conversed with God, such was his profound sense of the Divine Majesty that he durst not raise his eyes to look upon Him: *Non audebat respicere contra Deum* (Ex. 3, 6); and yet Scripture tells us, God spoke to him “as a man is wont to speak to his friend” (Ex. 33, 2).

From the time of the dedication of Solomon’s Temple, “the Majesty of the Lord” filled the temple so exceedingly that the priests dare not cross the threshold (2 Paral. 7, 2). Even under the law of love, even in the Beatific Vision, which is the absolute perfection of intimacy with God, adoration does not cease. St. John shows us the Angels and the Elect casting themselves down before the Infinite Majesty: *Et ceciderunt in facies suas* (Apoc. 7, 2). Now, during the Divine Office, we are introduced by the Church into the presence of the Father; we are, it is true, the children of this heavenly Father, but His adopted children; we ought not to forget our first condition of creatures. The *Invitatory* psalm which is repeated daily at the beginning of Matins and is like the prelude to the “Hours” of the whole day, is very expressive of this attitude. “Come, let us praise the Lord with gladness... let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; and make a joyful noise to Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. For in His hand are all the ends of the earth: and the heights of the mountains are His... For the sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us, adore and fall down. Let us weep before the Lord that made us, for He is the Lord our God” (Ps. 94, 1-7). What a magnificent opening! “Come”, says the Psalmist, and at this moment, we bend the knee, to manifest our adoration, our reverence. Our fear is not that of the slave, unworthy of us and of God; nor even an imperfect fear, like that of a servant; but it is the fear of children in their heavenly Father’s house, for we are really *His* people, the sheep of *His* pasture: *Nos autem populus ejus et oves pascuae ejus*<sup>60</sup>. It is an intense reverence, like that which even now in Heaven fills the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Himself: *Timor Domini sanctus, permanens in saeculum saeculi* (Ps. 18, 10).

This inward reverence for a “Father of infinite majesty”, *Patrem immensae majestatis*<sup>61</sup>, should from time to time be manifested outwardly. Let all, says our holy Patriarch, incline at the *Gloria Patri* which follows each psalm, and is the doxology wherein we translate our adoration, *ob honorem et reverentiam sanctae Trinitatis*<sup>62</sup>; let us, he says again, listen to the reading of the Gospel, at the end of Matins, standing in reverence and awe: *Cum honore et timore*<sup>63</sup>. These are some of the outward manifestations of inmost reverence, but we ought to be watchful to keep ourselves in this reverence throughout all the Office without however making violent efforts of mind or

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<sup>58</sup> Rule, ch. XIX.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* ch. XX. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Ps. 94. We here give the text of the Breviary and not that of the Vulgate.

<sup>61</sup> *Hymn Te Deum*.

<sup>62</sup> Rule, ch. IX.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* ch. XI.

imagination.

Nothing hinders us, while thus inwardly prostrate in adoration, from attending to the meaning of the words, to the affections that the Holy Spirit makes the Psalms express. This is what our Blessed Father asks of us when he tells us, in a lapidary phrase, to put our heart in unison with our lips: *Mens nostra concordet voci nostrae*. “If the Psalm prays, pray; if it weeps, weep; if it rejoices, rejoice; if it hopes, hope; and if it fears, fear. All that is contained therein is our mirror”<sup>64</sup>. We remain in adoration during all the time of the psalmody; it is a fundamental attitude; but over this reverence which holds the depths of our being in awe surge movements of love, joy, praise, complacency, confidence, intense longings, earnest supplications. All these modulations rise up from the Psalms, to the glory of our Father in heaven, and for the good of souls, in the measure that the Holy Spirit touches the chords of our heart. Our soul ought to be like a harp docile to the fingers of this Divine Artist, that so our canticle may be pleasing. to God.

Under an apparent divergency, there is perfect accordance between the views of St. Thomas, quoted above, and those of St. Benedict. The angelic Doctor does not in any way teach that “attention to God” is exclusive of “attention to the sense” (of the words); he only wishes that the soul shall not be bound to follow word for word, that it shall be free to soar God wards, in short that the means shall not become an end. And this is exactly how St. Benedict understands things; he does not say that the soul ought to be tied down to each word we pronounce (*verbis*); he says that it ought to be in harmony with our voice, that is to say it ought to go towards God by using the wings that the liturgical theme offers. This is what the elect do in heaven’s liturgy; they unceasingly remain in contemplation before God in most perfect adoration, without this contemplation hindering then from praising each of the Divine attributes.

This moreover is what our Saviour, our Divine Model, did here below. The soul of Jesus was always plunged in the contemplation and adoration of the Father’s perfections. When He spent the night in prayer, in *oratione Dei* (Luc. 6, 12), when His Divine lips murmured the sacred canticles, His understanding sounded all their depth, exhausted all their plenitude.

In the same way when the monk, united to Christ Jesus, enters the oratory, bearing in his soul the deepest and most precious interests of Jesus’ Mystical Body, when his heart is filled. and then overflows with the varied affections to which the Holy Spirit successively gives rise by means of the words uttered by the lips, – he offers God an extremely pleasing homage, while torrents of light and love, flowing at his prayer from God’s munificence, are poured out upon the world of souls.

The last disposition required for acquitting oneself well of the work of God is devotion: *devote*. *Devovere* means “to consecrate”. Devotion is the consecration of our whole self to God; it is the most delicate flower and the purest fruit of love, for it is love giving itself wholly to the beloved being; it is the literal fulfilment of Christ’s words: *Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex TOTO corde tuo et ex TOTA mente tua* (Marc. 12, 30). It is this totality in love which is the mark of devotion. When we love with all our heart, we do not count the cost, we willingly spend ourselves without measure for the sake of those we thus love. In regard to God and in the Work of God, these dispositions

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<sup>64</sup> *Si orat psalmus, orate; et si gemit, gemite; et si gratulatur, gaudete; et si sperat, sperate; et si timet, timete. Omnia enim quae hic conscripta sunt, speculum nostrum sunt.* S. Augustin, *Enarrat. II in ps. 30, Sermo 3, N° 1.* P. L. 36, col. 248.

constitute devotion.

We must not confound this devotion with certain of its effects. It does not consist in feelings of sensible consolation; however frequent these may be, they are not the less accidental, depending as much on temperament and circumstances as on Our Lord. It is good to feel sweetness in God's service. The inspired singer says himself, *Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus* (Ps. 33, 9), but it does not constitute the essential of devotion. We must thank God if He allows us to experience that His service is full of sweetness, for that encourages us and stimulates love<sup>65</sup>; however we must not cling to these consolations as if they formed the very basis of devotion.

To be truly devout in the Divine Office is to strive with all one's being to celebrate it well; it is to go to the choir every day and several times a day, with all the zeal, strength and energy that we can bring, in order to accomplish the Work of God as perfectly as possible; it is to persevere in doing this, not only when feeling consolation, but whatever be the state of our mind, the weariness of our body, the inward repugnance that God sometimes allows us to experience. These are sacrifices to be accepted during the hours of praise; we have mentioned several of them in the preceding conference. To accept them requires self-abnegation and much generosity. From whence will this generosity arise? What will nourish it? Love; for devotion is love put into practice. When one possesses this fervour which is born of love, he truly gives to God a sacrifice of praise: *Tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis* (Ps. 115, 17). Devotion is to praise God with one's whole being, to make of one's self a holocaust to God: *Confitebor tibi Domine TOTO corde meo* (Ps. 9, 2). A monk who does not sacrifice every thought foreign to the occasion, who, during the Work of God, does not concentrate all the forces of his intellect and will upon God, and assists at the office of praise scarcely moving his lips, neglecting the points of the ceremonial established by the Church for the glory of God, does not fulfil his duty as a monk in a satisfactory manner. This negligence, this indolence, is unworthy of a monk. While so many religious in purely active Orders, so many missionaries spend themselves without counting the cost in ministering to souls, it would be inadmissible that a monk should perform without fervour the lofty work devolving upon him. 'When we are in choir, we ought to be able to say in all truth: "O my God, I can now glorify Thee, in union with Thy beloved Son; I can do much for the interests of souls redeemed by the Blood of this Son; without my prayer, which is that of Thy Son, there might perhaps be some at this moment who would be lost for eternity. Let all within me sing Thy praise; let there be nothing in me which is not Thine!" God loves generosity in His service, but, according to the energetic expression of Scripture, He "vomits the tepid" (Cf. Apoc. 3, 16), those who are indifferent to the interests of His glory and those of souls.

Let us then give ourselves wholly to this work of capital importance, after the example of so many holy monks who have found it the best means of showing their love to God and souls. It is related of St. Mechtilde that "it was her custom to use all her strength in praising God with fervent love; it seemed that she would never be stayed even if it were at the cost of her last breath. One day when she was weary with singing, as often happened, she felt ready to swoon. It then appeared to her that she drew all her strength from Christ's Divine Heart, and could thus continue to sing, less by her own strength than by Divine virtue. In this union, she seemed to sing with God and in God, and Our Lord said to her: Thou dost now appear to draw thy breath in My Heart; in the same way, every person who shall sigh after Me with love or desire, shall draw his breath not in himself,

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<sup>65</sup> This is what we say to God in the Postcommunion of the Mass of the Rogations "Vouchsafe, O Lord, favourably to receive our vows; that receiving Thy gifts in the midst of our tribulation, we may, from the consolation Thou givest us, increase in Thy love": *de consolatione nostra in tuo more crescanus*.

but in My Divine Heart<sup>66</sup>.

## VI. FINAL EXHORTATION

For the Divine Office to be accomplished with the fervour entirely worthy of it, great faith and generous love are needed. If we have not this living faith and this ardour of love, it may happen that after some time we do not sufficiently esteem the Divine Office; that we no longer have a high enough idea of its immense value for God's glory and the welfare of souls, and we end by considering other works more important. Without owning this to ourselves, we may perhaps feel some satisfaction if it happens that for such or such a reason we are dispensed from presence in choir.

On the contrary, to a soul inspired with a living faith, the *Opus Dei* always appears incomparably great and inexhaustibly fruitful. Joined to the Holy Sacrifice which it encircles, it appears as the most perfect homage we can offer to God, as an extremely effectual means of union with Him. Routine takes no hold on such a religious; every day the Divine Praise has fresh attractions for him; every day it is a "new canticle" *canticum novum* (Ps. 95, 1; 97, 1; 149, 1) that all his being, body and soul, sends up to God to glorify Him. For example, at the oft repeated words of the Invitatory "Come, let us adore the Lord", all heads are bowed, like a field of corn bending beneath the breeze. If this inclination is made by routine, without attention to the meaning the action expresses, it is an almost valueless ceremony, but if the soul, full of devotion, casts itself interiorly before God and gives itself entirely to Him, what magnificent praises then rise up to God! The Angels alone can admire all the beauty of this action. In the same way, when we incline at the *Gloria Patri* at the end of each psalm, let us, gather up into this action all our praise and all our devotion, and strive to penetrate ourselves with devotion at the thought of the oblation we ought to make of ourselves to the Holy Trinity in chanting these words.

If it happens that despite all our ardour to praise God in choir, we are there assailed with distractions, what are we to do? Distractions are inevitable. We are all weak; so many objects solicit our attention that our mind easily wanders. We need not be anxious about those distractions which are the result of our frailty. "As for the distractions you experience in reciting the Divine Office", St. Teresa wrote to one of her correspondents, "I am subject to them as you are, and I advise you to attribute them, as I do, to weakness of the head; for Our Lord well knows that, since we pray to Him, our intention is to pray well".

This last phrase of the great contemplative is one to bear in mind. Inasmuch as we ought not to trouble ourselves about the distractions that arise during the Divine Office owing to the instability of our imagination, so, before the Work of God, ought we to do our utmost to prepare ourselves, in order to show "our intention is to pray well". Otherwise, having made no effort before the Office to turn our mind towards God, to recollect ourselves in Him, to fill our soul with deep reverence and great devotion, it will be very difficult for us not to have those distractions which are to be imputed to negligence. We can appeal to our own experience; the greater number of our distractions would be avoided if we gave the proper care to the immediate preparation; and if, going through the Office in a mechanical manner, we let many lights and graces escape us, it is our own carelessness we have to blame.

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<sup>66</sup> *The Book of Special Grace*. 3<sup>rd</sup> part. ch. 7.

But if, before offering our homage to God, we recollect ourselves with fervour; if we unite ourselves, in an intense act of faith and love, to Christ Jesus, the Incarnate Word, that we may lend Him our lips, in order to praise His Father and draw down the lights and gifts of His Spirit upon all His Mystical Body, we may be at peace on the subject of the distractions that arise; they are the result of our infirmity; as soon as we are aware of them, let us recover possession of our mind, but let us do so gently without any violent effort. In particular, let the *Gloria Patri*, by its frequent recurrence, be an opportunity of reawakening our vigilance. In pronouncing it, we bow in order to give to God the homage of our reverence and adoration; it is the easiest moment for bringing back the soul to the sense of the Divine Presence. Distractions will thus serve to reanimate our fervour; and if we continue to do our utmost to observe all the rites carefully, our praise will remain none the less pleasing to God and fruitful for the Church.

This is what Bossuet admirably says in terms which we will borrow as the conclusion of this conference. “Religious soul! The fruit of Jesus Christ’s teaching upon prayer should principally be to be faithful to the hours consecrated to it. Were you to be distracted inwardly, if you lament being so, if you only wish not to be so, and remain faithful, humble and recollected outwardly, the obedience you give to God, the Church and the Rule, by observing the genuflexions, the inclinations and all the other exterior pious observances, maintains the spirit of prayer. We pray then by state, by disposition, by will: but especially if we humble ourselves for our dryness and distractions. Oh! how pleasing to God is this prayer! How it mortifies body and soul! How it obtains graces and expiates sin<sup>67</sup>.”

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<sup>67</sup> *Meditations on the Gospel*. Sermon on the Mount. 44<sup>th</sup> day.