

# 1959

## Retreat in the Vatican

29 November-5 December, 1959

**Preacher at my invitation, Mgr Giuseppe Angrisani, Bishop of Casale,  
who made an edifying impression on all**

Ignatian inspiration. As the general foundation for meditations and instructions: Holy Scripture, the Gospel, St Paul and St John. Simple, transparent, encouraging. Unfortunately my own attention was again somewhat distracted by the circumstances, from which I could not altogether free myself. But everything helps my main work. 'Thanks be to God, and in all things blessing and peace.'

At mealtimes I had Mgr Loris read me several pages of the De consideratione which St Bernard wrote for Pope Victor." There could be nothing more suitable and useful for a poor Pope like myself, and for any Pope at any time. Certain things which did not redound to the honour of the Roman clergy in the twelfth century still survive today. Therefore 'one must watch and correct', and bear in patience.

(1) My first duty: to set my will in order, in preparation for my death, which may be near; the thought of it is never far from me. I shall take care to arrange everything in an orderly manner; even when it is written down, it will still be the will of a poor and simple Pope. I have only a few details to add and these are already substantially accounted for. I want the Pope's example to be an encouragement and an admonition to all the Cardinals. It is quite wrong for any ecclesiastic to die without leaving a will in good order, and not having done so may be a terrifying thought when he is face to face with eternity.

(2) Since the Lord chose me, unworthy as I am, for this great service, I feel I have no longer any special ties in this life, no family, no earthly country or nation, nor any particular preferences with regard to studies or projects, even good ones. Now, more than ever, I see myself only as the humble and unworthy 'servant of God and servant of the servants of

God'." The whole world is my family. This sense of belonging to everyone must give character and vigour to my mind, my heart and my actions.

(3) This vision, this feeling of belonging to the whole world, will give a new impulse to my constant and continual daily prayer: the Breviary, Holy Mass, the whole rosary and my faithful visits to Jesus in the tabernacle, all varied and ritual forms of close and trustful union with Jesus.

The experience of this first year gives me light and strength in my efforts to straighten, to reform, and tactfully and patiently to make improvements in everything.

(4) Above all, I am grateful to the Lord for the temperament he has given me, which preserves me from anxieties and tiresome perplexities. I feel I am under obedience in all things and I have noticed that this disposition, in great things and in small, gives me, unworthy as I am, a strength of daring simplicity, so wholly evangelical in its nature that it demands and obtains universal respect and edifies many. 'Lord, I am not worthy. O Lord, be always my strength and the joy of my heart. My God, my mercy.'

(5) The welcome immediately accorded to my unworthy person and the affection still shown by all who approach me are always a source of surprise to me. The maxim 'Know

thymself' suffices for my spiritual serenity and keeps me on the alert. The secret of my success must lie there: in not `searching into things which are above my ability's and in being content to be `meek and humble of heart'. Meekness and humbleness of heart give graciousness in receiving, speaking and dealing with people, and the patience to bear, to pity, to keep silent and to encourage. Above all, one must always be ready for the Lord's surprise moves, for although he treats his loved ones well, he generally likes to test them with all sorts of trials such as bodily infirmities, bitterness of soul and sometimes opposition so powerful as to transform and wear out the life of the servant of God, the life of the servant of the servants of God, making it a real martyrdom. I always think of Pius IX of sacred and glorious memory and, by imitating him in his sufferings, I would like to be worthy to celebrate his canonization.

## **1960**

### **Retreat in the Vatican from 27 November -3 December, 1966 Preacher, Mgr Pirro Scavizzi, Imperiari missionary'**

I knew him [Mgr Pirro Scavizzi] and esteemed him during my years as a priest in Rome, from 1921 to 1925, when he was parish priest of Sant' Eustachio. He is good and able. He took as his themes for meditation and instruction various considerations from the New Testament, and developed them well, touching the fundamental principles of ecclesiastical life as regards the clergy who work in close collaboration with the Holy See. There were present at his sermons in the Matilda Chapel eighteen Cardinals and fifty-eight prelates, including a few Vatican functionaries; in all, with myself, seventy-seven ecclesiastics. All invisible to me but, I have heard, attentive and devout. At the end of the retreat, before the Apostolic Blessing, I added three points:

- (a) Gratitude to the edifying preacher whose sermons were varied, made interesting with panoramic visions of Palestine and always full of fervour, containing some shrewd but respectful home-thrusts.
- (b) He was particularly effective in his references to the Roman Synod, the New Testament, and the universal vision of Holy Church in the world.
- (c) He spoke gently and lovingly of the adoration and love for the Blessed Sacrament, "God with us", and for Our Blessed Lady. Altogether very substantial and uplifting.

#### *Some thoughts to encourage a priest in unflinching fervour*

The course of my life over these two last years-z,8 October, i95859-60-shows a spontaneous and whole-hearted intensification of union with Christ, with the Church and with the heaven which awaits me.

I consider it a sign of great mercy shown me by the Lord Jesus that he continues to give me his peace, and even exterior signs of grace which, I am told, explain the imperturbable serenity that enables me to enjoy, in every hour of my day, a simplicity

and meekness of soul that keep me ready to leave all at a moment's notice and depart for eternal life.

My failings and incapacities, and my `countless sins, offences and negligences or which I offer my daily Mass, are a cause of constant interior mortification, which prevents me from indulging in any kind of selfglorification but does not weaken my confidence and trust in God, whose caressing hand I feel upon me, sustaining and encouraging.

Nor do I ever feel tempted to vanity or complacency. `What little I know about myself is enough to make me feel ashamed.' What a fine saying that is, which Manzoni put in the mouth of Cardinal Federico!

`In thee, O God, have I hoped; let me never be confounded

At the beginning of my eightieth year it is all-important for me to humble myself and lose myself in the Lord, trusting that in his mercy he will open for me the gate to eternal life. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you!

## **1961**

### **My retreat in preparation for the completion of the eightieth year of my life. Castel Gandolfo 10-15 August, 196**

*10 August, 1961*

I have called for silence and a halt in the customary occupations of my ministry. My sole companion is Mgr Cavagna, my usual confessor.

At dawn on this feast of St Lawrence, at a quarter to six in the morning, I said the Divine Office on the terrace looking towards Rome.

My heart is touched when I think of this anniversary of my ordination as a priest-10 August, 1904-in the church of Santa Maria in Monte Santo, Piazza del Popolo. The prelate who ordained me was Mgr Ceppetelli, Vicegerent of Rome, Archbishop and titular Patriarch of Istanbul. I remember it all, at a distance of fifty-seven years. Ever since then I have felt ashamed of my worthlessness. `My God, my mercy."

This form of spiritual retreat has a purpose beyond the usual scope. My heart rejoices at the memory of all the Lord's goodness, in spite of my shame that the effort I have put into my work for him has been so disproportionate to the gifts I have received. This is a mystery which moves me deeply and makes me afraid.

After my first Mass over the tomb of St Peter I felt the hands of the Holy Father Pius X laid on my head in a blessing full of good augury for me and for the priestly life I was just entering upon; and after more than half a century (fifty-seven years precisely) here are my own hands extended in a blessing for the Catholics, and not only the Catholics, of the whole world, in a gesture of universal fatherhood. I am successor to this same Pius X who has been proclaimed a saint, and I am still living in the same priestly service as he, his predecessors and his successors, all placed like St Peter at the head of the whole Church of Christ, one, holy, Catholic and apostolic.

These are all sacred words, which have a loftier meaning than that of any unimaginable self-glorification of my own, and they leave me still in the depths of my own nothingness, though I am raised to the sublime height of a ministry which towers far above the loftiest human dignity.

When on 28 October, 1958, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church chose me to assume the supreme responsibility of ruling the universal flock of Jesus Christ, at seventy-seven years of age, everyone was convinced that I would be a provisional and transitional Pope. Yet here I am, already on the eve of the fourth year of my pontificate, with an immense programme of work in front of me to be carried out before the eyes of the whole world, which is watching and waiting. As for myself, I feel like St Martin, who 'neither feared to die, nor refused to live'.

I must always hold myself ready to die, even a sudden death, and also to live as long as it pleases the Lord to leave me here below. Yes, always. At the beginning of my eightieth year I must hold myself ready: for death or life, for the one as for the other, and I must see to the saving of my soul. Everyone calls me 'Holy Father', and holy I must and will be.

### *My own sanctification*

I am very far from attaining this holiness in fact, although my desire and will to succeed in this are whole-hearted and determined. This particular way of sanctification, which is the right way for me, has once again been shown to me here at Castel Gandolfo, in a passage in a book and in a picture.

The passage I came across unexpectedly in a little volume: *La perfezione cristiana. Pagine di ascetica* by Antonio Rosmini, page 591: 'In what does sanctity consist?'

'Reflect on this thought, that sanctity consists in being willing to be opposed and humiliated, rightly or wrongly; in being willing to obey; in being willing to wait, with perfect serenity; in doing the will of your Superiors without regard for your own will; in acknowledging all the benefits you receive and your own unworthiness; in feeling a great gratitude to others, and especially to God's ministers; in sincere love; in tranquillity, resignation, gentleness and the desire to do good to all, and in unceasing work. I am about to leave and can say no more, but this is enough' (Stresa, 6 September, 1840).

I find it comforting to note that these are simply the applications of my own special motto, which I took from Baronius: *Oboedientia et Pax*. Jesus, this shows me that you are always with me! I thank you for this doctrine, which seems to follow me wherever I go.

The picture. This work is in the oldest and most private chapel of this Apostolic Palace. Today I showed it to my spiritual director, Mgr Alfredo Cavagna, as the most precious hidden jewel of this country residence. It dates from the time of Urban VIII (1636-1644). It served for his devotions and was used also by Pius IX who used to say his Mass here. Immediately after his own Mass he was present at his secretary's, in the small adjoining oratory that can still be seen, decorated entirely by the painter Lagi Simone, 'painter and gilder'. Over the altar is a very pious picture, a *Pieta*, the dead Jesus with Our Lady of Sorrows. Nothing could be more suitable: paintings and decorations. All round are scenes of the sufferings of Jesus: a permanent training school for any pontificate.

All this, the written words and the paintings, helps to confirm me in the doctrine of suffering. Of all the mysteries of the life of Jesus this is the most suitable and most

familiar thought for the Pope's constant meditation: 'To suffer and be despised for Christ and with Christ.'

This is the first light shed upon this exercise in perfection, while I prepare myself to enter upon old age: 'God's will, my sanctification in Christ.' Jesus, 'you have been my helper: I will rejoice under the cover of your wings. My soul has clung to you: your right hand supports me. '2

*11 August, 1961*

First of all: 'I confess to Almighty God.'

During my whole life I have kept faithful to my practice of weekly confession. Several times during my life I have renewed my general confession. So now I content myself with a more general examination, without precise details, but in the words of the offertory prayer of my daily Mass: thinking of my 'countless sins, offences and negligences', all of which have already been confessed in their turn but are still mourned and detested.

Sins: Concerning chastity in my relations with myself, in immodest intimacies: nothing serious, ever.

In relations with others, 'through the eyes, or through touch, in the time of puberty, or youth, or maturity, or old age or in the reading of books or newspapers, or in looking at statues or pictures. God's grace, God's grace I say, never once permitted temptation and failure, never, never; he always came to my help, with great and infinite mercy, in which mercy I trust that I shall always be preserved till the end of my days.'

Concerning obedience. I have never felt any temptation against obedience, and I thank the Lord that he has never permitted me to feel this even when obedience was a great effort, as it still is now that I am made 'the servant of the servants of God'.

Concerning humility. I make a special point of cultivating this and practising it. This does not mean I no longer feel hurt by what I consider to be a lack of respect shown to me. But for this also I rejoice before God, as if it were an exercise in forbearance, or the wearing of an invisible hair shirt for my own sins and to obtain from God forgiveness for the sins of the whole world.

Concerning charity. This is the virtue which comes most easily to me; yet even this sometimes costs me some sacrifice and I feel tempted and roused to show an impatience from which, unknown to me, someone may suffer.

Offences. Who knows how many, many times I have offended against the law of God and the laws of Holy Church! Times without number. But these offences have all been against the regulations of the Church and never in matters involving mortal or venial sins. I feel in my heart and soul a love of those rules, precepts and regulations, and obedience to all this ecclesiastical and human legislation, and I always keep a careful watch over myself where they are concerned, above all so that I may be an example for the edification of the clergy and all the faithful.

All these offences too have been confessed, all together and with the purpose of amendment and, as I grow older, a greater daily effort to achieve precision and perfection.

Negligences. These must be considered in relation to the sum of the various functions of my life as pastor, and the spirit of pastoral service must be pre-eminent in an apostle and successor of St Peter, as today I am regarded by all.

The vivid memory of the failings of my life, eighty years long, and of my 'countless sins, offences and negligences' was the general matter for the holy confession which I renewed this morning to my spiritual director, Mgr Alfredo Cavagna, here in my bedroom where my predecessors Pius XI and Pius XII slept, and where in fact Pius XII died on 9 October, 1958, until now the only Pope to die here at Castel Gandolfo, in the summer residence.

Lord Jesus, as you assure me of your great and eternal forgiveness, so continue to have pity on me. Still 11 August, the afternoon of forgiveness

Holy confession, well prepared and repeated every week on Friday or Saturday, still remains a solid foundation for the progress of sanctification; and it gives me peace and encouragement as I hold myself ready to make a good death at any hour and any moment of the day. This serenity of mine, this readiness to depart and appear before the Lord whenever he wills, seems to me to be such a sign of trust and love as to deserve from Jesus, whose Vicar on earth I am called, the final gesture of his mercy.

So let us continue moving slowly towards him, as if he stood waiting with outstretched arms.

To strengthen my usual trust in God I see that Rosmini quotes that wonderful Father Caraffa who was the seventh General of the Society of Jesus, and who used to say he was always meditating on three letters that had become very familiar to him: a black letter, a scarlet one and a white; the black letter for his sins; the scarlet letter for the Passion of Jesus our Saviour; and the white letter for the glory of the blessed souls in heaven.

These three symbols truly contain the fine flower of good Christian meditation.

The black letter teaches me to know myself and urges me to cleanse my soul; the scarlet makes me familiar with the thought of the sufferings of Jesus, racked in body and soul, and the white letter helps me to resist discouragement, desolation and sadness, while all the time the saints do their duty of strengthening me for suffering, reminding me truly that 'the sufferings of the present time 'are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us'.'

Moreover this thought is in any case in line with all the ascetic teaching of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, whose admirable book Rosmini said he always kept by him.

*12 August, Saturday. Jesus crucified and his sorrowing Mother*

So this retreat of mine is an attempt to make some progress in personal sanctification, not only as a Christian, priest, and Bishop, but as Pope, the 'good Father of all Christians', the good shepherd which the Lord has called me to be, despite my insufficiency and unworthiness.

At other times and frequently I ponder the mystery of the Precious Blood of Jesus, a devotion which, as Pope, I at once felt bound to encourage, as complementary to the devotions to the Name and Heart of Jesus which, as I said, are already fairly well known and wide-spread.

I admit: this was a sudden inspiration for me. I saw private devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus when I was a boy, little more than a child, as it was practised by my old great-uncle Zaverio, the eldest of the five Roncalli brothers. In fact he was the first person to train me to that practice of religion from which my priestly vocation was to spring, very early in my life and, I think, quite spontaneously. I remember the prayer books he kept on his prie-dieu, and among them The Most Precious Blood which he used during July. Oh sacred and blessed memories of my childhood! How precious they are to me in this sunset hour of my life, for they confirm the fundamental points of my search for holiness, and offer a consoling vision of what lies before me, as I humbly trust, in my eternity. The crucifix and eternity: the Passion of Christ in the light of neverending eternity. Oh what sweetness and what peace! So must it always be, and increasingly so: the life still left for me to live here below must draw its strength at the foot of the Cross of Jesus crucified, bathed in his most Precious Blood and in the bitter tears of Our Lady of Sorrows, Mother of Jesus and my Mother too:

This inspiration, which has lately taken me by surprise, is like a new impulse, a new spirit in my heart, a voice that imparts courage and great fervour. I wish to express what I feel in three distinctive ways:

(r) Total detachment from everything, with absolute indifference to both praise and blame, and to any grave event that may happen in this world, as far as it affects me personally.

(a) In the eyes of the Lord I am a sinner and nothing but dust: I live by the mercy of Jesus, to whom I owe everything and from whom I expect everything. I submit to him even if he wishes me to be wholly transformed by his pains and his sufferings, in the entire abandonment of absolute obedience and conformity with his will. Now more than ever, and as long as I live, -and in all things, oboedientia et pax.

(3) Perfect readiness to live or die, like St Peter and St Paul, and to endure all, even chains, sufferings, anathema and martyrdom, for Holy Church and for all the souls redeemed by Christ. I feel the awesomeness of this promise and I tremble, knowing myself to be weak and backsliding. But I trust in Christ crucified and in his Mother, and I fix my eyes on eternity.

*13 August, Sunday. The practice of prudence by the Pope and by the Bishops*

Faith, hope and charity are the three stars of the episcopal glory. The Pope as the head and as an example, and the Bishops, all the Bishops of the Church, with him. The sublime work, holy and divine, which the Pope must do for the whole Church, and which the Bishops must do each in his own diocese, is to preach the Gospel and guide men to their eternal salvation, and all must take care not to let any other earthly business prevent or impede or disturb this primary task. The impediment may most easily arise from human judgments in the political sphere, which are diverse and contradictory according to the various ways of thinking and feeling. The Gospel is far above these opinions and parties, which agitate and disturb social life and all mankind. The Pope reads it and with his Bishops comments on it; and all, without trying to further any worldly interests, must inhabit that city of peace, undisturbed and blessed, whence descends the divine law which can rule in wisdom over the earthly city and the whole world.

In fact, this is what wise men expect from the Church, this and nothing else.

My conscience is tranquil about my conduct as newly elected Pope during these first three years, and so my mind is at peace, and I beg the Lord always to help me to keep faith with this good beginning.

It is very important to insist that all the Bishops should act in the same way: may the Pope's example be a lesson and an encouragement to them all. The Bishops are more exposed to the temptation of meddling immoderately in matters that are not their concern, and it is for this reason that the Pope must admonish them not to take part in any political or controversial question and not to declare for one section or faction rather than another. They are to preach to all alike, and in general terms, justice, charity, humility, meekness, gentleness and the other evangelical virtues, courteously defending the rights of the Church when these are violated or compromised.

But at all times and especially just now, the Bishop must apply the balm of sweetness to the wounds of mankind. He must beware of making any rash judgment or uttering any abusive words about anyone, or letting himself be betrayed into flattery by threats, or in any way conniving with evil in the hope that by so doing he may be useful to someone; his manner must be grave, reserved and firm, while in his relations with others he must always be gentle and loving, yet at the same time always ready to point out what is good and what is evil, with the help of sacred doctrine but without any vehemence.

Any effort or intrigue of a purely human nature is worth very little in these questions of worldly interest.

Instead, he must with more assiduous and fervent prayer earnestly seek to promote divine worship among the faithful, with religious practices, frequent use of the sacraments, well taught and well administered, and above all he must encourage religious instructions because this also will help to solve problems of the merely temporal order, and do so much better than ordinary human measures can. This will draw down divine blessings on the people, preserving them from many evils and recalling minds that have strayed from the right path. Help comes down from above: and heavenly light disperses the darkness. So wrote Antonio Rosmini from Villa Albani, Rome, on 23 November, 1848.<sup>1</sup>

This is my pastoral thought and care, which must be for today and for ever.

*Still Sunday, 13 August. Ideas for a good apostolate*

Everyone must be treated with respect, prudence and evangelical simplicity.

It is commonly believed and considered fitting that even the everyday language of the Pope should be full of mystery and awe. But the example of Jesus is more closely followed in the most appealing simplicity, not dissociated from the God-given prudence of wise and holy men. Wiseacres may show disrespect, if not scorn, for the simple man. But those wiseacres are of no account; even if their opinions and conduct inflict some humiliations, no notice should be taken of them at all: in the end everything ends in their defeat and confusion. The 'simple, upright, Godfearing man' is always the worthiest and the strongest. Naturally he must always be sustained by a wise and gracious prudence. He is a simple man who is not ashamed to profess the Gospel, even in the face of men who consider it to be nothing but weakness and childish nonsense, and to profess it entirely, on all occasions, and in the presence of all; he does not let



himself be deceived or prejudiced by his fellows, nor does he lose his peace of mind, however they may treat him.

The prudent man is he who knows how to keep silent about that part of the truth that it would be inopportune to declare, provided that this silence does not affect the truth he utters by gainsaying it; the man who knows how to achieve his own good purpose, choosing the most effective means of willing and doing; who, in all circumstances, can foresee and measure the difficulties set before him, and knows how to choose the middle way which presents fewer difficulties and dangers; the man who, having chosen a good, or even a great and noble objective, never loses sight of it but manages to overcome all obstacles and see it through to the end. Such a man in every question distinguishes the substance from the accidentals; he does not allow himself to be hampered by the latter, but concentrates and directs all his energies to a successful conclusion; he looks to God alone, in whom he trusts, and this trust is the foundation of all he does. Even if he does not succeed, in all or in part, he knows he has done well, by referring everything to the will and greater glory of God.

Simplicity contains nothing contrary to prudence, and the converse also is true. Simplicity is love: prudence is thought. Love prays: the intelligence keeps watch. `Watch and pray': a perfect harmony. Love is like the cooing dove; the active intelligence is like the snake that never falls to the ground or bruises itself, because before it glides along it first probes with its head to test the unevenness of the ground.

### *Tranquillity on all occasions*

The Lord Jesus, the Founder of Holy Church, directs all that happens with wisdom, power and indescribable goodness according to his own pleasure and for the greater good of his elect who form his Church, his beloved mystical Bride.

No matter how much events seem to be working against the good of the Church I must preserve a perfect tranquillity, which however will not dispense me from grieving and from imploring that 'thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven'.

I must beware of the audacity of those who, with unseeing minds led astray by secret pride, presume to do good without having been called to do so by God speaking through his Church, as if the divine Redeemer had any need of their worthless co-operation, or indeed of any man's.

What is important is to co-operate with God for the salvation of souls, and of the whole world. This is our true mission, which reaches its highest expression in the Pope.

`In all things look to the end.' I am not thinking here of death but of the purpose and divine vocation to which the Pope has been summoned by a mysterious decree of Providence.

This vocation is shown in a three-fold splendour: the personal sanctity of the Pope which gives its own glory to his life; the love which the holy universal Church bears to him, in the measure of that heavenly grace which alone can inspire him and assure his glory; finally, his obedience to the will of Jesus Christ, who alone rules through the Pope and governs the Church according to his own pleasure, for the sake of that glory which is supreme on earth as in the eternal heavens.

The humble Pope's most sacred duty is to purify all his own intentions in this light of glory, and to live according to the teaching and grace of Christ so as to deserve the

greatest honour of all, the imitation, as his Vicar, of the perfection of Christ; of Christ crucified and, at the price of his blood, Redeemer of the world, of Christ the Rabbi, the Master, the only true Teacher of all ages and peoples.

*14 August, Monday. Six maxims of perfection*

Considering the purpose of my own life I must:

(1) Desire only to be virtuous and holy, and so be pleasing to God.

(a) Direct all things, thoughts as well as actions, to the increase, the service and the glory of Holy Church.

(3) Recognize that I have been set here by God, and therefore remain perfectly serene about all that happens, not only as regards myself but also with regard to the Church, continuing to work and suffer with Christ, for her good.

(4) Entrust myself at all times to Divine Providence.

(5) Always acknowledge my own nothingness.

(6) Always arrange my day in an intelligent and orderly manner.

My life as a priest, or rather-as I am called to my honour and shame as Prince of the whole priesthood of Christ, in his name and by his power, unfolds before the eyes of my divine Master, the great Lawgiver. He looks down on me as he hangs on the Cross, his body torn and stained with blood. His side is wounded, his hands and feet are pierced. He looks at me and invites me to gaze on him. Justice led him straight to love, and love immolated him. This must be my lot: 'The disciple is not above his master.'

O Jesus, here I am before you. You are suffering and dying for me, old as I am now and drawing near the end of my service and my life. Hold me closely, and near to your heart, letting mine beat with yours. I love to feel myself bound for ever to you with a gold chain, woven of lovely, delicate links.

The first link: the justice which obliges me to find my God wherever I turn.

The second link: the providence and goodness which will guide my feet. The third link: love for my neighbour, unwearying and most patient.

The fourth link: the sacrifice that must always be my lot, and that I will and must welcome at all times.

The fifth link: the glory that Jesus promises me in this life and in eternity.

O crucified Jesus, 'my love and my mercy now and for ever'. 'Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done' (Luke 22: 42).

*Thoughts. I Purpose of tribulations*

Turning my thoughts in on myself and on the varied events of my humble life, I must admit that hitherto the Lord has spared me those tribulations which make the service of truth, justice and charity hard and distasteful for so many souls. I have lived through my childhood and youth without feeling the effects of poverty, with no anxieties about my family, my studies or situations of danger, such as my military service, for example, at the age of twenty, and again during the Great War, from

1919 to 1920 Humble and unpretentious as I know myself to be, I was always warmly welcomed wherever I went, from the seminaries of Bergamo and Rome through the ten years of my life as a priest with my Bishop in my native city, and from 1921 until now,

1961 that is from Rome and back to Rome again, to the Vatican. O God, how can I thank you for the kindness always shown to me wherever I went in your name, always in simple obedience, not to do my own will but yours? `What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he has rendered to me? I know that my answer, to myself and to the Lord, is always the same: `I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord.

As I have already indicated in these pages: if and when the `great tribulation befalls me', I must accept it willingly; and if it delays its coming a little longer, I must continue to nourish myself with the Blood of Jesus, with the addition of all those great and little tribulations which the good Lord may send me. The short Psalm 130 has always made, and still makes, a great impression on me: `O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised

too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast." Oh, how I love these words! But even if they were to lose their comfort for me towards the end of my life, Lord Jesus, you will strengthen me in my suffering. Your Blood, your Blood which I shall continue to drink from your chalice, that is, from your Heart, shall be for me a pledge of eternal salvation and happiness. `For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory, beyond all comparison' (a Cor 4: 17).

*Thoughts. II. Contentment with my daily apostolate, without wasting time in predicting the future*

`Jesus Christ, yesterday and today and the same for ever.

Not to try to predict the future, indeed not to count on any future at all: that is my rule of conduct, inspired by that spirit of tranquillity and constancy from which the faithful and my collaborators must receive light and encouragement from the Pope, the head priest.

The source of all priesthood is Christ, as St Thomas assures us (S. T., III, q. 2,2, ad. 4) : `The priest of the Old Testament was a figure of Christ, the priest of the new law functions in the person of Christ himself.' This must be said in the first place of the Pope, both because of the Pope's conscience, which is felt to be invested with the presence, the grace and the light of Christ, and because of the fact that he entrusts everything to Christ, all the thoughts and operations of his many-sided apostolic activity. It is enough to take thought for the present: it is not necessary to be curious and anxious about the shape of things to come. The Vicar of Christ knows what Christ wants from him and does not have to come before him to offer him advice or to insist on his own plans. The Pope's basic rule of conduct must be always to content himself with his present state and have no concern for the future; this he must accept from the Lord as it comes, but without counting on it or making any human provision for it, even taking care not to speak of it confidently and casually to anyone.

My experience during these three years as Pope, since `in fear and trembling' I accepted this service in pure obedience to the Lord's will, conveyed to me through the voice of the Sacred College of Cardinals in conclave, bears witness to this maxim and is a moving and lasting reason for me to be true to it: absolute trust in God, in all that concerns the present, and perfect tranquillity as regards the future.

The various initiatives of a pastoral character which mark this first stage of my papal apostolate have all come to me as pure, tranquil, loving, I might even say silent, inspirations from the Lord, speaking to the heart of his poor servant who, through no merit of his own save that very simple merit of mere acquiescence and obedience, without discussion, has been able to contribute to the honour of Jesus and the edification of souls.

My first contacts with high and low; the charitable visits here and there; the meekness and humility shown in the approaches made to clarify ideas and give warm-hearted encouragement; my Lenten visits to new parishes; the unexpectedly successful outcome of the Diocesan Synod, the closer links between the papacy and the whole Christian world, achieved by the repeated creation of new Cardinals and Bishops from every nation and of every race and colour, and now this vast activity, of unforeseen and most imposing magnitude, for the General Council—all this confirms the wisdom of the principle of waiting on God and expressing with faith, modesty and confident enthusiasm the good inspirations of the grace of Jesus, who rules the world and guides it according to the supreme purposes of the creation, redemption, and final and eternal glorification of souls and peoples.

*15 August, 1961. Feast of the Assumption*

Here we are on one of the most solemn and beloved occasions for religious devotion. My immediate predecessor Pope Pius XII proclaimed this dogma of faith on 1 November, 1950. As Nuncio to France, I was one of the fortunate ones present at that ceremony in St Peter's Square. I felt no anxiety about this doctrine, having always believed it; during my years in Eastern Europe my eyes were constantly drawn to images of the 'falling asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary', in churches of both the Greek and Slav rites.

On the feast of the Assumption I think with tender affection of Sotto il Monte, where I loved so much to venerate Mary represented in her two statues: the very devout robed statue by Sansi at Brusico, the church of my baptism, and the other fine and powerful statue by the sculptor Manzoni in the new parish church. This was a gift from the beloved parish priest Father Carlo Marinelli, one of the priests best known to me and most helpful in my ecclesiastical training, and very dear to my grateful heart.

The political atmosphere of the world in general just now arouses some anxieties about the problem of preserving peace. I thought it good to celebrate my Assumption Mass here, in the parish of Castel Gandolfo, inviting everyone to it, regular parishioners as well as casual visitors. It was a great and imposing gathering. There were present also Cardinal Agagianian with Mgr Sigismondi and a considerable group from the Seminary of Propaganda. My prayer after the Mass came straight from my heart, moved with emotion and full of fervour. Yesterday I had broadcast throughout the world information concerning the significance of this ceremony: it was an invitation to all Catholics of all nations, Bishops, priests and lay folk, to join with the Pope in collective prayer to the glorious Virgin, the Queen of Peace and Peacemaker of the whole world.

This brief and satisfactory ceremony served as the introduction to this last day of my retreat.

My dominant thought at its close is expressed in the familiar but precious phrase: 'To Jesus through Mary.'

In fact, this life of mine, now nearing its sunset, could find no better end than in the concentration of all my thoughts in Jesus, the Son of Mary, who holds him out to me in her arms for the joy and comfort of my soul.

So I shall concentrate with great care and intimate joy on these three highly significant and glorious words which must summarize my efforts to attain perfection: piety, meekness, charity.

I shall go on trying to perfect my pious practices: Holy Mass, the Breviary, the whole rosary, and a great and constant friendship with Jesus, contemplated as the Child and as the Crucified, and adored in the Blessed Sacrament. The Breviary at all times uplifts my soul; Holy Mass sanctifies it in the Name, the Heart and the Blood of Christ. Oh what tenderness of love and what refreshing happiness I find in my morning Mass!

The rosary, which since the beginning of 1953 I have pledged myself to recite devoutly in its entirety, has become an exercise of constant meditation and tranquil daily contemplation, keeping my mind alert in the vast field of my teaching office and my ministry as supreme Pastor of the Church and common Father of souls.

As my retreat draws to an end, I see very clearly the substance of the task which Jesus in his Providence has allowed to be entrusted to me.

`Vicar of Christ? Ah, I am not worthy of this name, I, the humble child of Battista and Marianna Roncalli, two good Christians to be sure, but so modest and humble! Yet that is what I must be; the Vicar of Christ. `Priest and victim'; the priesthood fills me with joy, but the sacrifice implied in the priesthood makes me tremble.

Blessed Jesus, God and man! I renew the consecration of myself to you, for. life, for death, for eternity. When I turn from considering the events of my life and my circumstances it comes naturally to me to linger frequently on the hill of Calvary, there to speak with the dying Jesus and his Mother, and from Calvary to return to the holy tabernacle where Jesus dwells in his Sacrament. I find it easier to read my Breviary, and I enjoy it more, at my ordinary working desk, but the rosary and my meditation on its mysteries, with the intentions which for some time now I love to add to each decade, I enjoy more on my knees before the sacred veil of the Eucharist.

As a reminder of the fervour and the happy inspirations of these days, I wish to make a note of the three most important points arising from my daily talks with Jesus:

(1) In the morning, recitation of the Breviary followed by holy Mass; before Mass, the Hours up to Sext, after Mass Sext and None and the first five mysteries of the rosary.

(2) After dinner I must never omit the brief visits to the Blessed Sacrament as soon as I leave the dining-room. Then a short rest.

(3) In the afternoon and after my brief rest-never in bed but lying on a sofa-recitation of Vespers and Compline and the next part of the rosary: the sorrowful mysteries. This form of prayer may well take the place of a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

(4) In the evening, at seven-thirty, the third set of mysteries of the rosary, with the whole papal household, secretary, nuns and domestic staff If convenient, a last visit to the Blessed Sacrament, as a prayer for protection during the night hours.

As for the practice of meekness, I add nothing more. I am grateful to the Lord for helping me to keep `meek and humble of heart' in word and deed.

The same as regards charity. It is the Holy Spirit who `lives, speaks and works in us, and is poured out on the clergy and faithful people as great patience and charity unfeigned'.

I have enriched with a Plenary indulgence (ii March, 1960) the so-called 'Universal Prayer' (Oratio Universalis) of Pope Clement XI: 'I believe, O God, but make me believe more firmly, etc.' The memory of this Pope, Giovanni Francesco Albani (1700-1721), is especially dear to me also because of his piety and his devotion to St Joseph, on whose feast (i9 March, 1721) he died. I shall make a habit of saying his prayer more often. Pastor calls it 'a monument more lasting than bronze or marble' (Pastor XV, p. 410). 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? Do you love me?.. . Do you love me? (John 21).

### *Conclusion of my retreat*

For this my good Mgr Cavagna suggests to me the episode of the miraculous draught of fishes, ending in the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, with Peter's replies and the ensuing command: 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.'

There is great authority in these words: the investiture of the Pope with his task as universal shepherd, in answer to his thrice repeated assurance of love, an assurance he gives to Jesus, who has deigned to ask for it with gentle insistence. It is love, then, that matters: Jesus asks Peter for it, and Peter assures him of it.

Peter's successor knows that in his person and in all that he does there is the grace and the law of love, which sustains, inspires and adorns everything; and in the eyes of the whole world it is this mutual love between Jesus and himself, Simon or Peter, the son of John, that is the foundation of Holy Church, a foundation which is at the same time visible and invisible, Jesus being invisible to the eyes of our flesh, and the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, being visible to the whole world. When I ponder this mystery of intimate love between Jesus and his Vicar I think what an honour and what a joy it is for me, but at the same time what a reason for shame for my own littleness and worthlessness!

My life must be filled with the love of Jesus and also with a great outpouring of goodness and sacrifice for individual souls and for the whole world. From the Gospel episode which proclaims the Pope's love for Jesus, and through him for souls, it is but a short step to the law of sacrifice.

Jesus himself foretold this to Peter: 'Truly, truly, I say to you: when you were young you girded yourself and walked where you would, but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go' (John 21: 18).

By God's grace I have not yet entered upon helpless old age; but having now completed my eighty years, I am on the threshold. So I must hold myself ready for this last phase of my life, in which restrictions and sacrifices await me, until the sacrifice of my bodily existence and the opening of eternal life. O Jesus, I am ready to stretch out my hands, now weak and trembling, and allow others to dress me and support me along the way. O Lord, to Peter you added 'and to carry you where you do not wish to go'.

After so many graces, showered upon me during my long life, there is nothing now that I can refuse. You have shown me the way, O Jesus. 'I will follow you wherever you go,' to sacrifice, to mortification, to death.

'Not till death's hour is passed do other men obtain  
The meed of holiness, and glorious rest attain.'

The thought of death, perhaps very near, certainly not far away, brings me back to my beloved St Joseph, rightly venerated among his other titles as Protector of the Dying, because, just as his whole life had been spent with them, so he enjoyed the company of Jesus and Mary at his blessed and happy death. The Church's hymn continues:

'Thou like to angels made, in life completely blest,  
Didst clasp thy God unto thy breast.'

Oh what joy I feel in concluding the last notes of my retreat with the final verse of this liturgical hymn which Holy Church dedicates to the most holy and august Trinity, from whom, as we remember St Joseph, Mary's spouse, flow all blessings and all assurances of radiant and eternal life.

`O Holy Trinity, thy suppliant servants spare,  
Grant us to rise to heaven for Joseph's sake and prayer,  
And so our grateful hearts to thee shall ever raise  
Exulting canticles of praise. Amen."

*Retreat in the Vatican*

**26 November-2 December, 1961**  
**Preacher, Father Ilarino da Milano, Capuchin**

Short notes

(1) I return again to the meditations and notes I wrote for the occasion of my eightieth birthday, when I was alone at Castel Gandolfo with Mgr Alfredo Cavagna, my confessor (cf. the manuscript of my Soliloquies).

(2) To have entered and now to have completed my eightieth year does not cause me any anxiety: in fact, it helps to keep me serene and confident. As always: I desire nothing more or less than what the Lord continues to give me. I thank and bless him every day and I am ready for anything.

(3) I notice in my body the beginning of some trouble. that must be natural for an old man. I bear it with resignation, even if it is sometimes rather tiresome and also makes me afraid it will get worse. It is not pleasant to think too much about this; but once more, I feel prepared for anything.

(4) It gives me joy to keep faithful to my religious practices: Holy Mass, the Divine Office, the whole rosary, with meditation on the mysteries, constant preoccupation with God and with spiritual things.

(5) In order that what I say may be not superficial but full of substance, I wish to become more familiar with the writings of the great Popes of old. In recent months I have felt very much at home with St Leo the Great and with Innocent III. It is a pity that so few ecclesiastics study these writers, who abound in theological and pastoral doctrine. I shall never tire of drawing from these sources, so rich in sacred learning and sublime and delightful poetry.

(6) But above all I must endeavour to seek closer union with the Lord and to keep myself in serene and loving converse with him. He is `the Word of the Father made flesh': the centre and life of the Mystical Body, and a continuation of divine brotherhood, divine and human, through which I am his brother by adoption and, like him, the son of Mary his Mother.

(7) On this kinship is based the mission and office of the chief Pontiff of the Holy Catholic Church, the 'Vicar of Christ', as I am called. Oh how profoundly I feel the meaning and the emotion of the 'Lord I am not worthy' which I say every morning, in token of humility and love, when I take the sacred Host in my hands.

(8) A great deal of my daily work is in preparation for the Second Vatican Council. There begin to take shape in my mind the desire and idea of gathering around me in my daily prayer the prayers of all the secular and regular Catholic clergy, and of the women's religious Congregations, in some official and world-wide form. I shall await a happy inspiration to invite (the sentence ends abruptly).

## 1962

### *July and August, 1962*

This retirement to Castel Gandolfo for my usual, and rather better organized, work, still concerned with the daily occurrences in the life of Holy Church, has enabled me to follow the preparatory work for the Council. The large Audiences were very useful for this purpose. They were perhaps too crowded, as they included representatives from every country in the world, but full of spiritual and religious fervour, and a sincere and pious enthusiasm which is edifying and encourages optimism. What seems clear and providential is that all these crowds of Italians and still more of 'foreigners' who come to Rome know at once how to distinguish between the sacred and the profane; that is, Rome the capital of Catholicism and seat of the universal Roman pontificate, and the Rome of ancient ruins and the whirlwind of secular and . . . worldly living which rages even on the banks of the Tiber. All this however with mutual respect among the various human elements, and no unfriendliness between Italians and non-Italians.

For his part the Pope has been able to press on with his purpose, which is fairly well understood, of spending himself in all that is a service of faith, grace and pastoral spirituality, holding himself aloof from questions of a political character of whatever sort or degree.

The Biblical references to the attitude of the old patriarch Jacob who, when his sons were railing at their brother Joseph, pondered silently over the meaning of Joseph's dream," have had a salutary effect: everyone has kept to his place and behaved with moderation [. . .].

Government and municipal authorities are now busily co-operating with the twofold intent that the Council shall be worthy of Rome as the spiritual centre of the world, and that Rome's arrangements for accommodation, civic hospitality and the honourable treatment of her guests gathered from all over the world may excel all the finest achievements of her past. This is far better than might have been feared, considering the unwillingness of certain spirits who are to be found everywhere, but most of all in Rome, in the service of the 'Prince of this world'.

The personal preparation of the Servant of the Servants of God before the summoning of the Ecumenical Council, which was entirely his own initiative and in capite under his own jurisdiction, is briefly outlined here. His activity from 25 January, 1959, when the first communication was made about the Council, till 11 October, 1962, the official



commencement of the great event, is recorded in the story of these three years of preparation. These acts and documents are already well known.

Here are indicated only the last characteristic expressions-*ora et labora*-of the Pope's own spiritual state immediately before the opening of the Council, with a few brief indications of dates and other details.

### *The Pope's private retreat for the week 8 -16 September*

*Saturday, 8 September:* A day of loving prayer to Mary, on this feast of her nativity; careful reading of the final regulations for Council procedure ; the first session to be from the feast of the Divine Maternity to the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (11 October-8 December).

I have carefully studied the seventy articles of these regulations, to which it will be well frequently to refer.

*Sunday, 9 September:* Preparations in the Vatican for my retreat in the Torre San Giovanni where I intend to withdraw and stay all this week. The only persons to be admitted: the Cardinal Secretary of State if necessary, and every day at eleven o'clock Father Ciappi, Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, so that I may practise speaking correct Latin with him in case it may be necessary for me to do so during the general meetings presided over by me in the Council; and also every day from four till five in the afternoon the Very Reverend father Cavagna, my usual confessor.

*Monday, 10:* At an early hour and in silence I accompanied Mgr Loris Capovilla as he carried the Blessed Sacrament from the Vatican chapel to the chapel of the Torre San Giovanni, where I joyfully began my private pre-Conciliar retreat.

This retreat began with great fervour last night during the almost unexpected visit I agreed to make to the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. This was to have been a private visit, but the great concourse of people turned it into a most impressive occasion.

Although my soul is well disposed for this retreat I am making in preparation for the Council, present circumstances compel me to make inevitable alterations to the usual meditations on these Exercises. This time everything is with the intention of preparing the Pope's soul for the Council: everything, including the preparation of the opening speech which the whole world gathered in Rome awaits, just as it listened most attentively to the speech which was broadcast this very evening to the whole world.

Therefore, to help me to fix my thoughts on spiritual matters, I have resolved to fix my mind on the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity, and the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance; precisely seven points, altogether worthy of concentrated meditation, not only on the part of every good servant of the Lord but above all for the perfection of the holy and sanctifying virtue of a Bishop, and especially of the Bishop of Bishops, whose virtue must shine like the chief point of splendour in the glory of a Council.

This then is the order of the dates and points for thoughtful concentration

*Sunday, 9 September, under the heavenly auspices of Our Lady of the Angels*

Monday, 10: Faith and Hope

Tuesday, 11: Charity

Wednesday, 12: Prudence

Thursday, 13: Justice

Friday, 14: Fortitude

Saturday, 15: Temperance

***Beginning of my private retreat before the Council, in the Torre San Giovanni .***

*Monday, 10 September, St Nicholas of Tolentino*

Holy Mass at home, with prayer to my Holy Family in the chapel, that Jesus, Mary, St Joseph and the little St John may protect and inspire me during this week of spiritual solitude. After Holy Mass, and in complete silence, Mgr Loris took the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle, and I accompanied him along the way, to place it here in the Tower, in the new chapel, on the 'Chinese' altar' which will always remind me

1 A gift from the Chinese Catholics to John XXIII on the first anniversary of his election, 28 October, 1959.

of the missionary activity to which the Pope is called. At eleven o'clock appeared Father Ciappi, Master of the Sacred Palace, with whom I began to practise Latin conversation, and at four o'clock came Mgr Cavagna, my confessor. I realize that my desire to serve the Council will cause some alteration in the customary forms of the so-called Spiritual Exercises. But what is the Pope's life if not a daily continuation of true spiritual exercise for the salvation of his soul and the souls of all the redeemed of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world?

*Wednesday, 12 September, feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary*

Quanto a soave al cuore  
il nome tuo, Maria.  
Ogni dolcezza mia  
Da quel tuo nome vien.  
Che bella idea di amore  
da quel tuo nome appresi,  
the bei desiri accesi  
mi vien destando in sen.

[How sweet is your name to my heart, Mary! Every joy I have is linked with your name, from which I learnt the beauty of love. You arouse such noble desires in my heart.]

These lines are the beginning of the first poem I learnt as a child, and I learnt it from the Second Reader then in use in the village school. I did my first year's schooling in the old village schoolhouse at Camaitino, the first house on the right-hand corner of the so-called Piazza, as you come front the Guardina. Opposite was the shop (butiga) of Rose Bonanomi and her sister Marianna, who was an invalid. That must have been in

1886 or 1887. The next year, with the completion of the new municipal buildings, the new school was opened at Bercio, and for two years I was among the first to attend it.

*Thursday, 13, St Maurilius*

Justice is a common virtue.' This virtue may be exercised in many ways, as I once read in a passage written by Cardinal Mercier; and in Ecclesiasticus 4: 33 we read: 'Strive for justice for thy soul; and even to death fight for justice, and God will overthrow your enemies for you.'

This fourth chapter is indeed very fine, and full of instruction for personal, private and public life.

Meanwhile I continue my Latin conversation about religious matters with my good Father Ciappi, and in the afternoon I speak with Mgr Cavagna, my confessor. Alas! the cares which follow me even here do not permit me to go into it very thoroughly. But all helps to give me courage and a sense of spiritual meaning in everything. And this is what I need in my ministry.

*Saturday, is, St Nicomedus*

My retreat, with only Father Ciappi and Mgr Cavagna to see me, in immediate and personal preparation for the Council, today comes to an end, although I have not been able to use it, as I wished, solely and entirely for the purpose I had set myself.

But it set a good example; it prevented me from being distracted by any exterior matters, business, literature or anything else. It was a more intense effort to find union with the Lord, in prayers, thoughts, and a calm and determined will. It leaves me with an increased fervour in my heart for all that concerns the substance of my ministry and my apostolic mandate. Lord Jesus, supply what I lack. 'Lord you know all; you know that I love you.'

***Summary of great graces bestowed on a man  
who thinks poorly of himself***

A summary of great graces bestowed on a man who has a low esteem of himself but receives good inspirations and humbly and trustfully proceeds to put them into practice.

*First grace.* To have accepted with simplicity the honour and the burden of the pontificate, with the joy of being able to say that I did nothing to obtain it, absolutely nothing; indeed I was most careful and conscientious to avoid anything that might direct attention to myself. As the voting in Conclave wavered to and fro, I rejoiced when I saw the chances of my being elected diminishing and the likelihood of others, in my opinion truly most worthy and venerable persons, being chosen.

*Second grace.* To have been able to accept as simple and capable of being immediately put into effect certain ideas which were not in the least complex in themselves, indeed perfectly simple, but far-reaching in their effects and full of responsibilities for the future. I was immediately successful in this, which goes to show that one must accept the good inspirations that come from the Lord, simply and confidently.

Without any forethought, I put forward, in one of my first talks with my Secretary of State, on 20 January, 1959, the idea of an Ecumenical Council, a Diocesan Synod and the revision of the Code of Canon Law,' all this being quite contrary to any previous supposition or idea of my own on this subject.

I was the first to be surprised at my proposal, which was entirely my own idea.

And indeed, after this everything seemed to turn out so naturally in its immediate and continued development.

After three years of preparation, certainly laborious but also joyful and serene, we are now on the slopes of the sacred mountain.

May the Lord give us strength to bring everything to a successful conclusion!