

1926

*Retreat, 27 November-2 December, 1926
Rome, Monastery of St Paul*

(1) I have been a Bishop for twenty months. As I clearly foresaw, my ministry has brought me many trials. But, and this is strange, these are not caused by the Bulgarians for whom I work but by the central organs of ecclesiastical administration. Thus is a form of mortification and humiliation that I did not expect and which hurts me deeply. 'Lord, you know all.'

(2) I must, I will accustom myself to bearing this cross with more patience, calm and inner peace than I have so far shown. I shall be particularly careful in what I say to anyone about this. Every time I speak my mind about it I take away from the merit of my patience. 'Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord.' I shall make this silence, which must be, according to the teaching of St Francis de Sales, meek and without bitterness, an object of my self-examinations.

(3) The time I give to active work must be in proportion to what I give to the work of God, that is to prayer. I need more fervent and continual prayer to give character to my life. So I must give more time to meditation, and stay longer in the Lord's company, sometimes reading or saying my prayers aloud or just keeping silent. I hope the Holy Father will grant me the boon of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in my home in Sofia. The company of Jesus will be my light, my comfort and my joy.

(4) I must take great care to show charity in my conversation. Even with trustworthy and venerable people I must be very chary about mentioning things which refer to the most delicate part of my ministry and concern the good name of others, especially if these are invested with authority and dignity. Even when I feel the need to confide in someone, in hours of solitude and loneliness, silence and meekness will make suffering for the love of God more productive of good.

(5) The brief experience of these months as Bishop convinces me that for me, in this life, there is nothing better than bearing my cross, as Jesus sets it on my shoulders and on my heart. I must think of myself as the man bearing the cross, and love the cross that God sends me without thinking of any other. All that is not to the honour of God, the service of the Church and the welfare of souls is extraneous to me, and of no importance.

1927

*Retreat, 1927. Ljubljana (Slovenia). House of the
Jesuit Fathers. 9-13 November*

(1) I must, I will, become increasingly a man of intense prayer. This last year has brought some improvement in this direction. I shall continue with

perseverance and fervour, giving even greater attention and importance to my religious duties: Holy Mass, the Breviary, Bible reading, meditation, examination of conscience, the rosary, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in my house and he is my joy. May he ever find in my home and in my life something to gladden his Divine Heart.

(2) There must be more tranquillity, still more tranquillity, sweetness and peace in all my affairs. If I cannot do all the good that I think is necessary for the benefit of souls in the mission entrusted to me, I must not let myself be in the least worried or anxious about this. To do my duty in accordance with the promptings of charity, that is enough. The Lord knows how to use everything for the triumph of his kingdom, even my not being able to do more, even the effort it costs me to remain apparently inactive. By work and example I must impart this tranquillity and peace to others.

(3) I will be more and more careful to rule my tongue. I must be more guarded in the expression of my opinions, even with persons of my own household. Thus must once more become the object of the particular examinations of conscience. Nothing must escape my lips other than praise or the most mildly expressed disapproval or general exhortations to charity, to the apostolate, to virtuous living.

It is my nature to talk too much. A ready tongue is one of God's good gifts but it must be handled with care and respect, that is, with moderation, so that I may be welcome and not found a bore.

(4) In my dealings with all, Catholics and Orthodox, high and low, I must always endeavour to leave an impression of dignity and lovingkindness, a radiant kindness and a pleasing dignity. To these people I represent, however unworthily, the Holy Father. It must therefore be my aim to make him loved and esteemed, even in my own person. This is what the Lord desires. What a task! What a responsibility

(5) To make myself more useful in my ministry in Bulgaria I must apply myself with special care to the study of the French and Bulgarian languages.

(6) I have noticed certain things this year which convince me that I am growing old and that my body sometimes shows signs of its frailty. This will make the thought of death familiar to me, rendering my life more joyful, active and industrious.

(7) Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the souls in my charge, the Church and the Pope be ever in my heart! Serenity, calm and joy be mine in self-giving and self-sacrifice, according to the needs of my apostolic ministry! In my dealings with others: dignity humility, mildness, forbearance and patience, always patience . . . for ever and ever, Amen.

1928

*Annual retreat at Babek on the Bosphorus. Villa of
the Lazarist Fathers. 20-24 December, 1928
Notes*

(1) Today, the Feast of St Thomas the Apostle, I have made the general confession of my twenty-five years of priesthood to Father Luciano Proy, and God has poured a river of peace into my heart.

(2) Twenty-five years a priest! I think of all the ordinary and special graces I have received, of my preservation from grave sins, innumerable opportunities of doing good, sound bodily health, undisturbed tranquillity of mind, good reputation among them, immensely superior to my deserts, and the successful outcome of the various undertakings entrusted to me under obedience. Later on have come ecclesiastical honours, and finally the episcopate, not merely above but in contrast to my deserts . . . all these graces, O God! This thought must keep me habitually in a loving frame of mind, full of humility and awe.

(3) In twenty-five years of priesthood what innumerable failings and deficiencies! My spiritual organism still feels healthy and robust, thanks to God, but what weaknesses! What frequent little indulgences in sloth and in satisfying my preferences for one thing rather than another ! What inner impatience with all that demands effort and toll! What countless distractions in public and private prayers! What haste, at times, to get these over! and what a waste of time spent in reading or in matters that had little to do with the performance of my immediate duty! So many petty attachments to places, to things, to details, amidst all of which I ought rather to have passed as a pilgrim and exile. How easily I have offended against charity towards my fellows, even if in a correct and pious form. In my imagination and in the trend of my thought, what a mixture still remains of the human and worldly with the sacred, supernatural and divine, of the spirit of this world with the spirit of the Cross of Jesus Christ! Therefore I must always see myself as the poor wretch that I am, the least and most unworthy of the Bishops of the Church, barely tolerated among my brethren out of pity and compassion, deserving none but the lowest place: truly the servant of all, not merely in words but in a profound inner sense and outward appearance of humility and submission.

(4) During this spiritual retreat I have felt once more, and most keenly, that it is my duty to be truly holy. The Lord does not promise me twentyfive years of episcopal life, but he does tell me that if I wish to become holy, he gives me the time I need and the necessary graces.

Jesus, I thank you, and I promise you, heaven and earth being my witnesses, that I will make every effort to succeed, beginning from now. Most holy Mary, my kind heavenly Mother, St Joseph, my dearest protector, I call upon you to be my sureties for the promise I make this day before the throne of Jesus, and I implore you to succour me, help me, that I may be faithful.

(5) It is not difficult for me now to understand that the beginning of sanctity lies in my total abandonment to the Lord's holy will, even in little things, and that is why I must insist on this. I do not wish or ask for anything beyond obedience to the dispositions, instructions and wishes of the Holy Father and the Holy See.

I will never take any step, direct or indirect, to bring about any change or alteration in my situation, but I will in all things and at all times live from day

to day, letting others say and do, and suffering whoever so desires to pass ahead of me, without preoccupying myself about my future.

Let my familiar prayers be the two by St Ignatius in the Book of his Exercises: 'Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty' and the other which begins: 'O eternal creator of all things, I make my oblation.' All my heart is in those two prayers. May the Lord help me in this matter never to succumb to the fascination of any ecclesiastical circles in which love of this world may sometimes play a part.

(6) I renew my resolves concerning the life of prayer and union with God. I will be particularly careful about the sacred liturgy: the Mass and the Breviary, the well-meditated rosary, and other religious practices, the faithful observance of which is the safeguard of priestly piety.

(7) My dealings with others must always be marked with dignity, simplicity and kindness, a radiant and serene kindness. The love of the Cross must always be seen in me, a love which must wean my heart more and more from the love of the things of this world. May it make me

patient, equable, forgetful of self, always joyful in the generous exercise of episcopal charity 'which gives birth to some, suffers with others, tries to build up some, is reluctant to offend others, gives way to some, asserts itself to others, is by turns persuasive and severe-hostile to none, a mother to all.'

I shall return frequently to this in my examinations of conscience and confessions .

1930

*Retreat, 1930, at Rustchuk, in the house of the
Passionist Fathers. 28 April-4 May*

"Make me love thy Cross . . ."

A whole series of recent events has conferred on this retreat a special sense of loving abandonment to God, suffering and crucified, my Master and lily King.

The trials, with which in recent months the Lord has tested my patience, have been many: anxieties concerning the arrangements for founding the Bulgarian seminary; the uncertainty which has now lasted for more than five years about the exact scope of my mission in this country; my frustrations and disappointments at not being able to do more, and my enforced restriction to my life of a complete hermit, in opposition to filly longing for work directly ministering to souls; MY interior discontent with what is left of my natural human inclinations, even if until now I have succeeded in holding this under control: all this makes it easier for me to enjoy this sense of trust and abandonment, which contains also the longing for a more perfect imitation of my divine Model.

All around me in this great house is solitude, absolute and magnificent solitude, amid the profusions of nature in flower; before my eyes the Danube; beyond

the great river the rich Rumanian plain, which sometimes at night glows red with burning waste gas. The whole day long the silence is unbroken. In the evening the good Passionist Bishop, Mgr Theelen comes to keep me company for supper.

My soul is absorbed all day in prayer and reflection. Very simple Exercises. I am following the Ignatian text, pausing or reading on as seems more helpful. For reading matter I have a modern treatise by Father Plus: *The Folly of the Cross*, and some other authors that I dip into here and there. O Jesus, I thank you for this solitude which is giving me a real rest and great peace in my soul. As a spiritual bouquet from this retreat, I will gather and preserve a very few conclusions:

(1) With the grace of God, I feel, I want to feel, truly indifferent to all that the Lord may decide for me, as regards my future. Worldly gossip about my affairs makes no impression on me. I am willing to live like this even if the present state of things were to remain unchanged for years and years. I will never even express the desire or the slightest inclination to change, however much this may cost me in my heart.

Oboedientia et pax. That is my Episcopal motto. I want to die with the satisfaction of having always, even in the smallest things, honoured my obligation.

In truth, were I to ask myself what I would desire or do, other than what I am doing now, I would not know how to answer.

(2) For some time past, every morning after Mass I have said-and I think I say it from my heart-the prayer with which St Ignatius concludes his great meditation on the kingdom of Christ: 'O eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation' etc.' To tell the truth, I find it rather hard to say this prayer. But, as I want to keep myself entirely absorbed in the holy will of God and the spirit of Jesus, crucified and despised, I will make habitual and daily use of the following protestation also, which repeats the very words in which St Ignatius describes the third degree of humility:

'O eternal Lord of all things and Heavenly Father, grant to me, your unworthy servant, that I may always be faithful to this protestation whereby, if this were equally to the praise and glory of your divine Majesty, and for the better imitation of Christ Our Lord, so that I may become more like him in all I do, I desire and choose poverty with Christ who was poor, rather than wealth; scorn with Christ who was scorned, rather than Honours; and I prefer to be counted worthless and foolish for the sake of Christ who was once taken for a fool, rather than wise and prudent in this world.

I understand very well the reluctance of my nature, but I rely on the grace of God which, on this foundation of perfect humility, was able to work the sanctification of so many other souls who were to become instruments of his glory and illustrious apostles for the cause of Holy Church.

(3) I feel ever more strongly a love for my Lord's Cross, especially in these days. O blessed Jesus, do not let this be a spurt of flame to flicker out in the first shower of rain, but a burning, inextinguishable fire.

During this retreat I have come across another beautiful prayer which corresponds very well to the state of my spiritual life. It is by a recently canonized saint, St John Eudes. I humbly make it my own, and hope this is not too presumptuous on my part. In its context it is called: 'A profession of love for the Cross.'

'O Jesus, my crucified love, I worship you in all your sufferings. I ask your pardon for all the times I have failed you in the afflictions you have been pleased to send me till now. I embrace the spirit of your Cross, and in this spirit, as in all love of heaven or earth, I welcome with all my heart, for love of you, all the afflictions of body and soul which you may send me. And I promise to find all my glory, my treasure and my joy in your Cross, that is in humiliations, privations and sufferings, saying with St Paul: "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). As for me, I want no other paradise in this world than the Cross of my Lord Jesus Christ."

I think everything will induce me to make a habit of this solemn profession of love for the holy Cross. The profound and lasting impression that I received during the whole ceremony of my consecration as Bishop in Rome in San Carlo al Corso on 19 March, 1925, and since then the difficulties and trials of my ministry in Bulgaria during these five years as Apostolic Visitor, without any consolation save that of a good conscience and the rather sombre prospect for the future, convince me that the Lord wants me all for himself along the royal road of the holy Cross, and it is along this way and none other that I wish to follow him.

So I will make more use of meditations on the Passion of Our Lord, and of those religious exercises which have to do with it; I will celebrate Holy Mass with more fervent devotion, letting my heart be filled and inebriated with the blood of Jesus, the chief shepherd and guardian of my soul.

Oh if I too, poor sinner that I am, could succeed in making that great effort which St Ignatius recommends in his meditation on the sufferings of Jesus, to arouse in my heart feelings of 'grief, sadness and tears'.

(4) A characteristic of this retreat has been a greater inner peace and joy, which embolden me to offer myself to the Lord for any sacrifice he may wish me to make of what is dear to me. My whole person and my whole life must be imbued with this tranquility and joy. This comes easily to me now, but future difficulties and opposition may disturb me. I must do my best to preserve this cheerfulness in my soul and in my outward behaviour. One must learn how to bear suffering without letting anyone even know it is there. Was this not one of the last lessons I learnt from Mgr Radini of revered memory?

One of the similes used by St Francis de Sales, which I love to repeat, is: 'I am like a bird singing in a thicket of thorns'; this must be a continual inspiration to me. So, I must say very little to anyone about the things that hurt me. Great discretion and forbearance in my judgments of men and situations: willingness to pray particularly for those who may cause me suffering, and in everything great kindness and endless patience, remembering that any other sentiment or mixture of sentiments, a la Macedoine, as they say here, is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and of evangelic perfection. So long

as charity may triumph, at all costs, I would choose to be considered as of little worth. I will be patient and good to a heroic degree, even if I am to be crushed. Only in this way shall I deserve to be called a true Bishop and be worthy to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his compliance, humiliation and suffering was the real and only physician and Saviour of all mankind, by whose wounds we are healed.

I commend to my dear Mother Mary and to my gentle protector St Joseph these resolves for a renewed spiritual life. When I leave this holy retreat I will take up my cross once more with joy. Ever forward! How well I remember the motto of Mgr Facchinetti, of revered memory, the dear spiritual director of the first ten years of my priesthood: 'always crucified, under obedience' (semper in cruce oboedientia duce)

Offering of a crucified life: 'O my Jesus, grant me a hard, laborious, apostolic, crucified life. Deign to increase in my soul the hunger and thirst for sacrifice and suffering, humiliation and self-denial. I now no longer desire satisfaction, repose, consolations or enjoyments. What I want, O Jesus, and I implore your Sacred Heart for this, is to be always and evermore a victim, a sacrificial offering, an apostle, virgin and martyr for your sake.' (Thus prayer is by Father Lintelo, who was the apostle in Belgium of devotion to the Eucharist and of the need for spiritual reparation.)

1931

*Short retreat at Bujukada on the Bosphorus, at the
house of the Conventual Franciscans
18-21 June 1931*

(1) It is the octave of the feast of the Sacred Heart. The new Office for this feast seems to augur a renewal of spiritual life. I have in fact only my Breviary with me, and am reading nothing else.

(2) How I love St Augustine's description of the Heart of Jesus: the door of life. Sometimes it seems as if in recent years the devotion to the Sacred Heart has almost reached the point of exaggeration. But if the Heart of Jesus is really the door, there can be nothing excessive or exaggerated about it. We needs must go in and out by this. And I want to go in by it.

(3) There is another thought which gives me great confidence. It is St Bernard's and is included in the Office: 'Where is there a safe shelter and rest for the weak, except in the wounds of our Saviour? The world rages around me, my body presses me down, the devil ensnares me, but I do not riot fill: I am standing on a firm rock. I have sinned greatly, my conscience is troubled, but I do not despair when I remember the wounds of Christ Through his

pierced side the secrets of his Heart are laid bare; we see that great sacrament of compassion, the merciful kindness of our God, which has caused the dayspring from on high to visit us O Lord, how can we see your sweetness, meekness and great mercy more clearly than when we contemplate your wounds ??.

Of late I have found it very natural to feel a devotion to the sacred wounds of the crucified Jesus. It is complementary to the devotion to the Sacred Heart. I will try to do better in these.

(4) During the retreat last year at Rustchuk my circumstances led me to increase my love for the Cross and my desire to suffer with Jesus, my Master and my King. By the grace of God, that profound meditation was not without its fruit. Since then I have felt, and I still feel, more composed and ready for whatever the future may bring, willing to accept the most diverse things, successes or defeats, with equal calm, considering it a great triumph for me simply to be doing my duty in the service of the Holy See.

I shall often return to these considerations, trying to foster in myself the desire and holy longing to suffer with Jesus who suffers, lovingly to accept my present inactivity without being impatient to do more, and to love this semi-obscurity in which the Lord keeps me, prevented as I am by circumstances from doing anything else, though this would be my inclination and my desire.

What does it matter in any case, this little more or less that I can do in the service of Holy Church in my present ministry? Or even in other ministries which might be entrusted to me, but of which I do not and will not think; what is it all worth? In the eyes of God nothing more than the inner disposition of my soul, known to him even in secret; in the eyes of men, 'a mist that appears for a little time', often a snare and a delusion.

(5) I am in the fiftieth year of my life: therefore a mature man on the road to old age: perhaps death is near. I have achieved very little in half a century of life and of following a priestly vocation. I feel humble and ashamed before the Lord, and ask his pardon 'for my countless sins', but I look to the future with imperturbable and confident serenity.

'Heart of Jesus in which the Father is well pleased.'" This invocation has made a great impression on me during this retreat. When the Father's voice was heard expressing his pleasure, Jesus had as yet done nothing in his life except live in obscurity, in silence and humble prayer, doing the humblest work. Oh what great comfort there is in this teaching!

(6) I go on my way once more, ever more determined to make the most of the time that yet remains. I must persevere, driving my body and soul without merry. I will, I must be of more use, even in my present ministry. Therefore, a more conscientious use of my time: everything to be done at once, speedily and well; no waiting about, no putting lesser things before the more important; always alert, busy and serene.

(7) But above all and in all things I must endeavor to express in my inner life and outward behaviour the image of Jesus, 'gentle and lowly of heart'. May God help me.

1933

*Retreat in Sofia a with the Capuchin Fathers
4-8 September, 1933*

Great calm and peace. I have had to do everything myself because the good preacher Father Samuele had prepared some fine discourses for his colleagues but without any knowledge of the Ignatian method.

On the first day I dwelt on the theme of holy detachment. On the second day I made my confession to my usual excellent confessor, Father Alberto. I was content, and my heart very calm and peaceful. Once more I reviewed the best resolutions of my Episcopal life, and renewed them with all the fervour the Lord was pleased to grant me. I feel I am poor and helpless, but I persist in my resolve to sanctify myself at all costs, calmly and patiently, with absolute trust in Jesus, the "shepherd and guardian of my soul".

The general character of my resolutions of these days is expressed in the simple words of The Imitation of Jests Christ: `Desire to be unknown, and little esteemed. But, with all this, I roust never lose heart. On the contrary, I must always be cheerful, serene, courageous, until my last hour. Jesus, Joseph, Mary, may I breathe forth my soul at peace with you.

My prolonged mission as papal representative in this country often causes me acute and intimate suffering, but I try not to show thus. I bear and will bear everything willingly, even joyfully, for the love of Jesus, in order to resemble him as closely as I can and to do his holy will in everything, and for the triumph of his grace amid these people, so simple and good but, alas, so very unfortunate! All in the service of Holy Church and the Holy Father and for my own sanctification. `Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you'.

1934

*Retreat in 1934 at Rustchuk, with the Passionist Fathers
27-31 August*

(1) Father Ausonio Demperat, Assumptionist, preached for us. His sermons were good and earnest but far removed from the Ignatian method. I made my confession to Father Isidoro Detin, Vicar General to Mgr Theelen, and parish priest of Oresc. I am content.

(2) My soul is tranquil. This year was remarkably calm.

I tremble when I think of how the Lord will judge me, looking at me by the light of his lantern. But when I ask myself what more I can do to please the Lord, and to make myself holy, I find no other answer than thus: continue

under obedience as you are now; do your ordinary things, day after day, without over-anxiety, without ostentation, but always trying to do them with greater fervor and perfection.

Be faithful to the pattern of priestly piety: Mass, brief meditation, Breviary, rosary, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examinations of conscience, the reading of good books; but all this with a greater enthusiasm of love, with superabundant zeal, like a lamp overflowing with oil.

Do not be concerned about your future but think that perhaps you are drawing near the gateway of eternal life. At the same time be ever more content to live like this, hidden from the world, perhaps forgotten by your Superiors, and do not grieve at being little appreciated but try to find an even greater joy in "being esteemed of little worth."

(3) The circumstances of my ministry, as it has taken shape during ten years in Bulgaria, do not advise or permit me to do anything more than I am already doing—at least for the present. So I must go on living from day to day. I will offer more lovingly to Jesus the life I lead here and the restrictions I have to set on my outward activity and my whole life of more intense prayer for the salvation and sanctification of my soul and the souls of these Bishops and priests, and for the wider diffusion and penetration of the spirit of charity in this country where everything is so harsh; for the edification and religious advancement of the Catholics and for the enlightenment and blessing of this Bulgarian people, so sadly misled and yet so richly endowed with capacities for service in the kingdom of Christ and his Church.

(4) What has Mgr Roncalli been doing during these monotonous years at the Apostolic Delegation? Trying to make himself holy and with simplicity, kindness and joy opening a source of blessings and graces for all Bulgaria, whether he lives to see it or not.

This is what ought to be. But these are grand words and still grander things. O my Jesus, it shames me to think of them; I blush to speak of them. But give me the grace, the power, the glory of making this conic true. The rest does not matter. All the rest is vanity, worthlessness and affliction of the soul.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, my heart and soul are yours, now and for ever.