

1924

Retreat, Rome, Villa Carpegna 13-19 January, 1924
General reflections

(1) Today, 18 January, the Feast of St Peter's Chair, it is three years since I began, under obedience, my work as president for Italy of the Propagation of the Faith in the World.' You have always been with me, O Lord Jesus, and good and merciful: 'Thy decrees are very sure. '2 To my sorrow, I left behind in Bergamo what I loved so much: the seminary, where the Bishop had appointed my most unworthy self as spiritual director, and the students' hostel, the darling of my heart. I have thrown myself, heart and soul into my new work. Here I must and will stay, without a thought, a glance or a desire for anything else, especially as the Lord gives me indescribable happiness here.

(2) Anyone who judges me from appearances takes me for a calm and steady worker. It is true that I work; but deep in my nature there is a tendency towards laziness and distraction. This tendency must, with the help of God, be forcibly resisted. To humble myself constantly I will always tell myself that I am a lazy fellow, a beast of burden that ought to do much more work and get on with it much faster, and so deserves to be beaten. I must be particularly careful not to procrastinate but to do at once what is most urgent. In everything, however, I must keep and impart to others that calm and composure with which alone things can be done and done properly. I will not worry if others are in a hurry. He who is always in a hurry, even in the business of the Church, never gets very far.

(3) I fix the following rules as fundamental for the reorganization of my life: rising at six o'clock and saying my prayers in my room; from seven to eight, work at my desk. From eight to nine-thirty, Holy Mass and prayers (meditation, etc.). Less time to be spent after dinner and after supper in chatter. A short walk every day, and this to include the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. To bed at eleven, never later. I will faithfully attend at least the discussion on the *casus moralis* and if possible also on the *casus liturgicus* and always the priests' monthly meeting at San Claudio.

(4) The Association for the Propagation of the Faith is the breath of my soul, and lily life. Everything must be for this, and always: head, heart, spoken and written word, my prayers, labours and sacrifices, by day and night, in Rome and elsewhere, I repeat, everything and always. I will accept other priestly tasks only in so far as I can subordinate them and make them serve my primary mission, which is the only reason for my presence here in Rome.

(5) In order the better to succeed in developing the work and lily whole programme, I will always remember and practise St Gregory's rule, which is to make others Work, and not keep everything, or almost everything, in my own hands: 'Less important matters are to be assigned to subordinates, more important things are to be dealt with by the Superiors, so that the preoccupation with trifles may not, as it were, blind the eyes which should be concerned with the general plan' (*Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, II, c. 7).

Fortunately, this does not go against the grain with me, and moreover the Lord has given the excellent collaborators.

(6) I shall insist on making good use of mortification in matters of choice, in order that the Lord may enfold my whole person, soul and body, in the atmosphere of priestly purity, so that I may be the fragrance of Christ' everywhere, because I know that if God does not help me, I too am capable of anything.

(7) The Church, in view of my office, has conferred on me the dignity and honour of a prelate, which is more than I can ever deserve. I want to honour thus the part of Holy Church by great spiritual humility (considering myself, as I am, the least and most unworthy of all) and by friendliness with all, especially with the poor and humble.

(8) I intend to set a special watch on my tongue, avoiding every word -I repeat, every word- which in any way might sin against charity. I shall always find something which I can at least improve in this connection, so I shall insist on it in my examinations of conscience.

(9) The care I wish to take about my conversation with my fellow men, especially with my superiors, I wish to show also in all my religious practices, which I shall perform 'worthily, attentively, and devoutly' for my own spiritual joy and for the edification of my fellows. 'Heart of Jesus, burning with love for me, inflame my heart with love for you. Mary, Mother of grace, pray for me. St Joseph, pray for me. St Francis Xavier, pray for me. St Francis de Sales, pray for me. St Paul and all the saints, intercede for me.'

Special reflections

The priest assistants are Father Folli, whom I met at Siena when the arm of St Francis Xavier was taken there to be venerated, and Father Santopaolo. There are only five of us making the retreat, and so we are not given the points for the meditations; everyone looks after himself.

On my desk I have Father Bucceroni's fine commentary, but I prefer to do my own thinking, humbly and fervently, on the text of St Ignatius.

I am here, unworthy as I am, 'to conquer self and set my life in order', that is, to overcome my sluggishness which still hampers me, and to increase my activity and output. Everyone says that I work too hard, but I know that I really do very little, compared with so much more that I could do for my principal ministry, which is my work for the Propagation of the Faith.

St Ignatius desires to see the effort to acquire a virtue even more than the virtue itself. 'We must cultivate detachment from all created things.' In the Book of the Exercises there is a remarkable example of the greater or lesser sin of the man who speaks against the Papal Bulls on the Crusades, 'in acting or causing others to act against the pious exhortations and recommendations of our Superiors'.

What useful conclusions can be drawn from the Meditation on the three sins?

What have I done for Christ? Little, little or nothing.

What am I doing for Christ?' Something, but badly, like a sluggard.

What should I do for Christ? Everything, O Lord, if you do but help me with your holy grace.

The meditation on the kingdom of Jesus Christ has done me a great deal of good. I want to return to it frequently and every morning I will say the very beautiful and powerful prayer which concludes it, and which I have written out for my own devotions: O aeterne Domine rerum etc.

I have made my confession to Father Folli, and I feel a great peace in my soul.

'Let everyone consider that the more he detaches himself from his own self-love, will and self-interest, so much the more will he perfect himself in spiritual things.'

So it is quite clear: to love God, not myself; to do the will of God, not my own, and work for the good of others, not for my own, and all this always, everywhere and with great joy

'Even as an angel of God, neither moved with blessing nor with cursing.'" What fine encouragement to despise the world for one who, Angelo by name, would like to be an angel in fact!

'Jesus Christ, rising from the dead, has made man's life one long festival of joy.' This thought of St Athanasius is a fitting conclusion for these days, dear holy days, full of spiritual emotions.

Today is the third anniversary of my coming to Rome to take up my work on behalf of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. My thoughts turn reverently to the Chair of St Peter, whence every apostolate draws its motive and He. In this beautiful place of meditation and rest, whence I can see the majestic dome, I hail that Chair of truth and pay it the fervent homage of my mind and heart.

A day of wonderful sunshine! The sparrows are chirping in the warm air. It is a delight to hear them, and the song of the bells of St Peter's.