

1905-1906

1905

In 1905 Fr Angelo Roncalli did not make his usual annual retreat. He took part for the first time in a pilgrimage to Lourdes, from which he brought back tender and unforgettable memories, which he often lovingly recalled. On this occasion he visited other French shrines, notably the basilica of the Sacred Heart at Paray-le-Monial and the places hallowed by the Curé d'Ars.

From 19-21 April, 1905 before taking up his duties as Secretary to Mgr Giacomo M. Radini Tedeschi, Bishop of Bergamo, Fr Angelo Roncalli passed three days in retreat with the Camaldolesi of the Hermitage at Frascati. No notes remain from these Exercises. On 19 May, 1959, after he became Pope, he went to the Nursing Home of the Sisters of St Elizabeth at Frascati, to visit Mgr Paolo Pappalardo, Titular Archbishop of Apamea in Syria, who was a patient there, and took the opportunity of going up to the Hermitage. The Camaldolesi monks, in memory of this visit and of the days which he had spent there in 1905 put up a tablet inscribed in Latin with these words:

**THIS HUMBLE STONE COMMEMORATES
POPE JOHN XXIII
WHO, HAVING ALWAYS TREASURED AN UNFADING MEMORY
OF THE HOLY HERMITAGE OF THE CAMALDOLESI MONKS,
WHERE HE HAD MADE A RETREAT OF FERVENT PRAYER
FROM 19-21 APRIL, 1905
BEFORE HOLDING FOR TEN YEARS THE OFFICE OF
SECRETARY TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND VIRTUOUS
GIACOMO RADINI TEDESCHI, BISHOP OF BERGAMO,
RETURNED UNEXPECTEDLY TO THE TUSCULAN HILL
ON THE EVENING OF 19 MAY, 1959,
SO BRINGING THE MONKS
AN UNLOOKED FOR AND MUCH APPRECIATED JOY.**

1906

From 19 September to 22 October, instead of making a retreat, he took part in the third Italian national pilgrimage to the Holy Land, led by the Bishop, Mgr Radini.

We have a few notes about this journey, written in pages full of moving piety, published in 1906 in *L'Eco di Bergamo*, from 27 September to 25 October, and in the journal of the Committee for Palestine and Lourdes. These are to be published in full in a later volume of Pope John's papers. Here are two extracts:

30 September

I am leaving Cana, but not without a heartfelt hope and prayer. At Cana Jesus worked his first miracle, gave the first proof of his divinity. But now at Cana,

out of about 1,300 inhabitants, the majority are Moslems, most of the others being schismatic Greeks and very, very few, about fifty in all, Catholics, and these are more or less like all the Catholics in Palestine, not very faithful and not at all fervent. May the Lord grant that the new altar solemnly consecrated today and dedicated to the mystery of the first miracle of Jesus may call all those scattered souls and gather them together in the unity of the Catholic faith, its the whole-hearted and constant practice of the Christian life.

4 October

(Jerusalem. Pontifical Mass of Mgr Radini Tedeschi.) The Bishop compared the bewilderment of the pious women when they saw the stone of the sepulcher rolled away with the sense of amazement and grief felt by Christians from distant countries when confronted with the disorder, the confusion of people, things, languages, rites and faiths surrounding the holy sepulchre. Then he made an impassioned appeal to the risen Christ to return in all the splendour of his glory above the empty tomb not to disperse but to convert, that there may be heard again, in this place above all others, and echoed throughout the entire East, and from the Russian Steppes and Africa too, his promise of one fold and one shepherd. All eyes were on the Bishop and all hearts responded to his words and throbbed in unison with his in one great prayer, the common desire shared by all that the separated brethren should return to the true fold.

With the help of all Christians everywhere why should today's prayer not become tomorrow's reality? Meanwhile we must strive for the realization of this wonderful prayer, so magnificently expressed, and leave the rest to God, knowing that Christ's words will one day come to pass, and especially here in Jerusalem: one fold and one shepherd!

1907

*Retreat of 1907, in the House of the Holy Family
at Martinengo, 1-7 September*

At last I have been able to give some time to recollection, in this retreat which I have so long desired. I have revised my old resolutions and have experienced once more my former impressions. My spiritual life has been rather too much affected by the events of these first years of my priesthood, during which I have never had time to think seriously about myself. My soul has always been, as it were, dissipated in a thousand little responsibilities and duties, some of them very unimportant, but which are always there and always will be. I feel impelled to thank God, not only for having preserved me from grave sins but for the immense innumerable precious, ordinary and extraordinary graces which he has never ceased and never ceases to pour into my soul. Such graces, my God, so strange and indescribable! This thought alone is an appeal

to me to rekindle my fervour and strengthen my resolve truly to lead a holy priestly life. O Jesus, I will answer your call: it might be the last, for who knows what your plans are for my life? I return to your embrace, to your loving Heart. My position as secretary to the Bishop and my teaching duties, which are heavier this year, determine the character of my whole life, a life of great recollection, prayer and study. In a word, I have gone back to being a seminarian, and I wish to live as one. I have looked over all the notes I wrote while I was in Rome. These certainly contain practical ideas and impressions which are always useful. I will add a few more notes and a few more resolutions, to which I shall often return during my examinations of conscience.

(1) My continual and pressing occupations in the house and elsewhere have worked havoc in my religious exercises. So everything must be put back into its proper place. I intend to be adamant on this point. I will always recite Matins with Lauds in the evening; come what may, I must find time for a little meditation before Mass, half an hour, twenty minutes, a quarter of an hour or, if I can do no more, at least ten minutes: the meditation must on no account get left out. I will never leave the chapel before I have said the Little Office as well. My set time for getting up in the morning must be regulated according to circumstances, so as to leave time for everything. As a general rule I will get up at half past five. This means that even if I go to bed at half past eleven I shall have six hours' sleep, which ought to be enough.

(2) During the retreat, I have once more felt a great surge of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Thus devotion has meant everything to me; now that I am a priest I must give it all my love. 'The heart in love goes with him, comes with him, stays with him always, Tasso said of the soul in love with God.' That is what my life must be, centered in the Blessed Sacrament. I will never miss my daily visit and I will try to return to Jesus frequently during the rest of the day, if only to greet him. I must treat Jesus as I would treat a guest whom I am delighted to honour. My devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart must permeate my whole life, my thoughts and affections and all I do, so that I live only by it and with it. I must take great care over my preparation for Holy Mass and my thanksgiving afterwards. I must also scrupulously hold to my monthly day of recollection of the first Sunday of every month, or the nearest and most convenient day to this, and make my examination of conscience strictly, every day in the afternoon after Vespers.

(3) One of my chief faults consists in still not having learnt to make the right use of time. I must find a way of doing much in a short time, and with this in mind I must be most careful not to waste a single moment in useless things, idle chatter, etc. Immediately after breakfast I will attend to the duties of my office, correspondence, etc. All the remaining time is for my lectures, which I shall prepare most conscientiously. I will read the newspapers at times, when I have least energy for other things, after dinner, on my walks, for example, or in any odd moments. Every day, last thing at night, I will read some good books which will be of use to my soul.

(4) My post as Bishop's secretary sets me grave duties and demands the greatest tact and prudence. I will always try very hard to succeed in all this. The first thing necessary is great reverence for the Bishop, at all times, in my mind and heart, in my works, in private and in public, full obedience and union of mind and heart with him. It is also my duty to set a good example in the eyes of men by conduct befitting a priest; to be charitable and gentle in all circumstances and to be tactful and reserved, especially in my speech. I must speak little but well, and above all know how to keep silence, but without ostentation and without becoming a bore, indeed always preserving the greatest tranquillity of soul and calm with everyone, with the finest courtesy in manners and speech so as to hurt no one. In short, I will follow the advice St Paul gave to Titus: "Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds." Nor will I forget what the Holy Father Pius X said to me when he came to Bergamo with the Bishop: "So, Father Angelo, you must be a faithful servant and a wise one, a wise one!" As for what the world may say, let us "rejoice and do well", and let the sparrows twitter.

1908

Retreat of 25-31 October, at Martinengo with the Bishop

(1) I thank God once more for having borne with me till now and for the new grace of this retreat. My first conclusion is a profound feeling of my utter worthlessness and the renewal of my old resolve to sanctify myself at all costs, beginning straight away, because these beautiful and precious years are swiftly passing.

(2) I still note in myself a lack of calm and serenity in what I do, although perhaps this is not apparent to others. The numerous tasks assigned to me leave my head and heart in a ferment of excitement and prevent my attending seriously and whole-heartedly to anything, to the grave detriment of my spirit of piety. Therefore more calm, more orderliness in everything, with my practices of piety taking precedence over everything else, cost what it may.

(3) I feel a great need of more intense prayerfulness and a closer and more trustful union with my Lord in the midst of my work. Therefore I resolve very firmly to keep to my religious practices very scrupulously.

I will always and without fail get up at half past five, so that I shall never lack time for meditation; and after supper I will always say Matins with the Lauds of the following day. The visit to the Blessed Sacrament, either in the house or outside, must never be omitted. Above all, I must see that I am recollected and attentive while reading my Breviary and saying the holy rosary. I will try to keep my spirit of prayer constantly alive, for this is essential if I am to preserve the fervour of my resolutions.

(4) Just lately the good Lord has been pleased to give me a clearer understanding of what it means to be a priest, and how this conception should rule my whole priestly life. I must think of myself as always in the hands of God, like a victim ready for the sacrifice of myself, my ideas, my comforts, my honour, all I have: for the glory of God, for my Bishop, for the good of my dear diocese: `a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. I will accustom myself to constant reflection on the sublime meaning of these words. So, without resorting to extremes, I shall find a way of practising continual mortification, especially of my self-love and my comforts, without complaining and without losing the joy in my soul, which will shine through and be seen in all my actions. Tills will be particularly in my thoughts when I am celebrating Holy Mass, when I will unite myself to Jesus Christ, the High Priest and divine victim for the whole world. What a fine thing that would be, to work untiringly and suffer in silence the little setbacks of every day, without ever losing my composure, always preserving pure and glowing the desire to suffer more and contribute more to the welfare of the diocese and to please lily good Master Jesus Christ.

(5) I have re-read the brief notes which I still keep in various shin notebooks of the Spiritual Exercises made in Rome when I was a student, preparing for Holy Orders.' O my Lord, do not let me forget the good intentions of those days.

I am still what I was, a sinner, and ungrateful for the tender love you have shown me: yet I still desire to work and to make myself holy, in order that I may soon be able to do something useful for the Church.

The examples of your saints, whose lives I read, spur me on to imitate them more courageously. O good Jesus, support me in my good intentions and come to my aid.

1909

During the retreat made at Martinengo with the *Bishop, from 19-25 September, 1909*

(1) I have nothing to add to or to take away from the resolutions made during the two preceding retreats, concerning my life of prayer. It is humiliating to have to confess the same negligence over and over again, but I am bound to do so.

I shall follow more closely my spiritual director's advice to go to bed a little earlier in the evening, so as to rise punctually at half past five in the morning. Getting tip at the right time and without delay makes a good start for the whole day. I shall also follow the good practice of saying the Divine Office as a role in the chapel in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

(2) During this retreat I have frequently felt a strong urge to study Holy Scripture, and I have already begun, with great enjoyment, to read St Paul's Epistles. I intend to go on doing this, and also frequently to use a passage from Holy Scripture, generally from the New Testament, as matter for my

meditation. Every evening, before going to bed, I shall read a chapter from the Bible, calmly and devoutly.

(3) All the things I have to do, which at times seem unending, are burdensome to the and confuse my brain. This will not do. I roust do all my work with religious care but without in any way disturbing the tranquillity and peace of my soul. I will just do what I can. Above all, I will take care not to put off till the last moment the most important things and those which I am most bound to do.

(4) During these days I have decided to join the new Diocesan Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart and I hope soon to be able to gratify this wish. This act does not require of roe anything more than what I have promised the Lord for a long time past, that is, ` to consider myself entirely at the disposal of my Superiors, without ever doing anything that might influence them, one way or another, about me. However, it will be a new and constant encouragement to me to persevere in all my former intentions to sanctify myself, and also to give a good example to the other priests, especially the younger ones. Being a member of the new Congregation will serve to keep intact the spirit of utter humility and obedience, and will place me under a stricter obligation not to be self-seeking in any way, but always to follow the will of God as expressed in the will of my Bishop. May the Lord and Our Lady bless me in this joyful intention.

(5) Although I am not making any special resolutions but only renewing those made on former occasions, which are quite sufficient, when I come out of this retreat I shall have to make some adjustments in my life, if I am myself to feel in my soul the full benefits of these reforms.

However, to remind myself of my intentions and also to accustom myself a little more to the spirit of Christian mortification, which will also be good for my bodily health, I promise to practise self-denial, especially in food. Eating a little less than usual will certainly do me good. So I will cut down my portions by half, and in general drink little wine, and that mixed with water. On second thoughts, it seems to me I am promising too much. However, I hope the Lord will help me to keep my resolves faithfully and enable me to find joy in doing so.

(6) Next year there will be great celebrations in Lombardy for the third centenary of the canonization of St Charles Borromeo; I have already tried to do something for him here in Bergamo, pointing out how richly the great Archbishop has earned our gratitude. I myself will try to make this great saint more and more familiar to my heart and mind, to pray to him frequently for his help and to imitate him. If, with the Lord's help, I could inspire the souls of our clergy with the example of St Charles, it would do much to increase their eagerness for apostolic work, to the greater spiritual advantage of the whole diocese. Perhaps the work I have undertaken will be very onerous, but I will do it willingly in honour of St Charles, certain that in this way I shall be contributing more to the desired result.

1910

*During the retreat made at Martinengo with the
Bishop, from 2-8 October, 1910*

(1) Another year of grace has come and gone. But I have made little progress in perfection and so once more I feel humbled and ashamed. But I do not lose heart. I have read over word for word what I wrote and promised last year, and I am starting again at the beginning, resolved to carry out my religious duties with more faithfulness and precision. There must be fewer distractions in so many things; and I must learn to be contented with what is possible, and in all things acquire an ever more sensitive and profound sense of humility because of my worthlessness, and a habitual trust in God who is all and can do all things. Only by being united to him can I do anything. I must remind myself that the Lord takes everything into account, even the word that went unsaid, the glance that was denied, the invocation and the stifled sigh. I shall therefore endeavor to continue in the practice of the presence of God who strengthens, cheers and encourages me at all times.

(2) During this retreat Jesus, my blessed Lord, has deigned to give me an even clearer understanding of the necessity of keeping whole and intact my 'sense of faith' and my 'being of one mind with the Church, for he has shown me in a dazzling light the wisdom, timeliness and nobility of the measures taken by the Pope to safeguard the clergy in particular from the infection of modern errors (the so-called Modernist errors), which in a crafty and tempting way are trying to undermine the foundations of Catholic doctrine. The painful experiences of this year, suffered here and there, the grave anxieties of the Holy Father and the pronouncements of the religious authorities have convinced me, without the need of other proof, that this wind of Modernism blows very strongly and more widely than seems at first sight, and that it may very likely strike and bewilder even those who were at first moved only by the desire to adapt the ancient truth of Christianity to modern needs. Many, some of these good men, have fallen into error, perhaps unconsciously; they have let themselves be swept into the field of error. The worst of it is that ideas lead very swiftly to the spirit of independence and private judgment about everything and everyone.

I thank the Lord on my knees for having preserved me safely in the midst of such a ferment and agitation of brains and tongues.

But the experience of others and my own preservation until now are a grave warning that I must keep an even closer watch over my impressions, thoughts, feelings and words, everything that in any way might be affected by this devastating whirlwind. I must always remember that the Church contains within herself the eternal youth of the truth and of Christ, and is of all ages; it is the Church which transforms and saves the peoples and the times, not the other way round.

The most precious treasure of my soul is faith, the holy, pure, simple faith of my parents and the other good old folk in my family. I will be vigilant and strict with myself lest the purity of my faith should come to any harm.

(3) The grave responsibilities as Professor in the seminary assigned to me by my Superiors, oblige me not only to think of the purity of my faith for my own sake, but also in order to see that in all that I teach the young clerics in the school, as in all my words and bearing, a spirit of loyalty to the Church and the Pope be apparent. In this way I shall influence them for good, and bring them up to think the same way too. Therefore I shall be most guarded in all I do and say, taking care to imbue my students with that spirit of humility and prayer in all their studies which strengthens the understanding and ennobles the heart.

1911

*Retreat made at Martinengo with the
Bishop, 1-7 October, 1911*

(1) I am always greatly encouraged by the thought of the past, but also much ashamed. I am now a liegeman in the service of Jesus Christ and his holy cause. I must seek nothing else, but try to remain cheerful and calm amidst all my various occupations, without haste but without procrastination, without fuss or over-exertion.

(2) I intend, and I hope this time with better results, to pay careful attention to orderliness and recollection in my religious exercises. This is something I really need. In the evening after supper: Matins and Lauds. I must get up at half past five, assist at the Bishop's Mass and then say my own; after the thanksgiving, the Hours. A brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament as soon as I return from my classes, another before the afternoon lesson. Vespers after my brief siesta and everything else in its right place. These are the absolute imperatives: my own fervour will suggest anything else.

This year I have joined the Association of Priest Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, so I must be faithful to my hour. Calm in everything, but combined with fidelity and precision.

(3) I confirm my last year's intention about guarding my loyalty of heart and mind to the Church and the Pope. In days of uncertainty and sadness St Alphonsus used to say: 'The Pope's will: God's will !' This shall be my motto and I will be true to it. O Lord, help me, for I desire you alone!

1912

*During the retreat made at Martinengo with the
Bishop, from 13-19 October, 1912*

(1) I am about to enter the thirty-second year of my life. The thought of the past makes me humble and ashamed; the thought of the present is consoling; because mercy is still being shown to me; the thought of the future encourages me in the hope of making up for lost time. How much future will there be?

Perhaps a very short one. But long; or short as it may be, O Lord, once more I tell you that it is all yours.

(2) I must not try to find or follow new ways of doing good. I live under obedience, and obedience has already overburdened me with so many occupations that my shoulders are sagging under the weight. But I am willing to bear this and other burdens, if the Lord so desires. My rest will be in heaven. These are the years for hard work. My Bishop sets me an example, since he does more than I. I will be most careful never to waste a single moment.

(3) I find it humiliating, but it is my duty to insist again on the resolutions already made about being absolutely faithful to my rule of life. Getting up at half past five, then meditation, the Bishop's Mass, my Mass, thanksgiving, the Hours; brief but frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Vespers after my brief siesta, a very devout recital of the rosary; after supper Matins and Lauds, without fail, and a rather longer visit to the Blessed Sacrament; some spiritual reading; before falling asleep. These are the fundamental points: they are my lifeline.

O Lord, I acknowledge my weakness; help me to keep strictly to these practices. Help me so that next year I shall not need shamefacedly to confess once more my infidelity.

(4) Having to keep to strict times for meals, with so many other things to think about, has discouraged any greediness over food. That is all to the good. But I must do more. My miserable body is becoming; fat and heavy; I am conscious of this as it reduces the physical agility which also is very necessary to me if I am to do good; moreover, the body must be kept tamed lest it should start to kick: "chastise my body and subdue it."

So I must be very careful to eat slowly, not like a greedy man, and in general eat a little less, and in the evening very little. The same with drink. It is above all in the use of food and drink that I must exercise the spirit of mortification.

(5) Next month on the feast of St Charles I will place in the Bishop's hands the special promises which will make me a member (external) of the Congregation of Priests of the Sacred Heart. I confess that certain difficulties which arose almost weakened my good intentions about this. But they were due to human respect and caused, for the most part, by my pride. So I am glad to crush them underfoot and to hasten with eagerness wherever Jesus calls me and has shown that he wants me.

I care nothing for the judgments of the world, even of the ecclesiastical world. My intention, before God, is upright and pure. I want a seal, a visible seal, set on the intention conceived in the first years of my clerical life, that is the intention of being entirely and solely under obedience, in the hands of my Bishop, even in matters of no importance. I intend that the promise which I make shall be a declaration before the whole Church that it is my will to be crushed, despised, neglected for the love of Jesus and for the good of souls, and to live always in poverty and detachment from all the interests and riches of this world.

During this retreat the Lord has been pleased to show me yet again all the importance for me, and for the success of my priestly ministry, of the spirit of sacrifice, which I desire shall from now on ever more inspire my conduct 'as a servant and prisoner of Jesus Christ'. =And also I want all the undertakings in which I shall take part during this present year to be done in this spirit, in so far as I have a share in them; all are to be done for the Lord and in the Lord: plenty of enthusiasm but no anxiety about their greater or less success. I will do them as if everything depended on me but as if I myself counted for nothing, without the slightest attachment to them ready to destroy or abandon them at a sign from those to whom I owe obedience.

O blessed Jesus, what I am proposing to do is hard and I feel weak, because I am full of self-love, but the will is there and comes forth from my heart. Help me! Help me!

(6) The keen sense of my own nothingness must ripen and perfect in the the spirit of kindness, great kindness, making me patient and forbearing with others in the way I judge and treat them. Although I am only just over thirty years old, I begin to feel some wear and tear of the nerves. This will not do. When I feel irritable I must think of my own worthlessness and of my duty to understand and sympathize with everyone, without passing harsh judgments. This will help me to keep calm.

(7) The work I am doing now requires great delicacy and prudence as it frequently means dealing with women.' I intend therefore that my behaviour shall always be kind modest and dignified so as to divert attention from my own person and give a richer spiritual quality to my work. Past experience is an encouragement for the future. Here again, if I think poorly of myself and distrust my own powers and raise my thoughts constantly to Jesus, returning to his embrace as soon as I have ended my task, it will be a great protection. It would be dangerous if in this work I were to presume on my own powers for a single moment.

(8) There is a great deal of tittle-tattle about just now. I will be true to my principles of love, obedience and devotion to the Holy Father and be on my guard against anything that might impair these loyalties, but I shall not let myself be distracted by idle gossip, still less get drawn into it. There is so much to do, and the words of our Holy Father Pius X are so solemn, and the opportunities he has given for apostolic zeal in the present hour so vast, that it seems to me a waste of time to get involved in journalistic questions. While remaining apart from all this and above it I will nevertheless consider it my duty always to speak well of the Holy Father and of his directives, and to inculcate in others that sense of love and veneration for him which I shall feel myself. This I will try to do, especially with my students in the seminary.

(9) I once again renew all the intentions I formed during earlier retreats. What I wrote at various times during these still reflects my needs and present conditions.

For the rest, let us proceed with confidence. A life of piety in the most profound theological sense of the word: a life of sacrifice. And all the time joy, gentleness and peace.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus, my beloved Mother Mary, and my good patron saints, who see what I cannot say but feel most deeply in my heart, help me to be strong, good and faithful, and bless me. 'O God, receive me, thy servant, that I may live, and do not disappoint my hope.'

1913

*During the retreat made at Martinengo with the
Bishop, from 19-25 October, 1913*

(1) This is the seventh time that I have withdrawn to this dear and holy place to think of my soul. My overwhelming obligation is always the same: to bless the Lord who continues to show me his love, to preserve me from grave faults and make me feel ashamed of my own unworthiness.

I feel I need add no more, except in confirmation of all that I have written and proposed in earlier years. I say only this to the Lord: here I am ready for everything, sufferings as 'yell as joys. 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. ' I wanted to rid myself of some of the burden of my responsibilities and to indicate which of these I would prefer to retain. But I have decided not to do anything about it. My Superiors know everything, and that is enough. As I have not been asked about this I will be careful not to show my preference for one kind of work rather than another. I must proceed, as my spiritual director tells me, with my head in the sack of Divine Providence.

(2) Suppose the seven years that have gone by represented only the abundance of God's gifts to me, and the seven years of famine were to begin now? I should deserve them for not having made the best use of so many graces. Oh well, let the purging work of famine come, the bitterness, humiliation and suffering. I will accept them willingly as a token of the sincerity of my love for Jesus.

So I will accept with holy joy the daily occasions, great and small, for humiliation, shame and the mortification of my pride, without reacting in any way, as contented as the snail that collects the drops of dew that fall from heaven and secretly transforms them.

It does not matter to me if men humiliate me, as long as everything turns out to be for the glory of God and my own real good, the sanctification of my soul. I will try to live in this constant awareness of my littleness and unworthiness, and when I am hurt I will rejoice to say: 'It is good for me that I was afflicted.'

(3) When I think of keeping all the resolves already made and now renewed I am alarmed. Good will is not lacking, but the uncertainty and overlapping of my occupations make me unsure of myself, especially as regards the ordering of my pious practices.

Well then, I will make a formal and solemn promise to Our Lady, my beloved Mother, that in this new year I will say the holy rosary every evening with special devotion. It is one of the great joys of my life that I have always been

faithful to thus practice. But alas! sometimes it has been reduced to a mere recital of the prayers aloud. The special pledge I now make, with deeper thought and devotion, will I hope win from my dear Mother the reward of an ever more powerful protection of the virtue of holy purity which, especially amid the dangers offered by my special ministry, I intend to guard most faithfully, and I hope she will help me to keep all my other intentions also.

If this were to be the last year of my life, - ,what a joy it would be to appear before Mary with my garland of fragrant roses! This will be my best passport to heaven.

'Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty.' 'Lord, you know everything you know that I love you.'

1914

After ten years of priesthood: 1904-10 August, 1914

Groppino, 10 August 1914

Today my heart is full of a sense of joyful contentment and at the same time full of shame.

I have received from God so inane ordinary and special graces during these ten years ! In the sacraments, received and administered and in the many and varied duties of my ministry, in words and works, in public and in private, in prayer, in study, amidst the little difficulties and disappointments successes and failures-my experience growing richer and stronger every day, in my contacts with my Superiors, with the clergy and with people of all ages and all social conditions. The Lord has indeed been faithful to the promise he made me on the day of my ordination in Rome, in the church of Santa Maria in Monte Santo, when he said to me: 'No longer do I call you a servant . . . but a friend." Jesus has been a real friend to me, allowing me to share in all the sacred intimacies of his Heart. When I think of all that he knows about me and has seen in me, I should be licking in sincerity if I did not admit to feeling a great satisfaction in my soul. In the field 'which I sowed, and in which I have worked, there are in fact a few cars of corn, enough perhaps to make up a small sheaf. I bless you, Lord, for this, because it is all due to your love.

But for my own part, I can only feel ashamed that I have not done more, that I have reaped so little. I have been like barren waste ground. With all the grace I have received, or even with much less, so many others would already be holy. I have had so many good impulses which have not yet borne fruit. My Lord, I acknowledge my failings, my total worthlessness; be generous in forgiveness and mercy.

Besides this feeling of satisfaction, and this sense of my need for forgiveness, I feel gratitude too. Everything, O Lord, has been done for your glory; I thank you for it now and always.

But my dominant thought, in my joy at having accomplished ten years as a priest, is this: I do not belong to myself, or to others; I belong to my Lord, for life and death. The dignity of the priesthood, the ten years full of graces which he has heaped upon me, such a poor, humble creature—all this convinces me that I must crush the self and devote all my energies to nothing else but work for the kingdom of Jesus in the minds and hearts of men, as I do in my own simple way, even in obscurity; but from this time forth it must be done with a greater intensity of purpose, thoughts and deeds.

My own natural disposition, my experience and my present circumstances all indicate calm peaceful work for me, far removed from the field of battle, rather than controversial action, polemics and conflict. Ah well, if this is the case I will not try to save my soul by defacing an original painting, which has its own merits, in order to become an unsuccessful copy of someone else whose character is entirely different from mine. But this peaceful disposition does not mean pampering my self-love, seeking my own comfort, or mere acquiescence in thoughts, principles and attitudes. The habitual smile must know how to conceal the inner conflict with selfishness which is sometimes tremendous, and when need arises show the victory of the soul over the temptations of the senses or of pride, so that my better side may always be shown to God and my neighbour.

I have now been a priest for ten years; what will my life be in the future? That remains hidden from me. It may be that but a short time remains before I am called to render my final account. O Lord Jesus, conic to take me now. If I am to wait for some, perhaps many, years then I hope they will be years of intense labour, upborne by holy obedience, with a great purpose running through everything, but never a thought straying beyond the bounds of obedience. Preoccupations about the future, which arise from self-love, delay the work of God in us and hinder his purposes, without even furthering our material interests. I need to be very watchful about this, every day, because I foresee that with the passing of years, and perhaps in the near future, I shall have many struggles with my pride. Let whoever will pass before me and go on ahead; I stay here where Providence has placed me, with no anxieties, leaving the way clear for others.

I mean to preserve my peace of mind, which is my liberty. So I shall always remember those four things which Thomas a Kempis (Book III, chap. 23) says bring great peace and true freedom:

- (1) Seek to do another's will, rather than your own.
- (2) Choose always to have less rather than more.
- (3) Always take the lowest place, so as to be inferior to everyone.
- (4) Always desire and pray that the will of God 'nay be wholly fulfilled in you.

With these resolves, O Lord, today once more I offer you the precious chalice of my soul, hallowed by your anointing. Fill it with your strength which made the apostles, martyrs and confessors; make use of me in something good,

noble and great, for you, for your Church, for the souls of men. I live only, I wish to live only for this.

While I am pondering these thoughts, at the close of this holy anniversary day which has rejoiced my heart with precious memories of my priestly ordination, my revered Bishop, who is everything to me—the Church, the Lord Jesus, God-lies here close at hand, suffering, as he has done for so long. How I suffer with him and for him! These days of my vacation are so melancholy and anxious! O Lord, make my Bishop recover soon, if it is your will; restore him to his apostolic work, to his Church and yours, to his work for your glory, to the love of so many children.

More heart-rending than the gentle resigned grief for my Bishop is the clamour of war now rising from every part of Europe. Lord Jesus, I raise my priestly hands above your Mystical Body and tearfully repeat today St Gregory's prayer with the utmost fervour: O God, 'order our days in your peace' today.

And what of the Church in this tumult? Save her, save her, O Lord. Ten years ago, when for the first time I celebrated the sacrifice of the Mass over the tomb of St Peter in Rome—oh blessed memory!—I had for the Pope and for the Church one great thought, one fervent prayer. During these ten years that thought and that prayer have grown ever more insistent.

O Lord, in these days of storm and amidst the clash of nations, give your Church liberty, unity and peace.

*Retreat, 27 September-3 October, 1914, with the
Priests of the Sacred Heart*

(1) On 10 August last, when I completed the tenth year of my priesthood, I thought that there might be, that there must be, some change in my circumstances as I entered this new period of my life. O God, your purposes are unfathomable! Immediately afterwards, on the 22nd of the same month, you called my revered Bishop to share your heavenly joy, and here I am in an entirely new situation.

However, I do not lose heart. In the hour of dismay and grief I felt great peace and spiritual comfort. Certainly the great and holy soul of the man I loved and venerated so much is now in heaven praying for me, blessing me, protecting and sustaining me. May I follow him there when it pleases the Lord to call me, and meanwhile may I imitate him in his holy works!

(2) In my new situation I will give my whole attention to the seminary without neglecting my pastoral work. My life will therefore be one of greater calm and recollection, which is just what I wanted. This is another gift from the Lord. I am grateful, and I will make the best use of it. I shall love my own room and my seclusion, where I can be wholly absorbed in prayer and study.

(3) In particular I must see to it that I always get up at half past five. Then I will at once make my meditation in my own room, and go to the church of San Michele for Holy Mass and after that for confessions. I will not repeat the other points for my daily observance, as it is sufficient to recall the resolutions already made.

(4) I want to be exemplary in all my professional duties, in my relations with the Rector of the seminary, my colleagues and pupils. I will be very humble and friendly with everyone, doing my best to contribute to the mutual harmony and edification which are so important where such grave responsibilities are shared. Above all, I will refrain from criticizing or complaining about anything and always remember, among other things, that nowhere else could I be so comfortably situated.

(5) I shall make a special point of giving my new Bishop, whoever he may be, that reverence, obedience and sincere, generous and cheerful affection which by the grace of God, I was always able to feel for his unforgettable predecessor. Indeed in time I shall try to set a good example, convinced as I am and that in the person of the Bishop we ought to see and recognize no less a one than Jesus Christ himself.

Naturally my different position will mean a different relationship, but whatever it is, it will be inspired by those feelings of respect, prudence and exquisite delicacy which are the fine flower of love. May my behaviour give the new Bishop some satisfaction and comfort, so that my person may be not a stumbling block but a block and a tool with which to build. This respect and affection for my Bishop I will show in word and deed while I earnestly beg Jesus to keep the faithful at all costs to these good intentions.

(6) I will endeavour not to feel any anxiety about my future, nor to allow myself to be influenced in this matter by the opinions, even if benevolent, well-intentioned and apparently well-founded, of anyone else. I was born poor and I must and will die poor, sure that at the right time Divine Providence, as in the past, will provide what is needed, sending me what I require and even more. It would be very bad for me if I were to become attached, even in the slightest degree, to the things of this world.

(7) As for fantastic dreams in which my pride may indulge, thoughts of honours, positions, etc., I will be very careful not to entertain them, but will spurn them at once. They upset one's peace of mind, sap one's energy, and take all real joy and all value and merit from anything good one may do. For myself I must think only of retraining very humble, very, very humble, leaving everything else to God.

(8) I am a priest of the Sacred Heart. Therefore what is said and proposed here has particular significance because of the special promises I made to the Lord as a member of this holy Congregation. As far as possible I shall share in the common activities of my fellow members and, by my good example before all the clergy, try to do honour to the Congregation which has accepted me, and to further its aims.

N.B. On Wednesday I had to interrupt this retreat for a short time while I paid a flying visit to Milan, to ask His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop for some advice about how to handle certain matters with the new Bishop.

This visit has consoled and cheered me very much. Afterwards I went down and prayed for a long time over the tomb of St Charles, and there I renewed my vow of absolute loyalty to God for life and death, offering myself

entirely, body and soul, to the service of God for the Church and for the salvation of souls and, according to the will of God, preparing myself for every sacrifice now and always. Amen.