

In Praise of
The Blessed Virgin Mary

Little Sisters of the Poor

3630 W. 30th Ave

Denver, Colo.

In Praise of
The Blessed Virgin Mary

Thomas à Kempis

Translated by Robert E. Patterson

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Introduction

To the many lovers of the *Imitation of Christ*, it may be of interest to know that Thomas à Kempis, generally recognized and accredited these days as author of that masterpiece, also wrote many other devotional treatises. Several of these treatises are worthy of being better known than they are at present, such as, *The Prayers and Meditations on the Life and Benefactions of Christ*; *Discourses and Contemplation on the Incarnation, Life, Passion and Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ*; *Discourses to Novices Regular*; *Spiritual Exercises*; *The Elevation of the Mind*; *The Soliloquy of the Soul*; *The Garden of Roses*; *The Valley of Lilies*; *On True Compunction of the Heart*; *On Solitude and Silence*; *On the Discipline of the Cloister*; *On the Three Tabernacles (of Poverty, Humility, and Patience)*.

The selection published herein is taken from his *Discourses to the Novices Regular* and entitled "In Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary." À Kempis was especially devoted to the Blessed Virgin and throughout his various treatises he shows his love and devotion for the Mother of God by extolling her virtues and recommending to all to seek her aid and intercession.

Thomas à Kempis was born in Kempen, near Düsseldorf, in Germany in 1380 and died in 1471 in his ninety-second year at the monastery of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, Mt. St. Agnes, near Zwolle in the Netherlands. He had been in religious life for about seventy years, for a few years with the Brothers of the Common Life and for the remainder of his life, a priest in the Canons Regular.

He was deeply religious and the very model of humility. He had been well educated and made use of his many talents throughout his long religious life in writing and copying books to meet the spiritual needs of the community to which he belonged. À Kempis is typical of the many monks who, in the centuries before the invention of the printing press, laboriously copied valuable books, both religious and secular, which otherwise would have been lost, as so many others have been.

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In Praise of
The Blessed Virgin Mary

Translated from the Latin of Thomas à Kempis'
Discourses to the Novices Regular —
Discourses XXI–XXV

Discourse XXI

ON BEING MINDFUL of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the highest respect owed to her.

“There stood by the cross of Jesus, His Mother”
(*Jn. 19:25*).

Brothers, it is proper and reasonable that after calling to mind the holy cross, that a special remembrance also is considered of the sorrow of the most blessed ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God, who stood faithfully by her beloved Son Jesus hanging on the cross, and indeed dying for the salvation of the entire world. O the lamentable sight of the Mother and the crucified Son; of the Mother weeping and the Son suffering greatly; of the Mother disconsolate and the Son consoling; of the Mother standing under the cross and the Son hanging on the cross; of the Mother sighing and the Son dying. O the vastness of the immeasurable sorrow, never to be forgotten, but to be held permanently in the hearts of the faithful. Pilate imprinted an inscription on a board on the top of the cross: **Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews**. Do you also imprint this same inscription in your heart in letters of gold against the scorn of men and the fear of the devils, and Jesus Christ the King of Heaven will free you

from all afflictions of the enemy. If you will do so, Mary the Mother of Jesus will stand by you also with her prayers. For no Mother had so great a joy and comfort in the birth of her Son, as this most blessed One felt, who was worthy of conceiving and giving birth to the Son of God. Certainly no Mother had and bore so great a grief and intolerable a sorrow in the death of her Son in the flesh, as this most loving Mother felt so deeply out of pity in the Passion of her most beloved Son, when she stood by the side of His cross, and her soul being pierced with the sword of sorrow, she wept most bitterly. Certainly, seeing so much anguish on the part of her Son, whom she loved exceedingly beyond all measure, it was extremely remarkable that she was able to live longer physically, whose soul the sword of sorrow had pierced as often as she saw or heard her Son tortured or ridiculed. O truly an unequaled martyrdom on the part of the forsaken Mother and delicate Virgin, who was more severely tortured in heart as she felt pity for her Son, than any martyr stretched on the rack.

Brothers, if you love our Lady and desire her protection in every affliction, then stand with her by the side of the cross of Jesus having pity for her and for her beloved Son from the depths of your heart, that she herself may also pray diligently again and again for your sins and indifferences after death. For he who now, often and devoutly, reflects on and

considers the Passion of the Lord and the tears of His most mournful Mother with pious feelings, is bound to hope in the mercy of God and in the benevolence of both the Mother and the Son, that they shall also be present to help him in his needs and assist him by consolation as he lies prostrate at the end.

O how joyful will that soul be, which loved Jesus and Mary during its life and reflected every day on the sad watch of Mary standing by the side of the cross of Jesus. Happy is that member of a religious community who despising all the comforts of the world has chosen for himself our Lady, the Blessed Mary, as his Mother of Consolation and the safeguard of his whole life. There is no doubt that the pious and tenderhearted Mother, the comforter of the poor and the helper of orphans, will readily speak for her faithful servant departing from this world, a good and pleasant word, soothing the face of her beloved Son, our Redeemer, with her holy prayers, saying: "My most loving Son, be merciful to the soul of Your servant who has loved and praised me, as You have seen and know well, from whose mouth the holy angels have very often brought to me the joys of a devout greeting and who was also accustomed to invite many brothers to join with him in praising Your Holy Name and mine. He is our copyist, transcribing sacred books, and a lover of the holy cross, fondly praying and

singing psalms, who on hearing Your Holy Name and also mine was accustomed to bow to us reverently and to pay his respects by genuflecting. Passing along a road and seeing far off a cross and being reminded of Your Passion, he showed due reverence to You by bowing to the cross. Also seeing in a church or in any place a painted picture of me, or You lying or sitting in my loving embrace or hanging in my arms as dead, immediately he was moved with pity, and he suffered, wept, and prayed, genuflected, and adored. He never departed from us without a kiss of love but all day and all night he hid in his heart the sorrows of Your sacred wounds and the tears of my eyes and deep within he desired to suffer with me. Therefore remember these things my most loving Son and grant him now to find mercy when he comes before You, and I with all Your angels and saints beg with great earnestness for him."

Brothers, you ought to attend to these things immediately while you are still healthy and have time to correct your faults. Now you should look for such friends and advocates on your behalf who will say a good word very pleasing to God for your offenses and debts and will receive you into their eternal homes after the dangers and tedious strife of this world. For you will not find more faithful and more powerful friends in heaven and on earth than Jesus, the King of the angels, and our Lady, Mary,

Queen of Heaven. If you are lovers of Christ, take up the cross of Christ, follow the cross, stand beside the cross, cherish the cross, do not abandon the cross, until you come to Jesus Christ the true light, who says, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me, shall not walk in darkness" (*Jn.* 8:12). If you desire to be comforted in every trial, come to Mary the Mother of Jesus standing beside the cross, weeping and suffering, and all your troubles will immediately vanish or be made lighter. Choose this most kind Mother of Jesus above all your relatives and friends as your particular Mother and advocate before your death, and greet her frequently with the angelic salutation, because she listens to this prayer with great pleasure. If the malicious enemy tempts you and prevents you from praising God and Mary, do not trouble yourself nor cease praising and praying, but on that account appeal to Mary more eagerly, pay your respects to Mary; think of Mary, call Mary by name. Honor Mary, ever glorify Mary, bow to Mary, commit yourself to Mary's care. With Mary linger in your cell, with Mary be silent, with Mary be joyful, with Mary be sad. With Mary work, with Mary watch, with Mary pray, with Mary walk, with Mary sit. With Mary search for Jesus, with Mary carry Jesus in your arms, with Mary and Jesus live in Nazareth. With Mary go to Jerusalem, with Mary stand beside the cross of Jesus, with Mary weep aloud for

Jesus, with Mary bury Jesus. With Mary and Jesus rise again, with Mary and Jesus ascend into heaven, with Mary and Jesus desire to live and die. Brothers, if you meditate on these things and do them well, the devil will flee from you, and you will go forward in the spiritual life. Mary will gladly pray for you because of her kindness, and Jesus will gladly listen to His Mother because of her respect. All that we do is not enough, but if we go to the Father through the intercession of Mary and Jesus her Son with a humble and contrite heart, we shall attain mercy and grace now, and glory without end with them in the world to come, Amen. Happy is the devout soul which has Jesus and Mary as close friends in this life, companions at meals, fellow travelers on the way, providers in necessity, comforters in trials, assistants in dangers, advisers in uncertainties, protectors in your last moments. Happy is the member of a religious community who considers himself a stranger in this world, and has for his chief consolation Jesus and Mary in the welcome abode of his heart.

EXAMPLES CONCERNING THE ANGELIC
SALUTATION

AN EXAMPLE

A certain brother lost a small book in his cell which he was unable to find after searching for it for a long while. And while he was saddened with its loss, and despaired then of finding it, he had recourse to prayer, invoking the Blessed Virgin by means of the angelic salutation. Therefore when he began to say the Hail Mary in his customary way and had repeated the prayer often, and during these prayers had sadly kept thinking about the small book, suddenly, while he was sitting beside his little bed praying before a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary, this inspiration came to his mind — “Search here before you under the straw of your bed.” Immediately he put his hand on the frame of the bed, wishing to find out whether anything lay hidden there. And behold, lifting a little straw, he immediately touched the small book with his hand and brought it out. And seeing it he was astonished, and kissing it for joy, he gave thanks to God and immediately he paid to the Blessed Virgin the angelic prayers which he had promised to her. And he said to himself, “Perhaps our Lady wanted to enjoy some Hail Marys and for that

reason you were not able to find the small book so soon." Therefore it is good to say the Hail Mary often and devotedly to call on the Mother of Jesus for assistance.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

A certain brother transcribing books in his cell being tempted by the devil, was annoyed with a filthy thought. Being afflicted by this thought and feeling ashamed he immediately arose, in order to leave his cell and to avoid this trouble more quickly. But before he left, inspired by God, he looked at a picture of the Blessed Virgin which he had near him and was accustomed to pay reverence to as a means of devotion. He then immediately knelt down and with joined hands began to say the Hail Mary devotedly, and behold divine grace aided him without delay, our gracious Lady Mary coming to his assistance with her noble blessed Son. For having begun the angelic salutation and said it carefully, at that moment when at the end he said, "Jesus Christ, Amen" immediately he felt within him the goodness of God, and relief from all harm. Therefore, amazed how quickly his prayer was favorably received, he knew at that very moment the great usefulness of the angelic salutation against whatever assaults of the enemy. And giving thanks to God, he said to himself, "Now I really know that our holy Lady Mary has power to aid and to

rescue all that call upon her." Indeed, on the following night, this vision appeared to him while he was sleeping: for it seemed to him that he was passing through the orchard alone when Satan rushing upon him, began to frighten and discomfit him. And indeed terrified at the appearance of Satan, he began to run ahead to avoid his clutches. And since he would not venture to pass outside the walls of the monastery, because of his sudden flight, he unexpectedly fell into a ditch of water and deep in the soft mud. Anxious then lest he sink beneath the water and since he saw no one near who would help him and pull him out, he began to say to himself the Hail Mary and to ask for assistance. Then as soon as he had said, "Jesus Christ, Amen," he was drawn from the deep ditch of water and put back again on dry land. Thereupon greatly rejoiced, and rescued almost from a deathtrap, he awoke and returned to his senses completely. Then raising himself up in bed, he began to weep with joy, and as an act of thanksgiving on bended knees he carefully said the Hail Mary over and over again. And he also added these words, "Hail Mary, our sweet Lady, full of grace, the Lord is with you, gate of mercy."

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Two brothers of the Order were going together to the upper part of the country for the dutiful mo-

tive of visiting relatives and friends faithful in Christ. Accordingly it turned out that they strayed a little from the right road. And so the older brother said to the younger one, "Brother, it seems to me that we have lost our way, let us turn back to the main road again." Going back then to the point where they had previously been, the older brother began to pray and to appeal to the Blessed Virgin that she might send to them a guide to the right road, a traveler of good fellowship. And while he was even then saying some prayers together with hymns and collects of the Blessed Virgin, behold a certain man approached them who appeared to be a pilgrim, carrying a staff and on his back a little bag containing the things necessary for a journey, and who, having greeted the brothers, said that he intended to travel on to the shrine of St. Quirinus for the indulgences and gladly would accompany them. Accordingly they quickly followed this guide for a long distance until they came to the desired place where they were to stay. Then the older brother, recognizing that the divine assistance had been with them, desired to give in return more abundant thanks to God and the Blessed Virgin for the guide to the right road, remembering the words of St. Peter the apostle who said, "Casting all your care upon Him: for He has care of you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

A certain brother when exposed to trouble was accustomed to ask assistance of Jesus and His most gracious Mother Mary. And when he was tempted by any wicked passion or by melancholy, immediately he had recourse to the Passion of our Lord by means of the angelic prayer, calling on Jesus and Mary to assist him against the temptation. Thus one night, while asleep, he saw the devil rushing at him and meaning to harm him. And since he was afraid of being injured, and was not able to flee, he began silently to say the Hail Mary. But when the devil heard the name of Jesus, immediately he turned away from him and began to flee and to run speedily. Noticing this, the brother shouted still louder at him, 'Jesus, Jesus!' And the louder he shouted, the faster Satan ran away, terrified by the sound of the dear name of Jesus and of His Mother Mary. And suddenly falling down the devil disappeared. Seeing this, the brother awoke joyful in heart, and said, "If I am able with one Hail Mary to put the devil to flight, what then have I to fear?"

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

There was amongst us a certain layman named Egbert, old and advanced in years, devoted to God and to the Blessed Virgin, and an ardent lover of holy poverty. This man worked resolutely as his

strength would allow, digging up the earth, and carrying it from one place to another, and while laboring greatly, he used to call to mind the sorrows of the Passion of our Lord, and when fatigued by his labor he used to apply himself to prayer in order to find relief for his body. Satan had tempted him for a long time to withdraw from the monastery and to go through the world asking for alms, reasoning that this would be more pleasing to God, because he had many advantages here of which he was unworthy. But he was restrained from this opinion by the advice of the prior and the warnings of the brothers, lest he put himself in danger and wandering through the world finally go wrong. For the crafty tempter often deceives the unsuspecting under the pretext of better advantages, and from a good beginning, on account of the change of position, he draws them to an irresolute frame of mind. And while he was still not at all content to remain and yet did not dare to go away foolishly without permission, during these temptations he fled to the Blessed Virgin for the pious assistance of her prayers. Thus on a certain day when he was fatigued by labor, he lay down to pray near his cart, just as he very often did, appealing to our Lady and calling Jesus Christ by name. Then while he was stretched out on the ground all alone, in a little while he fell asleep in a soft slumber in the Lord. And he saw a very venerable Lady standing beside

him and saying these words of kind advice, "Remain in this place and whatever the prior judges to be right for you and tells you, do it." Having said these words, the worthy Lady immediately disappeared, and he, being awakened with a start, wept copiously. Then he went quickly to the prior and, amid sighs and tears, he gave to him an account of the events one after the other which he had seen and heard. To whom the prior, like the good shepherd comforting his sad sheep, replied, "This pleases me very much dear Egbert. Remain with us, just as our Lady has now made known to you and advised you." Nor did he survive long afterward, but being about to receive his eternal reward for his brief labor, persevering with great patience in obedience, with a happy end he fell asleep in the Lord after matins on the octave of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist. Anno Domini — 1420.

Discourse XXII

ON THE PRAISE of the most sweet name of Jesus and of His most sweet Mother Mary.

“My spirit is sweet above honey: and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb” (*Ecclus. 24:27*).

Brothers, these words of eternal wisdom are worthily and also very nobly ascribed to the Mother of Mercy, out of whom arose the sun of justice, Christ. Sweet Jesus, Sweet Mary, and there is no bitterness in them, but the highest devotion, gentleness, love and mercy without end. Blessed is he who stays close to the footsteps of the humble Jesus and devotedly places his trust in His Mother, in order to find favor in their sight. Therefore, most faithful servant of God, gather together again in one small bundle the deeds which Jesus did and spoke about, and they will reveal to you more than all the treasures of the world. Also turn over in your mind carefully the acts and words of the most holy Mother of Jesus, and they will be full of comfort for your soul and sweeter than all spices. The body is pleased with fragrant odors and is restored by the nourishment of food; however, the soul is maintained, is strengthened and made glad by true virtues and

holy meditations. In fact, the more one applies himself to perfection in his studies, and the more he puts himself under the guidance of the more distinguished teachers, so much the more clearly is he taught, and the more quickly does he reach, the height of happiness. The greatest teachers of virtue and the light of all sanctity are Jesus and Mary, whom you ought to place before yourself for a means of measuring your insignificance and, as it were, to see in person. Join yourself to them; show yourself friendly and devoted to them. Wherever you hear anything said about Jesus and Mary, listen attentively there, spend a long time there, and consider what instruction and hidden pleasure are to be found therein. And also as often as you come to accomplish the divine work, or when you are called to do common labor, or to attend to some personal matter, first raise your eyes to heaven and call upon Jesus and Mary especially, humbly entrusting yourself to their perpetual care. Offer yourself also to their gracious purpose in all your activities, that your action may be pleasing to God, advantageous to your neighbor, and profitable to yourself. May your intention always be pure, your good will earnest, your work careful, your speech considerate, persevering in accomplishments, in the praise of the Holy Name of Jesus, and the honor of His blessed Mother. Begin to praise, adore, and to love them here below, in order that you may be

worthy of reigning with them in the future, and also to praise, bless, and commend them forever with the holy angels. The praise of Jesus is pleasant and noble, the praise of Mary is desirable and beautiful. Therefore, praise when glad, pray earnestly when sad, for they are worthy of the praise of all and to be called upon for assistance as well at all times. The more that you cultivate their praise, so much the more will you increase in their love and grow stronger in the grace of devotion. They will never forget you, if you do not forget them. And if you should neglect them — and may this never happen — or if you should conduct yourself badly — which may God forbid by all means — or if you should become indifferent in performing your devotions — and may God not permit that — it will be necessary to reprimand yourself with the proper punishment and to be brought back to your senses by misfortune, in order that you may learn to conduct yourself more carefully with God and to guard more vigilantly in the future the grace that is given. And then be mindful of these benefactors and deplore your carelessness and your great ingratitude, into which you have foolishly fallen. Happy is he who deserves to bear the encouragement of Jesus in spirit so that he may reform himself for the better, until, after bitter tears, he may again be transported into a joyful ecstasy. For the devotion of Jesus exceeds all the sins of the world, and the liberality of

Mary can never be exhausted. O if you could greatly increase in your love and praise of Jesus and serve His Blessed Mother Mary worthily and devotedly! But what will you do, for in truth you are not worthy to call them by name to any extent, since you are a frail, lukewarm, and thoughtless man, frequently displeasing in many things also? Therefore, how will you give praise, since praise is not well sounding from the mouth of a sinner? For it is proper for the holy to be praised by the just and the worthy. Therefore, are you to be silent or to say something? Alas for you if you do not praise, and alas for you if you open unworthy lips. What will you do to gain mercy, and not commit offense? Nothing is better for gaining the good will of the most gracious Jesus and of His most compassionate Mother Mary, than to humble yourself in all things and to submit to all, and also to put yourself in the last place, judging yourself truly unworthy and vile, and reducing yourself to nothing if you imagined anything good. In this way God will be pleased, and Jesus will have compassion on you. Mary also will pray for you, and you will be consoled in your humility. You will not be frightened by their face but you will receive abundantly, giving hymns of praise in return. But if you cannot praise worthily, do what you are able to do, express what you have the ability to express. For your pious intention will assist you, until you become richer in expressing your devotions

in a better manner. They who are highly esteemed and very devoted, praise sublimely and devoutly, but they who have little of the oil of fervent devotion, let them offer up even this gladly to the Son of devotion and to the Mother of grace. It seems proper to be silent on account of the transcendent glory and dignity of the sublime Son of the Virgin Mother, but since Mary does not despise the lowly and sinners, she will mercifully receive your outcry in the assemblage of those praising her, as the holy prophet says, "The poor and needy shall praise thy name" (Ps. 73:21). For that reason it is right to pray a little as an incentive for devotion, and if this is not done for the greatest part orderly and clearly, nevertheless one's prayer may be of a more humble nature and of a more evident love to the best of one's power.

Who are the more exalted in heaven, and the more humble on earth? Are they not Jesus and Mary? Jesus made Himself One who served; Mary called herself a handmaid. The whole world has tried and not found wanting the love of both; the dwellers of heaven extol their nobility; the multitude of angels adore them. O if you were able to be in the midst of them and with unwearied voice to praise greatly the sweet name of Jesus and of the dearest Virgin Mary. O how good and delightful it is to serve them who have served us faithfully as well as humbly. Sons of mankind, serve the Lord, who has

condescended so often to serve you. Serve the Mother of God, who has disclosed to you an example of holy service. O how becoming it is to honor these most excellent protectors who are able to help more than all others can, through whose hands the heavenly judgments pass and are accomplished. Therefore every hour they should be prayed to for help, who defend us against the enemies of body and soul and who contribute eternal joy to those who serve them. In any necessity, resort to Jesus and Mary; make known to them all your troubles; acknowledge your sins of omission; deplore your sins of commission. Seek pardon, gain repentance, renew hope, promise amendment, and be well assured of the help of grace. If you fall into danger easily, take care to rise again more quickly. They willingly consent to the prayers of the suppliant, they do not despise the sighs of the poor; but the holy angels will rejoice concerning you, when you will turn away from all the ugliness of sin wholeheartedly and will choose a better life after the model of Christ and of the Mother of blessed Jesus. If only you will avoid giving offense, they will not deny the assistance desired. And if you will show due respect, they will show the most steadfast solicitude for you. Amen.

A PRAYER

To You, O Lord Jesus, and to Your most holy

Mother the Virgin Mary, I commend my soul and my body to be preserved to life everlasting. O Jesus and Mary, my only hope, may your kindness assist me in every trial and sorrow. You are my most powerful protectors, to be loved above all the saints. I, poor and a stranger in this world, do not have such faithful and dear friends among all that are dear and known to me, as I confidently hope I have in you.

Discourse XXIII

CONCERNING THE DEVOTED SERVICE of the Blessed Virgin and the remembrance of her name.

“My memory is unto everlasting generations” (*Ecclus. 24:28*).

Mary is the friend of poverty, the way of humility, the model of patience, and perfect in all things. From the beginning of the birth of Jesus she led a life of extreme poverty, and even to His death on the cross, she was patient constantly. May it be agreed to follow her, for it is right to honor her with humble and pious devotion, and it is also expedient, day by day, to consider what gratitude and particular love should be shown to her most earnestly. You would readily be glad with Mary in heaven; even so, endure readily poverty and contempt with Mary on earth. Consider her humble manner and her maidenly sense of propriety among her friends; restrain your fickleness and avoid violent disturbances. Take care not to offend Jesus and Mary with idle words and unworthy deeds. For it is not trivial to offend such dear protectors. They see everything that you do, and just as you prove yourself by amendment, just so will you find that

they will come to your assistance. However, your good sense prevails over your wickedness, and their kindness moves you to repentance. If you know your faults, change your state for the better. Remain steadfast in doing good and devoutly give thanks to God for the gifts He has bestowed on you. Indeed the Blessed Mary did this when she was filled with the Holy Ghost and carried Jesus in her womb. Learn by the example of her gentleness to endure dutifully the burdens that come your way and yield to the divine plan, just as it was planned from eternity. Jesus will be your aid; Mary will be a faithful Mother to you; see that you are a good son and a devoted slave ready to do all the good possible.

Do you wish to do what is pleasing to the Blessed Virgin?

A VERSE

“Be humble, patient, sober, chaste, and respectful.

Be fervent, kind, inwardly devoted in mind.

Rarely be away, read, write, and pray very often.”

The service to Mary should not seem long nor irksome. It is pleasant and joyful to serve such a Lady with heart and voice. For it will not be without noteworthy reward, however little it may be that is performed in her honor. The humble Mother

does not despise small services; the dear Virgin gladly accepts little gifts when they are offered voluntarily and devotedly. She knows that we are not able to give great things, nor does the merciful Lady, the gentle Queen, exact the impossible from those who serve her. That noble character who brought forth mercy for the entire world does not know how to be unmerciful to the poor and needy. O how graciously she receives those who serve her faithfully, she who, by her warnings and miracles, has so frequently changed the lives of those living wretchedly here on earth. How many would have been condemned for eternity or would have persisted stubbornly in despair unless the most kind Virgin Mary had pleaded for them with her Son. Therefore it is deservedly said concerning her, that she is the commiserator of the afflicted and the helper of all sinners. She does not ask for, nor have need of, any thing from us, she, whose commands the heavenly powers are waiting to serve. She likes any good we do whenever she requires service from us; she longs for our salvation whenever she asks that praise be bestowed on her. And whenever she observes the memory of her name being celebrated, she then seeks an occasion for doing good to us, for she is happy in return to reward those who serve her. She is very faithful in what she promises and very generous in her gifts. She is filled with rapture and always takes pleasure in the singing of the

angelic choirs. Nevertheless she is made happy with the services of men, in order that the honor of God and the salvation of many may thereby be more widely increased. She is touched by the tears of the afflicted; she is moved to pity by the sorrows of the oppressed; she hastens to the aid of those in danger of the devil; she is favorably disposed to the prayers of the devoted. If anyone resolutely and humbly seeks her protection and invokes her sweet and glorious name, he will not depart from her empty-handed. She has many who are greatly devoted to her, and the choirs of the angels obey her, whom she is able to send to the relief of the destitute. She orders the devils lest they dare to molest anyone who places himself under her power and direction. The evil spirits greatly fear the Queen of Heaven and they run away as from fire, on hearing her holy name. They are terrified at the holy and sacred name of Mary, which to Christians is the most amiable and renowned everywhere. They do not dare to appear nor are they able to perform their foul practices, where they know the name of Holy Mary is evident. As though a clap of thunder came out of the heavens, they are thrown to the ground at the name of Holy Mary; and the more often it is said and the more ardent the desire with which it is invoked, the more quickly and the further they run away from it.

Again, the holy angels and the spirits of the just

are joyful, rejoicing at the devotion of the faithful, because they so fondly, diligently, and frequently call to mind the memory of Holy Mary, whose name, worthy of all honor, extends to all parts of the churches which are particularly consecrated to her name. And it is proper and worthy for the Mother to be honored by those on earth before all the saints of God whom all the angels adore with the highest praise. And so the name of Mary is to be venerated by all the faithful, to be loved always by the devoted, to be cherished by members of religious communities, to be commended to those in the world at large, to be made known to sinners, to be recommended to the oppressed, and to be prayed to for assistance in all dangers. She is the closest to God and the dearest to the Son of God, her Blessed Jesus, being able confidently to intercede for the weeping sons of Adam so that He may forgive their sins and come to their assistance in their dangers. For when the opportunity presents itself, she does not delay to whisper a good word to her Son and to beg His mercy for the needy. And she will also be heard most promptly in all matters entrusted to her, on account of the extraordinary awe and respect held for her, since her gracious Son Jesus, the source of salvation of mankind, shows His respect for her by denying nothing. For that reason let everyone who is faithful and devoted, and anxious to avoid the shipwrecks of this world, and

to arrive at the port of eternal salvation — let him seek refuge with our Lady Saint Mary whose unspeakable love tastes more pleasant to the unfortunate and clings to them more firmly, so that properly one should trust in her more abundantly. Assuredly compassion increased with her from childhood, nor has it forsaken her in heaven so that now she could be forgetful of her poor, but it has filled her more fully and more suitably. And although she is the noblest of all, and enveloped with the most blessed joys, nevertheless she is not forgetful of her humility through which she deserves most worthily to be exalted above all others. And therefore she has learned to stoop condescendingly to the level of her inferior servants, rejoicing to become the adviser of the unfortunate and also to be called the Mother of orphans. Amen.

Discourse XXIV

CONCERNING THE SORROW AND CONSOLATION of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“I yielded a sweet odour like the best myrrh” (*Ecclus. 24:20*).

The examples of the dear Virgin Mary are to be meditated on by you with the most perfect love. For she, like choice myrrh, bestowed fragrant fruit in patience and was most delightfully refreshed with the overabundant consolation of divine sweetness. And you also will discover an excellent consolation, if you have carried the name of Mary engrafted on your heart. For you will have many gifts, if you will be happy with Mary. The love of holy Mary drives away all the passionate ardor of carnal desires and bestows the consolation of chastity. The love of holy Mary causes anyone to despise the world and to serve Christ in humility. The love of holy Mary protects one from all bad company, and instructs one in the purity of the religious life. Therefore love holy Mary and you will enjoy a special grace. Call to Mary for assistance and you will obtain the victory. Honor Mary and you will receive an everlasting reward. Two blessings especially are gathered by often recalling

to mind Mary's holy way of life: In good times she teaches you to praise God from the depths of your heart; and in times of misfortune, to remain patient. She herself without ceasing praised God most highly for benefits received — benefits which she received from Him to an extent surpassing all others. She always showed herself gentle in the afflictions of this world and chose the wretched conditions rather than the favorable. She passed no day without sorrow, yet she was not without great consolation in her distress. For indeed every trial endured for Christ sweetens and gladdens, and the more repeatedly anyone is injured by the blows of misfortune, so much the more does he deserve to be blessed with more worthy gifts. For the Blessed Virgin suffered exceedingly for the offenses of the world and for the wickedness of many. She was moved with pity for those truly repentant and severely tempted. She suffered for the great ingratitude of men, for whom God the Father had sent His only-begotten Son made Man from love that they might return to Paradise lost in time past by Adam. She suffered on account of the ruin of the wicked who neglected to hear the word of God, who loved the world rather than heaven, and sought deceitful wealth rather than true virtues. She suffered on account of the oppression of the innocent and the violence of the bad; the derision of the poor and the haughtiness of the proud; the neglect of divine worship and the

transgression of heavenly commands. And because the whole world was put in a bad condition and few arranged to see the eternal light which shone upon the world, the Mother of the greatest tenderness was full of feelings of compassion. In these matters she was most patient, living a life filled with martyrdom, uttering tearful prayers with sobs for the salvation of souls. And as for that, if you wish to a greater extent to direct your attention to what and how much she suffered in the persecution and Passion of her beloved Son, you will certainly find that she drank to the dregs as many bitter draughts in life as Jesus had moments of bodily pains in His lifetime. For when did Jesus suffer any desertion and abandonment by men that she did not become disconsolate through compassion? If she suffered when she lost Jesus about an hour, how much did she weep when she saw Him crucified and die? This is well known to those loving Jesus, because this motherly love in suffering greatly went beyond the general manner of the devoted. Therefore, if you long to test the power of the grief in the Mother, think of the strength of the love in the Virgin.

Again, no one is able to express the joy of Mary, no one is capable of comprehending the profusion of her charm and the extent of her consolation; for there is far greater joy and consolation there, where a fuller infusion of grace and also a more frequent

visitation of God is usual. From this both a more earnest love of divine praise always increases, and the condition of the entire inner man is altered. Celestial grace does not allow a holy soul that loves God above all else to live without inner consolation but inspires it immediately to higher things, and prudently enlightens it in its actions, excites it in holy meditations, and makes it devout again returning thanks. However, the greater the grace and the holier the life, so much the more grateful the conscience and more devoted the prayer of praise. For this way of life, separated from earthly commotion and not restrained by the basest desires, eagerly wishes every day to join the choirs of angels, is raised above present things, and ardently desires to enjoy the everlasting glory of the supreme Trinity, which glory none of the saints tasted beforehand so clearly in this life as the blessed and glorious Virgin Mary, the most fervent suppliant created of all that contemplate and bless God. Do you also now at this moment imitate the Mother of God, listening attentively to the declaration of her praises, in order that you too may deserve by the prayers of the Virgin Mother to be counted in the number of the devoted. Strive carefully to follow most holy Mary in the footsteps of virtue spoken of before, in order to gain possession of the honor of celestial glory. Be sufficiently disheartened on account of your carelessness in the past and because of your failings not

yet mastered, by which you have offended God and all creation. You have acted badly in life, you have followed a listless course of conduct, in serving Christ. Therefore it is your duty first of all to express sorrow for yourself, after that for your neighbor out of charity. Accordingly be moved with pity for the risks taken by those who live badly, for whom eternal punishment threatens, unless they change from their evil way of life. Many do evil and do not know it; a greater number are fully aware of their wicked ways, nevertheless they do not correct their ways. It is your duty to be sorry and to pray for these so that God may give them the feeling of remorse for their salvation. Pray also for your friends and benefactors, for your opponents and detractors, that deserving grace may be given to the devout, to the offensive, a well-disposed thought, but to all, the peace of Christ with mercy. Pray that all may love God and keep His commandments so that those creatures who are endowed with reason may glorify their Creator, on whose account God did all His wondrous deeds and laid aside His glory, humbly subject to Mary and Joseph. Again be grateful for the divine favors contributed most condescendingly to the entire human race through the most holy Mother of God, showing continually reverence, and esteem also. For while the natural law commands us to give reverence and love at all times to the parents of our flesh, much more should the sons

of the Church be thankful and obliging to the Mother of grace, and also love the Mother of God above their parents and all relatives.

You also ought to learn to ascend with Mary to God with devoted praises and to confide faithfully in her protection, and not to put your trust in your own strength lest your mind, weakened by your passions, should be impeded further, but every day inflamed with new desires it may without hindrance reach upward where the devout Virgin Mary, the glorious Queen of Heaven, reigns happily with Jesus, King of the angels. But alas, human infirmity compels us to descend again into this vale of tears after a brief taste of divine consolations. And then it is again necessary to cry with a loud voice to the Mother of much compassion that she may remind her merciful Son that you have no wine of ardent desire, but that you long for the sacred anointment of devotion in order to praise Him with deserved veneration. For she is anxious for the helpless and for those who despise the world, and for those held in contempt in the world on account of Jesus and the doctrine of His Kingdom. And therefore it is beneficial to know a hiding place from the sight of the enemy where you may be safe from the sharp arrows, where you may be concealed from the chilly horrors and the tempests of trouble. There is no safer place to hide than under Mary's protection, nor a swifter horse to

escape the clutches of the pursuer, than the prayer of faith sent forth into the sanctuary of the royal abode of Saint Mary. For Jesus Himself also went into this sanctuary, receiving from it the sacred parts of His body to vanquish the prince of darkness. Therefore do you likewise enter under the protection of this sanctuary, praying day and night that you may be freed from all threatening evils through the merits of the most holy Virgin, being safely concealed under the most ample and most beautiful cloak of our Lady. For with holy Mary praying, the whole wicked rabble will hasten away. With Mary assisting, you will escape all dangers. There the poor have a home, there the weak find a remedy, there the sad find comfort, there the troubled obtain advice; there the destitute get assistance. It will go well, very well with you, if you will show yourself so worthy and compliant to the gracious purpose of holy Mary, that you will obtain her influence now and glory in the future with all those chosen for salvation. Hold fast to her and do not send her away until she blesses you and conducts you with safe guidance to the heavenly palace.

Discourse XXV

CONCERNING THE EXCELLENCE of the merits and concerning the privileges of the gifts of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“Many daughters have gathered together riches: thou hast surpassed them all” (Prov. 31:29).

Beloved brothers, be faithful servants of Jesus Christ and devoted lovers of His most holy Mother the Virgin Mary, if you wish to be joyful with them forever in heaven. Then you will be beloved to God and to His Blessed Mother if you have been humble in heart and chaste in body, if in your whole way of life you have been modest, prudent, full of reverence to God and careful, gave no occasion of sin nor of just complaint. It is more for your salvation, for the honor of God, and the praise of the Blessed Virgin, that you let yourself be pious in praying, fond of reading, active in labor, at rest in the dormitory, awake in the choir, cheerful in singing, submissive in assembly, quick to accept correction, severe in keeping silent, sensible in recreation, circumspect in your glances and disciplined in all your manners. Therefore if you desire to praise the Blessed Virgin worthily, and to venerate her in the highest degree, then let yourselves be just like simple children of God without

malice, without deceit, without vice, without lies, without anger, without quarreling, without grumbling, without mistrust, bearing all things opposed to you in brotherly love, with humility and patience, on account of Jesus and Mary, and imitate the lives of the saints, for your own peace and the edification of others and especially for fulfilling the glory of the Holy Trinity. In fact all bitter things are made sweet, all burdensome things are made light when the love of Jesus and the intimate remembrance of His kind Mother enter into the heart. If anyone wishes to prove this, let him frequently think of them, speak of them, read about them, sing of them, and pray to them.

However, in order that the most glorious merit of the most blessed Virgin Mary may become known to you somewhat, listen to a few of her many gifts and privileges, with which God has blessed and exalted her above all the holy angels and archangels in heaven and above all men on earth. This is the most sacred Virgin and the most beloved Mother of God of whom in holy Church spread far and wide over the entire earth, is sung: "The holy Mother of God is exalted above the choirs of angels to the celestial Kingdoms." Therefore think back carefully to the events of the holy patriarchs in ancient times from whose root Mary the Mother of God was born, like a rose without thorns among the thorns. For just as in

times past Christ the Son of God was foretold by many holy men, patriarchs, and prophets, by judges and kings, by priests and levites, by doctors and scribes, by words, signs, and forms, as He who would be born of a Virgin for the redemption of the world and would suffer on the cross — so, very properly and wisely, by divine planning, the most blessed and most devoted Virgin Mary was shown by a figure beforehand and foretold by the consecrated virgins of that time, by distinguished women, by chaste widows, by pious prophetesses, and by other good women living virtuously and also, as a protection of their chastity, confined with their maids in their homes and their rooms away from the presence of men. She is indeed by the testimony of holy scripture the Virgin most prudent of all virgins, the most modest of all women, the most beautiful of all maids, the noblest of all matrons, the loveliest of all ladies, the most illustrious queen of all queens, in whom all virginal grace, all moral virtue, all theological observation, all affectionate zeal, all worthy offerings, all perfection of sanctity, equally come together, abide in and shine forth most completely; who neither has, nor had, nor will have her like before her, nor her equal after her. And just as in times past the actual temple of Solomon was decorated more than all the temples on earth, and most widely known and most abundantly enriched, and was glorified magnificently by kings

and the common people, so the spiritual temple of God which is the Blessed Virgin Mary, free from all blemish, outshines all the temples of the saints, and therefore ought to be honored and loved more.

O truly illustrious descendant splendidly brought forth from the distinguished race of the patriarchs, nobly begotten from a priestly people, most worthily derived from the pontifical rank, most truly foretold by the choir of prophets, most illustriously descended from the royal stock in a direct line from David, most nobly sprung from the most illustrious tribe of Juda, most happily born of the Israel people, particularly selected from the chosen people of God, most happily arose by divine pre-ordination unto the Light of the World from parents holy and religious and pleasing to God! O happy and undefiled Virgin Mary, most worthy of all praise and honor, to be cherished by all with all love and respect! O magnificent jewel of virgins! you were predestined by God from God in the beginning and before all time to give birth at a predetermined time to the Redeemer of the world, longed for by the patriarchs, predicted by the prophets, chosen by many kings and the just, awaited a long time by the most devoted people in Israel, and finally shown visibly to a suffering world by God in His compassion. O sacred and most renowned Virgin Mary! how excellent and praise-

worthy is your name in all the earth. Surely from the rising even to the setting of the sun in various parts of the world, your name is praised by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ your Son, by Jews and Gentiles, by Greeks and Latins, by Romans and Germans; and more than that your glorious name each day is praised in all the churches of God, in chapels and cloisters, in fields and woods dedicated to God, by the humble and the great, by priests and doctors, and by the preachers of various Orders, all of whom alike long to praise you and proclaim you. For all the spirits of the just are aglow and rejoice to extol you even to the stars of heaven and to commend with loud voices your sanctity and beauty above the angelic dignity, and through the greatness of love and the sweetness of devotion, they do not grow tired of singing, praying, meditating, and celebrating your sacred festivals, according to the well-known word of wisdom: "They that eat me, shall yet hunger, and they that drink me shall yet thirst" (*Ecclus.* 24:29). Praise and glory to God in the highest, who has given to you, O Mary, the greatest grace before all the daughters of mankind in the world, and now He has established your seat near the throne of your Son in the celestial kingdom, in a more prominent place above all the choirs of angels and saints, most beautifully made ready beforehand for you from eternity and enduring most fortunately forever.

O most venerable Virgin Mary Mother and Daughter of the eternal King, to be blessed by the mouth of all, to be venerated with all honor, most pure in virginity, most profound in humility, most fervent in love, most gentle in patience, most abundant in mercy, most devoted in prayer, most pious in meditation, most noble in contemplation, most pleasant in compassion, most prudent in counsel, most powerful in assistance. You are the palace of God, the gate of heaven, the garden of charm, the well of graces, the glory of angels, the joy of men, the model of character, the splendor of virtues, the light of life, the hope of the needy, the health of the sick, the mother of orphans. O Virgin of virgins, all sweet and beautiful, shining like a star, red as a rose, brilliant as a pearl, radiant as the sun and moon in heaven and on earth! O mild Virgin, innocent as a lamb, simple as a dove; wise as a noble lady, serving like a humble handmaid! O holy source, high cedar, fruitful vine, most sweet fig tree, most wide-spreading palm tree, in you all good things are to be found and through you eternal rewards are granted to us. Therefore we all ought to fly to you, like children to the lap of their mother and like orphans to the home of their father, as long as we live, so that we may be protected from all evils by your glorious merits and prayers.

But now hear the words of a certain doctor concerning the twelve stars in the crown of the blessed

Virgin, by which Our Lady Saint Mary shines gloriously above all the saints in heaven. These twelve stars are the twelve privileges of her reigning splendor which she has with regard to all other citizens of heaven. For with regard to the Church militant, she has four gifts of surpassing resplendence filled with works of mercy. Because before all others she hears more favorably, condescends more humbly, acts with more ability, assists more frequently, as indeed experience teaches in the just causes of the Church which are hard to attain. In like manner with regard to the Church triumphant, she has these four outstanding privileges. Because she is exalted far above all others in heaven, she is more brilliantly resplendent, she is loved more fervently, she is honored more fully, as it is fitting to be thoroughly persuaded concerning her glorious merits. Likewise with regard to the most beneficent Trinity, she has similarly four privileges or stars brighter than every heavenly body. Because before all others contemplating the glory of the eternal Trinity, she perceives the holy Trinity itself more clearly: she is more happily disposed toward It, she contemplates It more profoundly, and she enjoys It more abundantly than all in heaven, concerning which no one should doubt further.

But besides that, hear what St. Bernard says concerning those stars, Bernard the special lover of the Blessed Virgin and the pleasant doctor and

devoted instructor of the monks: "On her head," he says, "there are twelve stars. Who would set a value on these jewels? Who would describe the stars with which Mary's royal crown is set? It is beyond the ability of man to explain the nature of this crown, to discover its composition. However we, as a measure of our smallness, abstaining from the perilous inquiry about mysteries, it appears perhaps not inconsistently, may take these twelve stars to mean the twelve privileges of stars with which Mary particularly is adorned. Since the privilege of heaven, the privilege of the flesh, and the privilege of the heart are found in Mary. And if this group consisting of three is multiplied by four: we get by chance the twelve stars, with which the crown of our Queen shines before all. Indeed the brightness first of all shines like gold to me in the birth of Mary, second in the salutation of the angel, third in the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her, and fourth in the indescribable conception of the Son of God." Indeed it will be a mark of your earnestness to consider each alone more carefully, indeed let it be sufficient for you to have come to learn from me these few words from many more. If anyone wishes to know more fully the mystic meaning of the stars, let him read that sermon of blessed Bernard beginning with the following topic: "A sign appeared in the heaven," etc.

Therefore, beloved brothers, recall to mind often

and meditate upon these things on account of the extraordinary reverence and love of the most blessed Virgin Mary, and for an act of thanksgiving, sing most joyfully hymns and canticles of joy on her feast days and on days in commemoration of her throughout the year. However, bow and bare your heads particularly before the altar of God, and in the presence of a figure of the Blessed Virgin genuflect humbly, as though you saw Mary present physically talking with the angel, or holding her Son to her bosom, and after that with uplifted eyes full of confidence in the salvation longed for, most affectionately pray for the merciful assistance from the mother of mercy and say:

“O most compassionate Mother of God Virgin Mary, Queen of heaven, Lady of the world, joy of the saints, consolation of sinners, hear the groans of the penitents, satisfy the desires of the devoted, help the needs of the weak, comfort the hearts of those in distress, assist those who are in agony, protect your servants who beseech you from the attacks of Satan, conduct your lovers with you to the reward of eternal blessedness, where, with your most loving Son Jesus Christ, you reign most happily forever. Amen.”

(*Finis*)

Little Sisters of the Poor

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