

DIARY

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Bishop Francis M. Arborio Di Gattinara (2)⁶

[Castellazzo]

[1720]

Thanks be to God and to Mary Ever a Virgin.

Saturday, November 23⁷

[This] was the first day of my retreat at Saint Charles. Though unworthy, I went to Holy Communion. I was neither particularly recollected nor distracted. The rest of the day I was afflicted with a particular kind of melancholy which is not like that which one experiences in the troubles of the world. Rather, it is a certain interior suffering in spirit and heart, mingled with hidden temptations which are hardly recognized as such. For this reason they afflict the soul very much. One does not know whether one is here or there, so to speak, the more so because there is no sensible sign of prayer at this time. I realize that God enables me to understand that they purify the soul. Through the mercy of God, I know that I do not desire to know anything else nor to taste any consolation. I desire only to be crucified with Jesus.

Sunday, November 24

Though unworthy, I made prayer. I did not experience any particular spiritual uplift, but I had my usual interior peace, that is to say, a pure loving attentiveness to God in general, infused into my spirit. Then, though unworthy, I received Holy Communion and was recollected for some time and ended that way.

Monday, November 25

I was without sensible feeling at prayer, even distracted. In my Holy Communion I was recollected at first, then that ended. Most of the fervor I experienced was during the night while praying to the Lord for sinners so that He might be appeased with regard to the threatening scourge that I deserve

6. Gattinara, born at Padua in 1658, was a member of the Barnabite Order. Pope Clement XI named him bishop of Alessandria in 1706. He was Paul's spiritual director and clothed him in the hermit's habit.

7. We must remember that Paul is twenty-six years old and not a novice in the spiritual life. He did not begin this retreat in order to experience sensible consolations. He desired "only to be crucified with Jesus."

because of my sins — as well as other prayers I refrain from citing. The rest of the day I was filled with affliction and melancholy — also tempted with compassion toward my family. Seeing people, hearing them pass by, and the sound of the bells irritated me.

In short, I seemed to have a heart that was buried without any feeling of prayer. Nevertheless, I had no desire for relief, and in my mind I was content to have these troubles. But this contentment is not felt, for at such a time there is anguish of a special kind. There is a certain contentment that the most Holy Will of our dear God is fulfilled. But this remains buried beneath the ashes in the deepest region of one's spirit. I find it difficult to explain myself, and anyone who has not experienced this will have difficulty in understanding.

Tuesday, November 26⁸

Though unworthy, I made my nightly prayer, and I was dry except at the outset, when I experienced a very subtle and delicate interior sweetness. I received Holy Communion and was especially elevated in God with a very high sweetness and a certain warmth of heart which touched even my stomach. I knew this to be supernatural and it left me with great consolation. I know that I had some colloquies on the sufferings of my dear Jesus. When I speak to him of his torments, I say, for example: "Ah, my Good, when you were scourged, what did you feel in your Sacred Heart? My dear Spouse, how you were afflicted by the sight of my sins and ingratitude! Ah, my Love, why do I not die for you? Why am I not in agony?" Other times I feel my spirit can say no more and simply remains in God with his sufferings infused in my soul. At other times it seems my heart is shattered. The rest of the day, and especially at night, I was particularly afflicted and melancholy in the way mentioned before. Although this sadness did not take away my peace of heart, I felt great affliction since I had no spiritual consolation or any other. It seemed rather that I never had any. I know I told my Jesus that his crosses are the joy of my heart.

Wednesday, November 27⁹

I made my prayer during the night — at the outset I was very recollected and that lasted a little while. Then I experienced some disquieting thoughts and some temptations, which lasted a short time. My Holy Communion brought great sweetness and elevation in God, mixed with tears. Then I remembered

8. On this day Paul speaks more clearly of his prayer on the sacred Passion. Notice his methods of praying on the sufferings of Christ.

9. For the first time Paul writes about the deeper reason for his retreat, namely, to write the Rule and prepare for his role in founding this community in the Church. The following day he will experience the consoling vision of the holy founders "praying for my intentions."

how it was said that I would never endure this naked suffering. In that moment I had such joy and desire of suffering that the cold, the snow, and the ice all seemed sweet to me, and I desired to experience them with great fervor as I said to Jesus: “Your pains, my dear God, are the pledges of your love.” Then I continued to rejoice in my beloved Jesus in great sweetness and peace without any activity of my mind, but in silence. Fervor in praying for the needs mentioned above never ceased.

I know I had, as well, a strong impulse to go to Rome for this great marvel of God, and I asked my Sovereign Good if he wished me to write the Rule for the Poor of Jesus.¹⁰ I felt myself strongly moved with great sweetness. I rejoiced that our great God wished to make use of this great sinner; on the other hand, I did not know where to bury myself, seeing I am so vile. Enough! I know I tell my dear Jesus that all creatures will sing of his mercies.

Thursday, November 28

At prayer I was dry and a bit distracted. At Holy Communion I was recollected. Afterward, in my thanksgiving and prayer I had great tenderness with tears, especially as I prayed the Sovereign Good for the happy outcome of his holy inspiration that he has given me out of his infinite goodness and continues to give me. I recall that I prayed to the Blessed Virgin with all the angels and saints and especially the saintly Founders. Suddenly, I was carried in spirit and saw them prostrate before the Most Holy Majesty of God, praying for my intention. This happened to me in an instant, like in a lightning flash, along with a sweetness mixed with tears. What I saw was not in bodily forms, but in the spirit and with an understanding of the soul beyond my explaining. It quickly disappeared.

Friday, November 29¹¹

Again, unworthy, I received Communion and was dry and distracted in prayer. I would like to explain what happens in my distractions. When I am distracted, my soul remains at peace with God, neither more nor less, no matter how disturbing the thoughts may be that molest me. At night I say to my mind: “Go wherever you wish — here, there, everywhere — you will always go with God.” What happens in these distractions, not counting those that are clearly temptations, I really cannot say, except that they are of indifferent things, and sometimes they turn out to be thoughts of spiritual things.

However, in line with the understanding that God gives me, and as I have come to realize, I know my soul remains always rooted in God and in his

10. This title was inspired not so much as a dedication to the material poverty of Jesus, as to the lack of power and esteem that Jesus saw in his life and in his passion, as described in Philippians 2: 5-8.

11. On this day and the following Paul attempts to explain how he deals with distractions at prayer and how he prays with humility.

peace. But this is hidden and not evident to the senses, though the will is aware of this. It is the will which is the mouth and entry for the holy food of divine love. Even though it is fed silently, because of the hindrance from memory and intellect, which are lost in distractions, the will, nonetheless, remains attentive to its feeding on the love of God. At most, it does not relish the situation as much as when the powers of intellect and memory are at one with it.

It seems to me it is similar to a baby at the breast of its mother. With its mouth it sucks the milk even though hands and feet are gyrating about. Head can twist, bow, and move, but always it takes its milk because it never takes its mouth from the breast of its mother. It would certainly do better if it remained quiet instead of behaving as I said. Nevertheless, milk continues to flow down its throat because it never takes its mouth from the mother's breast. So it is with the soul. Our will is the mouth and never ceases to imbibe the milk of holy love, even though the powers of intellect and memory go astray. It is true that the will is more invigorated when all powers remain together and quiet. Since the Lord does not wish me to understand it otherwise, I cannot better explain myself.

Saturday, November 30 – Feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle

I was dry and distracted at prayer. At Communion I was recollected. Afterward, there were many tears. I remember I asked Jesus to make me humble in a supreme degree. I wished to be the lowest of humankind, the dregs of the earth, and I prayed the Blessed Virgin to intercede for this grace with many tears. I remember that I asked my Jesus to teach me what grade of humility would please him most, and I heard in my heart: "When you throw yourself beneath the feet of all creatures, even under the feet of the demons, this is the humility that most pleases me."

I had already understood that to abase oneself beneath hell, under the feet of demons, that is when God raises one to paradise. For just as the demon wished to exalt himself to the height of paradise and for his pride was cast into the depths of hell, so on the contrary, the soul that humbles itself beneath hell itself makes the demon tremble and defeats him, and the Sovereign Good raises that soul to paradise. I know that everything comes from my God. To him be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Sunday, December 1

At both my prayer and Communion I was dry and distracted and also had some of the depression described above.

Monday, December 2

I was without feeling and distracted, both during prayer and at Holy Communion, but with this difference: at Holy Communion I was not distracted. Indeed, I am hardly ever distracted then. Dry and without feeling, yes indeed, but either before or afterward I nearly always seem to experience a movement

of the heart which comes and goes so quickly that I am hardly aware of it. Then I remain like a stump for a longer or shorter time. May the gentle Giver of all good be blessed in everything.

Tuesday, December 3

All day long I was troubled with great afflictions. I had undergone the like while I was in the world, but not so keen and vehement. For my part, although I am in such a state, I experience a great desire that they continue. I can even say to you that when such afflictions or worries, I do not know how to name them, come to me, I seem to be buried in the depth of misery, to be the most desolate and wretched of men. Nevertheless, my soul embraces them, for I know this is the Will of God and that they are the joys of Jesus. I can say with Saint Teresa: "Either to suffer or to die."

Wednesday, December 4¹²

I was recollected during prayer and also experienced a mild restlessness in my thoughts. At Holy Communion I had much sweetness. My dear God gave me infused knowledge of the joy the soul will have when we see him face-to-face, when it will be united with him in holy love.

Then I felt sorrow in seeing him offended, and I told him that I would willingly be torn to pieces for a single soul. Indeed, I felt that I would die when I saw the loss of so many souls who do not experience the fruit of the Passion of my Jesus.

When God gives me this deep understanding of the joy felt in seeing him face-to-face, that is, when my soul is united to him, it can no longer remain in my body, so to speak, because with the deep light of faith it sees itself in the infinite love of God; it senses a wish to be set free from the body.

I remember I once said that the body is the chain for the soul and holds it in bondage; and until God breaks the chain by the death of the body, the soul cannot fly to union and the perfect vision of its beloved Good.

Thursday, December 5

During prayer and at Communion I was at peace. At the beginning, that is, before receiving Communion, I had much tenderness and also much self-knowledge. I asked the angels who assist at the adorable mystery to drive me forth from the church as worse than a devil. But at the same time, my strong trust in my sacramental Spouse did not leave me. I asked him to remember the word he left in the holy Gospel, that he came to call not the just, but sinners.

Friday, December 6¹³

12. After feeling that he was "buried in the depth of misery," Paul now experiences peace and joy. He does not mention the writing of the Rule during these days, but treated of this in the document called the Preface to the Rule.

13. On December 6 and December 7, when Paul finishes writing the Rule, he mentions

I was especially recollected, particularly during Holy Communion. Afterward, I had great peace and tranquility, along with a feeling of intense love. I was especially fervent in praying for sinners and for God to hasten to found this Congregation in the holy Church. I had a keen infused knowledge of the sufferings of my Jesus, and I felt so ardent a desire to be perfectly united with him that I wished to actually feel his suffering and to be on the cross with him.

These wonders cannot be explained with bodily comparisons because God makes them understood deep down in the soul with movements so spiritual that they cannot be explained; yet they are grasped in an instant. All the rest of the day I was dry and troubled with thoughts, but at peace.

Saturday, December 7

During morning prayer I was at peace, and then once more troubled with thoughts. At Holy Communion I was particularly recollected and uplifted with tears to such an extent that my bones and stomach pained me, for I was shivering a bit from the cold, but then everything dissipated. This often happens to me. I know I have experienced bodily weakness before — oh, the infinite mercy of our Sovereign Good! After Holy Communion, I feel myself growing better and strong. According to the understanding that God gives me, this comes from the great strength which the soul receives from that angelic Food which has, in addition, the effect of strengthening the body.

I also had great fervor, mingled with tears, while praying for the conversion of poor sinners. I kept telling God that I could no longer bear to see him offended. I also had special tenderness in imploring God in his mercy to found the holy Congregation quickly and to send forth some people for his greater glory and for the good of their neighbors. I said this with great desire and fervor. I asked him to accept me as the least and lowest servant of his poor, and it seemed to me that I was unworthy to serve him as a scullion.

I had great self-knowledge. When God gives me this deep knowledge of myself, it seems to me that I am worse than a devil, that I am a smelly dung heap, as is the case in all truth. But never do I lose my supreme and most tender trust in my sacramental Spouse. I tell him that in giving me so many graces and such innumerable favors, he only displays, all the more, his infinite mercies, because he acts thus toward the greatest of sinners. In all things may his Holy Name be blessed!

that he prays for the founding of the Congregation.

Sunday, December 8¹⁴

At prayer I was at peace as usual. In offering the sufferings which my Jesus endured, I felt moved to tears, likewise in praying for the needs of my neighbor. At Holy Communion I was particularly recollected, especially in a sorrowful and loving remembrance of the sufferings of my Jesus.

This high favor, which the good God grants me at such a time, I know not how to explain because I cannot. You must know that in recalling the sufferings of my dear Jesus, sometimes when I have recalled one or two, I have to stop because my soul can say nothing more and feels itself melting away. I remain thus, languishing with great sweetness, mingled with tears, with the sufferings of my Spouse infused into my soul. Or to express it more clearly, the soul is immersed in the heart and in the sorrows of its beloved Spouse Jesus. Sometimes it understands them all and remains thus in God in this loving and sorrowful contemplation. It is very difficult to explain and always seems to be something new.

Monday, December 9

I was greatly troubled and molested by thoughts. At Holy Communion I was recollected, then dry, and then molested again by thoughts. In my petitions to God during my prayer at night, I was very fervent, especially in praying for the conversion of sinners.

14. Paul attempts to explain his prayer of remembrance of the sufferings of Christ. On November 26 he had written of his "colloquies" on the sorrowful Passion. On this day he explains a further aspect of his prayer on the Passion. He "stops" or "pauses" in silence, "melting away...in loving and sorrowful contemplation."

Tuesday, December 10th – Friday, December 13¹⁵

I was dry, distracted, and tempted. I had to force myself to stay at prayer. I was tempted to gluttony and seized with hunger. I felt the cold more than usual and my body wanted some relief, and on that account I wanted to flee from prayer. By the grace of God, my spirit held out, but the violence of the assaults kept coming from both my flesh and the devil. For my part, I believe that the devil played his part, because I know he has a special hatred against anyone who prays.

Then, as I mentioned, my heart pounded. I was trembling from head to foot, my bones and my back ached all over. But by God's mercy, I kept repeating that I wanted to hold out even if I had to be carried away in pieces. This happened because my flesh wanted relief before the fixed time I had planned to remain in prayer. When the prescribed time came for me to leave, I remained on in peace and tranquillity, wishing always for more suffering. I asked God never to take sufferings away from me. This also happened to me on other occasions, and often. Blessed be God for it.

I know that this kind of prayer of suffering is a great gift, which God grants to the soul to make it a spotless robe of purity, a rock in the face of suffering, to such a point that it no longer takes any account of it. When by God's grace the soul reaches such a state, the Sovereign Good will inflame it with love.

Care must be taken not to withdraw from prayer at such a trying time because suffering would not be diminished thereby. On the contrary, without gain to itself the soul would be the more afflicted because it would see itself slipping into tepidity. However, I know that God makes me understand that the soul, which God wishes to draw to a high degree of union with himself by means of prayer, must travel along this road of suffering in prayer — of suffering, I repeat, without any sensible consolations so that the soul no longer knows where it is, so to speak, but has the deep infused knowledge which God gives it, that it is ever in the arms of its Spouse and is nourished by his infinite charity.

I know this and I also understood, but in a hidden way, that when I was enduring a particular suffering, that to him who overcomes will be given the hidden manna, which is what Sacred Scripture says. I understand "the hidden

15. Paul begins a long period of interior suffering. He describes what one suffers who walks "the road of suffering in prayer." At the same time he writes about how one must conduct oneself during such trials. He realizes the fruit of such suffering is to be inflamed with love.

mana" to be the sweet food of holy love, that is, the soul resting in deepest repose with its beloved Spouse in prayer. Thanks be to God.

Saturday, December 14¹⁶

I was recollected and also experienced the aridity, distractions in thought, as well as the suffering referred to, but not so violent. At Holy Communion I was recollected and experienced tenderness in expressing loving affections for my sacramental Jesus. May he be praised and loved by all. Amen.

Sunday, December 15 – Wednesday, December 18

During these days I was dry, distracted with uneasiness and conflicts between the spirit and the flesh of the kind I explained above. I was assailed — sometimes more, sometimes less — with impatience, with desires to leave my prayer, and with temptations to eat, feeling an especially keen hunger. This occurred even at prayer. I kept asking my Jesus not to deliver me from them, but rather to make me walk the path of suffering. Whence it followed, by the grace of God, that, although I was in particular desolations, temptations, and interior afflictions, it did not occur to me to desire any relief.

During these days I was suddenly moved to shed tears, but they ceased almost immediately or at least remained for only a short time. Then I continued in the way I have described. But, by the mercy of the Sovereign Good, peace of heart did not leave me. I mean that I did not feel my heart troubled with scruples, but truly at peace with God. It even seems to me that I do nothing good, as is indeed true, but I trust in the great goodness of the Sovereign Good. May he be loved by all. Amen.

The continual desire for the conversion of all sinners does not leave me. I feel particularly moved to pray to God because I do not wish him to be offended any more.

Thursday, December 19

I experienced sweetness, mingled with tears, of special contrition for my sins, and this before confession and also afterward. Then it disappeared.

Friday, December 20¹⁷

I experienced some dryness and also some recollection, especially over the agonies of my Jesus. I remember that last evening, Thursday, I was saying that the memory of the sad and sorrowful day of Friday was something to make one agonize and collapse. I asked my Jesus to make me collapse with sorrow.

16. Paul's trials at prayer continue for several more days. He did not ask for relief. Finally, he experiences interior peace.

17. Throughout his life Paul put a special emphasis on Friday. In the Rule he wanted Friday to be observed with greater fasting and prayer. Paul calls it "the sad and sorrowful day of Friday."

Saturday, December 21 – Feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle¹⁸

I was greatly troubled by assaults and combats of the kind mentioned above. This is how it happened. The spirit, by the grace of God, wishes to subdue the flesh and make it stay submissive and obedient by uniting it to the understanding. The flesh, on the other hand, finds this hard to bear. Therefore, when it feels hungry, it wants to eat; when it is weary from work or kneeling for a long time at prayer, it wants to rest; when it is cold, it wants to be warmed; etc. On this account, I say, I have been very violently troubled by most of these things on this particular day. The spirit kept resisting and wanted to remain with God in prayer, although it felt desolate and afflicted. The flesh, on the other hand, did not want to. On this account the passions were stirred up with such intensity of feeling that my heart pounded and made me tremble from head to foot until my very bones ached. I came to the point where I felt I could bear no more.

Then the enemy appeared with temptations to impatience. He roused me to anger against the priests who were coming to say Mass, suggesting to me that they came too late. It seemed to me that I was being forced to make insulting remarks to them. At this point I called upon God and Mary to help me, and I kept saying to myself that I would stay there until all the Masses were said. This was to resist the temptation, for it seemed to me that I was being forced to leave.

When that was over, I felt assailed by temptations to the most frightful blasphemies against God. I seemed to hear myself interiorly repeating the most outrageous and appalling things; whereupon, I called upon Mary to help me. You must know that when in this state the soul feels as if it were utterly abandoned; it no longer feels any movement of the heart toward God; no longer does it remember anything of the special favors of the Spirit. It seems reduced to an abyss of miseries.

It is true, however, that although the soul is in great distress, these dreadful temptations against God disappear in a flash, and the Sovereign Good does not allow the poor soul to remain beset by them. In the secret depths of the heart,

18. Paul writes down various aspects of this “prayer of suffering.” He speaks of the “assaults and combats” he has suffered: temptations to eat, to seek physical comfort, followed by temptations to impatience at the conduct of others, and finally temptations to blasphemy against God. Notice his different strategies. He remains longer at prayer when tempted to impatience. He serves the priests who seem to have come late for their Masses. He begs for immediate deliverance when faced with temptations to blasphemy. He also understands that even amid such trials God is with him and giving him strength and love. He even prays not to be set free, for he wants so much to suffer with Jesus. He appreciates the value of suffering, for by it one becomes more conformed to Jesus. In the afternoon his brother John Baptist visits with him.

there is a certain hidden and almost imperceptible desire always to be immersed in sufferings of one kind or another. It is likewise true that with regard to these temptations against God, I pray to him to deliver me from them, from those diabolic locutions that lacerate heart and soul. It does not matter so much about the suffering, but the soul cannot endure the feeling of being thus tempted against its God.

At the same time I know that the glory of God shines forth therein and that the devil is confounded because in this resistance put up by the soul and in these sufferings — according to the understanding that God gives me — the Sovereign Good is pleased, and the devil is mocked and put to flight. I know, too, that God holds the soul in his embrace, although the soul, not realizing this, seems to be utterly abandoned in its overwhelming misery, and all this is mixed up in some way with the attacks I have referred to. If God, in his infinite mercy, did not give it special assistance, these things would terrify it.

For the greater glory of God, I must add one point. Namely, when I am in this state, which I have already been on some few occasions and for a considerable time, but not with such violence, I beseech Jesus Crucified not to deliver me from it. On the contrary, I desire it in order to suffer, and I have a certain fear that it will depart except, of course, those temptations against God, which I cannot desire unless God permits them for my greater mortification. The fear I mention arises from the soul's longing to follow Jesus in suffering. The profit which the soul gains from this can never be over-estimated; but it does not seek this, for love seeks not its own advantage, but only the glory of the Sovereign Good.

I had a conference with a very spiritually minded brother of mine. Indeed, I am unworthy to be called his brother. The subject of our discussion was the experience of spiritual sufferings. I told him that I hardly dared speak about sufferings for fear that they might disappear if any consolation were obtained from them, although this does not happen. I said that I had a greater fear of losing sufferings than another would have for the loss of his wealth.

Although it is true that sometimes my soul is troubled by the fear of losing its sufferings, I am never so troubled as to lose peace of heart on this account. I am careful not to mention them, save to him to whom I am obliged to do so under holy obedience. I will have enough courage to describe how sweet it is to suffer when I speak to one who suffers, but to tell him of all my own, which the Lord sends me, this I cannot do!

I would like to make everyone understand the great grace that God, in his mercy, bestows when he sends suffering, especially suffering devoid of consolation. Then, indeed, is the soul purified like gold in the furnace. Without knowing, it becomes radiant and is set free to take flight to its Good, that is, to the blessed transformation. It carries the cross with Jesus and knows it not. This arises from the number and variety of sufferings which make it forget everything and no longer remember that it is suffering.

I understand that this is a great and fruitful way of suffering, most pleasing to God, because the soul thereby becomes indifferent to such an extent that it no longer thinks of sorrow or joy, but solely of remaining conformed to the Holy Will of its beloved Spouse Jesus. It desires, above all else, to be crucified with him, because in this it is more conformable to its beloved God, who during his whole life did nothing but suffer.

In all things praised be the Sovereign Good, who in his infinite goodness has deigned to give his infused understanding to such a wretched sinner.

Sunday, December 22¹⁹

I was recollected with great feeling of fervor.

Monday, December 23²⁰

In prayer at night I enjoyed great peace, sweetness, and tears, with deep understanding of the divine perfections, especially of the infinite goodness. Then the rest of the day I was buried in desolation and exteriorly disturbed by thoughts of the future, aroused by the devil. By the word "exteriorly" I mean that the thoughts come in this way.

When the sea is swept by storms, the waters are raised by the wind and swell in huge billows. As these waves approach the rocks, they beat upon them as if they wanted to break them up and smash them to pieces. But not so! They beat upon the rocks, yes, but they do not break through nor do they smash them to pieces, though they may knock off a small chip here and there. No matter how great the waves may be, because the rocks are so hard, there is no danger that they would be shattered. Similarly, the soul at prayer is a rock because God holds it fast in his infinite love. It may even be called a rock of strength because the Sovereign Good imparts this strength to it.

Now the devil, envious of this high state of the soul at prayer, seeing that he cannot snatch it from the infinite grasp of the Immense Divinity, attempts, nevertheless, to disturb it to some degree. He assails it with temptations, or else with vain imaginings, or with different kinds of thoughts, or again, the better to deceive it, with his infamous lies. He does all this to distract it from deep attentiveness to God. Then what happens? Amidst these stormy waves of the devil, the soul stands firm like a rock, provided that it always remains firmly fixed in its beloved Good. These waves of thoughts, in fine, produce no other effect save to chip it a little, to distract it for a few seconds from this continuous, singular, lofty sight of its Beloved, even though, as I understand it,

19. Paul does not share with his director the peace and fervor he experienced on this Sunday, the day after the severe trials. The diary has only a few words.

20. For Paul there is another temptation: to give way to anxieties about the future. In spite of the visions and assurances he had received from God, Paul will frequently be "disturbed by thoughts of the future." On this day he likened this temptation to the powers of mighty waves that break upon the rocks without shattering them. Often Paul had witnessed the power of the sea in a storm. Frequently he explains God's actions in one's spiritual life by recalling the power of nature!

this is not diminished at such a time. I have said this the better to explain my meaning because there is really no question of more or less. It only appears thus to the soul. In fighting these attacks and repulsing them, the soul may appear to be at a disadvantage because it loses a little of its loving attentiveness and seems to be no longer in the embrace of its beloved Spouse. But God makes me understand that the soul is with him and that he is pleased to see it thus engaged in battle. This is more profitable for the soul since, as a result of what it suffers and endures in the struggle, it is purified like the rock, which before the storm may have been covered with debris, but after the storm is cleansed because the waves have washed it clean.

A word of warning is necessary here. When these storms of troublesome thoughts arise, one must remain always fixed in God without taking any notice of them. When the enemy sees that he gains nothing thereby, he is put to shameful flight, perceiving that by God's help he is not feared. When I am beset by these storms of thoughts and other troubles, I turn to my God and say to him: "My Supreme Good, cast a little glance at the condition of my poor soul!" Then I pray that, if it be his Holy Will, he will deliver me from them, and then I carry on in this way. I must not fail to admit they give me a lot of trouble, but may they all be for the love of the Sovereign Good, to whom be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Tuesday, December 24²¹

I was more deeply recollected with tears, especially at Holy Communion. On this holy night I was recollected, but not to the same extent. I also felt much tenderness, especially remembering the infinite love of our dear God in becoming man, in being born amid such lack of comfort and in such poverty. Then I took my rest in God.

Wednesday, December 25 – Christmas Day²²

At dawn I went to confession with heartfelt contrition and great self-knowledge. Afterward, at Holy Communion I was dry like a stump and remained so nearly all day.

Thursday, December 26 – Feast of Saint Stephen, Martyr²³

21. Paul had a great devotion to the mystery of Christmas. Frequently he advised his disciples to spend the holy vigil in prayer. In his later letters at Christmas time he wrote that Christ must be "born again" interiorly in one's soul. He frequently mentions that this "rebirth" follows from the "spiritual death" one has experienced.

22. This year Christmas Day itself is for Paul a day of spiritual dryness. The few words he writes down on this day strikingly remind us of his interior barrenness. This is the price Paul of the Cross must pay to have Christ "born again" in his soul.

23. On this Feast of the Saint Stephen, a martyr, Paul prays to be a martyr. Perhaps this desire led him to remember England and "the neighboring kingdoms." Paul prayed throughout his life for the conversion of England. Perhaps his prayers were heard when

I experienced a special elevation of soul, especially at Holy Communion. I wanted to go to die a martyr's death in a place where the adorable mystery of the Blessed Sacrament is denied. The Infinite Goodness has given me this wish for some time past, but today I had it in a special manner. I desired the conversion of heretics, especially those of England and the neighboring kingdoms. I offered a special prayer for this at Holy Communion.

I also had a special understanding of the Infinite Mercy. Our Sovereign Good made me realize the greatness of his love in inflicting punishment in this life so as to avoid an eternity of suffering. Because his Infinite Majesty knows the place where his infinite justice has prepared for the justly deserved punishment of sin, so his infinite mercy is moved by compassion to inflict loving chastisements, with which he warns his sinful creatures to amend their lives so that they may avoid eternal punishment and may give his service first place in their lives.

All this I understood in an instant with many tears, mingled with the greatest degree of sweetness.

Passionist Father Dominic Barberi went to England in 1841 and established the Congregation. Dominic had the privilege of receiving Cardinal Newman into the Church.

Friday, December 27 – Feast of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist²⁴

Through the infinite goodness of God, I enjoyed great repose and tenderness, especially at Holy Communion. Through infused understanding and deepest consolation of the Spirit, I enjoyed a certain spiritual rest, mingled with the sufferings of the Redeemer, in which my soul takes delight. There was a mingling of love and sorrow. On this point I cannot give a clearer explanation because it is impossible to explain.

During the time I was serving Mass and while I beheld Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I kept asking him to send the seraph to pierce me through with darts of love. This comes from the loving impulses which the Infinite Mercy imparts to the heart. I also asked him to allow me to quench my thirst for his love by allowing me to drink from the infinite font of his most Sacred Heart, but this last happened to me at Holy Communion.

Saturday, December 28 – Feast of the Holy Innocents²⁵

In the morning I was dry and suffered from headaches. I remained thus for a while, until the longed-for moment of Holy Communion had come, after which I was moved by the Infinite Goodness to deepest recollection and to intense loving aspirations and colloquies with our beloved Spouse.

Then I recalled the flight into Egypt, made with such lack of comfort, with such suffering, and the sorrow of Mary and Joseph, but especially of Mary. Within my poor soul there was a mingling of sorrow and love with many tears and much sweetness.

Of all this the soul has a deep infused understanding, sometimes of all at one time, sometimes of one mystery only. But it understands these things in a moment without bodily forms, not even imaginary ones. God infuses them into the soul by a work of his infinite mercy and love. In the very same moment, in

24. Paul's prayer on this Feast of the Beloved Disciple was inspired by the example of John, who at the Last Supper rested on the bosom of the Lord. It is interesting that Paul speaks of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Like John, Paul also "rests" on the Heart of the Lord. Like John, Paul also is filled with love and sorrow.

25. Paul gives a fuller explanation of the colloquy on the Passion as he speaks to the Lord or to Mary of the flight into Egypt on this Feast of the Holy Innocents. We should note that while he dwells on this mystery, he may include the entire event or remain on one or more aspects of the flight. He does not rely on "bodily forms or even imaginary ones." He stresses that this prayer seems to be "infused." There is a mingling of love and sorrow.

which the soul understands this in the most elevated manner, it either rejoices or is sorrowful according to the mystery. In the majority of cases there is always a mingling of holy satisfaction.

Later in the evening, I had a special sorrow for my great sins and failings, for my innumerable shortcomings, knowing myself to be an abyss of ingratitude. During the day I also had special knowledge of myself. I know that I told my Divine Savior that I could call myself nothing other than a miracle of his infinite mercy.

May his Holy Name be praised and magnified by all. Amen.

Sunday, December 29²⁶

In prayer by night I was at peace and also a little distracted. I had special recollection in offering his Most Holy Life, Death, and Passion, as also in my petitions, especially for heretics.

I had a particular impulse to pray for the conversion of England, especially because I want the standard of the holy faith to be erected so that there will be an increase of devotion and reverence, homage and love, with frequent acts of adoration for the Blessed Sacrament, the ineffable mystery of God's most holy love, and so that his Holy Name may be glorified in a very special way. The desire to die like a martyr, especially for the Blessed Sacrament, in some place where people do not believe, does not leave me.

At Holy Communion I was almost without feeling, and then distractions came on as well. Later in the evening, I was recollected and felt moved to make reparation for irreverences, especially in the church, feeling inspired to remedy these by admonitions, as indeed, by God's grace I have been in the habit of doing. I felt inspired to say: "Ah, my dear Jesus, would that we could flee instantly from this church, and that angels would carry away the Blessed Sacrament to a place where it would not be thus profaned by irreverences and grave misdeeds!"

26. During the night prayer, Paul mentions that he made "offerings" of the sufferings of Christ as he presents petitions to God for various intentions, but especially for heretics and for England. Again, we learn of Paul's desire to die like a martyr, especially like a martyr for the Blessed Sacrament. Paul speaks of his great devotion to the Eucharistic Presence of the Lord and of the manner in which he exhorts the people to an appropriate reverence in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

I asked him to give me the grace to shed tears of blood, something I greatly desire.

Monday, December 30²⁷

I was at first recollected, and then at Holy Communion particularly recollected and also moved to tears. Afterward, for the rest of the day I was plagued with distractions, especially by thoughts of things in the future. The enemy represented to me that great tribulations would befall me, especially with regard to my family. I was also very downcast. In all things may the Will of our God be done. Amen.

27. During the next two days Paul begins to reflect on what his calling will mean to his family as well as what it will require of him. He speaks of “the great tribulations” awaiting them all. He continues to be “molested” by these anxieties. His response is to pray that “the Will of our God be done.”

Tuesday, December 31 – Feast of Saint Sylvester

I was dry and distracted, but with internal peace, though molested with the thoughts mentioned above. At Holy Communion I was at peace, yes, but rather insensible and unmoved in my affections. Toward evening I was particularly recollected.

Wednesday, January 1, 1721²⁸

Through the infinite love of our dear God, I was raised up in spirit to great recollection and many tears, especially after Holy Communion, during which I felt keenly the sweetness of holy love. It seemed to me that I was melting away in God.

With greatest confidence, without weariness, and with exceeding sweetness I was relating my woes to Jesus. I told him of the scruples I felt with regard to a vow I had made to deprive my body of all unnecessary pleasures. Then I told him what he knows already, that when I am hungry, I feel pleasure in eating even a piece of dry bread. Whereupon, I heard an interior voice say gently: "But this is necessary." Then I felt as if my heart would break, and I burst into the most loving tears.

I also had knowledge of the soul united in a bond of love to the Sacred Humanity and, at the same time, dissolved and raised to a deep, conscious, and felt knowledge of the Divinity. For since Jesus is both God and Man, the soul cannot be united in love to the Sacred Humanity without being at the same time dissolved and brought to a deep, conscious, felt knowledge of the Divinity.

This wondrous and exalted marvel cannot possibly be set down or explained, even by one who has experienced it. It is impossible because the soul understands that God wills these gentle experiences and exceedingly high marvels because he who is Infinite helps the soul to understand these things. But to describe them afterward is utterly impossible. These are things which are experienced and comprehended in an instant, at least so it seems to the soul. For even if they should last for a full thousand years, it would, in my opinion, seem less than an instant because the soul is in its Infinite Good. It desires nothing else but his glory and his love, and that he be feared and loved by all.

I have had another very special grace, especially in contemplating the holy mystery of the Circumcision. Likewise, when serving Mass, I had such a deep light on the great love which God displays toward me and my misery, my

28. The final day has come. For Paul this is a day of "confidence and exceeding sweetness." Paul seems to be melting away in love. He also receives an "understanding" of the mystery of the Incarnation. At the same time he realizes that even though one may be given the gift of "understanding" this mystery, one cannot describe it afterward. The final grace of this day is a renewed and deeper awareness of God's love for him and his own unworthiness.

ingratitude, my whole life, that I did not venture even to raise my eyes to look upon the picture of Mary — and always with an abundance of tears mingled with great sweetness, especially on seeing my Spouse Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament.