

CHARITY

Meditations

By **Richard F. Clarke S.J.**

1—The Definition of Charity

1. ‘What is charity? It is an infused virtue, by which we love God for His own sake and above all things, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God. It is the best gift that God Himself can give, the gift compared with which all other gifts are insignificant and valueless. It is the end and aim, the perfection and crown of the Christian life. If we possess it we have all things; if we possess it not, we have nothing; we are miserable and wretched and poor and blind and naked before God. Pray that God may teach you to know and to love His Divine gift.

2. Charity is called an infused virtue, because we can only obtain it if God shall please to pour it into our soul. No amount of practice can make it ours. No natural benevolence will develop into charity unless God adds that supernatural character which alone can render it pleasing in His sight and meritorious of eternal life. We must carefully distinguish natural from supernatural charity, and beware of being satisfied with the former.

3. Charity is also one of those virtues which are called Christian virtues, inasmuch as their model and type is the Life of Christ upon earth, because they unite us to Christ and make us like to Him. It is true that this is in itself pre-eminently *the* Christian virtue, and when St Paul says, “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans xiii. 14), he refers alone to the virtue of charity with which we must be clothed if we are to be the servants and followers of our Lord. How far can I say that I am clothed with charity so that all around me see it? Do they not too often detect in me a lamentable want of this virtue?

2—Charity a Love of Friendship

1. Charity is primarily a love for God and a love of friendship, which is the highest kind of love. All true friendship implies that the love exists on both sides. Men are not friends unless each of them possesses and recognizes the love of the other. If we are really the friends of God, we shall recognize His love, and find in all that happens to us a proof of His love and friendship, not complaining or wishing that He had acted otherwise, but being fully convinced that He never does anything or permits anything which is not intended for our good. Until we do this our friendship is a very imperfect one.

2. Friendship also requires that we declare our love to God. He knows it already, and the exact degree in which it is present in our hearts; but He likes to listen to our assurance of the love we bear Him. Our love is prone to wax cold unless it finds expression in words, and it is a pleasure to those who are close friends to make known to each other their mutual sentiments of friendship. God does not spare in His written Word to give us the strongest assurances of His undying love to man. Do we in return assure Him of our grateful love to Him, the best and dearest friend we have in Heaven or on earth?

3. Whatever words we use they cannot surpass God’s messages of love to us. He says that if a woman can forget the son of her womb, He will not forget us. (Isaias xlix. *ŕ.*) That He loves us so dearly, that He spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us (Romans viii. 32), and therefore can refuse us nothing that we ask for. (St John xvi. 23, 24.) What have we to say to Him, as a counterpart of loving words like these?

3—Charity a Love of Complacency

Charity is also a love distinguished by the complacency or pleasure that it takes in the welfare of him who is its object. Let us apply this to the supernatural charity that has God for its object.

1. It takes pleasure in thinking of God’s infinite perfections. It rejoices in His unapproachable majesty. The continual joy of the angels in Heaven and of the Church on earth is, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*. It rejoices in His infinite holiness; *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth*; in His Power, His Wisdom, His Eternity. Does my heart rejoice in the thought of God’s power and glory and in my complete subjection to Him?

2. Charity also thinks with complacency of the homage paid to God by angels and by men; of the honour He derives from the holiness of the saints, from the immaculate purity of His Holy Mother, from the obedience of the

Son of God to His Eternal Father, and from the Sacrifice on Calvary whereby the world was made once more the Kingdom of God, and filled with tens of thousands of saints. For all this I must render thanks to God, and rejoice in the glory He derives therefrom. I thank Thee, O my God, that Thou hast on earth so many faithful servants who give glory to Thy Name.

3. Charity, moreover, rejoices exceedingly in the honour done to God whenever a sinner is reconciled to Him. The angels rejoice over the sinner doing penance, not so much for his own sake as because God's Kingdom is thereby enlarged and His glory increased. So, too, we ought to rejoice in the conversion of every sinner, and this the more because we are sinners and therefore can appreciate the better the injury done to God by sin, and the honour He receives when sin is blotted out and the sinner is reconciled to Him.

4—Charity a Love of Benevolence

1. By love of complacency we take a personal pleasure in the good of our friend, by a love of benevolence we desire to see that good increased. The benevolence of charity consists in an ever-present desire that the glory of God may be promoted by all men who live upon the earth, that His Kingdom may spread, that the number of the saints may receive continual additions, that sinners may be converted to Him. This is the chief wish of our hearts, and is ever present to our minds; that the interests of God be everywhere advanced.

2. This love of benevolence also includes a feeling of grief and sorrow whenever we hear of anything that is an insult to God's honour or that diminishes His eternal glory. All the sins of men cause a real pain to those in whose hearts is present supernatural charity ; all sacrileges, impieties, forgetfulness of God which they witness around them wound them, and cause them to suffer. Above all they compassionate the sacred sufferings of Jesus and the agony of Body and mind that were caused Him by our sins.

3. Charity, moreover, requires that we shall not be satisfied with a mere feeling of good-will. Our benevolence must be a practical one. We must do our part to add to God's glory. In proportion to our charity will be our devotion of every act and word and thought to the glory of God. When St Paul said: "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God," he was but inculcating a precept of charity. What do I do to promote God's glory? Alas, how much less than I ought!

5—Charity a Love of Choice

1. Although God chooses out of the world those on whom He sets His love and for whom He destines the rich gifts of grace and glory, yet He never forces their will. He draws them to Himself with the cords of love, but it is in their power to resist. All men choose deliberately at some period of their lives between the love of God and the love of self. Our homage to God must be a voluntary homage, and our love must be a voluntary love. It must be a choice of God in spite of the difficulties and objections that are raised by our lower nature. Have I made this choice? And do I make it in all the details of my life ?

2. It seems almost a matter of course that every sane man should choose Him who contains all perfections in an infinite degree, rather than any of the miserable trifles which do not satisfy and soon pass away.

Yet how few there are who make a full and complete choice of God! The Prophet complains (Jerem. ii. 13) "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Do I not, alas! every day choose some passing indulgence, though I know I should please God more and earn His love if I denied it to myself?

3. Our Lord tells His Apostles: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." So God has chosen us rather than we Him. He has gone before our choice with His preventing grace and co-operated with it and carried it through to the end. It was more His than ours. This is true of all vocations, great or small, when we have through God's mercy chosen Him rather than yielded to natural inclination. O my God, choose me ever, and grant that I may ever choose Thee!

6—Charity a Supreme Love

1. Charity does not exist within the soul of anyone who does not love God above all things. If some created being has the first place in our heart and God only the second, then we are the enemies, not the friends of God. He must have all our heart or none. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul." If any person or thing hinders this supreme love for God, we must avoid it at any cost, or if this is impossible, we

must pray earnestly that we may never fall into the terrible misfortune of loving the creature more than the Creator, who is God, blessed for ever.

2. This, however, does not mean that we must needs have a stronger *feeling* of love for God than for some loved object upon earth. We cannot always control our feelings. We are creatures of sense, and our senses and imagination have great power over us. Nor does it mean that the love of God is to swallow up the love of things created: this is impossible. Nor, again, does it mean that there must be no possible circumstances that we can imagine in which we could not promise to choose God, however violent the temptation might be. It simply means that as I am now and under present circumstances, I would give up anything rather than offend God mortally.

3. This supreme love of God includes a conviction that God is our best friend, and therefore He will never ask of us what is beyond our power. He will provide an escape from every temptation, however violent. Hence I will have no fear about the future. God will never ask of me what He does not give me strength to perform.

7—The Disinterestedness of Charity

1. Charity is a love of God for His own sake. In its perfection it banishes self altogether. It does not advert to self or to that which self desires. It thinks only of God, His greatness, His goodness, and seeks to promote His honour, His glory, simply for the sake of promoting the honour and glory of One so infinitely worthy of our love and homage, quite independently of any reward or gain which is to accrue to ourselves thereby. Is this the nature of my love of God?

2. Yet if “charity begins at home” and we necessarily as rational beings seek what is good for ourselves, how is this disinterested love possible? It is because those who possess it find their highest and purest happiness in this forgetfulness of self. In their very neglect of the interests of self they are really procuring for themselves the greatest of all rewards, the joy which comes of loving and serving God simply and solely for His own sake.

3. Do those who have this charity in their hearts seek at the same time the eternal blessedness of Heaven? Some of the saints in an ecstasy of love have, like Moses and St Paul, protested that they would willingly forfeit the prospect of their own eternal happiness if thereby they could promote the glory and honour of God. They did not mean thereby to relinquish the hope of Heaven, but that their Heaven was formed in this highest love, and that any happiness save this was as nothing in their eyes. The highest charity indeed includes a longing after the Beatific Vision, but this is secondary to the absorbing love of God simply for His own sake, and as so worthy of our love.

8—Charity and Self-love

If charity really promotes our highest interests, and even in its most disinterested form ministers to our good, how is it that it is so often placed in contrast with self-love?

1. When we speak of self-love we do not mean that true love of self that is identical with charity, but we mean the love of our lower self. We mean the choice of some immediate good instead of the far higher and nobler good that we shall secure by sacrifice of the lower good. Self-love is the love of the child for the unwholesome sweets that it knows will produce sickness on the morrow. How often my self-love has led me to grasp at the passing enjoyment instead of the solid happiness which I should have gained by renouncing it.

2. But self-love does a still more mischievous work. It leads us to thrust ourselves into a position which we know is a false one, in order that we may gratify our desire for independence and for liberty. Self-love hates subjection, and is thus diametrically opposed to charity, which loves to be subject. Self-love hates the lowest place or humble work and yearns after notoriety or prominence. Charity appreciates the nothingness of self and desires that God should be all in all.

3. Self-love, again, cannot endure any sort of reproof or correction, it rebels against it and longs to revenge itself. It is thus no true love of self, for he who really loves himself or rather who finds his highest happiness in preferring God to self, welcomes anything that tends to lower self and to make God the exclusive object of his love. Then in hating self he loves self with a true self-love and will reach charity. Is this my relation to self?

9—The All-Importance of Charity

1. “If I have not charity I am nothing.” These are the words of Holy Scripture written under the inspiration of God Himself. Unless we are united to God by the habit of supernatural charity, unless we love Him before all else

for His own sake with a supreme and unselfish love, we are not children of God but aliens; we have no inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, we can earn no merit before God, all that we do has no beauty in His sight; all our actions, however noble and generous, do not really please Him, or deserve grace in this life or glory in the next.

2. Moreover, unless there is at least an initial element of charity in our actions, they will not help us in any way on the road to Heaven. Acts of faith and hope, though they may be performed by one who has not perfect charity, contain an unformed and rudimentary element of charity. They are the germ or bud from which charity may afterwards spring, and in this way they lead on to charity. But in themselves they gain no merit unless they are the actions of one who has already charity in his heart.

3. Even if we have the habit of charity and are in a state of grace, our actions are not meritorious before God unless they are done from a motive of charity. Charity must in some way influence them, if not with a present thought of God, yet with the golden light of our love to Him lighting them up. Without this they may count for nothing, or at most merit only a natural reward. If I give money purely out of natural compassion and pity, I gain a temporal, but not an eternal reward. How careful I must be to offer to God each act of charity to men!

10—The Spirit of Charity

1. The spirit of charity is none other than the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity. He not only is the Spirit of Charity, but Charity itself. The personal love of the Eternal Father for His co-equal Son, is identical with the Holy Ghost who proceeds from the Father and the Son. All these Persons are thus consubstantial and co-equal, united together by Infinite Love, and this Infinite Love is itself one of these Divine Persons. Adore this mystery, and pray for the humble faith which believes what it cannot comprehend.

2. It is from and through the Holy Spirit that the Charity of God is imparted to us. The Charity of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us. When we receive the gift of supernatural charity we also receive into our hearts the Holy Spirit Himself, who is really present with us and by His presence produces all the graces that flow from His seven-fold gifts. Reflect on the exceeding honour we thus enjoy, and pray that you may never grieve the Holy Spirit who is in you by your want of charity.

3. Charity is also mentioned as the first and foremost of the fruits that the Holy Spirit causes to ripen in our hearts. “The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continence, chastity.” (Galat. v. 22, 23.) All these fruits are but the effects of charity. Charity brings joy because it unites us to God, and peace because it prevents our will from rebelling against His. Pray that the Holy Spirit may impart to you these fruits of His presence; above all, the charity whence the rest proceed.

11—Charity in our Actions

1. We have seen that charity must influence all our actions if they are to be meritorious in the sight of God. But this does not mean that the conscious motive of promoting God’s glory should ever be present to our thoughts. This is an end to be aimed at. The saints had God always before their eyes, and every movement, every act, however trifling, was done with the motive of pleasing Him. But ordinary Christians can only attain after long years so close a union with God. They must begin by offering up their actions to Him from time to time, and renewing the offering as often as they can. Am I striving to do this? and am I advancing in this practice of charity?

2. One thing we must never omit: to offer our actions to God when we rise in the morning. We should make the sign of the Cross, repeat some little ejaculation consecrating the day to God, *e.g.*, “O my God, I offer Thee all my actions, thoughts, words, deeds and sufferings of this day in union with those of Thy beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.” This little prayer I will say with the intention of its lasting through the day, even though I may forget it, and I will pray that all I do may be influenced by it.

3. But this single offering can scarcely continue to have any controlling power over our actions unless it is renewed. Its influence fades away; we not only forget it, but become so absorbed in our various occupations that we are in danger of ceasing to do them in any sense for God. A frequent renewal of the intention to do all for God is necessary. Do I thus renew it at Holy Mass, when I say grace at meals, when the Angelus rings or the clock strikes, at mid-day and in the evening, and at other times beside ?

12—The Patience of Charity

1. “Charity is patient.” Patience consists in supporting without murmuring or complaint, injuries, hardships, ill-treatment, whether they are deserved or undeserved. It is thus a most difficult virtue, and cannot be practised in its perfection except by those who have attained to a high degree of charity. We are naturally eager to defend ourselves, full of resentment when accused, angry when some wrong is done us, anxious to take revenge on our impugner. Yet all this is forbidden by patience and is inconsistent with charity. Can I stand this test?

2. There are some persons to whom patience is specially difficult in every form. Active, energetic, eager natures cannot endure to be thwarted or contradicted; even to be kept waiting irritates them. For them a careful practice of patience is necessary if they are to rise high in virtue. They must begin by suppressing the outward expressions. This will help them to overcome the internal movement of impatience. They must school themselves carefully in little things with a persevering determination to conquer their natural inclination to impatience, else they will offend continually against charity.

3. Patience, like all the virtues, brings its own reward. How much the impatient suffer when checked! How painful is the inward struggle and desire to be rid of the obstacle in their path, or of the person who hinders and annoys them. How they chafe under the restraint that hampers their activity! On the contrary, how full of tranquil peace is one who allows nothing to make him impatient, and who takes everything as coming from God. Do I so act?

13—The Kindness of Charity

1. “Charity is kind.” All appreciate kindness and are drawn towards those who are kind. Even natural kindness is very precious and beautiful. It is one of the marks of a noble and generous character. Yet how often we have to lament over our own want of kindness. We feel it keenly when we think that others are not kind to us. But we overlook our own many acts of unkindness to others. Have I not to reproach myself with omitting many little acts of kindness that I might have done, and sometimes with being positively unkind?

2. Natural kindness is a sort of foundation for supernatural kindness, but the two are very distinct from each other. The one has some natural motive, our own inclinations or love for the individual to whom we are kind, or an innate benevolence. The other has always a supernatural motive and is directed to the glory of God. It is kind to others for Christ’s sake, and for their own sake chiefly as being His brethren and friends, and therefore ours. Do I seek to supernaturalize the kind offices I do for others so as to earn by means of them an eternal reward?

3. If we are kind to others for God’s sake, He will be kind to us in our turn. Yet our kindness must not have any advantage to ourselves for its chief motive, if it is to be the kindness of charity. We must not only have the love of God in our hearts, but we must have the thought of God present to us, and for Him the kind action must be done, because it is a happiness to please Him who is in Himself so kind and good. Does my kindness stand this test?

14—The Contentedness of Charity

1. “Charity envieth not.” Envy is the vice that grudges to another his happiness, liberty, riches, or success, or some other good. It is pained at seeing him in possession of what the envious man desires himself to have, but cannot obtain. Envy is a mean and contemptible vice. What difference can it make to us that others should succeed and be happy? If they were involved in our misfortunes we should be no better off. Examine whether envy lurks in your heart.

2. Envy is a vice that utterly destroys the peace of him who harbours it. He is always uneasy, and he unites the longing for what he cannot have with a sort of hatred of those who are enjoying it, and this double worm gnaws unceasingly at his heart. In our own interest there is scarce any vice that it is such folly to harbour. It is also specially displeasing to God and hateful in His sight, because it is a challenging of His goodness, and a rebellion against a state of things that He has ordained or permitted.

3. How different is the spirit of charity! It takes pleasure in the pleasure of others, it rejoices in their success, and is happy in seeing them happy. It wishes for nothing that others have and that is out of its own reach, for it recognizes the wise providence of God in all that happens, and therefore is perfectly satisfied with everything, and has no wish to see itself exalted and others depressed as envy does. Is my spirit in view of the greater successes of others one of envy or one of charity? Do I rejoice in them, or do I feel vexed and annoyed?

15—The Reasonableness of Charity

1. “Charity does not deal perversely.” Perversity generally results from an overweening self-love. We all dislike children who seem to take a pleasure in doing a thing just because it is opposed to the wishes or orders of those set over them. Those who are perverse may have clear motives set before them, and may know that a certain course of action is alike their duty and their interest, and yet they set it aside for some folly of their own. In their hearts they perceive its character still more clearly, and would clearly see it to be such were they not blinded by the deceptive mist of their own self-will. Is not perversity an element that enters into my actions from time to time?

2. Opposed to perversity is docility in those who obey, and reasonable conduct in those who have to act for themselves. How we love the docile! Even if we are not docile ourselves, still others are dear to us if they can be easily guided. We also love reasonable men who will take a common sense view of things, and abjure crotchety and misguided theories of their own invention. Even in the natural order such men win our regard and esteem, and how much more when they are influenced to it by the love of God.

3. Charity includes all possible reasonableness and docility. No one can ever accuse it of eccentric action, or of running counter to others unnecessarily. On the contrary, its great aim is to yield to others, and to carry out their will as far as right reason will allow. It will give up what it thinks best to please another unless serious harm seems likely to result therefrom. Such pliability and consideration for the opinion of others is one of the marks of love of God as opposed to the pertinacity and perversity resulting from self-will.

16—The Lowliness of Charity

1. “Charity is not puffed up.” One of the great dangers of prosperity is that it so often produces a fatal exaltation of self. We are flattered by others and we begin to think that we are persons of importance. Those around give way to us, listen to us when we speak, respect our opinion, and at once in our folly we fancy ourselves distinguished and eminent persons, and expect to be treated accordingly. This temper, if it exists in us, shows that we are very deficient in true charity, for charity is never puffed up with a high estimate of self.

2. How does charity prevent this self-conceited pride and arrogance? It would seem as if humility were the proper virtue by which it is to be met. Humility is indeed more obviously its opposite, but charity is equally a remedy for it. For charity is an emptying-out of self in order to give place to God alone. True charity ignores self, despises self, and is therefore quite incompatible with the temper which is nothing else than a magnifying of self and an ignoring of God. Which of the two tendencies is the stronger in my heart?

3. We are not likely to arrive at a true estimate of ourself unless others treat us as we deserve. How are we to know what our deserts may be? Our idea of our own deserts will be regulated by the degree of our charity. Those who esteem God the most esteem themselves the least, consider themselves worthy only to be trampled underfoot, spat upon. How should I appreciate such treatment? Would my charity enable me to rejoice in it, as suitable indeed for one like myself?

17—The Self-Sacrifice of Charity

1. “Charity seeketh not her own.” In all the affairs of life men may be divided into two classes; those whose eye is always fixed upon some advantage to themselves and those who devote themselves without thought of self to the work in which they are engaged, and whose object is to carry it through, even at the cost of suffering and humiliation to themselves. When I look at my life and the motives that guide it, do I recognize in myself that sacrifice of self which is of the essence of charity?

2. What is the test of this spirit animating my life? Not zeal, for there is a zeal which is nothing but a disguised form of self-seeking. Nor activity, for an active nature rejoices in being employed. Nor a strong interest in the work—perhaps the pious work in which I am engaged. All these may be mere counterfeits. The real test is the willingness that the work should prosper independently of myself; the preference of its success, even though I myself am thrust out of it, to my own success in it; a readiness to disappear if only I can do anything to help the good cause.

3. Yet this is not enough. I must not be satisfied with a general willingness to obliterate myself, especially where this is perhaps impossible. I must also, if my motives are pure, be ready to be taken down, humbled, misjudged, thought little of; I must be prepared to accept all the blame of failures and to see others reap the praise

of success that I know is through God's grace done to me. I must rather rejoice in this as a good sign. Can I stand this test?

18—The Meekness of Charity

1. "Charity is not provoked to anger." One of the strongest instincts of human nature is the instinct of self-defence. In some it is almost irresistible. The desire to return blow for blow, is, within due bounds, a reasonable and lawful impulse, and is prompted by the duty we owe to ourselves.

Yet there is no tendency more likely to lead to sin if it is indulged; none more prone to set aside prudence, justice, and, above all, charity. Am I one of those natures ready to take up arms in my own defence at the slightest provocation?

2. The instinct of self-defence is always prone to mislead us on account of our excessive self-love. We fancy we have been attacked when nothing of the sort is the case; we see a slight or insult when none was intended. We do not remember how simple the true explanation may really be. We get angry and long for revenge and are carried beyond all bounds by our wounded self-love, and say and do what we afterwards bitterly regret, alienating others from us and offending God by our angry words. How often, alas, I have done this!

3. How is this evil to be remedied? By charity and nothing else. If God were more prominent in our hearts, if we loved God more and ourselves less, if our ambition were to promote His honour not our own, we should not indulge in these outbursts of intemperate or bitter words, we should not be easily provoked or get angry as we do, but should either take a gentle view of what has been done, or else should accept the injury or unkindness done us for our sins, and in union with the supreme charity of Christ our Lord.

19—The Judgments of Charity

1. "Charity thinketh no evil." We are all surrounded by those of whose actions we are continual witnesses and of whose character we cannot help forming an opinion from their actions. We see what they do and listen to what they say, and we not only receive a certain impression from them, but are tempted to judge them and to pronounce on their moral value. Moreover, we are too prone to judge of them unfavourably rather than favourably, to ascribe to them inferior motives and to see faults in them where there are none, or to exaggerate whatever defects may be found in them. This unhappily is my tendency; I cannot deny it.

2. Why is this? It is because I am so full of faults myself that I see many faults in others. It is the reflection of myself that I find so repulsive in them. I really attribute to them the very defects that in some form or other are to be found in me. It is by reason of my own want of charity that I judge them so harshly. How this ought to humble me, and how careful it ought to make me in my judgment of others.

3. How do men judge who are imbued with the spirit of charity? They think no evil, that is, they never attribute a bad motive to any action if it is susceptible of having been actuated by a good one. If the action is in itself bad, they somehow do not seem to notice it. They are so occupied with their own shortcomings that they do not observe those of others, and where the faults of others are forced on their notice, they search for some excuse or explanation. Is this my temper? Do I thus think no evil?

20—The Attitude of Charity to Sin

1. "Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity." Anything that offends God is necessarily a source of sorrow to the charitable, for as charity consists in loving God above all things for His own sake, and is accompanied by a yearning desire to see Him honoured more and more, that which detracts from His honour cannot cause it any satisfaction, but on the contrary gives it a pain corresponding to the offence committed against God. Do I share this personal sorrow and pain when any wrong is done to His Divine Majesty, or is it to me a matter of comparative indifference?

2. The saints would gladly have given their lives to prevent sin being committed. It was an intense pain to them to think how continually God is offended. Many of them laid down their lives to prevent sin from being committed, they all devoted themselves, with generous self-sacrifice, to the furtherance of God's glory, and the hindering of sin against Him. By prayer, by active zeal, by word and work, by personal penance, they fought against iniquity. What do I do to check all the sin and vice in this wicked world?

3. Above all, the saints feared and dreaded any sin in themselves. They avoided with the utmost care anything

that could lead to sin. No spectacle however magnificent, no honour however brilliant, no pleasure however intense, caused them anything but disgust and horror, if it was in any way mingled with iniquity and tended to it. Is this true in my case? or do I relish things questionable or dangerous, or perhaps not altogether unmixed with positive sin.

21—The Joy of Charity

1. “Charity rejoiceth in the truth.” Everything that is done to promote the cause of truth is a source of sincere joy to those who have in their hearts the spirit of true charity. It matters not whether the success is due to their own efforts or those of others; they are always glad at the advance of truth, and the defeat of error. How do I testify my joy when truth prevails, when heresy is crushed, when souls are converted to God? Do I say a *Te Deum* or *Magnificat*, or thank God with all my heart on these joyful occasions?

2. Charity also finds a pleasure in the truth being known. It has no wish to conceal anything. Those who have it in their hearts make no attempt to hide the truth concerning themselves. They are willing to be known as they really are with all their defects and imperfections. They are even glad that their faults should be manifested, as far as the manifestation tends to the glory of God and the edification of their neighbour. Do I rejoice in the truth being known respecting myself, even in matters that may humble my pride?

3. Do I again rejoice in the truth when I find that I have misjudged or misunderstood my neighbours, and that they are very different from what I thought them to be, and far better than myself? Do I rejoice in the truth when I am shown to be wrong in some opinion, and when others set me right? Do I rejoice in the truth when I am brought face to face with my own weakness and nothingness, and find that I cannot trust in myself but have to trust to God alone? I will examine myself to see what progress I have made in charity.

22—The Sufferings of Charity

1. “Charity beareth all things.” If there are any who deserve to be exempt from suffering, it is those who are full of the spirit of charity. Suffering is indeed necessary in expiation of sin, and to humble our pride and show us our own misery. But why should the charitable simply because of their charity have to bear all kinds of trials? Yet so it is; generally speaking, the law seems to be the more charity the more suffering. Perhaps this is why I have comparatively little to suffer. Even if I have heavy trials, can I flatter myself that they are the sign of a high degree of supernatural charity?

2. Yet after all it is reasonable that the charitable should suffer when we remember that the Lord and model of all charity suffered all things simply because of His charity. What else caused His Agony in the Garden, His cruel Scourging at the Pillar, His dereliction on the Cross? It was all the result of His Divine charity. We therefore, if we are to follow in His steps, must expect to encounter the same results as a reward for any charity if it resembles His, however remotely. If we are wise, we shall rejoice in any sign that we are to be honoured by sharing our Master’s lot.

3. These sufferings are a source of joy to all who suffer for Jesus’ sake. He rejoiced as a giant to run the course of His Passion, on account of His longing desire to see accomplished the deliverance from bondage of those He loved. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross. So charity rejoices to suffer, because it knows that those sufferings will obtain for it in Heaven the eternal joy of seeing others brought to God by its offering to Him of all that it holds dear.

23—The Faith of Charity

1. “Charity believeth all things.” Faith is a preliminary gift of God without which charity is impossible. No one can do any work pleasing in His sight unless he believes in God, and is ready to accept whatever God has revealed. Works of benevolence are not works of charity if he who performs them does not possess this belief, and the charity that rests on a feeble faith will always be itself feeble. He who minimizes in matters of faith will generally have a minimum of charity. Hence pray for a loyal readiness to believe, that so you may obtain an intense charity.

2. Charity, while it believes all things that God has revealed, is the reverse of credulous. It is the bitter enemy of superstition, and carefully examines into the claims of any doctrine or the proofs of any fact that is not already vouched for by authority. It is no act of faith or of charity to swallow down some unauthenticated statement. We

should prove all things and hold fast only that which is good. The saints never were credulous or given to believe in portents, omens, or apparitions, unless bearing the mark of the finger of God.

3. Charity supplements faith and it strengthens it. The stronger our love of God, the stronger will be our belief in all that He has revealed. When love waxes cold, faith becomes faint. No man ever loses his faith without first wilfully estranging himself from God by deliberate mortal sin. If I want a strong faith, I must cultivate a fervent charity. If I have difficulties in belief, is it not that there are gaps and defects in my charity? In proportion to my love of God will be my ready acceptance of all that He has revealed.

24—The Hopefulness of Charity

1. “Charity hopeth all things.” How common and how fatal an evil is discouragement! Half of our enterprises fail simply because we get discouraged. More than half of our faults are owing to discouragement. We lose heart, and therefore fail in the necessary perseverance. We become despondent, and seek to console ourselves by some earthly pleasure or perhaps sinful indulgence. No general who was discouraged ever won a victory, and no sinner who lost heart ever became a saint, or even turned to God as long as the despondency remained.

2. Yet it is no easy thing to keep up our courage and our hope. We so often fail, and failures are discouraging. We commit so many faults, and there is nothing that saps our courage like the consciousness of having done wrong. Then there are the continual impediments and obstacles in our way, and the neglect and indifference shown by others to our work, the opposition we meet with, and a thousand things more. These are too often causes of discouragement to all who are working for God. But we ought not to be discouraged by them, for often difficulties and opposition are the best signs of coming success.

3. How then are we to keep up courage and to be always hopeful? The only chance for us lies in our keeping God always before us and forgetting ourselves as far as possible; that is, it depends on the degree of our charity. When self prevails, sooner or later disappears hope; when God is predominant, hope springs up in our heart. For “Charity hopeth all things,” and I shall have a strong confidence and a certainty of final success if I have a fervent charity.

25—The Resignation of Charity

1. “Charity endureth all things.” The test of our love for anyone is what we are willing to endure for him. If we love only a little, we are willing to endure but little; if we love much, we are willing to endure much. And if we love him better than ourselves, then it is a positive pleasure to us to endure for his sake what we should otherwise dread and shrink from. Hence the test of our supernatural charity is what we are willing to endure for God; whether it is a pleasure to us to endure positive suffering for Him.

2. We all of us should esteem it a great privilege if we were called upon to lay down our lives for the Faith. But this is a grace which we poor ordinary mortals cannot expect, and we must be careful against deluding ourselves by fancy pictures of the courage we should then display. The real question before us is whether we suffer willingly the little disagreeables of life, bodily ailments, failures in our projects, the neglect or unkindness of others, undeserved reproaches. It is no use thinking of martyrdom till we have learnt to bear these.

3. If I have true charity, I shall take all with joy. There is nothing that I have endured which I would not willingly endure again for God’s sake, and I would, with His grace, accept things still more painful, for charity endures all things sooner than offend God, and fervent charity would endure all things rather than be unfaithful to one single inspiration that comes from Him, or neglect one single grace that He desires to give us. Here is the test for me. How far can I stand it?

26—The Perseverance of Charity

1. “Charity never falleth away.” We are all anxious to persevere to the end. We know that without perseverance all else is of no avail. Of what use was it to the Israelites, who for their sins perished in the desert, to have escaped from Egypt and safely crossed the Red Sea, and toiled for years over the sandy plains? What use to Solomon to have been dear to God and endowed with supernatural wisdom, if, as some think, he did not persevere to the end? So all our graces are of no avail, but rather tend to our condemnation, if we in the end fall away and are lost.

2. Yet who can be certain of perseverance? Who does not tremble at the thought of his own insecurity? We may have great gifts, but they will not save us; talent, activity, zeal, courage, prudence, will be useless to us. Even

faith will not save us—the devils believe and tremble— and hope may degenerate into presumption, or may disappear and leave us at the last to an eternal despair.

3. How then are we to be safe? One thing alone never falleth away. One virtue alone will carry us unharmed through every danger. If we have in our hearts that supernatural gift of God which fears nothing so much as to offend Him, then we are safe. Faith may grow dim, all sorts of doubts may present themselves to our minds; hope may seem to have disappeared altogether; all may look black and dark, but if we can say from our hearts that with God's help we would do or suffer anything rather than offend Him, then we have in our hearts that supernatural charity which unites us to God and ensures our entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, "for Charity never falleth away."

27—The Gratitude of Charity

"We love Him because He first loved us."

1. Perfect charity loves God for His own sake independently of any thought of ourselves. But perfect charity is preceded and accompanied by a charity which has at least an indirect reference to ourselves. The love of God first springs up within our hearts because of the love that He has shown to us. We think of all that He has done for us, and we recognize therein a clear proof of His love. Love begets love, and we cannot help being drawn towards One who has thus gratuitously manifested towards us a charity to which we owe all that is really precious in our lives, and all the good gifts that we possess. How then can we fail to be attracted towards Him who has shown such love to us?

2. This love of gratitude is not the same as the love of concupiscence, nor as the pure love of friendship. It most resembles the latter, and always enters into it. Without some sort of gratitude friendship would be mere admiration; the personal element necessary to love would be wanting. When a Saint dwells with rapture on the Divine perfections, there is always present to his mind a remembrance of all that God has done for him. Do I ever recount to myself with gratitude all that God has done for me?

3. This element of charity is present in the charity of the saints in Heaven. Their song will not only be: "We give Thee thanks because Thou has taken to Thyself great glory and has reigned," and also "because Thou hast redeemed us to God in Thine own Blood." This is the song I must seek to sing in my heart here on earth: "Thanks to God first for His great glory, and then for His goodness and love to me."

28—Charity our Protection

"Charity shall cover a multitude of sins."

1. One of the characteristics of charity is that it always looks to the bright side of things. It seeks to bring out all that is good respecting others, and to conceal their sins. It does not notice them; it never alludes to them unnecessarily, whether they are committed immediately against man or against God; it has a happy knack of forgetting them or seeming to forget them. It covers them from the eyes of men, and even seeks to obliterate them before God by the prayers it offers for the offender. Is this my spirit? Do I not rather cover the virtues of others, and disclose their faults?

2. In this respect it is especially true that we shall be treated as we treat others. "With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged," says our Lord. If we pass on others the severe sentence of harsh criticism, our sentence will be severe. If we make little of their faults and much of their virtues, God will do the same to us. What utter folly to prepare for ourselves a harsh verdict at the tribunal of Christ by our condemnation of others.

3. Charity shall on the other hand cover a multitude of sins. If we have been always men of charity, it is wonderful how God will seem to have forgotten our many sins. The poor whom we have helped will pray for us; those whom we have comforted in sorrow will say kind things in our behalf, and our charitable judgment of others will find its counterpart in God's judgment of us. Our sins will be concealed so as to disappear under the mantle of our charity. Is my charity such as thus to cover my sins?

29—The Charity of God

1. Among all the Divine perfections charity is the only one with which God our Lord absolutely identifies Himself. We do not read in the Word of God that God is power, or God is wisdom, but we do read, and this not once only, that God is charity. (i St John iv. 8, 26.) God therefore desires that this aspect of His Divine Nature

should be continually before our minds, that we should dwell on His love to us more than on any other of His attributes.

2. When God appeared on earth, it was but natural that the perfection most characteristic of His Divine Nature should manifest itself most clearly through the veil of His Humanity, that among the qualities acquired by His Sacred Humanity from the Hypostatic Union, the foremost should be that with which He most completely identifies Himself. Who can study our Lord's life on earth without recognizing above all His unbounded charity and the intensity of His love for us?

3. We notice another phase of this love in Jesus Christ which helps us to confidence in the love of God. His charity was above all a charity to sinners. He had a sort of preference for them, they were His friends and companions. He sought them out, and His charity to them knew no bounds. How clearly from this we learn the true nature of God's charity to man. God loves sinners now, He has always loved them and will always love them as He loved them when on earth. What confidence I ought to derive for myself from this thought, and what charity and commiseration for others!

30—The Charity of Jesus Christ

“The Charity of Christ surpasseth all knowledge.”—(Ephes. iii. 19.)

1. In what did the Charity of Christ consist? (1) In an infinite self-abasement for our sakes. From the Throne of God He humbled Himself to the form of sinful man. (2) In a sacrifice of Himself which passes all comprehension, He gave up the infinite joy of Heaven for the sufferings of this valley of tears. (3) In the endurance of mental and bodily agony, of desolation and dereliction, one moment of which would have crushed the life out of the strongest of men. Try and realize those familiar truths, and see what a contrast your life is to His.

2. What are the chief points of contrast?

(a) Christ humbled Himself for the good of others; I seek to exalt myself at their cost. (b) Christ gave up His life of perfect happiness that He might make others happy; I am willing to sacrifice little or nothing, my aim is to make myself happy, not others. (c) Christ endured unspeakable agony to save men from the agony they well deserved. I, on the other hand, complain of the least discomfort, and as to giving up my joys and pleasures for others, and enduring misery for their sakes, I would not even think of it.

3. Yet I consider myself a good Christian and talk glibly about treading in the footsteps of Christ. I expect to be admitted to Heaven as one of His friends and followers. What will He say to me when I present myself? Will He recognize in me any likeness to Himself; any vestige of His Divine Charity? O my God, I must be very different from what I have been if I am to present myself with confidence before Thee as one whose charity is like to the Charity of Christ.

31—Charity in Heaven

1. Some virtues there are that will not enter into the door of the Celestial Paradise, inasmuch as they imply some sort of imperfection in the nature of him who possesses them, or the circumstances among which he lives. Such are faith, hope, prudence, &c. But one virtue there is which is not only welcome in Heaven, but reigns there supreme. The very atmosphere of Heaven is nothing else than an atmosphere of charity. It is to the saints and angels the very breath of their life, it is the light that enlightens the celestial city.

2. When we read that the glory of God enlightens the Heavenly Jerusalem and that the Lamb is the light thereof, St John is speaking of that charity with which God has identified Himself, and which shone amongst men in Christ our Lord. Each saint in Heaven will shine with a radiance proportioned to his charity, and will enjoy happiness, the extent of which will be commensurate with his charity. When I shall be judged by the standard of charity shall I be found fit for Heaven at all?

3. Charity is moreover the Queen of Heaven, and therefore may be identified with our Lady, who, next to her Divine Son, was its earthly ideal. This is why she is the Mother of Mercy, and why we fly to her protection in all our troubles. She reigns supreme in Heaven, and her sovereignty is due to her charity. This is why she is the most powerful of all our intercessors, the most loving, the most compassionate, the most tender, the most full of pity for sinners. To thee then, O Mother of Charity, I will fly, and will beg of thee to obtain for me from thy Divine Son more and more of His unspeakable charity.
