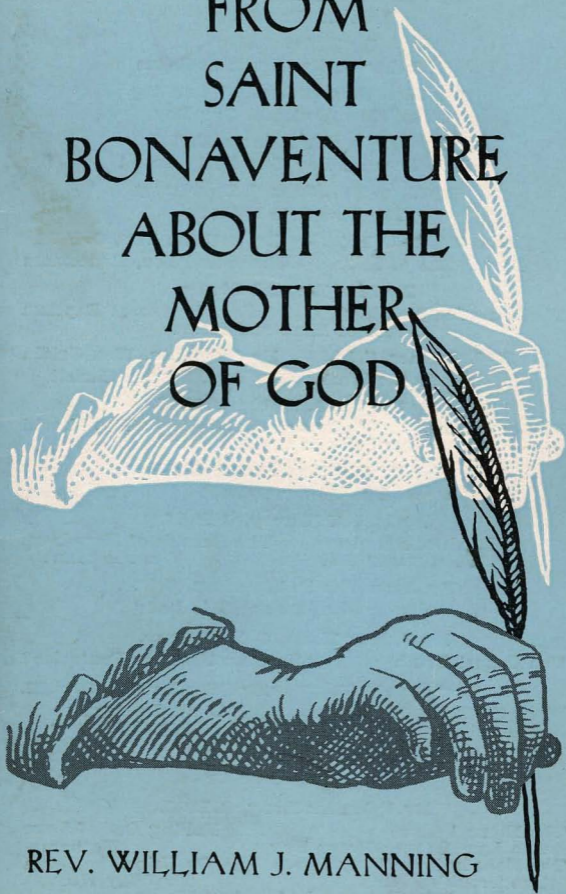


Manning, William J.
Thoughts from ...
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THOUGHTS
FROM
SAINT
BONAVENTURE
ABOUT THE
MOTHER
OF GOD



REV. WILLIAM J. MANNING

St. Anthony's Guild, Paterson, N. J.

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OF GOD

by

WILLIAM J. MANNING

Priest of the Diocese of Bismarck

St. Anthony's Guild
Paterson, New Jersey

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To the Holy Spirit
in loving memory of

REVEREND PHILOTHEUS BOEHNER, O. F. M.

who introduced the author to the depth and beauty of the Seraphic Doctor's writings. It was through Father Philotheus' encouragement, guidance and generosity that this work came into being.

He was a dear friend—a true Father in Christ to more than one. *He pleased God and was beloved*; and may those who loved him be consoled by the blessed truth that *the souls of the just are in the hand of God*.

FOREWORD

THE name of the Virgin Mother Mary springs forth so often in the writings of Saint Bonaventure that it appears well nigh a motif for his luminous exposition of Sacred Doctrine. The Seraphic Doctor knew well that Mary's name was shadowed with profound mystery;¹ hence we can assume that what he has written of it is the fruit of his most intimate and prayerful contemplation.

Saint Bonaventure frequently bases his praise of the Blessed Virgin on the ancient interpretations of her simple and lovely name. Thus Mary is for him "Mare Amarum," "Stella Maris," "Domina" — "Sea of Bitterness," "Star of the Sea," and finally and pre-eminently "Queen."² Saint Bonaventure's considerations of our Mother propose three meditations which extend over the liturgical year. We will consider Mary in three of her most exquisite roles in the drama of our Redemption. First, we shall meet her at Calvary; then we shall await with her the great Feast of Pentecost; finally, we shall reflect on the significance and wonder of her glorious Assumption into heaven, where the Godhead wills that she reign as Queen. This threefold consideration of the

Mother of God will enable us to meditate particularly on her singular love for each of the Divine Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity.

* * *

These Marian meditations are adapted from a series which originally appeared during the Marian Year in *The Cord*, a Franciscan spiritual review. The author is grateful to the editors of that publication for their kind permission to present this work in pamphlet form.

For the information of the reader it seems advisable to indicate the manner in which Sacred Scripture and Saint Bonaventure's writings have been used in this pamphlet. The Old Testament quotations have been taken from the Douay-Challoner version of the Bible; the New Testament from the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Revision. All Biblical quotations used in the booklet appear in italics.

The definitive Quaracchi edition of Saint Bonaventure's *Opera Omnia* has been the basis for the translation of the Saint's mystical writings in this pamphlet. Key references to the Seraphic Doctor's thoughts are shown by means of footnotes. When quotation

marks are used in the main text, they indicate an exact presentation of the material as Saint Bonaventure gives it. When quotation marks are not used in conjunction with material that is acknowledged in the footnote as deriving from Saint Bonaventure, the author has taken a thought from the Saint and developed it. The footnotes will especially serve the reader who desires to go to the original sources, to enjoy in their fullness the beauty and depth of Saint Bonaventure's comprehension of the spiritual life.

— W. J. M.

I

SEEKING JESUS WITH MARY

Sea of Bitterness

*Call me not Noemi (that is, beautiful),
but call me Mara (that is, bitter), for
the Almighty hath quite filled me with
bitterness.*

Ruth 1:20

CONCERNING Our Lady's first title —
Sea of Bitterness — Saint Bonaventure
counsels: "Be you also a sea of bitterness in
your tears of contrition, that you may pour
forth a flood of bitter sorrow for the sins
you have committed; be a sea of bitterness
that you may mourn from the depths of your
being the good that you might have done but
failed to realize; lastly, be a sea of bitterness
that you may be pierced by the incessant
recollection of the days you have neglected
and lost."³

With Passiontide all the lovely depictions
of Our Lady are veiled in our churches.
Yet Holy Mother Church does not thereby
imply that we are to forget Mary; rather,
these veils are her invitation to turn within

ourselves and with the eye of the soul to consider well the great mystery of Christ's Passion and Death. It is Mary who leads us to a deeper appreciation of her Son's tragic end.

Saint Bonaventure's first counsel, then, leads us to ponder the Sea of Bitterness and to beg of her a participation in her sorrow, that we may be purged of our past faults and cleansed of all our evil propensities. With great courage and devotion we will attend and hear the lament of Jerusalem's daughter, through whose heart there passed the sword of Christ's Passion. She will lead us to embrace the Cross in penance and tears, lest we endeavor to compassionate her naked Son while yet clothed in the luxury of our own wills; lest while pitying the Crucified in His death-white pallor we be darkened with worldly satisfaction, pleasure, and comfort.⁴

The immediate prelude to Golgotha is the Via Dolorosa. It is on this narrow way that we first behold the sorrow-filled but sinless Mother of God silently weeping for her torn and bleeding Child. He, *who knew nothing of sin*, is on the way to pay the price of sin as it could never be given to another to pay; and it is she — the Sea of Bitterness — who

so compassionates Him in His suffering that it can be said that while He journeys up to Calvary, there to redeem us by the flow of His Precious Blood, she attends Him on the way, there to co-redeem us by the flow of her bitter tears.

So beholding the tearful Virgin, we may pray: O Sorrowful Mother of Christ, *give water to our heads, and a fountain of tears to our eyes, and we will weep day and night* for the Lamb that goes to be sacrificed, and for you who met Him on the way. We, too, have met Him on the way, only to cower behind the jostling, jeering crowd. Yet you are there, the *Valiant Woman*, the shadow of the Cross resting heavily on your heart. You alone, with your Son, know the secret part we have played in His Passion; for how often we have fallen and how often we have arisen to show ourselves still hypocrites of sin. We have assiduously sought the way of virtue, but only insofar as to appear virtuous in the eyes of men. Well does Saint Bonaventure remind us, grief-stricken Virgin, that we have only feigned to follow you, so deep within do we fear to wrench ourselves from ourselves. We pretend your humility — yet how smug we are; we pretend your kindness — how merciless we are; we pretend

your meekness — how rebellious we are; we pretend your devotion — how sanctimonious we are; we pretend your generosity — how niggardly we are; we pretend your temperance — how avaricious we are; we pretend your chasteness — how wanton we are.⁵ These are our failings, our leanings, O Sorrowful Virgin, and they must be purged in the sea of your bitter tears; that sea of sweet bitterness which permits not the slightest stain of sin to survive its waters;⁶ wherein is mirrored the Passion of your Son by which we are redeemed. Take the hands of your children now, O Mary of the Sorrowful Way, and touch them to His Cross, that that same Cross may free us of all our evil inclinations. Let our tears mingle with the Precious Blood that already trickles down the furrows of that holy wood.

We do not hear the shouting rabble, for we have *grown hard of hearing*; we do not see the milling, mocking mob, for our *eyes have failed with weeping*. What have they for us, O Woman, who see only Jesus and you! We cannot speak, but only weep and beg you to understand that we would thus compassionate with you your Son's derision. Grant that we may hate our sins, not alone for their indescribable iniquity but even more

because of the part they have taken in bringing about the terrible torments of your Son. May this picture of your meeting along the way encourage us forever to *embrace discipline*, lest we crucify again for ourselves *the Son of God and make His a mockery* with this cruel crowd.

We have seen enough, O Virgin, and *therefore is our heart sorrowful; therefore are our eyes become dim*. The way is now made known to us wherein we should walk, and we will no more *make excuses in our sins*. Mary, we love you, for you have poured out your *heart like water before the face of the Lord, . . . in the beginning of the watches* for us: now *lift up your hands to Him* for us, for . . . your *little children, that have fainted for hunger at the top of the Via Dolorosa*. Pray that this Blessed Tree may be *cast into the waters* made bitter by our penances, so that henceforth *from within us there shall flow rivers of living water*.

Secondly, Saint Bonaventure would have us become a sea of bitterness in our tears of contrition, that we may mourn from the very depths of our being the good we might have done but failed to realize. For by neglecting opportunities to increase in virtue, we again increased the sufferings of Christ's

Passion, and laid *the chastisement of our peace . . . upon Him*. Well then are we disturbed in contrasting our neglect to the attention of the Sorrowful Mother, who, *weeping, has wept in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: there is none to comfort her among all them that were dear to her*. Her eyes have sent forth springs of water, because we have not kept the law of her Son; because He who has borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows has become despised, . . . a leper; while we, settled in comfort, loathe the necessity of mortification and discipline. What price our neglect, our comfort, that it should be requited in Him who *was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins*.

Were we to stand on Calvary and see the grossness of the scene as it actually took place, there is no doubt but that we should faint at the first blow that battered the fair face of Christ as He was measured to the Cross; at the first clang of the mallet's requiem toll as it drove the nails through His hands and feet and fixed them to His bloody throne; at the first creak of the wood as the Tree of the world's Redemption was planted in the ground, in order that the *Root of Jesse* might become an *ensign* of the

people. O God, what men are we to fear to meditate each tragic happening on that hill — would that our sins froze us so icily! Mary stands there, weeping but not wailing, her heart turned within her, *full of bitterness*; standing for all of us who, in the person of one or the other of the intimates of the Master, have failed with trembling to follow Him to the end. Have we not often, like them, tasted His goodness and sweetness: the thousands fed bread; the guests at Cana; the lame, the blind and the deaf; the sinners forgiven? But more than these, and sorrow of sorrows, only one who sat at the Supper and ate the Bread is at the Cross. Where are they? Where are *we*?

We cry to her: *O daughter of Jerusalem, to what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee* in this sad hour? She answers not, for the irony of our words is that she is to comfort us. The first and last and only word spoken by her Son to the Mother of Jesus throughout the Passion makes her our Mother. Her heart so close to breaking would not bear that loving word, and for this reason Jesus says: *Woman, behold thy son*. But to the disciple: *Behold thy Mother*. This word completes her sorrows. Who is this John, and who are we whom he repre-

sents, in exchange for her Son, Jesus? Mary is emptied, and now becomes so poor that she is nothing — absolutely nothing! This is how she becomes *everything* to us. How can it be otherwise? Her Son gave all, even to the last drop of His Precious Blood; can Mary then reserve anything of herself? This is poverty of spirit, preciously complete, completely precious. Although not able to approach the sufferings and emptiness of her Son, nevertheless the Mother has given all that she could give for Him. No other mother, regardless of her love, ever gave, gives, or will give as Mary gave for her Son; no other mother, regardless of her anguish, ever knew, knows, or will know, sufferings to compare with these. This love — this suffering? A mystery beyond our most profound comprehension.

Saint Bonaventure somehow found the secret of imitating Mary on Calvary, and with characteristic brevity and loftiness of phrase he gives it to us as: "Cor in cruce — crux in corde!"⁷ This is to say that Mary's heart throughout all the Passion, through every moment on Calvary's hill, pulsated in constant unison with the throb of her Son's heart. God knows, by that very fact, that the Cross has pierced no heart, nor will it

ever, as it pierced Mary's. Because Mary's heart was on the Cross, and because the Cross was in her heart, the last of Simeon's sorrows becomes the crown of the martyrdom of the Queen of Martyrs.

Into Thy hands I commend My spirit! Jesus is dead! The earth is dark, for the *Orient* has burned out for man. The soldiers have had their sport, and are too sated now to taunt the little group that remains by the Cross. The two Marys and the beloved disciple are dazed and deadened, so blunted their senses are by the sight of the torn and battered Body hanging from the crimsoned wood above them. We have failed so often in our small participation in bringing the fruits of the Redemption to souls, but Mary does not fail. Now that it is over, she does not quiver, or retire, or moan. Joseph and Nicodemus appear on the crest of the little hill bearing their linens and ladder, and with soft-spoken words of deference seek Mary's approval of the burial plans. From the arms of the Cross the sacred and lifeless form of her Son is lowered into her loving outstretched arms. She washes each wound with her tears, embracing and kissing her Child times un-

numbered before surrendering Him to the disciples.

The tragic day is spent and the little group must move down to Jerusalem. One artist has touchingly captured the Return with the Woman of Sorrows supported by the arms of the beloved disciple and the holy women. Affecting as the picture is, there does not seem to be any tradition demanding our assent to the artist's impression. Perchance that is how they did return; perchance, too, and more probably, it was Mary who gathered the pathetic little group together and it was she who guided their faltering steps back to the Holy City. Such does not seem incongruous, for when her Jesus died on the Cross the last dregs of bitterness welled forth from Mary's Immaculate Heart. She was filled now with joy and love. Mary knew above all that *all things . . . written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man had been accomplished*. She knew that this sacred and precious Death had conquered sin; she knew that this merciful and saving Death had opened heaven to all.⁸ Because she understood the purpose of this death, it was uniquely in keeping with her role in the Passion that she

should become the Mother of all the sorrowing, the sweet "Consolatrix afflictorum"—and the return from Calvary already necessitated that the afflicted should know her comfort.

So she sends us forth with *mourning and weeping*, to learn the horror of our ways in her Son's Passion; yet she knows all the while that the Lord will bring us back to her *with joy and gladness forever*; for the *bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench*. God alone knows the uncounted souls that have resolutely turned to Him from sin and begun to do good because of one last glance, one last hope, in the Sea of Bitterness.

Our tears are truly bitter, and well may we be pierced by the incessant recollection of the days we have neglected and lost, as Saint Bonaventure counsels us lastly. Yet this same recollection is a source of great hope to those who love the Virgin Mother. For if we have neglected to compassionate her Son, we may still now learn from the Sea of Bitterness one great lesson, and that lesson is filled with holy hope. We learn from her that the Cross must wound and break our hard hearts, in order that they may send forth their torrent of tears. But when we are emptied of ourselves by the cleansing

virtue of the Cross, we know the meaning of the hymn with which we salute that same Cross on Good Friday, and it truly becomes for us "Dulce Lignum" — the Sweet Wood by which our wounds are healed. As for the well left emptied by our tears, that, says Saint Bonaventure, will be filled to overflowing by the rain of graces which Jesus pours on us through Mary.⁹ Proving ourselves now with these tears of repentance, we may know that we have recompensed our Saviour as best we can, and thus we may look more confidently to that day of blessed expectation when *God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.*

II

SEEKING THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH MARY

Our second meditation happily leads us to the great Feast of Pentecost. There is much profit for us to reap in considering the Mother of God in her unique and mystical role as Spouse of the Holy Spirit. Saint Bonaventure's second interpretation of Our

Lady's name reveals her particularly as an exemplar for us who seek to carry *the Spirit as a pledge in our hearts*, for it was given to no other wayfarer on this earth to shine with *the brightness of eternal light* as did the Immaculate Virgin, who was all radiant from the manifold graces of the Spirit of God.

Star of the Sea

I am the Mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth; in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits.

— Ecclus. 24:24-26

The first great chime of heaven's Angelus announcing that *the Holy Spirit* had hovered over a youthful Virgin, overshadowing her with *the power of the Most High*, has echoed down the ages, keying a melody that sings from the carilloned hearts of Christendom even to this moment. This, because the Maiden of Nazareth had so perfectly cooperated with the workings of divine life in her soul that God raised her up over the sea

of Christian souls to sparkle as the great Star above that sea. Thus exalted, *she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars: being compared with light, she is found before it! She is more beautiful than the sun,* because her soul magnified with blazing willingness the designs of God for her; *she is above all the order of stars,* that is, above all the elect of God, because with benign meekness, which is the soul of nobility, she softly sang that her lowliness had been regarded; *being compared with light, she is found before it,* because with manifestly luminous wisdom her soul found its only joy in God her Saviour.¹⁰

No wonder, then, that Saint Bonaventure envisions the Star of the Sea as our Illuminatrix, to whom we must pray with great devotion if we are to be illumined and become ourselves as lights shining in God's Church on Pentecost.¹¹ It is with great confidence, then, that we beseech her in her Litany: *Stella Maris, ora pro nobis!* — Star of the Sea, pray for us — because your *thoughts are more vast than the sea, and your counsels more deep than the great ocean* on which we are tossed. Give us to share in your thoughts; grant us the grace of your counsel, as you granted it to the first Christians gathered

about you in the Upper Room awaiting the Flame sent from heaven; for we know that you *have not labored for yourself only, but for all that seek out the truth.*

Teach us, Mother of God, that we may become lights illumined *by the power of the Holy Spirit.* Teach us to shine with lucid love, that by the goodness of our association men may truly love God. Teach us to burn with flaming faith, that the virtue of our fulfilling the obligations of holy religion may lead men to believe in God. Teach us to glow with holy hope, that we may encourage men to hope confidently in God.¹² We ask these graces of the Paraclete, through you, because you are *the Mother of fair love, and of knowledge and of holy hope, shining gloriously in the firmament of heaven; because you were wrought in the grace of the Holy Spirit poured forth.*

Saint Bonaventure would first have us become a light in the goodness of our association with our fellow men. To accomplish this we must show all who behold us that *the charity of God is truly poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Mary teaches us that love; for her soul was so inflamed by the Fire of Love brought forth by the Holy Spirit who over-

shadowed her, that nothing save the Divine Power could sustain her. The ardor of her love fans that of the flaming seraphs who hover around the throne of God.¹³

O chosen Tabernacle of the most pure Spirit of Love, give us to reflect on the endless hours you spent in prayer and meditation, striving ever to return love for love. How often our prayers are mechanical mutterings, our meditations mere worldly preoccupations which smother rather than enkindle *the grace of the Holy Spirit* which has been poured forth in us. How often we *oppose the Holy Spirit* by conduct which is far from upright, and by words which kill rather than encourage, thus dimming the light of love which should beam forth from us as a beacon to those who walk through the world seeking in us a ray of love to guide them into the harbor of Holy Church. How often we are engaged in making great displays of love, by which we pretend to hate all that would separate us from holy things, when actually our pseudo-love is nothing but a self-righteous desire to reform others. How often we pretend to love in little things, not caring for the really great obstacles that we ourselves have laid on the path leading to our sanctification.¹⁴

Teach us, then, *Mother of Fair Love*, to appreciate the great gifts which are all about us, which seeing we see not — the miracle of our Redemption, renewed before our eyes each morn; the wonders of creation, free and pure, unlitteed by the trash that mars the beauty of the world; the gift of our vocation, which means that we have been named by God as His ambassadors; the promise of our Resurrection, which means that *this mortal body . . . puts on immortality*. We do not love sufficiently, because we are ingrates; because we fail to realize the priceless worth of God's gifts to us.¹⁵ Do thou, our Mother, pray for us, that this Pentecost we may be filled with holy love, and that our gratitude may impart itself to all with whom we associate. Grant that henceforth we may open wide our hearts in fraternal love to the needs and sufferings of all with whom we come into contact, that as the Spirit of God is Father to our poverty, so we may love to aid His poor; that as He is the Giver of gifts to us, so we may love to give ourselves to the friendless; as He is the Light of our hearts, so we may love to illumine the ignorant; as He is our rich Comforter, so we may love to console the saddened and oppressed; as He is the gracious Guest of

our souls, so we may love to welcome all who turn to us; as He is our Refuge, so we may love to care for the helpless and miserable. May we become guiding lights to all who are lost on the vast ocean of this world, leading them into the safe harbor of Holy Church, under the heartening beam of your light, O Star of the Sea!

Secondly, Saint Bonaventure would have us become a light by the virtuous fulfillment of the obligations of holy religion, thus leading men to believe in God. In considering this counsel of the Seraphic Doctor, we do well to recall the preface to the history of Holy Church. It is written in the few, yet intensely significant words that after Christ's death all, *with one mind, continued steadfastly in prayer with . . . Mary, the Mother of Jesus*. The words reveal the longing that filled the hearts of the first followers of Christ, and we cannot reflect enough upon the fact that they were gathered around the Bride of the Holy Spirit, waiting in prayer, until *suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a violent wind blowing, which filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as of fire, which settled upon each of them. And they were all filled with the*

Holy Spirit. Lo! thus *the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father* has sent in Jesus' name, is visibly manifested in the infant Church. The happenings of the first Pentecost are still so vivid that the whole world is yet aglow with the fiery coming of its Sanctifier. The reign of the Holy Spirit began, and it has not ended, nor will it end, until the last whose name is *written in the book of life of the Lamb* is gathered into the New Jerusalem. As of old *the Spirit of God moved over the waters* of the earth, so this very day, and every day, He breathes out His spirit of holiness into the Church. This is a glorious mystery, the coming of the Holy Spirit; and she who was there is better able to illumine us with its significance than any other; for the advent of the Holy Ghost especially manifested the singular place of the Mother of God in the Church. We may ask of her, the *Mother of fear, and of knowledge*, fear which will strengthen us to fulfill our religious duties, and knowledge which will make us firm believers of every revealed truth.

O glorious Virgin, the words of the ancients are on our lips: *Now therefore pray for us, for thou art a holy woman!* Pray for us in order that we obtain from the

Holy Spirit grace and wisdom: wisdom to know the truth, and grace to do the truth. We are dull and lazy, and we need your intercession, good Lady, that through your prayers we may be constant in imploring the divine aid of the Spirit, who will teach us to relish, and delight in, all things having to do with God.¹⁶ Beholding you, we are abashed at our small knowledge of things divine, and our willingness to compromise the little we know, fearing lest we upset the fictitious prudence of our times, or lest we ourselves be upset. Grant us to savor the fruits of the vision that was yours on the first Pentecost when, filled with the Holy Spirit, twelve poor mortals like ourselves went forth and preached Christ with such courage and conviction that the true faith was made known to men *from every nation under heaven*. Give us to speak with solid and firm assertion that, having heard us speak, no man may excuse himself by incredulity, nor be led by us to hesitate in the things of faith.¹⁷

Mother of God, your venerable place in Holy Church is not least among the truths which separate us from false brethren. *Lying men shall not be mindful of you, but men that speak truth shall be found with you,*

and shall advance, even till they come to the sight of God. Grant us ever to stand proud of our faith in you, for it is the Spirit Himself whom we await who has inhabited our hearts and enkindled in them such great devotion for you. He has made you our love and our Mother.¹⁸ We come to you now, your children, your Magdalenes and your Johns, and implore you to obtain for us a great love for each and every truth of our faith; great courage in defending the faith against ridicule and falsehood; great strength in propagating the faith among *all the nations*. Let your sublime and secret sanctification inform us that the Holy Spirit is most desirable because He shares with us the abundance of His grace; most delightful because He communicates to us His glory; most refreshing because He fills our desires with His presence; most noble because He makes us partakers of His nature; most efficacious because He strengthens us in His power. Grant us to know, O Lady of the Cenacle, that He who filled the hearts of the Apostles with the abundance of Himself is the same Vivifier who pierces our intellects, inflames our affections, directs our intentions, enlightens our understanding, and makes

known to us hidden things even as He did for them.¹⁹ Keep ever before our minds and hearts the precious verity that *the manifestation of the Spirit* has been given to us for profit.

Saint Bonaventure's last admonition is that we become a light by encouraging men confidently to hope in God. The glorious Virgin, styled the Mother of Holy Hope, in whom *is all hope of life and of virtue*, is refulgent with this eminent virtue. She it is through whom God showers down the sweet dew of courage, confidence, and consolation which falls into every corner of this parched earth where the hearts of men lie open to the grace of God. In addressing her, we invoke her aid not only for ourselves, great though our need, but for all her children who need their Mother, and know her not.

O Mother of Good Hope, in whom the Holy Spirit fulfilled the expectation of Israel, show us how to cultivate *the Spirit as a pledge in our hearts*. In thinking about you may we come to *perfect understanding* of the disappointments and heartaches which like *thorns and briers come up* in this life to entangle our efforts.

In our watching for you, may we meet you and *quickly be secure* when *the ways*

are made desolate under our feet. Meet us *with all providence . . . in the ways* of life's journey and turn our eyes to *Jerusalem, the rich habitation* of heaven where we are destined to abide forever. Give us, Star of the Sea, the holy hope of gladness in our hearts when the land of our soul is *desolate and impassable*. Teach us to rejoice in the wilderness of this world when men are small and mean and contemptible to us. Pray that holy hope may grow in us during this season of Fire, O Immaculate Virgin, *flourishing as the lily*. Help us to tell all what Pentecost means: that the *waters are broken out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness*. And that which was dry land shall become a pool; and the thirsty land, springs of water. Turn to us all, Mother of God; strengthen ye the feeble hands; confirm the weak knees. Say to the fainthearted, "Take courage, and fear not." Let the eyes of the blind be opened, unstop the ears of the deaf, let the lame . . . leap as harts, free the tongue of the dumb. Tell us all that God Himself is coming and that He will save us!

Whatever our failings, however many our falls, however miserable our fervor, point out to us now the most generous Spirit who comes to impart to the young visions of

greater strength and virtue, and to the old, dreams of promise for a life well lived. Impress deep in our hearts joy that the Church of God is filled today with holy hope, even as it *was filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit* in its infancy.

Instruct us concerning the three offices of the Paraclete which particularly fill us with holy hope. Lead us to the Divine Physician who is possessed of eminent knowledge in both the spiritual and corporal arts, even as Ezechiel spoke of Him: *Come, Spirit, . . . and blow upon these slain, and let them live again.* We desperately need this Physician who is so learned that He vivifies the spiritually and physically dead, healing all wounds with neither knife nor drug, curing only with a word—His gracious: So be it! Beseech Him, Star of the Sea, to raise us from the death blow of sin with the healing art of grace, for we know that just as our bodies are dead without our souls, our souls are dead without this Spirit. Bring us to the Divine Teacher, who is endowed with eminent wisdom which will instruct our ignorance. We know that He is the only Font of knowledge, and without Him we

can never understand the truths of faith. When we long for illumination in the study of things sacred, show us the words of Wisdom: *I wished, and understanding was given to me; and I called upon God and the Spirit of Wisdom came upon me.* Pray that this same Spirit may reveal Himself to us as the King whose treasury abounds with overwhelming riches, with which He will fill our emptiness even as He filled the emptiness of the Apostles, and sent them forth *filled with the Holy Spirit.*

Such are our desires to become lights of the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed the Handmaid of the Lord in Nazareth, filling her with such goodness that the Handmaid of the Lord in the heavens shines as the Star of the Sea, *being transformed into His very image from glory to glory, as through the Spirit of the Lord.* In love, and with firm faith and hope we pray to this Virgin, that *with faces unveiled, we may on Pentecost morn reflect as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*—the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier. Our prayer will be heard, and we will become great lights of love and faith and hope, if we but continue *steadfastly in prayer*

*with . . . Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and
with His brethren!*

III

SEEKING OUR FATHER WITH MARY

Our last Marian meditation based on the writings of the Seraphic Doctor Saint Bonaventure brings us to the month in which we sing of the Mother of God — “Mary ever Virgin has been taken to heaven,” there to reign as Queen, *a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of . . . God.*²⁰ There are many facets to Our Lady’s queenship, and that displayed by Saint Bonaventure in his third interpretation of her name is particularly pointed to our age.

Queen of Virgins

*For she is a vapor of the power of God,
and a certain pure emanation of the
glory of the Almighty God: and there-
fore no defiled thing cometh into her.
For she is the brightness of eternal
light, and the unspotted mirror of God’s
majesty, and the image of His goodness.*

— Wisdom 7:25-26

Saint Bonaventure proposes that we best imitate our Blessed Mother as Queen if we

ourselves become rulers. Rulers of our senses, our passions, our every thought, in order that we may act according to the dictates of reason, thus obtaining our own salvation and the edification of our neighbor; for it is by so acting that we indicate our desire for, and merit the praise and glory of, God Himself.²¹ It would seem that we best appreciate Saint Bonaventure's tripartite admonition if we consider it directed to what for him was the virtue of virtues — holy purity, which is the first pillar which needs be raised by any soul that would make itself a temple of God. Indeed it is impossible in his mind to attempt the work of sanctification without this virtue.²²

Saint Bonaventure's words are particularly meaningful to us if we but recall that our holy Father Francis had uncommon care for that purity which should be maintained in both the inner and the outer man. It is deeply significant, too, that the place which Saint Francis loved more than any other place on this earth, the precious Portiuncula — Saint Mary of the Angels — was built up by him and chosen as the spot to begin, perfect, and consummate his mission on this

earth, precisely because of his reverence for the heavenly messengers of purity, and especially because of his burning love for the all-pure Mother of God.²³ If the most beautiful title which our Saint confers on his and our Father is *Amator castitatis* — lover of chastity — we know that in giving us the Queen of Heaven as the model of purity, Saint Bonaventure does no more than convey to us the wish of our Seraphic Father also for chastity on the part of his brethren.

If the flame of holy purity has grown dim in these our cold days, it is because we do not appreciate deeply enough the brilliant example given us in Mary's being taken up to heaven to be its Queen. And it is particularly the Franciscan heritage to see that her emblem, the *fleur-de-lis*, is emblazoned on the standard of the world, for she alone is the Lily of this Valley. It is our sacred duty and seraphic trust to re-awaken the hearts of men to the salient truth that the *Flower* of manhood, Jesus Christ, stemmed forth from the virginal womb of her who this day is led to the throne of heaven, *a most beautiful Virgin*.²⁴

Without in any way depreciating the honest efforts of sincere men and women who

seek to free men's minds from illness, it is up to us to tell the victims of the unscrupulous to rise from the analyst's couch with its plush enticements for releasing the libido to false love, and to get down on their knees and release their hearts to true Love. It is for us to silence the disgraceful din of a world gone mad with egos and libidos, and intone the litanied praises of her who reveals *the thoughts of many hearts* to God alone. This charge becomes more real to us if we but realize that the silent but centuried motto of Franciscanism is "amor," and love cannot be but it proceeds from a pure heart.²⁵

The world is waiting for us, and God knows that we need have no fear in coming to it. All the world is crying for its Mother — its Queen — to whom it can pour forth its heart. The very evil of the day proves this beyond doubt. If woman is today glorified as a goddess it is only because man is searching for that woman who is the Mother of God.

In going to the world with the message of purity, Saint Bonaventure would have us prepare ourselves well lest we be contaminated by the very vice we are commissioned

to destroy. For him our hearts are our homes, our castles, but it is the castle that is well fortified that does not have to fear attack. And what is the fortification of our hearts? The wall of chastity and continence, enclosing and defending the heart against the unceasing and bitter onslaught of Satan.²⁶ In a word, Saint Bonaventure reminds us that our love is totally God's, and nothing — above all, love — is able to come near to God unless it be pure. Nothing so unites us to God as the love of purity, and it is because she was all-pure that our Mother, Mary, was so especially and singularly loved by God.²⁷ Even as there was nothing between the heart of Mary and the heart of God, so there can be nothing of this world between the heart of those who invoke her as Queen and the heart of the King for whom she rules.²⁸ It is in imitating Mary, then, that the Franciscan heart becomes a true heart of love; and its love will burn and beckon to men precisely and only insofar as it is fed on the fuel of holy purity.

The cry of the world is the glorification of the human body, and the human body will be glorified, but only according to God's

design in eternity. The assumption and enthronization of Our Lady in heaven is a great reminder to us of this eternal design. Today she is all-refulgent *with the garments of salvation*, only because on earth she was chaste enough to become the incomprehensible Vessel of Election, beautiful enough for even God to take humanity onto Himself therein. She is the Lily of the Valley, the Mystical Rose, only because the garden of her soul was cultivated in purity. She is the Queen of Heaven only because she reigned totally for God on this earth. Realizing this, we may pray to her with all our hearts:

O Virgin, Queen of the Order of Friars Minor, give us to be saints by following you, heaven's Glorious Virgin, in the holiness of purity, and the purity of holiness. Give us to know that in following you we shall become precious to God — saints; and in following the world we are only made children of Eve — evil and vile.²⁹ Guide us in keeping the will of our Father in heaven, and let us *forsake not* the *law* of you, our Mother — that we may be all-chaste and beautiful in the eyes of heaven and earth. Open your lips now *to the sons of men*, for we would hear you speak of the great

things which lie in store for the *clean of heart*.

As *all your words are just, and there is nothing wicked nor perverse in them*, give us holy tongues that our mouths may *meditate truth* and our *lips hate wickedness*. Give us the pure words of your Magnificat, on our lips and in our hearts when we are before men, and turn us from any compromise, any word, with the serpent who enticed poor Eve in Paradise. Let us realize the venomous effect of unchaste words and vain babblings which rot the heart of speaker and listener alike.³⁰ O most upright among all women, who hatest *every wicked way*, deliver us from any speech which betrays *a double tongue*, corrupting and corroding the *most pure vessel* which God would have us to be.

Mother most pure, give us *learned thoughts* in which you are present to overcome the temptations which beset us. Teach us that *evil thoughts are an abomination* to God Himself, who thinks concerning us only *thoughts of peace, and not of affliction*. Give us to know that by thinking on you and God, who so triumphantly willed your glorification in heaven, we can conquer all the

wiles of Satan. Lead us to follow in the path that you have traced to heaven, keeping in mind all the good and beautiful things said of you, ever pondering them in our hearts.

Mother most chaste, show us the beauty of giving the very *substance* of our being for love of God, and teach us to *despise it as nothing*. Under your patronage may we cast off all the subtle and not-so-subtle influences of the world, which insidiously draw us away from integrity. Let us inspire great love among our people for your singular purity, so that once again a great legion of Mary-men and -women, may fall behind the ensign that leads to heaven. Pattern our hearts according to your own Immaculate Heart, that they may be all-embrasive, totally inclusive, as they go out to reconcile men to God. With your seal upon our hearts, they will be closed to all encroachments; with your seal upon our arms, may men know us for what we are — *friends* of God, made such by you. Teach us, in the fight against the allurements of the world and of the devil, that love is truly *strong as death*—and death immeasurably preferable to compromising the angels' very boast—purity.

Finally, O Queen of our Order, give us to shine with Seraphic candor before all men, that they may know that the lamps of our hearts are fed with the flames of blissful dedication to your singularly lovely virtue, and the virtue that you singularly love.

Guided by you, O Queen of the Universe, may we, on that day appointed for us to fall asleep, come to that *Jerusalem* whose streets are all *paved with the white and clean stones* of the *chaste generation* and awaken to your smile — who so loved us here on earth.³¹

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- 1 *Comm. Evgl. Lc.*, c. 1, n. 45 (VII 22a).
- 2 *Ibid.* Cf. also, *De Purif. B. M. V.*, sermo 2 (IX 640b-641a)
- 3 *De V Festiv.*, Festiv. 2 (VIII 91b).
- 4 *De Dom. infra Oct. Epiph.*, sermo 1 (IX 172b).
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- 6 *De Purif. B. M. V.*, sermo 1 (IX 641a).
- 7 *Laudis de S. Cruce*, Opusc. 7, Rhyth. V. 4 (VIII 667a).
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- 9 *De Nativ. B. M. V.*, sermo 3 (IX 713a).
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- 16 *De Donis S. S.*, collatio 6 (V 483a).

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