

Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer

EXPLICATION DE LA MÉTODE D'ORAIISON

*Par Monsieur J. B. De La Salle , Instituteur des
Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes.*

P R E M I E R E P A R T I E .



M. D C C. X X X I X .

Frontispiece: reproduction of the title page of the 1739 edition. The original text is preserved in the Archives of the Generalate in Rome.

Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer

by
John Baptist de La Salle

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Edited and revised translation by
Donald Mouton, FSC

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Cover: Saint John Baptist de La Salle at prayer during his sojourn at Parménie, France. (Painting by Pellegrini, 1878, original in the chapel at Parménie.)

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Sponsored by the Regional Conference of Christian Brothers of the United States of America and of Toronto, Canada, Lasallian Publications will produce volumes on the life, writings, and work of John Baptist de La Salle (1651–1719), Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and on the early history of the Brothers. These volumes will be presented in two series.

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Editor's Note

The complete text of the 1739 edition of *Explication de la méthode d'oraison* by John Baptist de La Salle can be found in *Cahiers Lasalliens* 14 (1963).¹ It was later published in a new format in *Cahiers Lasalliens* 50 (1989), with extensive notes and an overview of the text by Miguel Campos, FSC, and Michel Sauvage, FSC.

To facilitate the reading and to encourage the understanding of this difficult text, Campos and Sauvage designed a unique format which breaks the heavy, dense text of the 1739 edition, the earliest one to have come down to us, into short stanzas or verses. This format, however, preserves completely the integrity of the text in the 1739 original edition. The present English translation uses that same format, with the adjustments required by the translation into English.

There is a clear distinction in the text between De La Salle's explanation of the method of interior prayer and his examples of prayers. In this translation the examples of prayer are set off from the explanatory text by a smaller type font and wider margins.²

Direct passages from the Scriptures are italicized and identified in the margin. Passages that De La Salle paraphrases, adapts, or alludes to are identified with the reference "cf." CL 50 also contains in the margin further scriptural references suggested by Campos and Sauvage to enrich the reading of the text. Most of these references have been kept in this English translation. All direct references are taken from the New American Bible with Revised New Testament Translation and are used with permission.

The traditional term used in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools for *oraison* is "mental prayer." This term, unfortunately, suggests praying with the mind alone, which would be a betrayal of the intent of John Baptist de La Salle. On the first page of *Explication*, De La Salle is careful to point out that the prayer

he is speaking about “is not simply an activity of the mind” (*EM*, 1). The English language does not have a single word that can capture the meaning of the French word *oraison*. While “prayer of the heart,” “silent prayer,” “meditative prayer,” and simply “prayer” have been suggested, this translation uses “interior prayer,” recognizing that all forms of prayer, if they are to be authentic, must be interior to some extent. However, “interior prayer” seems the most adequate term to reflect the fact that De La Salle calls *oraison* prayer that is interior (see CL 14:3) and that the word “interior” occurs constantly in *Explication*.

For the convenience of the reader, the Appendix contains the text of “Method of Interior Prayer,” which John Baptist de La Salle wrote some years prior to *Explication*.³

In addition to his technical work as copy editor, Frank Huether, FSC, offered the editor valuable recommendations and advice during the preparation of this English translation. Cyril Ory, FSC, and James N. Grahmann, FSC, also made helpful suggestions.

The General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools held from April 5 to May 15, 1993, designated 1995 as a year devoted specifically to the prayer life of the Brother. It suggested programs for the renewal of our prayer life, especially interior prayer. (See Circular 435, *42nd General Chapter*.) It is hoped that this new English translation will be useful in that effort.

Donald Mouton, FSC
Editor
August 1994

Notes

1. *Cahiers Lasalliens* is an ongoing series of publications of studies, texts, and documents concerned with John Baptist de La Salle, his life, writings, and religious and pedagogical ideas. These publications also focus on the early decades of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Society that John Baptist de La Salle founded in 1680. Fifty-four volumes have appeared so far (1994) in this series.

2. In contrast to CL 50, where the examples of prayer are more prominent in type font than the explanatory text is.

3. The “Method of Interior Prayer” can be found in CL 15:7–16. The English translation is in *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, 7–12 (see Appendix). The first three paragraphs of the French text are missing in the printed English translation.

Abbreviations

Blain I	The Life of Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Vol. I (La vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes. Tome I. CL 7)
Blain II	The Life of Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Vol. II (La vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes. Tome II. CL 8)
CL	Cahiers lasalliens
Col.	Collection of Various Short Treatises
Duties	The Duties of a Christian to God (Les Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu. Tome I. CL 20)
EM	Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer
Exer.	Exercises of Piety for Use During the Day in the Christian Schools (Exercices de piété qui se font pendant le jour dans les Écoles chrétiennes. CL 18)
Explication	Explication de la Méthode d'Oraison (CL 14)
Instructions	Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, Confession, and Communion (Instructions et Prières, CL 17)
Histoire	Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes, by Georges Rigault
Letters	The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle
Med.	Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle
Rule	Pratique du Règlement journalier. Règles communes des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes (CL 25)

Introduction

I

John Baptist de La Salle refers in his writings to prayer frequently enough for us to recognize the vital role he attributed to it.¹ In a special way, *Explication de la Méthode d'Oraison* (Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer) integrates prayer into the very fabric of life.

For the general public, and especially for the use of the students in school, he wrote a treatise on prayer.² He also proposed examples of prayers for use by the students at Mass and at other times throughout the day.³ For the members of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, which he founded, he composed a “Method of Interior Prayer” and elaborated on this method in *Explication*.⁴ It was written for beginners in the practice of interior prayer, with the purpose of gradually leading them toward an advanced form of interior prayer, the prayer of simple attention.

Explication is the last book that De La Salle wrote. It reflects the responsibility he assumed during his later years of instructing the novices at Saint Yon in the exercise of interior prayer.⁵ Canon Blain, an early biographer of De La Salle, informs us of this as follows:

In his little work entitled *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, he tried to smooth out the paths of interior prayer by explaining the manner of performing it. He spoke to the novices every day on that noble subject. . . . He read them some pages of his book and taught them how to spend the time of interior prayer usefully. . . . To help them enter into such a spiritual life, he composed for them a collection of sayings, lively and ardent sentiments, various instructions and prayers of all sorts.⁶

De La Salle not only gave the novices instructions and lessons in the art of interior prayer but also monitored them in their efforts. He would have them render an account of their prayer and at times practice their prayer aloud. To assist them in advancing in the exercise of interior prayer he would point out their mistakes, due either to negligence or to ignorance, and have them read several pages of his work. Out of these lessons De La Salle continued to develop and revise *Explication*.

In 1734 the Fifth General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, held at Saint Yon under the leadership of Brother Timothée, Superior General, decided to have *Explication de la Méthode d'Oraison* published, along with other works of De La Salle.⁷ Five years later, in 1739, *Explication* was published, twenty years after the death of De La Salle. The manuscript or manuscripts that De La Salle and the novices used, or any published version that might have existed prior to 1739, have not come down to us.⁸

II

Both the Method of Interior Prayer in *Collection* and *Explication* bear the marks of the spiritual climate of De La Salle's time, but both also reveal his own stamp. Methods of interior prayer that appeared especially toward the end of the *Devotio Moderna* period of spirituality became excessively precise and complex.⁹ The success of the method developed by Saint Ignatius (1491–1556), known as the Spiritual Exercises, helped the practice of interior prayer regain some of the status it had lost.

The Carmelite tradition on interior prayer, especially in the thought of Saint Teresa of Ávila (died in 1582) and St. John of the Cross (died in 1591), appears to have had some influence on De La Salle. De La Salle retained in *Explication* certain features of that tradition, such as the importance of interior recollection, affective prayer, and the climate of faith within which prayer takes place.

The method proposed by De La Salle also reflects aspects of the method of Saint Francis de Sales (died in 1622). In *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1608), Saint Francis encourages interior prayer among the laity and proposes a simple and brief method consisting of three parts: preparation by placing oneself in the

presence of God, considerations of divine matters, and resolutions resulting from the good sentiments of the will. A conclusion contains a thanksgiving, an offering of the prayer to God, and a supplication.

The Sulpician influence is also apparent in De La Salle's method. Monsieur Tronson, Superior of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, gave definitive form to the method of interior prayer of Saint Sulpice, a method formulated by Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657), founder of the seminary. The method consists in having Jesus before our eyes (attitude of adoration), in our hearts (Jesus continues to live his mysteries and virtues in his members), and in our hands (resolutions to do God's will).¹⁰ Interior prayer is thus a privileged way of preparing the soul to be inhabited by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

III

Although an understanding of these various currents of spirituality can be helpful, a careful study of *Explication* is the best way to appreciate De La Salle's thought. *Explication* reflects his personal experience of interior prayer, his scripturally based spirituality, his times of solitude, his own reflection, the organization of a community of school Brothers, the training and forming of his disciples, and the testing of the method while teaching it to the novices.

In many ways the modern reader encounters difficulties with this book. The austerity of style, the complexity of the method, and certain expressions and sentiments incompatible with present-day mainstream theological perspectives present obstacles to appreciating the work.

Explication was developed at a time when logical thought was a major criterion of discernment.¹¹ The analytical form of the presentation—three parts, six ways of placing oneself in the presence of God, two series of nine acts, one of three acts—presents a hindrance to perceiving its value. In addition, *Explication* carries the baggage of interpretations over many years that emphasized the mechanical use of the acts to the detriment of the true intention of *Explication*.

The structure of the Method of Interior Prayer consists of three main parts:

1) the preparation of the soul for interior prayer, or recollection (First Part);

2) the consideration of a subject of interior prayer, namely, a mystery, a virtue, or a maxim (Second Part);

3) the conclusion of interior prayer, with acts of review, of thanksgiving, and of offering (Third Part).

The first and second parts are symmetrical in form. In each there is, first, the effort to become penetrated by a sentiment of faith with the presence of God (First Part) and the subject of interior prayer (Second Part). This is followed by applying oneself to the presence of God or to a subject of prayer by three acts, each of which, in turn, is divided into three sections. Then there are three acts to conclude the exercise of interior prayer (Third Part).

Thus, after placing oneself in the presence of God by using one of the six ways proposed, the Brother makes nine acts of application to that presence, then nine acts that consider a subject and three concluding acts—for a total of 21 acts! These divisions and subdivisions in methods of interior prayer reflect the Counter-Reformation mentality and the spiritual climate of the seventeenth century.

In *Explication*, De La Salle also describes three ways of making interior prayer, corresponding to the various stages of progress in the spiritual life: in a discursive manner by multiple reflections (for beginners), with few but prolonged reflections (for the proficient), and by simple attention (for the advanced).

IV

To understand and appreciate *Explication*, it is necessary to discover its inner dynamism beneath the complexity of the structure and the outmoded terminology. There is a gradual movement from initial steps involving a certain degree of mechanical procedures toward interior prayer of simple attention. The prayer of simple attention consists in being before God with faith that God is present and in remaining in a disposition of interior silence and affectionate attention. This movement from multiple considerations (for beginners) through few but prolonged reflections (for the proficient) to a prayer of simple attention (for the advanced) is an essential feature of *Explication*.

De La Salle wanted even beginners involved in multiple reflections to experience privileged moments of God's presence

while in a disposition of interior silence. He wanted the Brothers to arrive at a serene form of prayer uncluttered with multiple reflections or reconstructions of the imagination. The goal of the method he proposed is the formation of a disposition of the soul for prayer that is truly interior. What matters in interior prayer is for the soul “to fill itself and to unite itself interiorly with God;” this is “the principal activity of the soul during prayer that is truly interior.”¹²

Ultimately, the intention of the De La Salle’s method of interior prayer is to allow the Holy Spirit to pray in us.¹³ This is a capital concept in the spirituality of De La Salle. It is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we engage in prayer and progress through the various stages of prayer. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are united to the interior dispositions of Jesus when he prayed. It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus prays in us.¹⁴

For De La Salle, then, what counts in interior prayer is not completing 21 acts distributed in three parts but, rather, allowing ourselves to be filled with God, that is, to be interiorly united to God through the action of the Holy Spirit.

V

De La Salle wanted his Brothers to bring to their work the dispositions they experience and acquire during prayer. However, with respect to the close connection De La Salle makes in his spiritual writings between the prayer life of the Brothers and their ministry, *Explication* presents some difficulties. What *Explication* proposes as the model of prayer seems to deviate from De La Salle’s usual teaching. In *Explication* prayer appears to be almost exclusively a personal and intimate relation to God with little connection to the Brothers’ ministry.¹⁵ In addition, the apostolic engagement of the Brothers is portrayed in a negative light. Concern for the education of youth seems to be not only an obstacle but also a danger to personal perfection and salvation.¹⁶

In its initial pages, *Explication* presents prayer as being in opposition to normal daily existence.¹⁷ Prayer, rather than originating from life, from a person’s hopes and aspirations, appears to result from a complex and rigid technique.

A corrective to this apparent dichotomy between prayer and daily life in *Explication* is found in De La Salle’s other writings and

in his use of the Scriptures. In his other spiritual writings, De La Salle exhorts his Brothers to make no distinction between the duties of their state and what pertains to their salvation and perfection.¹⁸ In the meditations he composed, De La Salle frequently links prayer of petition and interior prayer to the Brothers' concern for their students. Prayer, growth in perfection, and the salvation of the Brothers are inseparable from their apostolic commitment.¹⁹

Furthermore, *Explication* encourages a scripturally oriented interior prayer.²⁰ It is interesting to see how, in the meditations De La Salle composed, the same scriptural quotations he uses in *Explication* in a rather restricted sense take on implications for the ministry of the Brothers.²¹ Being aware of the scriptural influence on *Explication* thus enriches our understanding of that work and opens it to a fuller meaning.

In this context it is not far-fetched to imagine John Baptist de La Salle teaching the method of interior prayer to the novices, having near at hand both his Bible and the meditations he composed, and making frequent reference to them.

VI

Although explicit references to the Brothers' ministry are rare, the inner dynamism of the method of interior prayer in *Explication* connects interior prayer to daily life. This dynamism can be delineated in four movements.²²

First, we distance ourselves from our daily activities and concerns to get to the center of our life, in the "depths of our heart"; this occurs at the beginning of interior prayer (Recollection);

Second, in the depths of our being and at the heart of our life, we encounter the living God, who comes to us (The Presence of God);

Third, in this relationship with God, we see human life and history as the place where the mystery of Jesus Christ unfolds (A Mystery, a Virtue, or a Maxim);

Fourth, we return to our daily responsibilities renewed and revitalized; this is the outcome of interior prayer (Resolutions).

First Movement

The beginning of *Explication* seems to present interior prayer and ordinary daily life as being incompatible with one another. The language of withdrawing from exterior and material things in order to engage in prayer is stark at times. The created world is pictured as being an obstacle in our journey to God. The thought expressed here is filled with oppositions: exterior and interior, material and spiritual, life and prayer. However, the notion that attention to God is incompatible with the rest of life is not coherent with the teachings of De La Salle in his other writings. Nor is it acceptable to people whose personal, communal, and professional life is dedicated to the ministry of education, who have responsibilities toward others, who live in relationship with others in school and in community.

It is important to go beyond the dualistic perspective and the severity of the language in this section to see that the movement here is less a retreat than an élan in which fullness, not emptiness, is the goal. The verbs in this section—to apply ourselves, to know, to love, to be united with, to be filled with, to be attentive to—all have God as their object. Recollection is a relief from external preoccupations to facilitate a centering on God in the depths of the soul in order to be filled with God.

With its language of withdrawing from normal daily activities, this section of *Explication* on the recollection phase of interior prayer reminds us that prayer takes effort. Prayer must be willed and practiced. Prayer is not merely an expression of the inner life that is spontaneous, that wells up naturally from our innermost being. There is prayer that comes from within, but there are times when this does not happen. Preparation is necessary for prayer. To pray we must step out of the normal routine and strive for a state of “collectedness,” a spiritual condition made possible because God turns to us and is already present to us.²³

In this élan toward fullness, we experience the limit of created reality’s ability to give us the plenitude we seek. Seen in this perspective, a stance toward created reality that incorporates a certain renunciation and detachment takes on positive meaning.

For De La Salle, recollection “in the depths of the soul” is not some kind of interior fixation or solitary introspection but, rather, an effort to locate the authentic self, the essence of our existence. We are seekers of God, who constitutes the depths of our existence, creating us, sustaining us in being, drawing us.

The “depths of the soul” or “depths of the heart”²⁴ is a classical expression among the spiritual writers of the seventeenth century.

De La Salle, however, does not use other expressions current at the time, such as the “center of the soul,” the “fine point of the soul,” or the “summit of the soul.”²⁵

Spiritual writers often link the “depths of the soul” with “the depths of God.”²⁶ God inhabits the person in the innermost center of being. Thus, to reach the depths of the soul is to find the presence of God, to encounter the revelation of the mystery of God. For De La Salle, the “depths of the soul” is a relational concept. It is there that we meet God, praise God, adore God.²⁷ Going to the “depths of the soul,” then, signifies a de-centering of self, a conversion, a turning to God “in whom we live and move and have our being.”²⁸

Second Movement

The place De La Salle gives to the presence of God in *Explication* constitutes a distinctive characteristic of his method of interior prayer. In fact, the whole purpose of the method of interior prayer in De La Salle’s view is to help us live every moment of life in the presence of God.

In the first movement of the method of interior prayer, we make an effort to seek God through recollection. In the second movement, we discover that God, whom we seek, is already present, and it is only in terms of this presence that we can understand our very existence.

De La Salle proposes six ways of placing ourselves in God’s presence.²⁹ This is done through faith, faith rooted in the word of God in the Scriptures.³⁰ These various ways do not create that presence; instead, they enable us to recognize a presence that precedes us, a presence already there. For De La Salle, placing ourselves in the presence of God is not reflecting on a theory but taking into account and experiencing the presence of God.

De La Salle draws upon his personal experience when treating of the presence of God. When developing the thought of God present everywhere, he undoubtedly had in mind the path he followed that led to the founding of the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He recognized God’s providential hand leading him from one commitment to another.³¹ In developing the thought of Jesus present in the midst of those gathered in his name, he most likely remembered the experience of being called by God through the community to be poor in association with his poor Brothers³² and, later, of being called by the community to return

from seclusion to resume the direction of the Institute.³³ His long nights in prayer in the church of Saint Rémy give special meaning to his presentation on the presence of God in church and of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.³⁴

The very act of placing ourselves in the presence of God is already entering into dialogue with God. The nine acts that follow continue this dialogue in which “the soul applies itself to God.”³⁵ The examples of prayers De La Salle proposes in these acts constitute about one-half of *Explication*, which is intended as a practical guide for beginners. However, De La Salle is careful to point out that the examples are just that and must not be utilized in a rigid manner.³⁶

These examples of prayer are filled with scriptural references, either explicitly or by allusion. This use of the Scriptures plays a significant role in De La Salle’s understanding of interior prayer. In prayer we listen to the word of God in the Scriptures, which calls forth our word of response to God. Listening to the biblical word in an attitude of faith constitutes an essential component of the method proposed by De La Salle.

The acts following the placing of ourselves in the presence of God—three acts referring to God, three referring to ourselves, and three referring to our Lord—correspond to the structure of Christian prayer in the New Testament, which addresses God in praise and petition in and through Jesus Christ.

It is significant that the first act in all the series of acts is the act of faith, for faith, in De La Salle’s method, constitutes the climate in which all interior prayer takes place.

Third Movement

The principal activity of the soul in interior prayer is to fill itself with God.³⁷ This is done in and through Jesus Christ, for it is in Jesus Christ that the mystery of God’s love is revealed. In this phase of the inner dynamic movement of *Explication*, De La Salle wants us to contemplate the person of Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ, the Life, in what he is (Mysteries), Jesus Christ, the Way, in what he does (Virtues), and Jesus Christ, the Truth, in what he says (Maxims). Ultimately, the only subject of interior prayer, for De La Salle, is the person of Jesus Christ. That is why, for the most part, *Explication* maintains a vital link between the Mysteries, Virtues, and Maxims and the person of Jesus Christ.³⁸

In all these ways of contemplating Jesus Christ, *Explication* begins by having us listen to the scriptural word. We enter into the mystery of Jesus Christ by allowing ourselves, first, to be penetrated with the word of the Scriptures.

Each Mystery, Virtue, and Maxim has a spirit proper to itself. De La Salle wants his Brothers to live in the spirit of the Mysteries, Virtues, and Maxims. This means following Jesus Christ as he practiced the virtue special to the Mystery, Virtue, and Maxim by doing the same in their daily life.³⁹

Fourth Movement

At the beginning of interior prayer, we take some distance from our daily activities and preoccupations. Through recollection we seek to return to the center of our life, “in the depths of our soul” (First Movement). There we see our relation with God, the God of salvation revealed in the mystery of Jesus Christ (Second Movement). We contemplate the mystery of Jesus Christ in which we are called to participate (Third Movement).

In the Fourth Movement in *Explication*, we confront the way in which we live the demands of the mystery of Jesus Christ. For De La Salle this means accomplishing the saving will of God, especially through teaching the poor and abandoned youth. Thus, interior prayer by its inner dynamic movement opens outward to life.

Interior prayer, as understood by De La Salle, opens to life in a specific way through resolutions taken during prayer, resolutions that must be practical, present, and efficacious.⁴⁰ These resolutions assist us in living in the “spirit of interior prayer.” De La Salle wants interior prayer to continue in some way throughout the day.⁴¹ This is what De La Salle means by the “spirit of interior prayer.” An integral part of interior prayer for De La Salle is taking practical means to live out its implications in the heat of daily existence. This is the purpose of the resolutions. There are examples of prayer in *Explication* that cast the resolutions in a legalistic form. They give the impression that advancement in virtue depends on foreseeing in considerable detail specific occasions of practicing virtue, or on artificial practices in a narrow individualistic perspective.⁴² However, there is also another trend in the resolutions, one that predominates in *Explication*. Here the orientation of interior prayer to life comes through participation in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in his dispositions and sentiments. This can be seen in

many texts of *Explication* and in many examples of prayer, especially the acts of remorse, or contrition, and of union with our Lord.⁴³ The prayers throughout *Explication* that center on the invocation of the Holy Spirit as the guide of our life give further evidence of this orientation of the resolutions.

VII

The goal of the method of interior prayer is the prayer of simple attention. De La Salle's description of simple attention calls to mind his description of the spirit of faith, which he calls the spirit of the Institute. He wants his Brothers to be completely filled with the spirit of faith as the guiding force of their life.⁴⁴ It is significant that the spirit of interior prayer, particularly that of simple attention, and the spirit of faith are identical faith stances before God.⁴⁵

The characteristics that De La Salle uses to describe simple attention and its effects are similar to those he uses to describe the effects of the spirit of faith. Simple attention frees us from selfish inclinations;⁴⁶ the spirit of faith helps us “not to do anything but in view of God.”⁴⁷ Those who have acquired this state of simple attention no longer pay attention to creatures except insofar as they are related to God.⁴⁸ The spirit of faith induces those who possess it “not to look upon anything but with eyes of faith.”⁴⁹

Simple attention consists in silent adoration, love, gratitude, and desire for union with God.⁵⁰ The spirit of faith leads us “to attribute all to God.”⁵¹ The prevailing attitude in both simple attention and the spirit of faith is the same—awareness of the presence of God, adherence to God, detachment from self and created things, a conversion of the heart, and the practice of good works.

De La Salle includes a description of the prayer of simple attention in his practical manual of interior prayer, for the prayer of simple attention seems to be the normal kind of prayer he expects his Brothers to be drawn to. He assumes that if they remain faithful to the method of interior prayer, they will no longer need to occupy themselves with all the acts that *Explication* describes. They will gradually move to a form of prayer with prolonged reflections and then to a state of simple attention in which they simply recollect themselves interiorly by directing their thoughts to the presence of God during at least some of the time of interior prayer.⁵²

Simple attention draws the soul tenderly and gently to the practice of virtue.⁵³ From the gentle attraction for good experienced in the prayer of simple attention there is a flow of this disposition into daily life. Virtue then is no longer a strenuous exercise of the will or the deliberate fulfillment of resolutions taken during the time of interior prayer.

Although the attention to the presence of God that takes place during the prayer of simple attention is explicit and cannot be the same while fulfilling the tasks of the day, the prevailing attitude is the same. The attractive force arising in the experience of the prayer of simple attention becomes the motivating power in all the actions of the day. De La Salle wants the Brothers to bring to their daily life what they experience during the time of prayer. Indeed, to experience in daily life the sentiments that arise during simple attention is a sign of a developing spirit of faith.

The overarching influence of the spirit of interior prayer, particularly that of simple attention, affects all the activities of life. This is also at the heart of the spirit of faith. What simple attention is in the context of interior prayer, the spirit of faith is in the context of daily life. For De La Salle, the spirit of faith is simple attention “in action.”

VIII

At first sight, *Explication* seems to be an excessively elaborate and systematized method of interior prayer. It turns out, however, that in the mind of De La Salle, prayer that is truly interior escapes all methods. The ultimate consequence of the method is to dispense with the method. This is De La Salle’s final recommendation. In prayer, we must allow ourselves to be interiorly and gently drawn by God, even if it is to some sentiment we had not proposed to ourselves beforehand.⁵⁴

Explication provides a means to “do something” during the time of interior prayer until prayer begins to happen within us, that is, until we can recognize and allow the Spirit to pray within us. At the end of his method, De La Salle joins the beginning, where he speaks of the soul “imperceptibly filling itself with God” during interior prayer.⁵⁵ Prayer is ultimately God’s work in us. This is the heart of the prayer of simple attention and can take place in

some way from the very beginning of learning the method of interior prayer.⁵⁶

For De La Salle, interior prayer is not a complicated path to follow but a dialogue with the living God. The ultimate criterion of prayer is found in life, not in the number of acts made. We know that God has worked in us when we leave interior prayer with renewed zeal for doing our duty for the love of God. The authenticity of interior prayer is judged by what happens when we leave interior prayer.⁵⁷

In this movement there is a coherence between the spirituality that De La Salle proposes to the Brothers and the type of person he envisions the Brother to be. De La Salle sees the Brother as one who knows himself, is open to God and to God's creation, is conscious of having been entrusted with a ministry by God, and has made a total gift of himself to God, who has called him to be a minister of salvation.

IX

In the Rule of 1705 De La Salle wrote:

The Brothers of this Institute ought to have a great love for the holy exercise of interior prayer, and they ought to look on it as the first and principal of their daily exercises and the one that is the most capable of drawing down the blessing of God on all the others.⁵⁸

Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer is De La Salle's commentary on this bold statement of the Rule.

Speaking of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, Georges Rigault wrote:

To know this writing is to enter into contact with the holiness of the Founder and to know the way to walk in the path of perfection."⁵⁹

A careful reading and study of this book will, it is hoped, rally many others to that forceful opinion of one of the most prominent of the Institute's historians.

Donald Mouton, FSC
August 1994

Notes

1. For example, in *Rule* (CL 25), *Col.* (CL 15), *Duties* (CL 20:405–494), *Exer.* (CL 18:3–52), *Med.* (CL 12, CL 13).

2. In *Duties*, CL 20:405–494.

3. In *Exer.*, CL 18:3–52.

4. The “Method of Interior Prayer,” a synopsis of a method of prayer, is found in John Baptist de La Salle, *Recueil*, CL 15:7–16. Unfortunately, the first three paragraphs of the French text do not appear in the printed English translation, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, 1993; they are included in the electronic (PDF) edition. The explanation of the method is found in De La Salle’s *Explication*.

5. In 1705 De La Salle moved the novitiate from Paris to Saint Yon, a property he leased in a suburb of Rouen. De La Salle spent as much time at Saint Yon as he could. The Director of Novices at that time was Brother Barthélemy, who succeeded John Baptist de La Salle as Superior in 1717.

In 1708 De La Salle moved the novices to Paris in the wake of a devastating famine throughout France. In October 1715 Brother Barthélemy and the novices returned to Saint Yon, because of an increasingly complicated situation in Paris. De La Salle returned to Saint Yon a month later and assisted with the formation of the novices. After Brother Barthélemy’s election as Superior, Brother Irénée replaced him as Director of Novices, a post he held until his death in 1747.

From October 1717 to March 1718, De La Salle lived in seclusion at the Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, a center for clergy renewal and reform. It is probable that he worked on *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* during that time. He returned to Saint Yon after his stay at Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet and resumed the task of training the novices in the art of interior prayer.

6. Blain II, CL 8:164, 287; Blain, *Life*, Book Three, Chapter XVII, 723–724.

7. Of the spiritual writings of the Founder, only *Collection* was published during his lifetime. Between 1726 and 1734, the interval between two General Chapters, *Meditations* (CL 12, CL 13) was published.

8. The 1739 edition seems to be the oldest edition. The 1816 edition, published at Langres, reproduces the 1739 edition; an 1853 edition of the book, published in Paris with the notice “in use in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools,” contains many variations from the original; the 1890 and 1898 editions, authorized by the bishop of Versailles, carry the notation “by the Blessed John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools” and are faithful to the original 1739 edition. In 1953 Brother Denis, Vicar General, requested that a critical edition be published. The work by Lett, *Explication*, contains the term *Édition Critique* on the cover. Miguel Campos, FSC, and Michel Sauvage, FSC, in their study do not agree that Lett’s work constitutes a “critical edition” (CL 50:544–545, n. 12).

9. In spite of its name, this period of spirituality was very traditional. During the period between Gerard Groote (1340–1383), founder of *Devotio Moderna*, and Jean Mombaer (1460–1501), interior prayer constituted an important reality of the spiritual life oriented toward the love of God and of

neighbor, but it was a complex reality that became excessively analytical and minutely structured.

10. Some of the vocabulary in De La Salle's *Explication* is similar to that of Maître Mathieu Beuvelet's *Conduite de l'Oraison* (1654). Beuvelet was the uncle of Nicolas Roland, the spiritual director of the Founder. The influence of Beuvelet's work, especially its insistence on the presence of God, was strong at the Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, where the Founder stayed from October 1717 to March 1718 (Blain II, 164,287).

11. Much of the thinking at the time of John Baptist de La Salle was influenced by René Descartes, French philosopher, mathematician, and physician (1596–1650). Meticulous classification and analysis characterize the Cartesian system.

12. *EM*, 22.

13. *EM*, 79.

14. *EM*, 79–80.

15. However, see *EM*, 37: “. . . direct us through his Spirit in all our actions and in all we do;” *EM*, 37: “. . . pour out your Holy Spirit upon me . . . to guide and direct me in all my actions.”

16. *EM*, 143–144.

17. *EM*, 22–23.

18. *Col.*, 78 (CL 15:95).

19. *Med.* 37, 197, 205:2, 206.

20. *EM*, 25, 118, 134.

21. For example, Acts 17:28, used in *EM*:32 with reference to God's life in us, is used in the meditation on the feast of Saint Denis that is concerned with bringing people to God (*Med.* 175:1; see also 70:2.) In *EM*:58–59, De La Salle refers to Gen 28:16, instilling confidence; the same biblical incident is used in *Med.* 198:1 with reference to the ministry of the Brothers, and in 77:1 with reference to community. See the link between prayer and ministry in *Duties* in CL 20:427, 455.

22. This inner dynamism of *Explication* is suggested by Campos and Sauvage in CL 50:545–546. Their *Vue d'Ensemble* is built around these four movements (CL 50:547–612).

23. Expression of Guardini, *Vorschule*.

24. In his writings De La Salle uses “depths of the soul” 14 times and “depths of the heart” more than 40 times.

25. John of the Cross, “center of the soul”; Francis de Sales, “fine point of the soul.”

26. “Depths of God,” 1 Cor 2:10.

27. See *Med.* 152:2, 34:3. “Depths of the soul/heart” is a rich one in De La Salle's writings. It is in the “depths of the soul/heart”:

- that we resolve to give up sin (*Duties*, CL 20:294)
- where there is total offering of oneself to follow Christ (*Med.* 167:1)
- where we welcome, understand, and are docile to divine teaching (*EM*, 146)
- where the spirit of justice resides (*Instruct.*, CL 17:183)
- where reconciliation with others takes place (*Duties*, CL 20:170)

- where our ministry is effective (*Med* 159:2)
- where penance for sin must draw its principle before we show external signs (*Duties*, CL 20:279)
- where we experience true horror for sin in order to avoid it (*Duties*, CL 20:277)
- where we experience regret for sin (*Instruct.*, CL 17:154)

28. See *EM*, 32ff.

29. Elsewhere De La Salle speaks of other ways of placing ourselves in God's presence:

- in the poor (*Med.* 96:3; 160:1)
- in our actions (*Med.* 177:3)
- in all things (*EM*, 25)
- in the Word (*EM*, 139; *Med.* 191:3)
- in the Pope (*Med.* 106:1–2)
- in the bishops (*Med.* 106:3)
- in the superiors (*Med.* 9:1–2, 10:2, 73:1)

30. In *Col.*, 7, De La Salle uses other scriptural passages for the first, fourth, and fifth ways of placing oneself in the presence of God.

31. First way, see Blain I, 169.

32. Second way, see Blain I, 187–188.

33. Blain II, 218.

34. Fifth and sixth ways, see Blain I, 229–230; Blain II, 281.

35. *EM*: 22.

36. For example, *EM*: 80, 149–151.

37. *EM*: 22.

38. The centrality of the person of Jesus Christ is more evident in the considerations of Mysteries and of Virtues than of Maxims. Maxims at times appear to be rigid formulas detached from the person of Jesus Christ. For example, the context of Matt 16:26 concerns the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and following him. In *EM* this context is obscured, and the maxim functions independently to exalt the virtues of renunciation and mortification in an individualistic perspective; see *EM*: 134–148.

Notably absent from the Mysteries that De La Salle proposes is the Resurrection, although he includes it in his other writings, for example, in *Duties*, CL 20:58–62.

39. *EM*: 83, 117, 135.

40. *EM*: 107.

41. *Letters*, 72.4, to Brother Anastase, January 28, 1711: "Turn often to interior prayer, and try to do everything in a prayerful spirit."

42. For example, *EM*: 107–108, 128, 143–144.

43. For example, *EM*: 77–78, 110–111, 145–146.

44. *Col.*, 30.

45. This idea is developed by Brother Joseph Schmidt, FSC, in "Simple Attention and the Spirit of Faith," in *Lasalliana*, 05-A-31.

46. *EM*: 52.

47. *Col.*, 31.

48. *EM*: 52.
49. *Col.*, 30–31.
50. *EM*: 97.
51. *Col.*, 31.
52. *EM*: 51: “. . . for a few minutes, or even a quarter of an hour, more or less.”
53. *EM*: 123.
54. Recommendations, *EM*, 151.
55. *EM*: 23.
56. *EM*: 135.
57. *EM*: 151. There is a contemporary ring to this aspect of De La Salle’s understanding of interior prayer. In Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s *Flow*, the author draws upon twenty years of his own and others’ research to demonstrate that action can be the road to a meditative life and that a meditative approach to action will lead to “optimal experience.”
58. Rule of 1705, CL 25:22; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 22.
59. Rigault, *Histoire*, 148.

The First Part
of the Method of Interior Prayer

Interior Prayer in General and the Preparation of the Soul

Interior prayer is an inner activity
in which the soul applies itself to God.

It is so called
to distinguish it from vocal prayer
which is partly an activity of the body,
because it is produced by the mouth,
but at the same time is an activity of the mind,
which should be involved in it.

It is called interior
because it is an activity not simply of the mind
but of all the powers of the soul
and because,
to be genuine and effective,
it must take place in the depths of the soul,
that is to say,
in the innermost part of the soul.

If interior prayer took place in the mind only
or in the superficial part of the heart,
it would easily lie open to human and material distractions,
which would prevent it from being fruitful,
and this activity of the mind would only be temporary,
not having penetrated the soul,
and would, consequently, leave the soul in dryness
and devoid of God.

Interior prayer is called an inner activity,
because the soul occupies itself therein
with what is proper to it in this life,
which is to know and to love God cf. JoHn 17:3; Luke 10:27–28
and to take all the means needed
to achieve both these ends.

But the principal activity of the soul
in prayer that is truly interior
is to fill itself
and to unite itself interiorly with God, cf. Eph 3:19
which through a lively faith is for the soul
a sort of apprenticeship and foretaste
of what the soul should do in reality
for all eternity.

It is for this reason
that interior prayer is called an inner activity
in which the soul applies itself to God.

There are three parts to interior prayer.
The first part is the preparation of the soul,
and this is properly called recollection;
the second part is attention to the topic of interior prayer;
the third part is the thanksgiving at the end.

The first part is called the preparation of the soul
for interior prayer,
because the mind,
being ordinarily attentive for the greater part of the day
to things that are in themselves exterior and material,
goes thereby, in some manner, out of itself and takes on,
at least to some degree,
the characteristics of the objects
to which it is attentive.

Therefore,
when we wish to apply our mind to interior prayer,
we must begin by withdrawing it entirely
from attention to exterior and material things
and by being attentive
only to spiritual and interior things.

It is for this reason
that we must begin by being attentive
to the presence of God.

The acts of the first part serve to maintain and to occupy the mind
with the presence of God
while these acts continue.

It is in this way
that the first part disposes us for interior prayer,
inasmuch as attention to the presence of God,
to which we apply ourselves
and which the acts of the first part
help to keep before our minds,
withdraws the mind from exterior things
to occupy it only with that which is alone capable
of keeping the mind within itself
and thus rendering it interior.

Attention to God has the characteristic of being incompatible
with attention to exterior and material things,
because God is a spiritual being, cf. John 4:24
and attention to God is in no way compatible
with attention even to spiritual creatures,
because God is infinitely above all created things,
however detached from matter
and however perfect they may be,
and the more our mind is attentive to God,
the more this attention supplants attention to creatures.

It follows necessarily that the more a soul is attentive to God,
the more will it disengage itself from all attention to creatures
and, consequently, from whatever attachment and affection
it may have had for them,
because as attention to creatures produces attachment,
the elimination of one from the soul
necessarily causes the elimination of the other.

It is in this way that the soul,
imperceptibly filling itself with God, cf. Eph 3:19
detaches itself from creatures
and becomes what we call interior
by turning away and disengaging itself
from material and exterior objects.

It is also for this reason
that the first part of interior prayer is called recollection,
for it serves

- to empty the mind of exterior things,
- to bring it back within itself,
- to keep it there,
 - and, consequently,
- to recollect the soul
 - through attention to God
 - and to purely interior matters.

Different Ways To Place Ourselves in the Presence of God

The first thing to be done in interior prayer
is to become filled interiorly with the thought of God's presence,
which must always be done through a sentiment of faith
based on a passage taken from Holy Scripture.

We can consider God present in three different ways:
first, in the place where we are,
second, within us, and
third, in a church.

Each of these three ways of considering God present
can be divided into two other ways.

We can consider God present in the place where we are,
first, because God is everywhere; cf. Ps 139:7–10
second, because wherever two or three persons
are gathered together in the name of our Lord,
he is in their midst. cf. Matt 18:20

We can consider God present within us,
first, to maintain us in existence; cf. Acts 17:28
second, by grace and the Holy Spirit. cf. 1 Cor. 6:19

Finally, we can consider God present in a church,
first, because it is the house of God; cf. Ps. 93:5
second, because our Lord Jesus Christ dwells there
in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

God Present in the Place Where We Are

The first way to place ourselves in the presence of God in the place where we are is to consider that God is present everywhere.

We can easily consider God present in the place where we are by interiorly dwelling on the thought that David expressed in Psalm 139:

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
From your presence where can I flee?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I sink to the nether world, you are present there.*

*If I take the wings of the dawn,
if I settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall guide me,
and your right hand hold me fast.*

Ps 139:7–10

From this it is easy to conclude that in this passage David wishes to make us understand that wherever we go,
no matter how far off
or how hidden from our eyes,
we will always find God
and cannot escape the divine presence.

This is something we ought to think of, particularly when tempted to offend God, paying attention to what Suzanna said when she was tempted by the two old men,

*It is better for me to fall into your power without guilt
than to sin before the Lord.*

Dan 13:23

We ought to say to ourselves, following the example of this saintly woman,
It is better for me
to be tempted and harassed by the devil
than to sin in the presence of my God,
because wherever I may go,
I cannot hide from the divine presence.

cf. Ps 139:7

This way of placing ourselves in God's presence
by considering God present in the place where we are
can produce three principal effects in us.

The first is to keep us easily recollected
and attentive to God's presence,
even in the most distracting surroundings,
whether we are walking about
or remaining in one place. cf. Ps 139:3

The second is to prevent us from offending God
when we are tempted
or find ourselves in some occasion of falling into sin.
For just as we would be ashamed to say something or to do
anything
that might displease a person whom we respect,
how much more must we fear to offend God cf. Dan 13:3
in the presence of One
who has shown us so much goodness and love?

The third effect is to inspire us with confidence in God,
with the view that attention to God's holy presence
in the place where we are
will give us strength against temptations
and will deliver us from them.

*My eyes, says David, are ever toward the Lord,
[who] will free my feet from the snare.* Ps 25:15

*Even though I walk in the dark valley
(that is, in sin, which brings death to the soul),
I fear no evil, for you are at my side.* Ps 23:4

*I set the Lord ever before me;
with [the Lord] at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.*
Ps 16:8

Example of interior prayer based on God's presence everywhere

How happy I am, O my God,
to find you always present cf. Ps 16:8
wherever I may go or wherever I may be. cf. Ps 139:7-8

If my senses experience some repugnance for a particular place,
how could my soul share their displeasure?
For you are always in that place,
and I can always think of you. cf. Ps 16:8

It is a sort of foretaste of the joy of heaven
 to be able always to be with you cf. Ps 23:4
 and to think of you. cf. Ps 16:8

I beg of you to give me, O my God,
 the grace of never doing anything displeasing to you,
 for without your help I can do nothing good. cf. John 15:5

Keep my mind so recollected and attentive to you
 that nothing exterior may be able to distract it.

The second way to place ourselves in the presence of God in the place where we are is to consider our Lord present in the midst of those who are gathered in his name.

We can consider God present in the place where we are,
 because our Lord says in Saint Matthew's Gospel,
*For where two or three are gathered together in my name,
 there am I in the midst of them.* Matt 18:20

Is it not a great blessing to know
 when we are together with our Brothers,
 whether to engage in interior prayer
 or to perform some other exercise,
 that we are in the company of our Lord
 and that he is in the midst of the Brothers?

He is in our midst cf. John 20:19–22
 to impart his Holy Spirit to us
 and to direct us through his Spirit
 in all our actions
 and in all we do. cf. Rom 8:14; Gal 5:25

He is in our midst
 to unite us to one another,
 thus accomplishing by himself
 what he had asked his Father for us before his death,
 through these words in Saint John:
*That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me
 and I in you. . . ,* John 17:21
that they may be brought to perfection as one. . . .
John 17:23

In other words, may we be so united
and closely bound together,
having but one spirit,
namely, the Spirit of God,
that we may never be disunited. cf. Eph 4:3-6

Jesus Christ is in the midst of the Brothers in our exercises
to give us the spirit of our state
and to maintain and strengthen us
in the possession of that spirit,
which is our source and assurance of salvation,
as long as we always preserve it soundly
and without alteration.

Jesus Christ is in the midst of the Brothers
to teach us the truths and maxims of the Gospel, cf. John 14:26
to implant these deeply in our hearts,
to inspire us to make them the rule of our conduct,
to make us understand them,
and to make known to us the way to put them into practice
in the manner most agreeable to God
and most fitting to our state of life.

Jesus Christ is in the midst of the Brothers
to lead us to practice these Gospel maxims
in a uniform manner in our Society,
so as always to preserve an entire and perfect union
among us.

Jesus Christ is in the midst of the Brothers in our exercises
so that by directing all our actions to him
as to our center,
we will become one in him cf. John 17:21
by the union we will have with him,
who acts in us and through us. cf. Gal 5:25

Jesus Christ is in the midst of the Brothers in our exercises
to give them completeness and perfection,
for Jesus Christ is in our regard like the sun,
which not only gives plants the power to produce
but also gives to their fruit goodness and perfection,
which are greater or less
insofar as they have been more or less exposed
to the rays of the sun.

In the same way, we perform the exercises and actions
appropriate to our state

with greater or lesser perfection
insofar as we are in greater or lesser
contact, conformity, and union with Jesus Christ.

This way of placing ourselves in God's presence
by considering Jesus Christ in our midst
can produce three distinct benefits.

The first is that all our actions will be referred to Jesus Christ
and will tend toward him as toward their center.

They will draw all their efficacy from him,
just as the branches of a vine
draw the sap from the vine. cf. John 15:5

Thus, there is a continual movement of our actions to Jesus Christ
and from Jesus Christ to us,
for he gives spirit and life to what we do. cf. Gal 5:25

The second is that we establish a close union with Jesus Christ,
who lives in us
and in whom we live, cf. Gal 2:20
as the Apostle Saint Paul so admirably describes.

It is because of this that we can do nothing without Jesus,
as he says,
and that Jesus Christ does all in us,
because he dwells in us and we in him,
and in this way, he tells us, we will bear much fruit. cf. John 15:5

The third is that he will pour out his Spirit upon us,
as he says by a Prophet, cf. Joel 3: 1–2
the Spirit of truth,
which the world cannot accept,
because it does not know it. John 14:17

This same Holy Spirit will enliven our actions
and will become a life-giving Spirit in them. cf. Gal 5:25

They will not be dead works in us,
not only as Christian works
but also in relation to our state of life,
which requires that they possess a special perfection.

Example of placing ourselves in God's presence in our midst

How happy I am, my God, to be engaged in prayer
with my Brothers,
because, according to your words, we have the advantage
of having you in our midst. cf. Matt 18:20

*God is not far from any one of us,
for in [God] we live and move and have our being.*

Acts 17:28

In fact, we have being, movement, and life
only because God abides in us
and communicates all this to us,
in such a way
that if God ceased for a moment to dwell in us
and to maintain us in being,
we would immediately fall back into nothingness.

How great a favor it is, then, that God,
by the divine power and presence within us,
makes us what we are.

This led Saint Paul to say,

For we too are [God's] offspring,

Acts 17:28

and Saint Leo declares

that we are made sharers in the divinity.

This idea ought to make us realize and hold for certain
that because we too are God's offspring cf. Acts 17:28
and live only because God imparts life to us,
we must manifest by all our conduct cf. Rom 8:1–14; Gal 5:13–25
that we live, indeed, by God's life
and that we have only thoughts that fill us with God
and only slight esteem for all the things of this world,
according to what they are exteriorly. cf. Col 3:1–2

If we do have any esteem for them,
it ought to be for what they are in God's sight.

We must be firmly convinced

that God is in all things,
that all things are nothing

except insofar as God dwells in them

and they are filled with the divine presence.

cf. Wis of Sol 11:21; 12:1

From this it follows that we offend God dwelling in us
when we do anything that displeases God,
when we use our senses for evil purposes,
and when we seek to satisfy ourselves
and not to satisfy God,
who is the only one in whom we must find
all our joy and all our satisfaction,

because God finds delight and joy
in sustaining us
and in maintaining our existence
by continuously dwelling in us.

This way of placing ourselves in God's presence
by considering God within us to maintain us in existence
can have three principal effects.

The first is to take care of our body
in view of preserving God's life in us,
so that we may live
by and through that life. cf. Gal 2:20

The second is not to offend God
either with the life
that God gives us continually cf. Acts 17:18
or with the actions
that God performs with and through us.

The third is to beg God often to take our life
rather than allow in us any life or action
apart from what tends to fulfill God's designs for us
and to do the divine will. cf. Ps 119

Example of praying to God as the source of our being

O my God, you are in me
and in all creatures,
and they all subsist only by you,
because you dwell in them. cf. Wis of Sol 11:21
Help me, then, to make use
of my whole body,
of my whole being,
and of all other creatures
only for your service.

Because I know that you dwell within me
to maintain my existence,
is it possible, O my God,
that I would use this life, which you have given me,
to offend you?
How could I do this, my God?

You do act in me,
and would I act against you?
Would I offend you by the actions
you inspire in me and perform within me?

Rather than allow me to commit the slightest sin,
destroy whatever life is in me
by ceasing to dwell in me
and to act in me.

Another example

Your dwelling in me, O my God,
ought to give me confidence in you
and reliance on you.

As the Royal Prophet says,

*Even though I walk in the dark valley,
I fear no evil,
for you are at my side.*

Ps 23:4; 138:7

*[God] will free my feet
from the snare.*

Ps 25:15

*It is God who trains my hands for battle,
my fingers for war.*

Ps 144:1; 18:35

Your presence, O my God,
and your continual dwelling in me
ought to inspire me
to wage war against sin
and to resist the devil
with all my senses
and with the life you give me through them.

cf. Ps 144:1; 18:35

cf. Acts 17:18

Another example

Must I not be prompted to think of you, my God,
for you are always with me and within me,
and I cannot do anything without you?

cf. John 15:5

All my actions ought to be so many reminders
inviting me to lift my spirit to you.

cf. Ps 25:1

All the aspirations of my heart
are so many caresses that you give it
to remind it to be all for you.

Give to my mind such feelings
that my mind may be always occupied
with the thought of you.

Ps 16:8

Give to my heart such tendencies
that my heart may love you alone.

The second way to place ourselves in the presence of God within us is to consider God present in us through his grace and the Holy Spirit.

We may consider God present within us
because God dwells in us
through grace and the Holy Spirit,
as our Lord says in Saint Luke,
For behold, the kingdom of God is among you. Luke 17:21

It is by the Holy Spirit that God reigns within us
through the very indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity,
as Jesus Christ again says in Saint John,
*Anyone who loves me will be true to my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we will come to him
and make our dwelling with him.* John 14:23

Is it not the greatest advantage we can enjoy in this world
to have God dwelling in us
and reigning over us
in as absolute a manner as a King in his kingdom
and with complete dependence on our part?

In this way God guides all our interior tendencies
according to the divine pleasure. cf. Eph 1:5

God curbs all our passions
and becomes so completely the master of our senses
that they seek out their proper objects Gal 5:13–25
only when there is a need to do so. Col 3:1–2

Furthermore,
when God has thus become the master of our heart
by the inner activity inspired in us
through the divine indwelling,
nothing of what is within us transpires outwardly.
All our exterior appearance is in a state of expectation,
so that our senses display hardly any further activity
because of this continual inner activity
and because the vital spirits that control them
are restrained within us.

Because all our inner activity is deeply absorbed
by the holy presence of God
and by that divine indwelling within us,

our soul comes to neglect and even to despise
 all that is external
 and pays no attention to anything
 except to what is taking place within it.

So it is that God rules fully over it,
 as the author of the *Imitation* says
 in book 2, chapter 1:

Learn to despise exterior things
 and to give yourself to those that are interior,
 and you will see that

the kingdom of God is among you. Luke 17:21

When God reigns thus in a soul,
 it is honored, says Saint Paul, by being the temple of God.

For we are, he tells us, the temple of the living God:

*I will live with them and move among them,
 and I will be their God,*

and they shall be my people. 2 Cor 6:16, quoting Lv 26:11–12

The body that this soul enlivens
 becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit,

according to the expression of the same Saint Paul,

*Do you not know that your body
 is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,
 whom you have from God,
 and that you are not your own?*

1 Cor 6:19

Such, indeed, is the case,

because everything in us, body and soul, belongs to God.

As the Saint insists in that same Epistle,

*Do you not know that you are the temple of God
 and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

1 Cor 3:16

We must, then, take great care
 not to profane that temple
 or to destroy it

by driving out God and the Holy Spirit from our heart,

*because if anyone
 destroys God's temple,
 God will destroy that person,
 for the temple of God, which you are, is holy.*

1 Cor 3:17

This thought that we are the temple of God and of the Holy Spirit
 ought to lead us to reflect seriously

that we must live in great holiness

cf. 2 Cor 6:16–18

and must refrain from sullyng our souls

by any vice.

We are also obliged with particular care
to adorn it with all sorts of virtues,
for the Holy Spirit is well pleased
only in souls possessing those virtues.
This is why Saint Lucy said
that chaste bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

cf. 2 Cor 7:1

God, who delights in such souls
and who wishes to possess them entirely,
takes pleasure instructing them
on the path they must follow,
*for the Spirit scrutinizes everything,
even the depth of God.*

cf. Matt 17:5

cf. Ps 25:4; 27:11

1 Cor 2:10

It is also this Holy Spirit who pours out
in the souls who possess this Spirit
the fullness and abundance of grace
that causes them to let themselves be led
and directed by the same Spirit,
so that they lose all attachment to created things
and become attached only to God,
whom they possess interiorly.

cf. Eph 1:1–23

cf. Rom 8:14; Gal 5:25

Example of considering God present within us by grace and by the Holy Spirit

How good you are, O my God,
to pour out your Holy Spirit upon me!
It is, no doubt,
to guide and direct me in my actions.

cf. Rom 8:9

cf. Rom 8:14

Your intention is that I do nothing
but through the movement of your Divine Spirit,
that I experience only those sentiments
with which your Spirit may inspire me,
that I be filled and absorbed by you,
that all my affections be agreeable to you,
that I be freed from all attachment to creatures
through your Divine Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will show me in creatures
only what is of you
and will remove entirely from me
every notion that I might have of them
that is capable of creating obstacles
to my being filled and absorbed by you.

Come, then, Holy Spirit! Possess my heart,
 and inspire all my actions to such a degree
 that it may be said that you, rather than I, cause them
 and that I may experience neither life, movement, nor action
 except inasmuch as you give them to me. cf. Acts 17:18

Happy those who live and act only by the Spirit of God.
 It is of them that we may say
 that they live no longer but that it is Jesus Christ,
 or rather the Holy Spirit,
 who lives in them. cf. Gal 2:20

Example of considering ourselves as the temple of God

How happy I ought to consider myself, O my God,
 when I reflect that I am your temple, cf. 2 Col 6:6
 that you assure me that I have this honor
 and that I need not go far to adore you cf. John 14:23
 and to pay you homage. cf. Ps 139:7; Acts 17:17

I merely need to enter within myself
 to offer you the worship I owe to you,
 as though in your living temple. cf. 2 Col 6:16

This temple, O my God, is very different
 from those built by human hands, cf. Acts 7:48
 because this one is yours,
 truly worthy to receive and to shelter you
 only because you are the one who fashioned it.
cf. Acts 7:50; 2 Sm 7:1–29

By your dwelling in this temple, embellish it
 with all that can make it please you
 and draw you to it.

Because you are holy and are holiness itself, cf. Is 5:16; 6:3
 impart this holiness to my soul in such abundance
 that you may take delight in it cf. Matt 17:5
 and that there may be nothing in it
 which is not agreeable to you,
 so that the words of Saint Paul may be applied to it,
The temple of God, which you are, is holy. 1 Col 3:17

God Present in a Church

The first way to place ourselves in the presence of God in a church is to consider the church as the house of God.

We may consider God as being present in a church
because it is the house of God, cf. Ps 93:5
as our Lord says in Saint Matthew,
My house shall be a house of prayer. Matt 21:13

This ought to lead us to two conclusions:
first, the church is the house of God, according to the testimony
of our Lord.

It is there that God wishes Christians to assemble
to adore God and to pay homage;
consequently, they must have great respect for it and show this
by their decorum,
their silence,
their external piety, and
their bearing.

Second, a church,
according to the intention and the command of God,
is so completely dedicated to prayer cf. 2 Chron 7:15–16
that when we are in it,
we are not allowed to do anything
but pray to God.

We ought not to come there with any other purpose
except to hear the word of God.

This is what Jesus Christ did
when he entered the Temple of Jerusalem,
less worthy of veneration than our churches,
drove out the buyers and sellers,
and overturned the tables of the moneychangers
and the booths of those who sold doves. cf. Matt 21:12

O marvel!

Jesus Christ drove out from the Jewish Temple
those who exchanged the coins of foreigners
who came there to buy
and those who sold and bought there
the items intended for the sacrifices,

looking upon this as profaning the Temple
 which he called the Temple of God, cf. Matt 21:13
 although the only sacrifices offered there were crude,
 consisting in slaughtering animals
 and in partially burning them. cf. Heb 9:12–13

What respect, then, must God not require us to display
 in our Christian churches?
 They are places where we offer daily
 (and in many churches a great number of times)
 the same Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God also,
 who by his sacrifice sanctifies these churches
 with an external holiness of no small degree
 and causes them to share in the sanctity of Jesus Christ
 through the offering and immolation he makes of himself,
 whole and entire, in his sacrifice. cf. Heb 10:10

This consideration of God present in a church
 because it is the house of God
 ought to produce three main effects in us.

The first effect is that we never enter a church
 except in a state of great interior and exterior innocence;
 hence, before going in, we must purify ourselves
 both in soul and in body,
 at least by making the sign of the cross with holy water
 and by an act of contrition.

It is for this purpose that there is the custom
 of putting holy water at the door of a church.

The second effect is that we remain in church with deep respect,
 with great exterior and interior reverence,
 recalling what the Church chants
 on the feast of the Dedication of Churches,
 that holiness befits those
 who enter into the house of God. cf. Ps 93:5

The third effect is that while there,
 we always apply ourselves to prayer
 when we are not occupied by listening to the word of God,
 for the church is a house of prayer, cf. Matt 21:13
 and we draw down on ourselves
 many extraordinary and abundant graces of God
 by the prayers offered in the church,
 for which God gives a special blessing.

cf. 2 Chron 7:15–16

Example of considering God's presence in a church

What is said in Holy Scripture, O my God,
at the dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem,
*The glory of the Lord was upon the house,
and they fell down upon the pavement
with their faces to the earth
and adored, praising the Lord,* 2 Chron 7:3

no doubt ought to make me resolve never to enter
or to remain in a church
except with fear and trembling, cf. 2 Cor 7:15
considering the majesty of God who dwells there,
all the more because even the angels tremble
before God. cf. Isa 6:1-6

If it is true that Oza fell down dead
because he had touched the Ark cf. 2 Sm 6:7
(which was nothing but a wooden coffer),
how much more ought I to fear being struck by God
if I dare enter and remain in the church,
which is the house of God, cf. Matt 21:13
when I am covered with sin,
for, as David said,
holiness befits your house, O Lord. cf. Ps 93:5

Give me holiness, O my God,
which is the surest mark of my attachment
to you and to your service.
Purify my soul to bring this about,
and in this way
make it worthy of the graces cf. Heb 9:14
that you pour out in abundance
on those who appear before you in a church
with pure hearts
and total detachment from the slightest sin.

Because these faults arouse your indignation,
grant that none may be found in me
when I enter that place
where you desire to be adored.

The respect I must show
for your dwelling place in this holy sanctuary
ought to lead me, O my God, to cleanse myself
entirely from all sin. cf. Matt 21:13

Example of considering the church as a house of prayer

You said to Solomon, O my God,
after he had dedicated the Jewish Temple to you,
*Now my eyes shall be open and my ears attentive
to the prayer of this place.
Now I have chosen and consecrated this house,
so that my name may be there forever,
and my heart also shall be there always.* 2 Chron 7:15–16

With how much more reason
can we say the same of our churches,
where you wish to be honored
by an interior worship
in spirit and in truth. cf. John 4:24

I beg this grace of you, my God,
that you would have the goodness
to listen to my prayers offered in this church,
for it is a place that you consecrated to yourself
to be thus until the end of time. cf. 2 Chron 7:15–16

It is in this holy place, O my God,
that you desire that the faithful come
to pray to you.

This is also the most appropriate place for doing this,
for it is the place of your dwelling on earth,
and your graces are more abundantly bestowed here
than anywhere else.

Pour out, then, your graces upon me,
and dispose my heart
to receive them
and to use them,
for the graces we receive in a church
all carry with them a special blessing from you.

The second way to place ourselves in the presence of God in a church is to consider our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

We may consider God present in a church
because our Lord Jesus Christ resides there constantly
in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

He sanctifies these temples
in which he is always present
to pour out his graces abundantly
on those who adore him there.

This is why we can apply to these sacred buildings
the words of the Apocalypse:

This is God's dwelling among men.

*He shall dwell with them and they shall be his people,
and he shall be their God, who is always with them.*

Rev 21:3

This is the favor our Lord grants to us,
which is why he is called our God.

In view of this continual dwelling of our Lord Jesus Christ
in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar,
we may consider the following:

- 1) that it is a great honor to have our Lord always with us
in the tabernacle
and to be able to adore and worship him
in this adorable Sacrament;

that he is there to listen to our prayers
when we address them to him in church,
acting as our Mediator and Intercessor before God
to present them for us to the eternal Father,
so that they may be agreeable in God's sight;

cf. Heb 7:25; 9:15; 12:28

- 2) that we ought to have recourse to him when we are in church,
because his mediation is effective
when he offers our petitions to the eternal Father,
and the Father always hears him, as Saint Paul says,
because of the profound respect
with which he prays for us;

cf. Heb 5:7

that if he wishes to look upon our needs
 he will obtain for us, without any doubt,
 whatever we ask through him cf. John 14:13–14
 and whatever he will ask for us
 from his eternal Father cf. John 15:16; 16:23
 because he has dedicated himself totally
 to our salvation
 and to the good of our soul;

- 3) that when we find ourselves in some special necessity
 or undergo some violent temptation,
 we will find a powerful and effective help in our need
 and in overcoming the temptation tormenting us
 if we turn to our Lord dwelling in the church
 in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar,
 for Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is a physician
 who heals all our ills, cf. Matt 8:8; Luke 4:23
 and he gives us all the graces we need
 and all that our soul requires.

- 4) Remaining attentive and respectful
 before our Lord present in the church
 is a good means of maintaining ourselves in the love of God,
 for Jesus Christ can make us share in this love
 while we pay our homage to his most sacred humanity,
 in whose presence we are,
 because in his humanity he is an ardent furnace of love
 for his Father. cf. Luke 12:49

Our Lord Jesus Christ remains with us in this sacrament,
so that we may have life
and have it more abundantly; John 10:10; 6:33–59
 this life in abundance consists
 in the knowledge and the perfect love of God,
 according to Jesus Christ.
cf. John 17:3; cf. Luke 10:22–28

Example of considering Jesus Christ residing in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar

I need only to approach you, divine Jesus, cf. Heb 4:16
 in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar;
 there I can have you always present. cf. Ps 16:8

You dwell there as on your throne,
to receive our homage and our adoration;
you reside there
to fill us with all the graces we need. cf. Heb 4:16

In whatever state I may be during interior prayer—
of dryness or
of afflictions and temptations,
I need only to present myself before you
to find solace for my woes.

No matter what difficulty I may experience
in overcoming myself in order to do good,
you are always ready to help me;
you are my only refuge cf. Heb 10:19–21
when deep distress overwhelms me. cf. Ps 32:7

You inspire and encourage me to do good
when I feel cowardly
and when I feel tepid.
I need only to turn to you,
for you are a God of love,
and you show a tender love for us
in your divine Sacrament.
You can easily fill me
with all that is lovable and loving in you.
Set me aflame with love for God,
and give me a burning love for my neighbor. cf. Luke 10:25–28

Another example

I unite myself to you, O my Jesus,
present in the Most Blessed Sacrament,
where you are the victim for my sins.
cf. Heb 7:26–28; 1 John 2:2; 4:10

In this sacrament you continually offer
to the eternal Father
the merits of your sacred Passion and death
in satisfaction for my sins. cf. Heb 9:1–28

Give me the grace,
to help me satisfy for my sins,
to share in your interior dispositions
of love for suffering.

I will strive, O my Savior Jesus,
to remain absorbed in this consideration
 while in your presence,
 being convinced as I am
that sin in me displeases you.
I know that you will strive
 to destroy it in me.

I beg you to help me apply myself to this
 with all care,
thus accomplishing your desires for me.

Different Ways To Attend to the Presence of God

Attending to the Presence of God by Multiple Reflections

When we place ourselves in the presence of God
by using one of the ways suggested in the preceding chapter,
it is important that the reflections we make
all refer to the same way
and all tend to the same end.

This practice not only helps to control the mind
and teaches it to reason correctly
but also contributes greatly to keep the soul recollected
and to give it more facility to occupy itself
with the presence of God
for a longer time
and in a more interior manner.

Whereas,
if we allow the mind to make a reflection
first in one way and then in another,
the mind is taken up with different thoughts,
and it remains in a sort of dissipated state,
making different reflections
that have no connection with one another
and cannot succeed in reflecting and thinking correctly.
By this manner of making reflections,
the soul loses its capacity for interior recollection.

Suppose, for instance, that we make a few reflections
on the way of placing ourselves in God's presence
by considering God in the place where we are,
but then we place ourselves in God's presence
by considering God present within us as in a temple.

This second consideration is out of place at this point,
because these two ways of placing ourselves in God's presence
are not suitable to each other,
for each one has a different purpose.

The purpose of the first way is to keep us recollected
wherever we may be,
because of God's presence.

The purpose of the other way is to help us preserve great purity
of heart,
because we are the temple of God,
or we may in this second way have this other purpose,
that of adoring God dwelling in our heart
or some other purpose
that is related to this second way.

Attending to the Presence of God by Few but Prolonged Reflections

The six ways of placing ourselves in the presence of God
ought to help the soul maintain this awareness
for some time during interior prayer.

But it can be said that they make us aware of God's presence
only in a passing manner
that is external to the soul,
because they lead us to recognize the presence of God
only through reasoning and multiple reflections.

These reflections, with respect to truths of faith,
darken the mind rather than enlighten it,
and they shut it up rather than open it
to a deeper understanding of the sacred mysteries
that these truths contain.

Unless these reflections are based on faith
and supported by views of faith,
they keep the soul away from God
instead of drawing it closer to God.

An easier means to make us more deeply aware of God's
presence

in an interior manner
is to recall some passage of Holy Scripture
that reminds us of the presence of God,
for example, this one:

I set the Lord ever before me.

Ps 16:8

Then we reflect on this passage without much reasoning,
for reasoning destroys faith
or at least introduces obstacles that diminish it,
keep it from being as lively as it might be,
and prevent it from being firmly fixed
in our mind and in our heart.

Example of a reflection on the passage

What a joy it is
for our souls to be constantly occupied
with the presence of God!
This is an anticipation of the happiness of heaven!

cf. Ps 16:9

We remain for as long a time as we can
attentive to this passage in a manner that is simple
and at the same time as lively as possible.
This reflection is not encumbered with reasoning.

The grasp that the mind has of the passage
and the attention it pays to it
not only do not hinder
but also do not even distract our attention from the passage,
which being of faith,
causes the mind to be imbued with this truth.

The understanding the mind has of this truth becomes so clear
that it cannot help adoring it
in God and outside of God
as coming forth from the mouth of God,
as it were,
according to our human way of expressing ourselves.

cf. Matt 4:4

When considering such things,
we must not let the mind grow fatigued,
as might happen sometimes,
especially when we are just beginning to apply ourselves
to interior prayer,
for fear that those who are not yet accustomed to this,
not having acquired much facility,
may become disheartened.

So when we find that we cannot occupy ourselves any longer
with this passage
by means of the reflection we made on it,
we must turn our mind to another reflection,
which, because it is new
and capable of touching the heart,
makes the truth
that we are seeking to impress on our minds and hearts
take on a fresh meaning.

Thus, we might reflect
that it is a sign that we love God very little
if we rarely recall
that we are in God's presence. cf. Ps 16:8; Gen 28:16

This reflection will remind us of the passage
as though for the first time;
in this way its meaning is renewed,
and the mind is ready to apply itself to it once more.

We must then again turn our attention,
both to the passage that was at first proposed
and to this second reflection,
for as long a time as possible.

When we are unable to apply ourselves to the passage any longer,
we take up still another reflection,
and in this way
we learn how to dwell on the thought of God's presence
as long as we find it useful to do so.

This is how, by attention to some passage of faith
joined with some reflection,
we can gradually acquire a certain facility
for making ourselves aware of the presence of God
by simple attention.

All six ways suggested above,
considered as truths of faith,
can help us fix our attention on God's presence,
provided that the reflections we make on each way are few
and that each of them is prolonged for a considerable time
and done without any reasoning.

This manner of placing ourselves in God's presence by attention
and by few reflections,
each of which is prolonged,
can be called, not simple attention,
but attention mingled with reflections.

Because these reflections are few
and without reasoning,
the soul can gradually acquire this habit,
no matter how little aptitude the soul may have
for attending to the presence of God by such attention.

Attending to the Presence of God by Simple Attention

Applying ourselves to the presence of God by simple attention
consists in being before God
with a simple, interior view of faith that God is present
and remaining thus for some time,
for a few minutes
or even a quarter of an hour, more or less,
as we feel ourselves interiorly absorbed and attracted.

It even happens to a number of souls,
who have reached interior detachment
and are free from affection for created things,
that God gives them this grace,
which they rarely or even never lose.
For them this is an anticipation and a foretaste
of the joy of heaven.

However, a soul will not ordinarily enjoy such a favor
unless it has preserved its innocence throughout life
or has for a long time remained faithful to God

and not only has thoroughly purified itself from sin
 and all affection for the slightest sins
 but also is entirely detached
 from its selfish inclinations
 and all human self-seeking.

In addition, the soul must resolutely turn aside
 from what pleases the senses and the mind,
 becoming, as it were, uninterested in such things.

Finally, the soul must entirely renounce its own self-will,
 so that the will of God becomes the principle of all it does,
 as an active force within the soul,
 and so that the presence and the action of God
 within this soul
 are the only object, or practically the only object,
 of its attention.

Then such souls can say with Saint Paul,

*yet I live, no longer I,
 but Christ lives in me,*

Gal 2:20

and they, so to speak, live the very life of God,
 which consists in thinking only of God
 and in acting only for God.

cf. John 5:30; 8:29; 8:55

Souls that have attained this state
 and have acquired these dispositions
 no longer pay attention to creatures
 except insofar as they are related to God.
 Consequently, they no longer find anything lovable in them
 except what comes from God;
 they can no longer separate the thought of these creatures
 from the thought of God.

Although there exists no comparison
 that can make perfectly clear the difference
 between the way of placing ourselves in God's presence
 through reflections and reasoning
 and of doing so
 by simple attention,
 we may, nevertheless, use the one that follows
 or some other one like it
 to give some idea of the difference
 and enable us to grasp it
 as far as the human mind is capable of doing so.

For example, if we see a beautiful picture
but know nothing about painting,
we cannot judge correctly its excellence and its perfection,
because we do not know in what this excellence consists
or why the picture seems so beautiful
in the eyes of people well versed in painting.

Hence, if we wish to understand the beauty of the picture,
we must be instructed by a skilled painter,
who can teach us, through reasoning,
why this picture is such a good one
and what constitutes its beauty.

It is also necessary that the painter
help us make reflections on his explanations
concerning the beauty of this work.

On the contrary,
if we are perfectly familiar with the art of painting,
we need neither much reasoning
nor deep and frequent reflections
when we are in the presence of a painting that is well done.
We appreciate how beautiful it is,
for we perceive this
as soon as the picture is before our eyes.

That is why we admire its beauty by an act of simple attention
and can remain for a long time considering its perfection
without ever growing bored
or reflecting that we have been looking at it
for a long time.

The perfection of the work has absorbed our attention
and gives us great pleasure as we consider it.
In fact, the longer we look at it,
the more we find it beautiful and pleasing to the eye
and the more thoroughly we grasp
what makes it so excellent and surprising
in the eyes of the beholder.

It is the same, with all due proportion,
when we apply ourselves to God's presence in interior prayer.

A person who has just left the world
 or who still lives in it
 and who wishes to make interior prayer
 but until now has done nothing
 except satisfy the mind and senses
 will be ignorant of the art of knowing
 and of thinking interiorly of God.

For this reason, it would seem that the best way
 for such a person to think of God
 would be to be convinced of God's presence
 through various reasons based on motives of faith,
 which can help a person to become aware of God's presence.

Such reflections will not withdraw the mind entirely
 from material things,
 for what mind can suddenly turn
 from the consideration of material things
 to that of purely spiritual realities?

This would be very difficult for many
 and altogether impossible for some.

Hence, it seems more advisable to insinuate spiritual thoughts
 into the mind of those who are beginning to devote themselves
 to God and to interior prayer
 by means of material things
 combined with and enlivened by motives of faith.

We need to use similar means
 to help the soul become familiar with God's presence,
 rather than expect the mind to apply itself directly
 to purely spiritual things,
 with no connection to matter,
 or to occupy itself with God's presence
 by a pure act of simple attention.

Acting thus would merely make interior prayer tedious
 for souls who follow the ordinary path
 and might even make them disgusted with the spiritual life,
 perhaps forever.

Lacking light and familiarity with God
 and with interior practices of the soul,
 they would view as impossible what later on,
 through frequent application to interior prayer,
 might become for them not only possible
 but even easy and agreeable.

For this reason,
when they try to learn how to apply themselves to God's presence
as they first begin to engage in interior prayer,
they ordinarily must use reasoning
and frequent reflections.

However, people who have devoted themselves to interior prayer
for a considerable time
and who find it easy to place themselves in God's presence
in an interior manner
usually need only remain recollected
and have simple attention to the presence of God
to find their attention absorbed thereby
without wandering off
during the time of interior prayer.

This simple attention procures inner consolation for the soul,
which makes it find delight and joy
in its awareness of the divine presence.

The soul maintains this consolation
without any need of other thoughts or reflections.

This simple attention,
without being directed to any particular concepts
and without any concern for self,
occupies the mind so powerfully
and penetrates the heart so deeply
that the mind can dwell on no other thoughts
and the heart is inclined toward no other affection
than that of God,
and neither mind nor heart can entertain any other affection.

Through such simple attention,
the soul detaches itself entirely from created things,
gradually comes to a clearer knowledge of God's own being
and of the divine perfections,
and achieves a more intimate union with God.

God, while possessing a soul
and being intimately possessed by it,
cannot allow anything in it that is not of God
or for God
or that might still have the savor of created beings.

When a soul has been sufficiently purified and detached
from the slightest sins,
so that it can begin to practice
simple attention to God's presence,
it finds its path
in the practice of virtue,
in the exercise of interior prayer,
and in the facility for concentrating on God's presence
much shorter and freed from many obstacles.

But if a soul wishes to walk resolutely in this path,
it should watch over itself very carefully,
so as to break off all attachments, even natural ones;
for God gives this grace only to souls that are very pure,
or that God wishes to purify in this way
by this special goodness.

It is worth observing,
when speaking of applying ourselves to God's presence,
that we ought to dwell on it for a considerable time,
because this contributes more than anything else
to procure for us the spirit of interior prayer
and the inner attention we must have for it.

We must ensure that our mind remains filled
with the thought of God's presence as long as possible,
and we must not go on to any other subject
until we can pay attention no longer.

The Nine Acts of the First Part of the Method of Interior Prayer

The acts of the method of interior prayer
described in this part of the book
all have reference to the presence of God,
in which we have tried to place ourselves
at the beginning of interior prayer.
They will help us very much to remain therein
during the whole time of such prayer.

They can also be of great usefulness
to help keep the mind recollected,
not only during interior prayer
but also during the day.

There are nine acts that it is fitting to make
in the first part of interior prayer.

The Three Acts That Refer to God

The first three acts relate to God,
because they are addressed to God,
and the mind, in making them, occupies itself
with God,
with God's kindnesses,
or with graces we have received.

These three acts are:

- 1) an act of faith,
- 2) an act of adoration,
- 3) an act of thanksgiving.

Act of Faith

Immediately after impressing the mind
with the thought of the presence of God
by one of the six ways proposed above,
by attention of the mind mixed with a few reflections,
or by simple attention,
it is fitting to make an act of faith
on this truth that God is present to us,
according to the way that we chose
to become imbued with this truth of faith.

To make this act of faith more vital and more moving
and to remain in this sentiment of faith for a longer time,
we can profitably call to mind
one of the passages of Holy Scripture mentioned above
or another that is related to the way
by which we placed ourselves in God's presence.

When we notice that the mind is distracted
or is poorly attentive,
we can repeat the passage
and once more pay attention
to keep the mind more fixed
and more settled
on the presence of God.

**Example of an act of faith in the presence of God in the place
where we are, because God is everywhere, using these words of
Jacob:**

*Truly, the Lord is in this spot,
although I did not know it!*

Gen 28:16

How frightening it is to be in this place
without realizing that God is here,
without respect,
without a deep realization
of our nothingness before God,

and without remorse
at the thought of our sins.

I firmly believe, O my God, this truth
that you are here.

Is it possible that you would be here
and that I do not think of you?

I believe, O my God, that this place,
wherever it may be,
is the sanctuary of your divinity.

This is what made Jacob afraid
in the place where he was, cf. Gen 28:17
in view of his sins,
and this is what ought to make us have great confidence in you.

**Example of an act of faith in the presence of God in the place
where we are, because God is everywhere, using these words of
Jeremiah in which God says:**

Do I not fill both heaven and earth? Jer 23:24

You are in heaven, O my God,
and you are there in all its vastness.

You are also on earth,
which you permeate entirely, because it contains you,
or, rather, you contain it within you. cf. Wis of Sol 1:7

This I believe, O my God,
that wherever I go, I will find you,
and that there is no place not honored by your presence,
for as the Royal Prophet so rightly says, in Psalm 75,
*[God] is neither from the east nor from the west,
neither from the desert nor from the mountains;*
Ps 75:7; 135:7–10
Yet with you I shall always be. Ps 73:23

**Example of an act of faith in the presence of our Lord in the midst
of those gathered in God's name, by considering what Saint
Matthew says:**

*For where two or three are gathered together
in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.* Matt 18:20

I believe, O my God and Savior Jesus,
that you are in the midst of us

Example of an act of faith in God, who reigns in us, as our Lord says in Luke 17:21, and because we are God's temple, as Saint Paul tells us in 1 Cor 7:19

If I am fortunate enough to possess your holy grace,
I believe, O my God,
and am fully persuaded
that you are present cf. Luke 17:21
and reign in me.

Rule over all my movements,
both interior and exterior,
so that I may not be master of any of them.

Because you established your reign within me, O my God,
I beg you to direct all these movements cf. Rom 8:12–15
and not allow a single one
to escape from your control.

It is only right that you,
who reign in my heart,
be the master
of all that takes place within it.

Permit not, then, that I would act of my own accord
or under the inspiration of any human motives.

Eradicate so completely from my heart
all natural sentiments and affections
that nothing may appear in it
but what is from you and for you.
cf. Rom 8:1–14; Gal 5:13–25; Col 3,1–2

Example of an act of faith considering God reigning in our bodies as in his temple

What great purity I must cultivate in my body, O my God,
because it is your temple
and because you dwell in it. cf. 1 Cor 6:15–19; 2 Cor 6:16

Everything in me ought to proclaim the sanctity
of the one who resides there,
for as Saint Paul said:
*Do you not know that you are the temple of God
and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19

I must, then, offer you my body
as a living victim,
holy and agreeable in your eyes,

offering you rational and spiritual worship,
according to the words of the same Apostle. cf. Rom 12:1

I must then,
from this moment and in the future,
look upon my body
as consecrated to you and sanctified
by your dwelling within it.

In view of this, I must not allow in it
any movement that does not tend to you.
I must observe great restraint in the use of my senses,
out of respect for your holy presence.

Example of an act of faith considering God reigning in our soul as in his temple

I believe, O my God, that you are the treasure of my soul
and that it enjoys the blessing of possessing you.
As Saint Paul assures us,
we are the temple of the living God,
who dwells in us
and converses with us. cf. 2 Cor 6:16

You take up your dwelling in my soul
to let me enjoy your companionship
and to make it a place of your delight, cf. Mal 3:12; Jer 3:19
as in your sanctuary

I adore you in my soul,
as in the place where you dwell,
for in my soul you wish me to adore you
in spirit. cf. John 4:23

Inspire my soul with such total detachment
from all created things
that you may be well pleased there
and may fill me
with your blessings and your grace. cf. Eph 1:1–23

My soul, being adorned as is proper
for the place where you desire to establish your dwelling,
will be worthy to welcome you
and to keep you within itself.

Example of an act of faith in the presence of God in a church as the house of God

When I am in church, O my God,
I am in a most appropriate place to pray to you,
because it is your house and abode,
and you have said
that it is a house of prayer. cf. Matt 21:13; Rev 21:3

In this place you promise
to pour out your graces and blessings
on all who offer their prayers to you.
Here they will receive whatever they ask of you,
because, as you say,
*My eyes shall be open
and my ears attentive
to the prayers of this place.* 2 Chron 7:15

May my prayer here be agreeable to you!

Your special dwelling in this holy place,
which is totally consecrated to you, cf. 2 Chron 7:16
ought to incite us to pray here, O my God.

Because I wish only to love you
and desire only what can obtain this favor for me,
give me in this holy place the graces that I beg of you
in virtue of your holy presence
and because of your dwelling here. cf. 2 Chron 7:16

Example of an act of faith in the presence of God, because of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament

O my God and Lord Jesus, here is truly the place where you dwell
in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

In this sacred place, I can,
and, indeed, I must
recognize your presence,
because you truly reside
in this most holy and adorable Sacrament.

How happy must I consider myself to be here often,
to keep you company,
and to pay you my homage.

Although you are here,
hidden by a veil from my eyes,

you are here
 as great,
 as powerful,
 as adorable,
 and as lovable
 as you are in heaven,
 for you are the same God
 and are as truly present here
 as in heaven.

But here you are in this place,
 sacrificed for us out of love,
 and so here you are for us
 a loving God,
 a God of goodness.

You are here to pour out upon us all the blessings of heaven,
 provided we do not make ourselves unworthy of them
 by our sins
 and by our lack of gratitude
 for all your goodness.

After making or eliciting an act of faith in God's presence,
 it would be appropriate to reflect on this faith,
 keeping in mind the method we used
 when placing ourselves in that presence.

Example of a reflection on God's presence in the place where we are

Is it possible, O my God,
 that you would be in all the places
 where I go or where I am cf. Ps 139:7–10
 without my thinking of this? cf. Gen 28:16

Enlighten me, O my God, with your divine light,
 so that I may always be aware of you
 and recognize you always present in every place, cf. Ps 4:7
 so that the thought of your divine presence may restrain me
 from offending you. cf. Dn 13:23

How could I, depending as I do on God
 for my very being
 and for every blessing, cf. Acts 17:27–28
 dare to sin
 in the presence of my God? cf. Dan 13:23

How could I dare even to remain there
without respect and without decorum?

How could this be?

The presence of a king makes us restrain all the movements
of our body and soul,
so as not to perform a single action
except with circumspection,
because the prince
in whose presence we are
deserves this consideration.

Would we dare to fail in this regard before God,
in whose presence we are at all times,
wherever we may be
and wherever we may go?

cf. Ps 139:7–10

O my God, grant that the thought of your holy presence
may continually remain before my mind,
so that being always in your holy presence,
I may not fail for a single instant to think of you.

cf. Ps 16:8

When we begin to experience a certain facility
in making reflections on these acts,
we ought to use only a few words
in these reflections
and then try to pause for a few moments
in an attitude of inner silence,
to let these reflections penetrate the mind
in a more interior manner.

Using many words when praying in this way
tends to unsettle the mind
and disturb the depths of the soul,
rather than procure for us true awareness of God
in an interior manner.

Instead, such a multiplicity of words of the mind and heart
shrivels the soul,
is only passing,
and often leaves it devoid of God
and of spiritual and interior matters.

Just these few words,

O my God,
because you are always present before me,

cf. Ps 16:8

how could I dare take the liberty to do anything
that might displease you?

cf. Dan 13:,23

if they are well impressed upon the mind,
and are reflected upon seriously,
give the soul a vivid grasp of this truth,
which will then remain deeply engraved on it
and later can easily come back to the mind
from time to time.

Even if they do not come back,
the deep reflection we made on them will often leave behind
such an impression on the soul,
such a yearning for God,
such a horror for sin
and for anything that displeases God,
that the soul, often being aware of God,
will continue to hold sin in horror.

Thus the soul will gradually grow accustomed to delight in God
and in all that leads to God,
only because this helps us to possess God,
not as though this in itself were capable
of attracting the soul
or of causing the soul to cling to it
and to become attached to it.

Some passages of Holy Scripture are often very useful
to help us make reflections of this sort
in few words,
especially because, being the words of God
as faith makes them known to us,
they possess their own divine unction.

cf. 1 John 2:27

Of themselves they lead us to God,
make us delight in God,
help us keep God in our thoughts,
and preserve within us a delight for God.

We can use these two types of reflections
in all the acts of interior prayer.

After making an act of faith and some reflections on it,
as mentioned above,
we next make an act of adoration of God, who is present,
because adoration is the first duty a Christian owes God.

Act of Adoration

We make an act of adoration by recognizing God
as our creator and our sovereign Lord,
remaining in profound respect in God's holy presence and
realizing
our lowliness and nothingness,
our dependence on God,
our unworthiness to enjoy the advantage and happiness
of being in the divine presence.

Example of an act of adoration

You are adorable everywhere, O my God,
for you fill heaven and earth. cf. Jer 23:24

There is no place where you are not present
or where you must not be adored. cf. Ps 139:9–10

I am your creature,
and as such I must recognize your infinite greatness cf. Job 40:10
and your sovereign majesty cf. Sir 13:13
wherever I may be.

I must abase myself profoundly
in the sight of your infinite perfections
and of everything within you
that our minds cannot comprehend,
because we cannot understand either what you truly are
or the excellence of your divine being. cf. 1 Cor 2:6–16

O my God, I acknowledge you in this place
as in a place consecrated to you,
for your presence here consecrates it entirely
and makes it a sacred place
sanctified by you. cf. 2 Chron 7:16

I adore you, then, in this place
as in your temple and sanctuary,
for you impart to it a share of your holiness
by your dwelling here.

The angels who accompany you everywhere adore you here;
cf. Isa 6:2

it is, then, very fitting that I,
a miserable creature,
join them in paying you my homage.

I trust that you will find acceptable
the worship that I pay you
in union with the angels.

Act of Thanksgiving

The third act to be made in the first part of interior prayer
is an act of thanksgiving.

After acknowledging God's infinite greatness
and paying homage
because of God's sovereign excellence
and our dependence thereon,
it is only right that we recall to mind
that God shows us goodness
and has always done so
and that we offer God our very humble thanks.

In particular, we must thank God
for having created us,
redeemed us, cf. Col 1:15–20; Rom 6:22
and delivered us from our countless sins,
for having protected us
from the occasions of committing them again
and from the wickedness of the world cf. John 17:15
by bringing us into the community,
and for bestowing innumerable graces on us
from the moment of our existence,
especially for the grace at this very moment
of maintaining us in the divine presence
and allowing us to converse with God in prayer.

Example of an act of thanksgiving

I have received, O my God, so many blessings
from your infinite goodness
that I would have to be very ungrateful
if I failed to express to you
my most humble gratitude. cf. Ps 103:2

I owe you everything that I am;
there is nothing good in me that I have not received
from your infinite goodness. cf. 1 Cor 4:7

Thanks to you, I have been redeemed
and delivered from my many sins. cf. Col 1:1–15; Rom 6:22

By withdrawing me from the world, you have withdrawn me
from all the occasions of sin
I might have encountered
and in which I might have committed many more sins.

I beg of you, O my God, to give me the grace
never to forget such a great favor,
so that I may thank you for it
every moment of my life.

I must consider the advantage I have
of belonging to the community
as my sovereign happiness on this earth.
For me, living in community is an anticipation of paradise,
for in it I enjoy the blessing of possessing you
as far as faith allows me.

I am enjoying this blessing right now, O my God,
for you are present to me
as truly as you are present to the saints in heaven,
even though I am able to know and to delight in this privilege
only as far as a person can do through faith.

Still, I consider this such a great favor
that I am constantly prostrate
in mind and heart before you
to assure you how grateful I am.

This constitutes all the bliss of the angels and the saints,
although not in the same manner.

O my God, you are the object of their joy and happiness,
as you are of mine
and in which I delight at this moment
as I think of you.

Accept, I beg of you, O my God, my thoughts of you
and my affection for you
as expressions of gratitude for the grace you give me
of thinking of you at this moment
and of being taken up with the thought
of your holy presence, cf. Ps 16:8
for this is an action I can offer to you
that will be most agreeable to you.

The Three Acts That Refer to Us

The acts to be made next in interior prayer refer to us:

- 1) an act of humility,
- 2) an act of remorse,
- 3) an act of contrition.

Act of Humility

The act of humility is made by acknowledging ourselves unworthy to appear before God,
because we are nothing.

To maintain ourselves in this sentiment,
we can use these words of Abraham in Genesis:
*See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord,
though I am but dust and ashes?*

Gn 18:27; cf. Job 30:19; Ps 144:13

It is appropriate for us to make this act at this point,
for after offering God our homage
by adoration and thanksgiving
for allowing us to come and to speak,
it is only right that we look within ourselves and consider
what a great honor is given to us,
and how unworthy we are of this grace,
because we are nothing
and hence much less than dust and ashes. cf. Gen 18:27

Dust and ashes not only exist
but are also useful in some manner,
whereas, because we are nothing,
we are good for nothing;
we can do nothing of ourselves
but offend God.

We must always have this deeply impressed on our mind
in interior prayer,
so as to keep us in a sentiment of deep humility.

Example of an act of humility

What am I, O my God?
Of myself I possess only nothingness and sin; cf. Rom 7:14; Gal 6:3
that is all I can rightly claim as my own.

If an ancient hermit said to himself,
What can you glory in,
for you are nothing
but dust and ashes? cf. Gen 18:27; Job 30:19

what reason can I have to exalt myself,
convinced as I am that it would be paying me too much honor
to call me dust and ashes,
for dust and ashes are the work of God;
they do not belong to me,
rather, they belong entirely to God, who made them.

The only thing I can claim is nothingness;
that is all there is in me
except for what God has done,
and all that I can rightly claim is sin.

How then could I dare approach you
and think of you, cf. Gen 18:27
if I thought only of what I am?
All I can do, O my God,
is to humble myself before you,
recalling to mind who I am
and who you are.

Yet, what a great honor you pay me
by keeping me in your presence
and doing me the favor of conversing with me. cf. 2 Cor 6:16
You act thus, so that
as I am nothing of myself,
I may be wholly lost in you
and you may be totally in me.

Give me this grace, I beg of you, O my God,
for it is your will that I be entirely yours.

Act of Remorse

After this act of humility,
it is appropriate to make an act of remorse,
recognizing ourselves as unworthy to appear before God,
because we have so grievously offended God.

It is not sufficient for us
to admit our nothingness
and in consequence to humble ourselves.

It is also very useful to feel remorse in God's presence,
 because of our sins,
 and to make our own
 and to share the feelings of the tax collector in the Gospel.
 So great was the remorse he felt
 that he stood in the corner of the Temple,
 not daring even to lift his eyes to God, and said,
O God, be merciful to me, a sinner! Luke 18:13

Example of an act of remorse

*I acknowledge, O my God, my offense
 and my sin is before me always.
 Against you only have I sinned
 and done what is evil in your sight;
 in sin my mother conceived me.* Ps 51:5-7

This thought continually gives me
 a reason to feel remorse.

But this sentiment is powerfully increased in me
 when I dare appear in your presence
 and take the liberty
 of conversing with you in prayer.

Abraham, although a just man, did not dare to do this,
 because he considered himself nothing but dust
 that people trample on. cf. Gen 18,27

How then would I dare to presume this,
 covered with sin as I am?

Yet you pardon me, O my God!
 I come to you to avow my sins
 and to manifest to you my iniquity, cf. Ps 32:5
 because I know that this action not only
 will not incur your indignation
 but also will draw down your mercy on me. cf. Ps 32;1-5

This is why the remorse I feel
 over the great number of sins I have committed
 serves to increase my confidence,
 for the greater my remorse for having committed them,
 the more you will be willing to pardon them. cf. Ps 32:1-11; 51:10-14

This is why I beg of you, O my God,
to permit me to appear today in your presence
as a sinner full of remorse,
not only in appearance
but also in truth.

cf. Luke 18:9–14

Act of Contrition

After this act of remorse,
it is important to make an act of contrition
by asking God to pardon all our sins
and by making a firm resolution not to commit them again.
This act can obtain for us the remission of all our sins,
as David says,

*I acknowledged my sin to you;
my guilt I covered not.*

Ps 32:5

This act, made from the depth of our heart
and with a sincere resolve to give up our sins,
will cause God to forget them. cf. Isa 43:25
They will even be hidden; cf. Ps 85:3; 78:3
as David again says in the same Psalm,
they will not, during the whole time of interior prayer,
be imputed to the one who committed them. cf. Ps 32:1–2

This is why, when making this act,
we must especially strive to ask God for true contrition
and then have full confidence that God will not despise the prayer
of a contrite and humble heart,
as David says in Psalm 51:19.

Example of an act of contrition

How sorry I am, O my God,
for having so grievously offended you.
My sins are before me always.

cf. Ps 51:5

I cannot think of them
without fainting away,
to speak like the Royal Prophet,
when I reflect on the great number of sins
I have committed against you.

cf. Ps 38:5

I repeat with David:

*O Lord, reprove me not in your anger,
nor chastise me in your wrath.* Ps 6:2; 38:2

I know that I deserve nothing but your wrath,
but have compassion on me,
because I am so weak, even weakness itself.

Cast your eyes upon me, cf. Ps 69:17
and draw my soul from sin,
for no one but you can do this. cf. Ps 6:2–6

I offer you the sorrow of my heart
and its groanings,
because my sins are so great, cf. Ps 6:7
both in number and in grievousness,
that they rise over my head
and crush me down like a very heavy burden,
as David says. cf. Ps 38:5

How miserable I am, O my God,
seeing myself in this state!
I am afflicted and humbled beyond belief,
seeing myself overwhelmed by so many sins.
*All my desire is before you;
from you my groaning is not bidden.* Ps 38:10

Pardon me, then, for all my sins,
so that I may appear before you cf. Ps 51:3
in a state and in an attitude
that you will find agreeable. cf. Luke 18:9–14

I am ready, O my God,
to accept all the sufferings
it will please you to make me endure
to satisfy for my sins.

*Forsake me not, O Lord;
my God, be not far from me!* Ps 38:22
*Turn away your face from my sins,
and blot out all my guilt.*
*A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.* Ps 51:11–12

I hope for this grace from you, O my God,
because you will not despise the prayer
of those who humble themselves
and because this prayer is most agreeable to you. cf. Ps 51:19

After having made an act of contrition,
if it has been done with a sincere heart
deeply penetrated with horror for sin,
we may feel confident
that God will no longer consider our transgressions.
Thus we will be able to appear in the divine presence
as freed from our sins
or at least as covered by the veil of divine mercy
and goodwill toward us. cf. Ps 85:3; 78:38

The Three Acts That Refer to Our Lord

Because we cannot be certain
of having made a perfect and complete act of contrition,
it is important,
after striving to do so,
to make three other acts
that refer to our Lord.
These are the three final acts of this part of interior prayer.

The three acts that refer to our Lord are:

- 1) an act of application of the merits of our Lord,
- 2) an act of union with our Lord,
- 3) an act of invocation of the Spirit of our Lord.

Act of Application

Because we cannot be certain
that our act of contrition fulfilled all the required conditions,
we take the precaution of drawing down on ourselves
the merits of our Lord's Passion
and the graces he merited for us by his death,
which, by covering our sins as with a veil
to hide them from God's eyes, cf. Ps 85:3; 78:38
will place us in a better condition
to appear before God in prayer
in a manner agreeable to God. cf. Luke 18:9-14

This act of application of our Lord's merits is made
 by begging him to apply to us the merits of his Passion,
 so as to make us more agreeable to God his Father
 and better disposed to receive the graces and lights
 in interior prayer.

There is nothing we must fail to do,
 so that God may be moved by our prayers and may
 in divine goodness
 grant us all that we ask. cf. Heb 4:14–16; cf. John 15:16; 16:24–27

Example of an act of application of our Lord's merits

It is true, O my God, that when I am in your presence,
 my heart ought to be so filled with horror for sin
 that being entirely purified,
 I may be found worthy to converse with you.

But my heart is so strongly inclined to sin
 that I cannot know completely,
 much less be certain,
 whether the sorrow and pain I feel for my sins are genuine
 and whether I am ready to carry out what I have resolved.

This is why I insistently beg our Lord Jesus Christ
 to have the goodness to apply to me the merits
 that he graciously obtained for me
 by his Passion and death.

His merits are in themselves so supreme and so effective
 that once covered by them, cf. Ps 85:3; 78:38
 I will have no trace of sin left in me.
 I will be more agreeable to you, my God,
 and better disposed to receive your graces and lights
 in interior prayer,
 for there is nothing I would fail to do
 to receive the fullness of your blessings
 and to obtain the effect of my prayers.

So too there is nothing
 that will make me more capable of this
 than being clothed in your merits,
 for they give such purity and innocence to a soul
 that in a moment it becomes by them in your sight
 entirely different from what it was before.

This is the grace, O my Jesus, that I beg of you.

Act of Union with Our Lord

If this act of application of our Lord's merits is properly made,
it can truly make us agreeable to God,
give us a motive for willingly remaining in the holy presence,
and help us obtain the object of our prayers.

By this act our sins are hidden from God's sight, cf. Ps 85:3
and God no longer remembers our sinfulness, cf. Isa 43:25; Jer 31:34
because of the efficacy of the merits of our Lord,
which are applied to us.

Nevertheless, there remains for us the obligation
to make satisfaction for our sins,
for the merits of our Lord's Passion and death are applied to us
to bring about in us the destruction of sin,
but only on condition that we fully and entirely satisfy
the punishment due to them. cf. Jer 31:34

This is why it is only right that we not be content
with making an act of application of our Lord's merits;
we must also make an act of union with our Lord.

We must unite ourselves to his interior dispositions
when he made interior prayer
and beg him to come and make interior prayer in us
and present our needs to his Father. cf. Heb 5:1–10; 4:14–18

Jesus Christ thinks of us as belonging to him
as his very members, cf. 1 Cor 12:27
who have and can have no interior life, movement, or activity
but in him, cf. Acts 17:28
for these things exist in those who belong to him
only insofar as he gives life to them.

We must be convinced that if in his goodness
our Lord considers us worthy
of uniting himself to us in interior prayer
and of making interior prayer in us,
our prayer will be most agreeable to the eternal Father
and will draw down a great number of graces. cf. Heb 10:1–18

Example of an act of union with our Lord

I unite myself, O my dear Jesus,
to your interior dispositions when you made interior prayer.

It was truly then
that you were in the Father
and the Father in you. cf. John 14:11

It was then
that you thought as the Father thought,
that you loved what the Father loved,
and that you adored the divine will for you. cf. John 8:29

All you desired was to have the Father's holy will
fulfilled in you. cf. John 14:31; cf. John 5:30

Accomplish in me also
what you wish me to do. cf. Acts 22:10

Present my prayer
and make all my needs known cf. Heb 4:14–18
to your eternal Father. cf. Heb 5:1–10

May I think of the Father only through you
and love the Father only in you,
so that I may obtain in you and through you
what I of myself could never acquire.
May nothing that you have the goodness to ask for on my behalf
ever be refused me,
for I know, as you said,
Father, I know that you always bear me. John 11:42

Take possession of me, I beg you,
as one belonging to you;
fill me with your life
as being one of your members. cf. 1 Cor 12:27

May I abide in you,
and may you abide in me,
for I can do no good
except insofar as I am in you cf. John 15:4–5
and you are in me,
for you are the author of all good. cf. 1 Cor 8:6; 2 Cor 1:3

Finally, may my interior life be maintained and preserved
by the life you live in me,
for just as a branch can have no sap in it
unless it remains attached to the vine, cf. John 15:4
so too, O my loving Jesus,
my soul can have no life, movement, or interior activity cf. Acts 17:28
except insofar as it remains united with you
and I remain wholly one
with you and in you. cf. John 15:4

Act of Invocation of the Spirit of Our Lord

It is not enough in interior prayer
to have drawn our Lord to us,
to have united ourselves with him and with his holy dispositions,
and to have begged him to pray in us.

It can happen
that we might not remain in this disposition for very long,
because of the distractions that might fill the mind
during interior prayer,
or we might not draw much benefit from it,
because of natural thoughts and human considerations.

So, it would seem to be appropriate for us
to implore our Lord to give us his Spirit,
so that we may make interior prayer
solely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To be filled by his divine Spirit,
we need to abandon our own mind and our own thoughts
during interior prayer
and entertain within ourselves only those thoughts
with which the Holy Spirit may be pleased to inspire us
during this time.

Thus may be fulfilled in us what Saint Paul says,
that it is the Spirit of God who prays in us, cf. Gal 4:6
for we cannot conceive even a single good thought
as coming from ourselves. cf. 2 Cor 3:5; cf. 1 Cor 12:3

Example of an act of invocation of the Spirit of our Lord

My Savior Jesus,
you poured forth your divine Spirit on the holy Apostles
while they prayed in the Cenacle, cf. Acts 1:14; 2:1–2
where they had received your sacred Body
from your blessed hands.

I pray you, give me the grace
to receive your Holy Spirit today
and to pray only under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
so that when I possess this Spirit fully,
you will remove from my mind all my own thoughts.

Thus I will be occupied throughout my prayer
only with the thoughts that your divine Spirit
will be pleased to inspire in me
and to impart to me.

For as Saint Paul says,
No one can say, "Jesus is Lord,"
in a manner worthy of God
except in the Holy Spirit.

cf. 1 Cor 12:3

This same Holy Spirit
will make my prayer rise up to you
like sweet-smelling incense,
will preserve in me the spirit of this prayer,
and will keep alive the fire
that was enkindled within me during this time
to express myself with your own words.

cf. Ps 141:2

cf. Luke 12:49

So I say with the Church,
Come, O Holy Spirit,
and send down upon us from heaven
a ray of your holy light.

All the acts given as examples in this first part
have been offered only to help those
who are beginning to make that prayer
and who cannot as yet produce their own acts.

Such people ought to select those they think proper
or find useful for themselves.

If they cannot use these,
they can make other acts
based on the examples offered here,
according as the mind and the heart may suggest.

It is not intended
that they simply get into the habit of using the acts given here.
If they do,
their interior prayer would not truly be prayed from the heart
but would degenerate into vocal prayer,
which would not have the same value for them
as it would if produced in them by the Holy Spirit,
who inspires them to make interior prayer
from the depths of the heart.

The same can be said of all the other acts offered as examples
in the explanation of the Second and Third Parts.

**The Second Part
of the Method of Interior Prayer**

Considering a Mystery

In the second part of interior prayer,
we may take one of the mysteries of our holy religion
as a subject of our meditation,
especially the mysteries of our Lord.

By the mysteries of our Lord's life, we mean the principal actions
that the Son of God accomplished for our salvation,
such as his Incarnation, Nativity, Circumcision,
Passion, and Death.

We may also meditate on the mysteries of the Most Blessed Virgin,
such as her Immaculate Conception , her Nativity,
and the like.

We begin by filling ourselves with the spirit of the mystery.
This can be done by considering
either what is said of it in the Gospel
or what the Church teaches on the subject.

We may either have a simple view of faith,
that is, by a simple attention to the mystery,
which we believe because faith teaches it to us,
or we may make some reflections on the mystery
or on what the meditation text says about it.

These reflections can stir up our devotion to this mystery
and inspire in us an attitude of interior respect
as we consider it.

To this respect for the mystery
we join an interior desire of profiting by it
and of receiving the spirit, the grace, and the benefits
that our Lord wishes us to draw from it.

For Jesus performed these divine mysteries of our holy religion
 not only to redeem us
 but also to instruct us
 and to lead us by his example
 to the practice of the most solid and sanctifying virtues.

He practiced such virtues
 in the sacred mysteries that he accomplished.
 This is what is called the spirit of these mysteries.

Each of these mysteries has a spirit proper and special to itself,
 because our Lord practiced certain virtues
 that are especially evident
 and that we observe
 in a special way with admiration and astonishment
 when we pay serious and deep attention to the
 mystery.

Our Lord practiced these virtues
 to give us an example
 and to lead us to practice them in imitation of him
 with the help of his grace.

He merited this grace for us
 and attached it to the mystery
 as being part of the spirit and of the action.

The spirit of the mystery of the Incarnation, for example, is love.
 By love for us

(as our Lord says),
 the eternal Father gave the Son, cf. John 3:16
 the Son became man, and
 the Holy Spirit accomplished this mystery. cf. Matt 1:20

It is also humility,
 because, as Saint Paul says,
*The Son of God emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave.* Phil 2:7

The spirit of the mystery of our Lord's Nativity
 is the spirit of childhood;
 when the Son of God came into this world, cf. John 1:11
 as we read in Saint John's Gospel,
*to those who did accept him,
 he gave power to become children of God.* John 1:11–12

This spirit of childhood
 consists in simplicity, docility, purity, cf. Eph 6:5; 4:2; Col 3:23
 and no concern for worldly riches and grandeur. cf. Luke 6:24–26

The spirit of the mystery of the Circumcision cf. Luke 2:22–24
is humility and mortification.

Our Lord humbled himself in accepting circumcision
as the mark of a sinner
and shed his blood in suffering and pain. cf. Heb 9:11–15

The spirit of the mystery of the Transfiguration
is the spirit of prayer. cf. Luke 9:28–29

And thus with the others.

The Three Acts That Refer to Our Lord

We may make nine acts in this second part,
all referring to the mystery that we are considering.

The first three refer to our Lord;
the next three, to us,
and of the last three,
the first refers to our Lord;
the second, to God, and
the third, to the saints.

Thus each of these three final acts has a particular object:
the first has for its object our Lord;
the second, God the Father,
and the third, the saints
to whom we have a special devotion.

The three acts that refer to our Lord are

- 1) an act of faith,
- 2) an act of adoration,
- 3) an act of thanksgiving.

Act of Faith in a Mystery

We may make an act of faith in the mystery we have chosen
as the subject of our prayer,
for instance, the Nativity of our Lord.

We make an act of firm belief that he accomplished this mystery,
that in becoming incarnate,

he was born as a little child
of the Most Blessed Virgin.

To convince ourselves more firmly of this truth,
we may call to mind a passage of Holy Scripture
that teaches it to us or refers to it,
such as the words of the Angel to the shepherds
in Saint Luke,
*Today in the city of David,
a Savior has been born for you,
who is the Messiah and Lord.* Luke 2:11

Or we may call to mind these words of Saint Matthew,
quoting the Prophet Isaiah,
*Behold, the virgin shall be with child
and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means "God is with us."* Matt 1:23; Isa 7:14

Consideration by Short and Multiple Reflections

Example of an act of faith

My Lord Jesus Christ, I firmly believe cf: John 1:14,18
that you are the only Son of God, the almighty Father, cf: 1 John 4:9
that you are one eternal God with the Father,
and that you humbled yourself to become human, cf: Heb 2:14
clothing yourself in our flesh
by taking up a body and a soul like ours,
through the operation of the Holy Spirit,
in the womb of the most pure Virgin, cf: Luke 1:35;
from which you were born as a tiny child cf: Matt 1:20
without ceasing to be God.

This I believe, O my Savior,
because faith teaches me this truth.

A way of occupying ourselves with this act of faith

Yes, my God,
I believe that you became a little child
out of love for me.
You were born in a stable cf: Luke 2:7
and you lay on straw and hay
in darkest night cf: Wis 18:14–15
and in the depths of winter. cf: Luke 2:7

Your love for me reduced you
to this state of poverty and wretchedness
and to such extreme destitution
that nothing like it had ever been heard of before.

O my Lord, I believe
all these truths that faith teaches me
about your love for me.
You could have been born amid the abundance of riches,
surrounded by the glory and splendor
of the most magnificent palace ever built.

At your birth you could have taken possession
of all the kingdoms of this earth,
for they all belong to you. cf. Luke 4:5-6
The Lord's are the earth and its fullness
says the royal Prophet, Ps 24:1
but you did not choose to enjoy all these rights,
O my divine Savior.

Your infinite wisdom judged it much more advantageous for you
to give me in your adorable Person
the example of the kind of life I must live
and the path I must follow.
By despising the perishable goods of this earth
and its false and fleeting honors,
I attain true glory and the enjoyment of true good,
that is, spiritual and heavenly riches.

You know well how my strong inclinations
of pride and of selfishness
and my avidity for sensual pleasure
passionately dominate me.

In your infinite love and goodness, you resolved
to heal me of this deadly malady
at your own expense
and then to gain for me the grace to follow you
and to walk in your footsteps. cf. 1 Pet 2:21

This is what I am resolved to do, O my loving Savior,
whatever it may cost me,
whatever repugnance my corrupt nature may experience,
whatever difficulties my self-love may encounter.

O my God, I beg you to help me
in my weakness, which is so overwhelming when I wish to act.

Grant me the grace to imitate you,
which you have won for me in this mystery,

I pray, O Lord, that you increase my faith,
which is so frail.

cf. Mark 9:24

Another example of exploring this act of faith by considering that our Lord has made us children of God

I believe with all my heart, O my God, that you are the eternal Word,
the one true Son of God the Father,
and that you became a child of the human race
to merit for me the grace
of becoming a child of God, your Father.

cf. 1 John 4:9; Gal 4:4

The infinite greatness of your love, Lord,
led you to this excess
of abasement and humiliation.

cf. Phil 2:7

You came unto your own,
says the Evangelist, Saint John,
that is, into this world, which belongs to you,
but your own did not receive you.

cf. John 1:11

The Jews, who were your special people and your servants,
did not acknowledge you;
they rejected you and would not welcome you.

But to those who received you,
you gave the power of becoming children of God.

cf. John 1:12

The Jews refused to acknowledge you,
because of the poor and miserable condition
in which you chose to enter this world.

cf. Luke 2:7

They were scandalized by your exterior lowly state;
they could not admit that your wisdom
and your love for us

could lead you to share our wretched state
in order to enrich us with the inestimable treasure
of your grace in this world
and your glory in the next.

cf. John 1:29

cf 1 Cor 1:22–25

O excessive bounty of my God!
You humbled yourself in this world
to lift me up to heaven.
You became miserable on earth
to make me blessed in heaven.

O infinite love of God's eternal Son!
You became my brother
 when you made yourself a son of the human race,
and you were not ashamed,
 as the Apostle says in Hebrews, chapter 2,
to call us brothers,
 saying to your Father,
 *I will proclaim your name to my brothers;
 I will praise you in the midst of the assembly,
 I and the children God has given me.*

Now because the children,
 adds Saint Paul,
*share the same flesh and blood,
Jesus Christ also shared in it
 and had to become like us in every way,
so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God
 to expiate the sins of the people.
Because he was tested through what he suffered,
 he is able to help those who are being tested.* Heb 2:11–18

What a great happiness this is, what prodigious joy!
What lofty nobility I enjoy,
 surpassing any the world can offer!

I can be for all eternity the child of God!
What a dignity, what a privilege, what a blessing!
My soul, can you grasp it?

It is you, O unique, eternal, and dearest Son of God,
 to whom I owe everything.
It is your love, O my Lord and my God,
 to which I am indebted for this incomparable favor.
When you became the child of the most pure Virgin,
you won for me the power to enjoy the grace of adoption
 as a child of God,
 according to an expression of Saint Paul. cf. Rom 8:14–15

Grant, O my loving Jesus,
that I may make myself as worthy as I can of this grace,
 which it cost you so dearly to merit for me.

O Lord, may I live in such a manner
that there may be at least some resemblance
 between my life and yours
 through my imitation of your sacred virtues.

I beg of you this grace of the spirit of the mystery
of your adorable birth and childhood.
I implore you, Lord, to grant me this
through the merits of your birth.

Example of a prayer addressed to the Most Blessed Virgin with respect to the preceding mystery

O Most Blessed Virgin, I firmly believe
that Jesus, our Lord,
the only Son of God the Father,
was conceived in your womb
by the power of the Holy Spirit. cf. Luke 1:35; Matt 1:20
I believe this because faith teaches me so.

In you, O most fortunate Virgin, cf. Luke 1:35; Matt 1:20
the prophecy of Isaiah was accomplished:
*The virgin shall be with child and bear a son
and shall call him Emmanuel.* Isa 7:14

You were a virgin
when you conceived this divine Infant.
You were a virgin
when you brought him forth,
and you remained a virgin
after giving birth to him.

You are the purest of virgins
and the most glorious of mothers. cf. Matt 1:22–23

For this reason you will be called blessed
by all generations to come. cf. Luke 1:48

I believe all these truths taught me by faith,
because God has revealed them.
I greatly rejoice in them, O Most Blessed Virgin;
I praise you with all my heart.

I very humbly beg you, O most holy Mother of God,
to intercede for me in your goodness
with your divine Child,
that I may be allowed to share in the spirit and the graces
proper to the mystery of his birth
and most holy childhood.

Through you, O incomparable Virgin,
this God of love and mercy came down to save us.

In you
he became a human child, cf. Gal 4:4; John 1:1–18

just as he is truly the Son of God
from all eternity. 1 John 4:9; Heb 1:3

In you he merited for us the grace
to become adopted children
of God, his Father. cf. Rom 8:15

We hope to enjoy, cf. Gal 4:6; John 1:12
through your intercession with your very dear Son,
the effects of this grace
and the spirit of children of God.

We beg you to obtain this for us
through the love with which you love this God of love
as your true son
and through the love by which he loves you
as his true mother.

Benefits That We Can Derive from These Considerations

The first benefit we can derive
from the consideration of the birth of our Lord
is a great horror and aversion for sin of any kind,
because the Son of God abased and humbled himself,
as Saint Paul says in Philippians:
He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave Phil 2:7
when he became a child,
in order to destroy sin by his sufferings. cf. Heb 2:17–18

The second benefit we can derive is great confidence
that we will obtain from God the pardon of our sins,
provided we truly repent of them
and are resolved not to commit any more voluntarily,
and all the other graces we may ask for
through the merits of the Son of God become a child.

The third benefit
is a great love for our Lord
and a tender devotion toward him,
considered as our infant God
born for love of us.

The fourth benefit we derive
is a great contempt for the riches and honors of the world,
because we behold the Son of God
born poor and humble in this world.

Finally, the fifth benefit
is a great desire to imitate Jesus in all the virtues
of which he gives us an example in his birth.

Example of a prayer to our Lord, born into this world to destroy sin

O my Lord and God, how could I dare commit sin again, knowing,
as Saint John says in his first Epistle,
that you came to take away and destroy our sins,
which are the works of the devil? cf. 1 John 3,5-8

How could I do this?
Will I restore in myself what you came to destroy
with so much suffering and pain?

My sins, O Lord, reduced you to this state of infancy
in poverty and humiliation.

My sins made you shed so many tears
from the moment of your birth.

My pride
and my love of luxury and vanity
humbled you
to the point of being born in a stable,
lying in a manger
on a bed of straw
between two lowly animals. cf. Luke 2:7

To shame me and to destroy my selfishness,
my insatiable lusting after possessions and wealth,
and my ill-regulated love of pleasures and comfort,
you endured such harsh poverty.

Now, realizing all these truths,
would I dare to commit sin again?
O Lord, do not permit me to be so heartless
as to love sin any longer,
for it cost you so much to destroy it.

You are
my Creator,
my Father,
my King,
my God.

Oh, I would rather die than continue in my evil ways
or return to those from which you delivered me!

Almighty Savior, my loving Jesus,
by the grace and the power of your adorable nativity,
destroy and remove from me all sin cf. 1 John 3:5–8
and all inclination to sin.

Mercifully pardon me for all the sins
I have had the misfortune to commit. cf. Ps 25:11

We may also converse with God on the second benefit
of reflecting on the birth of our Lord,
namely, confidence:

I ought to feel great confidence, my loving Savior,
that your heavenly Father will pardon my sins
for love of you
and through your merits.

I have confidence that for your sake
and in view of your infinite merits,
he will grant me all the graces I need to avoid sin, cf. Heb 4,16
to correct my defects,
and to acquire the virtues he desires to see in me,
and in the end he will grant me eternal life.

Your Apostle encourages me to have this confidence
when he says, in Romans, chapter 8:
*He who did not spare his own Son
but handed him over for the sake of us all,
will he not grant us all things besides?* Rom 8,32

Yes, my divine Savior,
I hope for everything
from the infinite bounty of your Father,
even though I am guilty of many sins,
for which I have deserved hell.

You are the precious pledge cf. Rom 5:8; John 3:16; Eph 5:2
of the love that God has for me
and of God's willingness to pardon me
and to save me.

You assure us in Holy Scripture
that God does not will the death of the sinner
but rather that he be converted,
live, and reach salvation. cf. Ezek 18:32; 33:11

You are, O my loving Jesus, infant God,
a convincing proof of this truth.

I place all my confidence
in the mercy of your heavenly Father,
in your love,
and in your merits. cf. Eph 3:11–12

Example of a prayer of love for the infant Jesus

How could I fail to love you, O eternal Word?
Your infinite love for me
led you to take on human flesh,
as Saint John says. cf: John 3:16; 1:14

You had every reason,
because of the enormity of my sins, cf. Ps 103:10
to hate me eternally and to punish me
according to the strict rigor of your justice,
and yet you gave me proofs of infinite love!

How can this be? You made yourself an infant,
a poor, humble infant,
and the most lovable of all infants.

What love do you not show me,
and how little have I loved you until now!
What striking proofs you give me of your love,
and how poorly I have responded to them!

Pardon me, my God,
and grant me, I beg you, your holy grace,
for with its help I am resolved to love you
with all my heart,
with all my soul,
and with all my strength. cf. Deut 6:5

O Jesus, infant God,
my loving Savior,
beloved son of Mary and of God,
I pledge you inviolable and everlasting love.
I offer you, I give you, I consecrate to you this heart of mine;
fill it with your divine love. cf. Rom 5:5

O God of love,
let me love you with all the love
with which you want me to love you.

Lord, may I live
and may I die
in your love
and for your love.

for as long a time as we can
and in the liveliest
and simplest manner possible for us.

This short reflection, based on faith
and inspired by a passage from Holy Scripture,
gives the soul a certain facility
in applying itself to the mystery
in an interior manner
and in imbuing itself with it,
so that the mystery imprints itself in the mind and heart,
which are thus filled with it and shaped by it.

Mind and heart will then share in the spirit and the grace
particular to the mystery,
and by this means they will gently and tenderly be disposed
and inclined to practice the virtues
illustrated in the mystery.

This is the end that we must always keep in view
and that our Lord had in mind
when accomplishing his mysteries.

When we perceive that the mind no longer finds it easy
to pay attention to the passage
by means of this first reflection,
we try another reflection,
which is also connected with the passage
and can renew the mind's attention to it.

We might try this other reflection:
Because God loved me enough to become a child
for love of me,
is it not right that I consider myself helpless
and humble myself like a child
for love of God?

This new reflection revives our attention
to the passage and to the mystery;
as a result, the mind and the heart will turn to them
with renewed affection and fervor.

Consideration by Simple Attention

Finally, we can consider a mystery by simple attention,
also called contemplation.

This consists in keeping ourselves,
 while considering the mystery,
in an attitude of deep interior respect
 by a simple interior view
 of lively and respectful faith,
which leads the mind and heart to a sentiment
 of silent adoration,
 of love,
 of admiration,
 of gratitude and thanksgiving,
 of self-abasement,
 and of a desire of the heart
 to unite ourselves with our Lord in this mystery
 and to share in his spirit and his graces.

We ought to remain in this attitude
 for a more or less lengthy period,
 as long as we feel drawn and absorbed by it.
We must not interrupt this process
by making distinct acts on these different interior dispositions.

It is not necessary to differentiate these dispositions
 one from the other,
for we can conceive them
with a simple and implicit movement of the heart,
 that is,
without explaining them,
distinguishing them,
or separating them into formal acts.

We continue in this disposition,
 provided that it remains lively and ardent
 and can be maintained by a few affectionate words
 pronounced from time to time,
 more or less frequently
 as the need is felt.

Interior prayer always ought to lead to the practice of virtue,
 as mentioned previously.

What is said in the First Part
about the three ways of keeping us in the presence of God
can easily be applied to a mystery.

These three ways of engaging in interior prayer on a mystery,
 as also in considering the holy presence of God,

can be related to the three stages of the spiritual life:
discourses and multiple reasoning befit beginners;
few and prolonged reflections befit the proficient;
simple attention befits the advanced.

Act of Adoration

After making an act of faith on the mystery
and spending some time dwelling on it
in one of the ways just proposed,
it is proper to make an act of adoration,
to do homage to our Lord
in his accomplishment of the mystery
on which we are making our prayer
and to remain before him with profound respect
and attention to his presence.

Example of an act of adoration considering our Lord as a newborn infant lying in the crib

Humbly prostrate before your crib,
O most holy and adorable Child Jesus,
I offer you my deepest expression of respect
and recognize you as the God of majesty
dwelling in heaven
in light inaccessible,
as Saint Paul says. cf. 1 Tim 6:16

You are, O my Lord,
the eternal Word begotten by the eternal Father.
Through you all things were made; cf. John 1:3
by you they subsist and are governed,
O Wisdom of the Father! cf. Col 1:16–17

Out of love you have become a child of the human race
for us and for our salvation.
Heaven and earth are filled with your majesty and glory. cf. Isa 6:3
Yet behold, here you are, in a stable
and lying in a manger! cf. Luke 2:7

O great God! O tiny infant!
I adore you with all my heart.
I adore your infinite greatness,
 contained in the small body of this infant,
 yet not ceasing to fill
 and to encompass the entire universe. cf. Wis of Sol 1:7

God commanded the angels to adore you
 and your coming on earth. cf. Heb 1:6
They do so,
 proclaiming glory to God most high
 and announcing to us the peace
 which you have come to bring to earth
 for all people of goodwill. Luke 2:13–14

I unite myself to these celestial spirits to pay you,
 O my God, my Savior,
all the homage due to you.

I humble myself before you,
 O Lord of angels and men,
and wish to render you homage
 with all the powers of my soul.

I annihilate myself at your feet
 in adoration of your own annihilation
and wish to honor yours by mine,
 as far as this is possible.

Example of an act of adoration of our Lord as a child in the arms of his holy mother

O great, eternal God!
In heaven you are seated upon the cherubim,
 as Holy Scripture tells us. cf. Dan 3:55; Ex 25:18
You are begotten by the Father
 in the splendor of the saints. cf. Ps 80:2; 99:1

Yet out of love for us,
you did not think it beneath you to abandon your infinite majesty
 to the point of becoming a tiny infant like us
 and of being born of a virgin.

I adore you in the arms of your most holy mother
as on the throne most worthy of your majesty
 after the throne of your heavenly Father.

I prostrate myself at the foot of this throne of grace
to offer to your supreme majesty cf. Heb 4:16
all the honor in my power.

I acknowledge you as my God,
my Redeemer and Savior, cf. Heb 2:17
who has come to ransom me
and deliver me from my sins. cf. Luke 1:68–69

You are the Lord, the true Christ,
Son of the living God, cf. Matt 16:16; Mark 8:2–9
the Messiah sent by God, your Father, Luke 9:20
promised by the Prophets cf. Luke 1:70
and so long desired
as the one Savior of the world. cf. John 4:42

I adore you, O Jesus,
Son of God, Son of David,
and Son of the immaculate virgin. cf. Matt 1:1–18

You are my Lord and my God. cf. John 20:28

I submit myself totally and irrevocably to you
as to my eternal King, on whom I depend
and desire to depend forever.

I swear eternal fidelity, obedience, and love
to you, O my sovereign Lord.

Help me, O my adorable Savior,
by the all-powerful grace
that you came to merit and to bring for us
by your holy birth,
so that I may persevere unswervingly unto death
in the fidelity I owe you
and now promise you.

I ask this, O my loving Jesus,
through the intercession of your most holy Mother.

Example of an act to honor the Most Blessed Virgin as Mother of God

Most glorious Virgin Mary, mother of my God,
on that happy day
when you gave birth in all purity to the infant God,
you also became most specially our mother
and the Queen of all creatures
in heaven and on earth.

I prostrate myself with all my soul at your feet
to render you under these titles
all the reverence that can be given to you.
You are the Mother of my Creator
and my own mother;
you are my Queen and sovereign Lady.

I honor and reverence you, and I love you above all things,
after God and your divine Son.
I submit myself to your gracious power
in time and in eternity.

O my loving mother,
who would not be subjected to you,
after God willingly became obedient to you
as your child?
O, with all my heart I too subject myself to you.

cf. Luke 2:51

I beg you, most holy Mother of God, to obtain for me
from your beloved Son
the grace to live and die
in submission to him and to you.

Act of Thanksgiving

After adoring our Lord in this mystery
and paying him the first duty we owe him,
namely, adoration,
we make an act of thanksgiving
to manifest our gratitude to our Lord
and to thank him for his goodness in performing this mystery
and for all that his great love caused him to do and suffer
to bring about our sanctification.

Example of an act of thanksgiving

How right it is, O my Lord,
that I profess my entire gratitude to you
and offer you my very humble thanks,

because in your great goodness to me,
 you chose to be born an infant
 in order to sacrifice yourself
 by offering yourself to the justice of God, your Father
 as a living, pure, holy, cf. Heb 9:14
 and agreeable victim to God cf. Heb 2:17
 for the expiation of my sins
 and for my sanctification. cf. Heb 10:11–14; 13:12

I thank you with all my heart, O God,
 for your great goodness.
 I offer you a thousand tokens of gratitude
 for such a great blessing.

By sinning I made myself the child and slave of the devil,
 an object of hatred
 in the sight of your Father,
 worthy of eternal death. cf. Rom 5:12

But you were touched with compassion
 at the sight of my miseries and my distress. Hos 11:8–9
 You came down to earth to deliver me. cf. Jer 31:20; Isa 54:8

O infinite charity of my God!
 O incomprehensible goodness!
 What can I offer you for so great a blessing? cf. Ps 116:12

I want to offer you infinite thanks,
 but because I cannot do so, I beg you, O my loving Savior,
 to make up for my weakness.
 Accept my goodwill and the offering I make to you
 of all the acts of thanksgiving
 offered to you by your most holy Mother
 and all the blessed angels and saints,
 as also all my thoughts, words, and actions.
 I beg you to bless them
 and make them agreeable in your sight
 by uniting them to your own. cf. Rom 12:1

In all this I seek nothing
 but to please you alone, O my God.

I also offer you my will, wishing to use it
 only in submission to your will
 and in dependence on you.

Such is the grace I beg of you, O my God,
 through the merits of your holy birth.

The Three Acts That Refer to Us

After we have made the first three acts that refer to our Lord,
we make the next three that refer to us:

an act of remorse,
an act of contrition,
and an act of application.

Act of Remorse

We make an act of remorse
by acknowledging before God how ashamed we are
for not having sufficiently applied ourselves
up to the present
to acquire the spirit of the mystery.

By this spirit we conduct ourselves
with the simplicity, docility, and submission cf. Eph 6:5
that become a child of God, Col 3:22; 3:12
and we despise riches, pleasure, and worldly honors, Matt 18:3
preferring poverty, suffering, and contempt to them,
in imitation of our Lord in his birth. cf. Luke 6:20–26

It would be very appropriate to think of the principal occasions
when we have failed in this regard,
in order to experience deeper remorse.

Example of an act of remorse

What shame and remorse must be mine,
O my Lord and my God,
when in your holy presence I consider and recognize
that up until now,
I have not or have hardly made an effort
to acquire the spirit of the mystery
of your holy birth and childhood.

Alas, my Lord! I have not yet seriously fixed the eyes
of my mind and of my faith
on this mystery, which you have brought about
as much for my instruction
as for my sanctification.

What have you done, O my God?
 You have humbled and annihilated yourself, O my Lord! cf. Phil2:6–8
 How you overwhelmed my pride!
 How you covered me with great remorse!
 How right I am to apply to myself
 these reproaches of Saint Bernard:

Blush for shame, O worm of the earth!
 God becomes humble for us,
 and you want to raise yourself up!
 God becomes subject to us, cf. Luke 2:51
 and you in your pride
 refuse to subject yourself to God!

I behold you poor, suffering the direst want,
 enduring mortification and pain,
 and I,
 a miserable and unworthy sinner cf. Ps 51:7
 who by right ought to be in hell
 suffering infinite torments,
 am unwilling to suffer anything,
 either poverty or pain.

O my God, how ashamed I am of myself in your sight!

To intensify my remorse even more,
 I wish to recall to mind at least some of the occasions
 on which I failed to practice these virtues
 of which you give me such admirable examples.

My God, I was wanting in submission, docility, simplicity cf. Eph 6:5
 on such and such occasions. . . . Col. 3:12; 3,22

I shrank from poverty. cf. Luke 6:24–26

I kept attachments to this or to that.
 I sought my comfort on such and such an occasion.
 What great remorse I have, O my God, over all this.

In your infinite goodness, grant me the grace at least
 to suffer this remorse
 as a means of expiating my sins.

Act of Contrition

The act of remorse, made with sincerity and thoroughness,
disposes us to make a good act of contrition,
 which is most appropriate at this point,
to beg God's pardon for the faults we committed
 against the spirit of the mystery.
For the future, we resolve to be more faithful
in embracing this spirit
 and in conforming to it.

Example of an act of contrition

Not only, my Savior, do I feel deep remorse
 when I see that I have lived all my life
 in dispositions and sentiments so far removed
 from those you exemplify for me in this mystery,
but also I feel great sorrow for acting in this way.

O my God, I am deeply grieved and contrite for my conduct,
 which is not very Christian.

I beg your pardon for this with profound humility
 through the merits of your sacred nativity
 and your divine childhood.

Give me your help, O my loving Savior, and your holy grace,
 to which I promise you to be more faithful in the future
 in following the spirit of your mystery.

Act of Application

After this act of contrition,
it will be most profitable to make an act of application,
 so that we may draw greater benefit from the mystery.

This we do by applying the mystery to us,
considering before God the great need we have
 to acquire the spirit of the mystery,
with special attention to the occasions
 when we ought to do so.

For this purpose we take appropriate and special means
 to conduct ourselves according to this spirit
 when the opportunity to do so arises.

I seem to hear your heavenly Father telling me,
while pointing to your adorable person
humbled and annihilated under the form of an infant:
cf. Phil 2:6–8

*Amen, I say to you,
unless you turn
and become like children,
you will not enter
the kingdom of heaven.* Matt 18:3

O my God, I am convinced of this truth,
that if I wish to share in your glory in heaven,
I must make myself like you on earth. cf. Rom 8,17
This is what I am resolved to do
with the help of your grace.

You teach me by your extreme poverty
and by your sufferings
to prefer poverty, the world's contempt, and mortification
to riches, honors, and pleasures. cf. Luke 6:20–26

This I propose to do, after your example.
Help me, my God,
for without you I can do nothing. cf. John 15:5

During this act of application, we form resolutions,
although we can form or renew them during any act whatsoever.

This is what is meant by taking appropriate and special means
to conduct ourselves
according to the spirit of the mystery.

The resolutions we make ought to have these three qualities:

- 1) present, so that they are put into effect the same day that they are made;
- 2) particular, so that we propose some definite acts related to the virtues we have observed in the mystery and foresee the occasions when we will strive to put them into practice;
- 3) effective, so that we take care to carry them out when we have the opportunity, without allowing any to slip away.

Example of forming resolutions

My God,

to profit by the grace of your holy birth
and to imitate the holy examples you gave me,

I will today accuse myself of my faults
with all possible simplicity.

I will obey blindly in all things
those under whose authority I am,
reflecting on nothing other than that I must obey
like our Savior, the child Jesus.

cf. Luke 2:51

If I am commanded to do such or such a thing,
I fear I would then experience great distaste,
but, most holy infant God, for your love
and to imitate you,
I am resolved to obey.

I will give an account of my conscience
without dissimulation;
I will reveal all that goes on within me,
with the simplicity and the candor
of a small infant,
in your honor, O divine Infant.

Perhaps today something will be taken away from me or exchanged.
It seems that I would be disturbed
if I were deprived of certain things.

My God, in honor of your poverty,
I resign myself to this;
if it does happen to me,
I will bless you
and rejoice over it.

It seems to me that I am attached to certain things;
I will make this known
for your love's sake and in imitation of you,
so that they may be taken from me or exchanged
if it is thought proper.

I prefer to be poor and in want of everything
in union with you, O my God,
rather than to be rich
without you.

I will pray that I may be put to the test
in all these things to which I am sensitive,
and I will reveal what they are.

Help me by your grace, I beg you, O my loving Savior,
to put these resolutions faithfully into practice.

To obtain this from your goodness,
I propose to cultivate a special devotion
to your divine Infancy
and to recite the litanies
with renewed attention.

I will honor you in a special way
on the 25th of each month.

To encourage myself to become more childlike
and to imitate you,

I will often think that your heavenly Father is speaking to me
and saying:

*Amen, I say to you,
unless you turn
and become like children,
you shall not enter
the kingdom of heaven.*

Matt 18:3

The Last Three Acts When Considering a Mystery

After the three acts that concern us are made,
there are still three:

- 1) an act of union with our Lord,
- 2) an act of petition to God,
- 3) an act of invocation to the saints
to whom we have a particular devotion.

Act of Union with Our Lord

We make an act of union with our Lord
by uniting ourselves interiorly with his Spirit in this mystery
and with the interior dispositions he had
in accomplishing it.

We ask him for a share in this Spirit
and in these dispositions
and beg him earnestly to give us the grace

to acquire the spirit of this mystery
and to practice the virtues of the mystery.

Our Lord became a child cf. John 3:5–7; 1:12
to merit for us the grace
to be regenerated in spirit cf. 1 John 3:1–3
and to become in him children of God cf. Gal 4:5
through adoption and by the grace
which is in Jesus Christ
and which he came to bestow on us,
as Saint John says. cf. John 1:17

It is, then, entirely appropriate
to unite ourselves with Jesus Christ in his birth,
so as to receive and to share his Spirit,
which gives us access to the Father cf. Gal 4:5–6
as adopted children in the only Son. cf. Rom 8:14–17
We ask our Lord to unite us to his own dispositions.

Examples of an act of union with our Lord

I unite myself to you, divine Jesus, infant God,
with an ardent desire to share in the spirit of your holy infancy,
in your dispositions,
and in the grace you merited for me
in the mystery of your holy birth.

I most humbly beg you, loving child Jesus,
to draw me into your divine heart,
to impart to me your Holy Spirit,
and to endow me with the disposition you had
in the stable at Bethlehem,
lying in the crib on hay and straw cf. Luke 2:8
or in the arms of your holy mother.

I earnestly beg you to impart to me the sentiments and the affections
of humility, docility, submission, and obedience
that you felt toward your heavenly Father, cf. Heb 10:5
and the feelings of your most holy mother
and those of your foster father,
the great Saint Joseph. cf. Luke 2:51

By your grace, Lord, may I have those sentiments and dispositions
toward those who have a right to my obedience.

May I even be prepared and disposed to submit with simplicity
to all sorts of people
in imitation of you.

Grant me, I ask you, Lord,
to share fully in your holy sentiments
toward poverty, mortification, and suffering.
May I love and practice them with views of faith,
in union with your Spirit
and your own dispositions,
and by the action and the effect of your holy grace
at work in me.

I promise to cooperate with your grace
as far as possible.
Be my strong helper, I beg you, my good Savior,
because I am so weak.

May I become in you a new creature; cf. 2 Cor 5:17
may I no longer live or act like a sinful child of the human race
but, rather, as a child of God, cf. Rom 6:14; Gal 4:5
regenerated through you
and adopted by the eternal Father. cf. Rom 8:14–17; 6:11–14

Impress your image on me, Lord,
as a seal does in wax.
May I be in you and you in me cf. John 15:5
in all truth and power.
May I not live any longer in myself and of myself
but in you and by you,
so that it may be you who live and act in me. cf. Gal 2:20
Give me, Lord, your spirit of childhood cf. John 3:34
to enable me to cry out to God with confidence
in union with you,
Abba, Father! Rom 8:15

Act of Petition

When this act of union with our Lord in a mystery is properly made
in an interior manner
and we are interiorly and intimately united with him,
we are then well prepared to present ourselves before God
with confidence cf. Eph 3:12

and to obtain from him the spirit of the mystery
and all the graces our Lord merited for us in that mystery.

This is why the next act refers to the eternal Father.

In it we humbly ask for the spirit of the mystery.

We confidently beg God to grant it to us

through our Lord and in union with him,

for it is in him alone and by his Spirit cf. Eph 3:12;

that we ask this and hope to be heard. John 16:64–26; 15:16

Example of an act of petition

Eternal Father, Lord of heaven and earth,

cf. Acts 17:24

you showed your goodness to us

cf. Matt 11:25

by sending your only Son,

so that those who believe in him and accept him

may not perish

cf. Rom 8:14, 17

but may have eternal life

by becoming your adopted children

Gal 4:5

in Jesus Christ, your Son.

cf. John 3:16

I most humbly beseech you to grant me the spirit of this mystery

of the birth of your beloved Son,

who for love of us became an infant.

For the love of him, I beg you

to give me the heart and mind of a child,

so that I may love you

as my true and only Father,

that I may fear and honor you,

and that I may obey you

as a good child obeys its parent.

To this end give me, I beg you, O my God, an abundant outpouring

of the Spirit and the grace of your Son.

O my God, renew me in him

in his Spirit and grace.

cf. John 3:5–7

Give me a spirit of submission and obedience to you

and to those who take your place on earth.

Grant, I beg you, that I may despise

the perishable riches of the earth,

the vain honors of the world,

and the fleeting pleasures of this life

cf. Luke 6:24–26

because they bring with them eternal woe

and because your Son, who turned away from them all,

has taught me to seek other benefits
more befitting my dignity as a child of God,
which he came to bestow upon me.

Following his example, O Lord, may I embrace poverty, contempt,
and suffering in this life
as a means of procuring eternal happiness. cf. Luke 6:24–26

I earnestly beg you, O my Father and my God, to grant me this
in union with and through our Lord, cf. Eph 3:12
in whom alone and by whose spirit I dare ask
and hope to obtain it
from your goodness.

It is impossible,
says Saint Paul,
that giving us your Son,
who is your truly beloved,
you would refuse to give us
in him and through him
all that is good. cf. Rom 8:32

Act of Invocation of the Saints

The last act of this part is an act of invocation of the saints
to whom we have a special devotion.

It is most advantageous to pray to the saints
and to ask them to help us by their intercession,
for, as one saint has said,
God often grants to their prayers
what he refuses to ours
because of the imperfections so often found in ours.

When the act of union with our Lord has been well made,
we feel confident that we will obtain from the eternal Father
whatever we ask cf. Eph 3:12; Luke 11:13
in the name of the Father's most dear Son
and in union with him. cf. John 15:16; 16:24–25

Yet, because we cannot be sure
of having made this act of union and the act of petition
with the required perfection,
we do well to have recourse to the saints.

Because they are God's friends, their prayers and intercession
 are always agreeable to God
 and may obtain for us what we seek;
 besides, as the Church observes,
 the superabundant merits of the saints are a great help to us
 in the sight of God.

We make an act of invocation of the saints
 to whom we have a special devotion,
 particularly those who were present at the mystery
 that we have been considering
 or who took part in it,
 by asking them to plead for us before God
 and to ask for us the spirit of the mystery.
 In doing so, we prove to them the great confidence we have
 in their intercession.

The Most Blessed Virgin is always to be invoked first,
 even though she may not have actually taken part
 in the mystery that we are considering,
 because she is our Mother, our Advocate, and our Mediatrix
 before her Son,
 because she loves us,
 because she has great power before God,
 and because she desires our welfare
 more than any other saint.

Saint Joseph is also to be invoked
 as the Patron and Protector of our Society,
 because he has such great influence with God.

In the same way, our holy guardian angel
 and our holy patrons of baptism and religious profession
 will take an interest in us in a special way,
 because we have been placed under their special protection
 and recommended to their care by God.

In the mystery of our Lord's nativity
 the Most Blessed Virgin took part
 by bringing him into the world. cf. Luke 2:7

Saint Joseph cared for him
 as his foster father. cf. Luke 3:23; 4:22

The angels were present and adored him,
 glorifying God
 and revealing Christ's birth to the shepherds,
 who then came to worship him.

Example of an act of invocation

Most Blessed Virgin, most worthy Mother of God,
I very humbly beg you,
 by the infinite dignity which is yours
 as the mother of the Messiah, the true God,
grant me your powerful protection
 in the sight of your beloved Son and his eternal Father,
 so that I may receive the spirit of this mystery.

I beg this of you by reason of your cooperation
in the sacred mystery of his nativity,
 because while yet a virgin you gave him birth.

I have great confidence
that your motherly solicitude will grant me this favor
and that out of regard for you,
God will bestow all things on me
 in the abundance of the divine mercy.

Invocation of Saint Joseph

Great Saint Joseph, my glorious and very loving father,
I beg of you very humbly
to join your prayers to those of the Most Blessed Virgin,
 your most dear spouse and my exalted queen, cf. Luke 1:27
and to pray to our Lord and to his heavenly Father
to grant me the spirit of this mystery of salvation
 in all the fullness which,
 by God's grace and mercy,
I am capable of receiving. cf. Eph 1:1–23

I beg this of you by reason of that most tender and respectful love
with which you received in your arms the incarnate Word,
 the Son of God made man, cf. John 1:14; Luke 3:24; 4:22
as your foster Son.

I have great confidence that God will grant me
everything that you will ask for me,
and I will remain eternally grateful
 to you and to your holy spouse
for all these favors.

Invocation of the holy angels and the shepherds

Holy angels of God,
you were present at the birth of the infant Jesus
 to adore him and to pay him homage.

Considering a Particular Virtue

We may also apply ourselves in the second part of interior prayer to the consideration of a particular virtue and make it the subject of our meditation.

We call virtues the holy actions, sentiments, dispositions, and affections contrary to vices and sins.

For example, chastity is opposed to impurity; humility, to pride; penance, to sensuality, and so on.

By his example and by his words, our Lord taught us the practice of virtue as something necessary for salvation.

This made him say that he is the way, cf. John 14:6
because by practicing these virtues
we walk forward on the path to heaven
and arrive at true, eternal, and blessed life, cf. John 8:12
a life that makes angels and human beings infinitely happy.

Our Lord communicates this life to us
by the gift of his grace in this world
and of his glory in the next.

We merit to share in this blessed life to the degree we have practiced virtue.

We begin by convincing ourselves interiorly of the necessity of the virtue that we are considering.

This we can do in two ways.
The first way is to recall to mind
by a conviction of faith
a passage of Holy Scripture
that speaks of the virtue.

For instance, to convince ourselves of the need for humility,
we can recall to mind the words of Saint James,
*God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble.* cf. James 4:6

Then we remain in a sentiment of interior respect,
concentrating on the thought of the virtue
taught us in this passage.

The second way to convince ourselves of the need for this virtue
is to make some reflections on the virtue,
based on what Holy Scripture says of the virtue,
especially in the New Testament,
that persuade the mind of our need to practice it.

We might, for instance, make this reflection on humility:
O my God, what a dreadful misfortune it is to be proud,
for you resist such people
and show yourself their enemy. cf. James 4:6

Or again,
Lord, how happy are the humble,
for it is to such that you grant your grace. cf. James 4:6

Or again,
My God, you are the friend of the humble.
How strongly this should incite me also
to become humble.

Having thus based ourselves firmly on faith,
we proceed to make the nine acts of the second part,
which we apply to the virtue
on which we are making interior prayer
and which we consider our Lord
as teaching to us by his words and example.

The Three Acts That Refer to Our Lord

The three acts that refer to our Lord are:

- 1) an act of faith,
- 2) an act of adoration,
- 3) an act of thanksgiving.

Act of Faith

We can make an act of faith on the virtue
by believing firmly
that our Lord taught us this virtue
and practiced it.

To convince ourselves more firmly of this truth,
we must call to mind a passage of the New Testament.

Example of an act of faith on the virtue of humility, considering our Lord teaching it to us by his words

My Savior Jesus Christ,
I believe with all my heart that you taught us
the virtue of humility
when you said,
Learn from me,
for I am meek and humble of heart,
and you will find rest for yourselves.

Matt 11:29

After making this act, we can dwell on it
by multiple and continued reflections,
by a few short reflections
filled with faith
and based on some passage of Holy Scripture
on which we dwell for a considerable time,
or by simple attention to our Lord,
who teaches or practices the virtue.

All this has been explained above in the first part,
when dealing with the manner of keeping ourselves
in the holy presence of God,
and in the explanation in the following section.

Consideration by Multiple Reflections

My divine Master,
 you command me to learn from you cf. Matt 11:29
 how to be meek and humble of heart, cf. Matt 23:12
 to humble myself, to humble myself voluntarily
 before God and before mortals.

You do not command me to learn from you
 how to work miracles,
 how to raise the dead, and so on,
 because such things are not necessary
 in order to be agreeable to you.

But it is absolutely necessary for me to be humble.
 This is what I must learn from you,
 who were infinitely humble
 although you were Lord of Lords
 and King of Kings.

You teach me that if I exalt myself,
 I will be brought low and humbled, cf. Matt 23:12
 that if I do not receive the Kingdom of God
 like a little child,

I will never enter it; cf. Luke 18:17
 that if I want to be first,
 I will remain last
 as a punishment for my pride. cf. Luke 13:30

This is what happened to the rebellious angels, cf. Rev 12:8
 who because they sought to exalt themselves,
 became the last and most miserable of all creatures.
 If I try to exalt myself like them,
 I will be humbled like them.

I must, then, learn from you to be humble of heart cf. Matt 11:29
 if I wish to avoid so great a misfortune.

This is what I propose to do
 with the help of your holy grace,
 and I beg you most humbly
 to grant me that grace.

Example of an act of faith by considering the advantages of humility

What a great advantage it is to humble myself with all my heart
 for love of you, O my God!

We enjoy peace and tranquility of soul,
just as you teach us. cf. Matt 11:29

You give your grace to the humble,
and you give it most abundantly
to the humblest of all. cf. James 4:6

You love the humble;
you console them in their afflictions;
you protect them in danger;
you deliver them in times of peril;
you save them
and lead them to glory
for all eternity. cf. Ps 116:6; 76:10; 5:12; 73:23

I beg of you, O Lord, teach me
by the interior light of your Holy Spirit
to put this precious lesson into practice.
I wish to learn it from you, cf. Matt 11:29
whatever price it may cost my pride.

I resolve to humble myself constantly and resolutely
and to annihilate myself, if such were possible,
so as to draw down upon myself your grace and your Holy Spirit,
who abides only with the humble, cf. Is 11:2; 57:15; 66:2
and so as to merit your love,
which is all I desire
in time and in eternity.

Help me, I beg you, my divine Savior,
with your holy grace,
without which I can do nothing. cf. John 15:5

Consideration by Few but Prolonged Reflections

We can dwell on this same act of faith
by considerations mingled with few but prolonged reflections
by recalling to mind the passage of Holy Scripture
in which our Lord says,
*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
and the one who humbles himself will be exalted,*
in Saint Luke 18:14.

We might then make a brief reflection
to help impress this thought on our mind
and to penetrate our heart
with the value and the necessity of practicing the virtue of humility.

Example

I need to humble myself with all my heart, O my God,
if I do not wish to be humbled
and brought down to hell.

Then we remain interiorly attentive to this thought
for as long as we can.

When we are no longer able to dwell on the passage
by fixing our minds on this reflection,
we try another one
that is also related to the topic
and that will remind us of it again
and make it possible for us to apply ourselves to the passage
with renewed affection.

Another example

What a great advantage it is to humble myself
for the love of you, O my God.

This is how I can be raised up
to enjoy a share in your glory in heaven.

cf. Rom 8:7

This manner of dwelling for a long time on a virtue
by using a passage that awakens our faith
produces this additional good effect:
the mind becomes convinced
of the necessity
and the advantages of the virtue,
and the heart is moved by the desire to acquire it
and to practice it.

Thus, we can by various reflections
dwell for a long time on a single passage,
which contributes much to make us relish the virtue
and the word of God that teaches it to us.

Consideration by Simple Attention

We can, finally, dwell on a virtue by simple attention,
merely keeping ourselves in the presence of our Lord

and considering him teaching us this virtue
by word and example
and by practicing it.

In this sentiment of adoration before him,
we keep ourselves thus interiorly disposed,
without discourse or reasoning
but by attention
that is simple, respectful, affectionate,
and as vivid as possible.

We do this for a longer or shorter time,
as we feel ourselves inclined and drawn to the virtue.

The benefit produced by this type of interior prayer,
when we engage in it in union with God,
is to draw our soul tenderly and gently
to practice the virtue
and to leave us with a supernatural inclination
toward the virtue.

This leads us to embrace it with ardor,
overcoming courageously the difficulties and repugnances
that nature may present.

We embrace with affection the occasions that arise
for practicing the virtue;
we find joy in doing so
and experience a great interior satisfaction
on these occasions.

We may use any of the three ways of prayer,
adapting them to the acts that follow,
according to the devotion we feel
and to our dispositions.

Act of Adoration

After dwelling on the act of faith
in one of the three ways proposed above,
we make an act of adoration by paying homage to our Lord
when he practiced this virtue
and taught it to us
by his words and example.

We remain in his presence in profound respect.

It is eminently right for us to pay to our Lord
these first acts of worship,
 which are due him as the God-man,
 who did not think it beneath him
 to become our teacher and model.

Example of an act of adoration while representing our Lord washing his Apostles' feet

I adore you, my Lord Jesus Christ,
teaching us the holy virtue of humility
 when you knelt at your Apostles' feet to wash them,
 thus giving me an example. cf. John 13:15

I acknowledge you as my sovereign Lord and God,
 despite the lowliness you thus manifested,
for I depend on you in everything, cf. John 20:28
 as all creatures do
 in heaven and on earth.

In view of this, I offer you my humblest homage;
I annihilate myself in your sacred presence
 and remain in this attitude of deepest respect
 before you, my Lord and my God.

Then we remain in a spirit of adoration before our Lord
 for as long a time as possible.

Act of Thanksgiving

It is only right to express to our Lord the gratitude we owe him
 by thanking him for the goodness he showed us
in practicing this virtue to instruct us
 and thus teaching us how to procure our sanctification.

Example of an act of thanksgiving

What ingratitude I would show, O my God,
if I failed to thank you for your goodness
in humbling yourself,
 even to the excess
 of kneeling before poor sinners to wash their feet,
and in teaching me the most holy virtue of humility
 by your example. cf. John 13:5–15

I offer you, then, with all my heart,
my humblest and sincerest thanksgiving.

Oh, what love!

You chose to humble yourself in that way
to encourage me to humble myself,
so that in this way and with your holy grace,
I may merit to be lifted up even unto you,
to be united to you
in this life by grace
and in the next by glory,
and thus to participate in your infinite happiness
for all eternity.

I thank you, O my loving Savior,
my good Master, and my God!

I wish to spend myself in gratitude and thanksgiving.

Complete, I beg of you, O loving Jesus,
what I lack through weakness.

The Three Acts That Refer to Us

After the three acts that we have just made,
we proceed to the next three that refer to us,
namely,

- 1) an act of remorse,
- 2) an act of contrition,
- 3) an act of application.

Act of Remorse

We make an act of remorse
by recognizing before God how remorseful and ashamed we are
for not having applied ourselves until now
to the practice of this virtue
or for not having done so as much as we ought.

We go over the principal occasions we had of doing so,
in order to feel even greater remorse.

Example of an act of remorse

How remorseful I ought to feel in your holy presence, O my God,
when I consider that in spite of the extraordinary examples
you have given me of this holy virtue,
I have been negligent until now
in trying to humble myself and practice humility.

This is because I have not yet sufficiently thought about it
or because, although I am, indeed, a sinner,
I have felt a secret contempt
for your humiliations and abasements,
as though they were unworthy of you or of me.

How many times have I failed to practice humility,
although I have had many suitable occasions to do so,
which you provided for me
in order to do me more good.

The Lord of heaven and earth humbles himself
so far as to wash the Apostles' feet, cf. John 13:1–16
poor miserable men that they were.

Yet, wretched sinner that I am,
nothingness formed of the dust of the earth, cf. Gen 2:7
I refuse to be humbled!

I find it difficult to do a service to my neighbor,
because it offends my pride.
I failed on this or that occasion. . . .
I fled humiliation and contempt on such and such occasions. . . .

O my God, how remorseful I am of such unworthy conduct!

Act of Contrition

The act of contrition is made
by begging God's pardon
for the faults we have committed against this virtue
and by taking a firm resolution
to be more faithful to practice it in the future.

Example of an act of contrition

My Lord Jesus Christ,
From the depths of my heart,
I am contrite and humbled in your presence. cf. Ps 51:19

I most humbly beg your pardon
for the faults I have committed
 against the practice of this virtue,
 which is so dear and agreeable to you
 and so necessary and advantageous to me.

Pardon me by the merits of your holy humility,
 I implore you, O my adorable Savior.
I promise you,
 with your help,
to be more faithful in practicing this virtue.

Act of Application

The act of application is made by applying the virtue to ourselves,
considering before God the great need we have to practice it,
 paying attention to the occasions on which we can
 and ought to do so,
and for this purpose taking appropriate means.

Example of an act of application

My God, I acknowledge in your holy presence
the great need I have of practicing this holy virtue of humility
 and of embracing humiliations,
all the more so because I am so proud.

Besides this, the example that you give me, Lord,
also ought to impress me deeply.

What is this! The Lord of angels and of humans
 kneels before his own poor creatures,
 washes their feet covered with dust and mud,
 and wipes them,
 thus performing the task of a slave!

cf. John 13:1–16

Why did you do it, Lord?
To teach me what I must do.

You said so immediately afterward
when you declared:

*Do you realize what I have done for you?
You call me “Teacher” and “Master,”
and rightly so, for, indeed, I am.*

If I, therefore, the Master and Teacher, have washed your feet,

*you ought to wash one another's feet.
I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you,
you must also do.*

John 13:12–15

In other words, if I,
although God and Lord of all,
have abased myself
to the point of washing your feet,
you ought not to find it difficult to render one another
even the lowliest and humblest services.
You ought to overcome your pride
at the sight of God humbled in this manner.

For as you said again,
*No slave is greater than his master,
nor the messenger greater than the one who sent him.* John 13:16
*If you understand this,
blessed are you if you do it.* John 13:17

For my instruction, Lord,
you humbled yourself;
it was to lead me to humble myself,
to experience no shame when serving others,
even in the most humiliating and lowly ways,
or at least to lead me to overcome my shame.

To your example you join a promise that I will be happy
if I imitate you.

O my loving Savior, who could refuse to yield
to such touching examples and encouragements?
Your action and your promises gladden my heart.

I wish to humble myself, O my God, to imitate you
and to be happy according to your promise.
I wish to abase myself with you
and for love of you.

Today I will ask to be given the most lowly tasks.
I feel great repugnance for such and such
If I were ordered to do it,
I would feel deeply humiliated,
and I would feel great repugnance
if I were assigned to such or such a task
or if I were commanded to perform such or such a penance
or mortification.

My God, for your holy love,
I will request to be tried in these ways,
so that by this means I may become truly humble.

Bless these resolutions, I beg of you, O my God,
and make them effective by your holy grace.

The Last Three Acts When Considering a Virtue

After the three acts that refer to us
we make the last three acts, which are:

- 1) an act of union with our Lord,
- 2) an act of petition,
- 3) an act of invocation.

Act of Union with Our Lord

We make an act of union
with the Spirit of our Lord and with the dispositions
with which he practiced and taught this virtue.

We ask him for a share in this Spirit
and in these dispositions,
begging him earnestly to give us the grace
to take up the practice of this virtue.

We must practice it not only exteriorly,
as philosophers and people of the world do
or through merely human motives,
but also through views of faith
in union with the Spirit and the dispositions of our Lord
and by the movement of his grace.

Example of an act of union with our Lord

I unite myself to you, my divine Savior,
and to the interior sentiments
with which you practiced
this holy virtue of humility.

How totally were your mind and heart overcome
by the majesty of your Father
when you knelt
at the feet of your Apostles! cf. John 13:1–16

What an ardent desire to suffer this enormous humiliation
for the purpose of making reparation
to the honor of God, your Father,
who was outraged by the pride of the first man,
by that of all his descendants,
and by mine in particular.

O, how worthy of the divine majesty this reparation was!
How capable it was to appease God's anger
and to satisfy for my pride!

I earnestly beg you, O Lord,
to give me a share in the sentiments you entertained then.
Let me partake, O loving Savior,
of the same thoughts
and the same affections that were yours.
I pray you, unite my mind and heart with yours.

May the unction of your holy grace
teach me to be humble of heart cf. Matt 11:29
and to practice humility,
not only in an exterior manner,
as people of the world do out of shrewdness,
but also by views of faith
in union with your Spirit,
in conformity with your dispositions,
and in imitation of you.

Incline and lead my heart to the love and practice
of humiliations and abjection.
May I love to remain unknown, despised, and humbled,
so that I may be more like you in your humiliations
and thus share in your glory. cf. Phil 3:10

Act of Petition

The act that follows is the act of petition,
by which we humbly beg God the Father to grant us the grace
to embrace the practice of this virtue in union with our Lord,

in whom alone
and by whose Spirit
we feel confident enough to ask this
and to hope to obtain it. cf. Eph 3:12; Luke 11:3; John 16:21–26

Example of an act of petition

My God, I most humbly beg you
to grant me your grace
to walk in the path of humility,
 following the example of your Son, our Lord. cf. 1 Pet 2:21

I ardently desire and eagerly long to acquire this virtue,
in order to be more agreeable in your sight
and to draw down upon me your Holy Spirit,
 who is pleased and takes rest
 only in humble hearts, cf. Isa 11:.,2; 57:15; 66:2
 as you said
 by the Prophet Isaiah.

Help me, O my God,
for you know how weak and helpless I am in doing good.
By your grace
may I love and desire humiliations and contempt;
may I make good use of all the occasions
 you will permit me to encounter,
 for they are the necessary means to become humble.

May I learn to humble myself before all and below all,
in imitation of your beloved Son.
May I take pleasure in serving others,
considering them all as my masters. cf. John 13:12–15; Phil 2:3–4

O heavenly Father,
I beg you to give me this grace
 through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 in union with whom
 and in whose Spirit alone,
I feel confident enough to ask your infinite goodness for this grace
 with the hope of obtaining it.
 cf. Eph 3:12; Luke 11:3; John 15:16; 16:24–26

Act of Invocation of the Saints

The last act of this second part
refers to the saints
to whom we have a special devotion.

This act is made by earnestly imploring them, especially those
who most excelled in the practice of the virtue
that we are considering in interior prayer,
to intercede for us before God
and to beg for us the grace to practice this virtue,
thus showing what great confidence we have in their
intercession.

Example of an act of invocation of the Most Blessed Virgin

Most Blessed Virgin, Mother of God,
you are the noblest,
the holiest,
the most perfect,
and the most excellent of creatures,
and yet you were the humblest of all,
for by your humility you abased yourself
below all things.

cf. Luke 1:46–55

In return,
you were raised to the dignity of Mother of God.

I beg you,
by your holy humility
and by your love for this virtue,
to be good enough to obtain for me
from your adorable Son
the love and the practice of this virtue,
which was always so dear to you
and which brought you to such an exalted state of glory.

I know that everything you ask for me will be granted without fail,
because you have all power over your beloved Son.

Example of an invocation of Saint Joseph

Great Saint Joseph,
although a descendant of the royal family of David, cf. Luke 1:27
you willingly embraced a profession

to live hidden and unknown by the world,
poor, abject, and laborious, cf. Matt 13:55
for the love of God.

By the greatness of your humility,
you deserved to be raised
to the dignity of spouse of the Mother of God cf. Luke 1:27
and to be considered the father of the Son of God made man.
cf. Luke 3:23; 4:22

For God's honor, I beg you,
together with your holy spouse,
to ask God to grant me the grace to acquire this virtue
by constant fidelity to its practice.

Example of an act of invocation of Saint Michael, of the guardian angel, and of the saints in heaven

By your deep humility,
O great Saint Michael,
you merited to become the prince
over all the choirs of angels
and to be raised to the great glory that you enjoy.

I beg you to help me by your holy intercession
to obtain from God
the grace to acquire this virtue.

My loving guardian angel,
you blessed spirits
who by your humility merited to be confirmed
in grace and in glory, . . .

All you saints, my glorious patrons,
Saint John the Baptist,
Saint Peter, Saint Paul,
(favorite saint and others),
you were so pleasing to God,
and you merited his favor
and the glory where you reign with God,
by the practice of all the virtues
but mainly of humility.

I have the greatest confidence in your intercession.

Grant me, I beg of you,
that with your assistance I may become humble
for God's greater glory
and to obtain my own salvation.

Considering a Maxim

In the second part of interior prayer,
we can consider a maxim of the holy Gospel
and take it as the subject of our prayer.

We call maxims
sentences or passages from Holy Scripture
that teach us some of the truths necessary for salvation
or interior words that make us understand
what we must do or avoid,
what we must esteem or despise,
what we must seek or flee from,
what we must love or hate, and the like.
The New Testament is full of such passages.

Among these maxims or sentences,
some include truths that are also precepts
and that impose on us the obligation
to practice the truths contained in these maxims,
for example:

Stop judging, and you will not be judged. . . .

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Luke 6:37

These are maxims of precept,
because our Lord positively commands us to carry them out
under pain of damnation.

Others express counsels;
in other words,
we are not absolutely obliged to practice them
to be saved,
but they are suggested as necessary means
to acquire greater perfection,

for example:

*If you wish to be perfect,
go, sell what you have, and give to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven.
Then come, follow me.*

Matt 19:21

Some of these counsels are perfectly clear, intelligible,
and easy to understand,
such as this one:

*Love your enemies;
do good to those who hate you;
bless those who curse you.*

Luke 6:27–28

Others are more obscure and difficult to understand
and need to be explained,
such as the following:

*If your right eye causes you to sin,
tear it out, and throw it away.*

Matt 5:29

*If anyone comes to me
without hating his father and mother,
he cannot be my disciple.*

Luke 14:26

There are a number of other similar texts
that must not be taken literally.

We begin
by convincing ourselves interiorly
through a sentiment of faith
of the necessity or the utility of the maxim
on which we desire to make interior prayer,
by recalling to mind the passage of Holy Scripture
in which the maxim is found.

The spirit of a maxim is the holy impression
and the salutary effect
that the maxim ought to produce
when it is seriously considered and understood.

Consider this passage, for example:

*What profit would a man show
if he were to gain the whole world
and destroy himself in the process?*

Matt 16:26

This maxim,
deeply pondered and relished, convinces the mind
that there is no true blessing
except winning eternal glory,

that we ought not to consider anything in this life as
 being an advantage
 except what can contribute to our salvation
 and that true good is to be found only in heaven.

It makes us develop a deep contempt
 for everything that worldlings love and pursue so passionately.
 It detaches us from earthly goods
 that are perishable, deceptive, and fleeting,
 so that we can attach ourselves only to those of heaven,
 which are true, permanent, and eternal.

The spirit of this maxim,
*If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self,
 take up his cross, and begin to follow in my footsteps,*
 Matt 16:24

is to do violence to ourselves
 for the purpose of resisting the vicious inclinations
 that lead us to sin
 and of overcoming the repugnance and the difficulties
 that we encounter in the pursuit of virtue.

It makes us receive all the pains and adversities of life
 with submission to God's holy will
 and as coming from God's hands. cf. Job 2:10
 It encourages us to endure them with patience
 for the love of our Lord and in imitation of him.

The spirit of this other maxim,
*Whoever would save his life will lose it,
 but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it,* Matt 16:25

is to despise and to reject sensual pleasures,
 not to seek the comforts of nature,
 not to fear, at least voluntarily, sufferings and mortifications,
 still less, to flee from them.

It leads us to do penance willingly
 and to endure labors,
 especially those of obligation
 and imposed by our state of life,
 without concern that they may affect our health.
 It even makes us willingly sacrifice our health to the Lord,
 keeping in mind these words of the Gospel:

Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matt 16:25

The spirit of this maxim
made the early Christians face martyrdom joyfully
and induced the ancient desert Fathers
to embrace such excessive and lengthy austerities
with so much courage and constancy.

Our Lord kept his promise to them,
not only in heaven,
by rewarding them with a blessed and eternal life,
but even here below,
by making most of them live to an extremely old age
exempt from illnesses.

So it is with all the other maxims,
each of which has a spirit particular to it.

The Three Acts That Refer to Our Lord

Having thus based our prayer on faith,
we proceed to make nine acts,
the first three of which refer to our Lord,
namely,

- 1) an act of faith,
- 2) an act of adoration,
- 3) an act of thanksgiving.

Act of Faith

We make an act of faith in the maxim
by representing to ourselves our Lord when he taught it
and by assuring him that we firmly believe
that he taught it to us.

To convince ourselves more fully of this truth,
we call to mind the passage of the New Testament
where this maxim is found.

Example of an act of faith on the importance of salvation

I believe with all my heart, my Lord Jesus Christ,
that you are the one who taught us this maxim:

*What profit would a man show
if he were to gain the whole world
and destroy himself in the process?*

Matt 16:26

I believe this truth, O my God,
that I am in this world only to labor
for the salvation of my soul
and that I am on earth only to work at meriting heaven
by loving you and keeping your commandments. cf. John 14:15

I believe that your purpose in creating me
and in calling me to religious life
is that
by making a right use of time
and of the graces you give me
and doing the good works proper to my vocation,
I make myself worthy of a blessed and eternal life,
insofar as I am able to do so
with the help of your grace.

I believe that even though I gained the whole world,
if I were to lose my soul, I would lose all. cf. Matt 16:26

It is you, my God, who teach me this truth.
I beg you to let me be fully convinced of it
by your grace and the power of your Holy Spirit.

After making this act of faith,
we remain attentive to our Lord present
in the interior disposition that it ought to induce in us
and to the truth contained in the maxim that he teaches us.

Before going on to the next act,
we dwell on this first act for a longer or shorter time,
depending on the attraction we feel.
This is something to do at every act we make
before passing on to the next.

We may dwell on this maxim
by using few but prolonged reflections
or by simple attention,
in the manner proposed above.

This procedure can easily be applied to the present topic
and to any other,
which is why we will say no more about it at present.

Act of Adoration

We make an act of adoration
by paying homage to our Lord teaching us this maxim,
 keeping ourselves attentive
 and in deepest respect before him.

Example of an act of adoration

My Lord and my God,
I offer you my very humble adoration
as you teach me this maxim and by means of it,
the importance of saving my soul.
I listen with all respect to your heavenly doctrine,
 so necessary for me to know and practice.

I acknowledge you as the teacher sent us by God.
In your holy Gospel, you command me
not to seek the title of teacher,
because Christ is to be our only teacher. cf. Matt 23:10

With Saint Peter, I confess
 that you are the Messiah,
 the Son of the living God;
 you have the words of eternal life. Matt 16:16; John 6:69

I adore you,
 and with all the angels and the whole human race,
I prostrate myself at your feet
in offering you the deepest respect,
 which I always wish to display in your sacred presence
and with which I listen with humility and docility
to your holy word,
 which is the life of my soul. cf. John 6:63

I adore this divine truth in you and outside of you
 as coming from your sacred mouth cf. Matt 4:4
to enter my mind,
 on which I beg you to impress it deeply
and also on my heart.

Act of Thanksgiving

We can make this act
by expressing our gratitude to our Lord
for the goodness he showed us in teaching us this maxim
for our instruction and sanctification.

Example of an act of thanksgiving

How deeply indebted I am to you, O my God,
for your goodness in teaching us this maxim,
for by it you have made known to us
how important salvation is for us.

Such a truth could have been taught us worthily
only by a teacher like you, O Lord,
who humbled himself to come down from heaven to earth
to reveal it to us,
to life away our darkness, cf. John 3:13; 6:38
and to give us a share in your admirable light. cf. 1 Pet. 2:9

My divine Master, I thank you for this
with all my heart and with all my soul.

To show you my gratitude, I resolve
to think only of saving my soul
and to labor faithfully to sanctify it
by the means you have taught me.

Help me to do this by your grace, my God,
for I know that without it I can do nothing. cf. John 15:5

The Three Acts That Refer to Us

After these first three acts
we make the following, which refer to us:

- 1) an act of remorse,
- 2) an act of contrition,
- 3) an act of application.

Act of Remorse

We make the first of these acts
by admitting before God how remorseful we feel
for not yet having tried
 or for not having tried as hard as we ought
to acquire the spirit of the maxim
 and to put it into practice.

To increase our remorse,
we go over the principal occasions
 we have had to practice the maxim
and the occasions when we failed
 to act according to the spirit of the maxim.

Example of an act of remorse

My God, how remorseful I am
when, in your holy presence, I remember how little my conduct,
 ever since I had the use of reason,
has reflected the spirit of this maxim.

I learned from your holy doctrine
that you created me and brought me into this world
 only so that I might apply myself
 to know, love, and serve you by doing your holy will
 through obedience to your divine commandments
 and by fulfilling the duties of my state of life.

How often have I frivolously exposed myself
to losing my soul for all eternity,
not for the sake of winning the whole world cf. Matt 16:26
but to enjoy some base, shameful, and fleeting pleasure,
 some ridiculous honor,
 some passing satisfaction,
 some worthless favor.

I admit and confess, O my God,
that this has happened to me on many occasions,
 especially when. . . .

How ashamed I am, O my divine Savior.
I beg you, let this shame help me
 to satisfy your justice.

Act of Contrition

We make an act of contrition
by begging God's pardon for the faults we have committed
against the spirit of the maxim,
and we make a resolution to be more faithful in the future
to follow the spirit of the maxim.

Example of an act of contrition

In the sorrow I feel
because my conduct has been so contrary
to the spirit of this holy maxim,
I most humbly beg your pardon,
O my Savior and my God.

I am filled with regret,
especially because I know that in so acting
I have displeased and offended you greatly.
By neglecting my salvation,
I offended your divine majesty, your grace, and your friendship,
which I ought to esteem infinitely
and to prefer to all the honors, pleasures, and goods
of this world. cf. Luke 6:24–26

Pardon me, Lord, I beg of you, for my deplorable conduct.
I detest it with all my soul.
I promise you, my God,
to prefer my salvation to everything else,
so that I may preserve your grace and love,
which is what I desire above all else.
In the future I will repeat on all occasions
what the ancient hermit said,
“I want to save my soul!”

For this I need your holy grace, my divine Savior,
for without it I can do nothing. cf. John 15:5
I ask it of you humbly,
for I know that you desire my salvation.

I will convince myself that they must not be equalled,
still less preferred,
to the spiritual exercises, which are there
to procure my salvation.

If a desire or thought occurs to me
to spend on them some
or all of the time
reserved for my spiritual exercises,
I will admonish myself:

What good would it do me to become
most proficient in these matters,
if I were to lose my soul
by neglecting what can promote its salvation? cf. Matt 16:26

If my eagerness to procure the material welfare of the community
leads me to busy myself with these concerns
without an absolute necessity
and without the sanction of holy obedience,
while neglecting my spiritual reading, my prayer,
and my other religious exercises,
or if greed incites me to accept anything
from my students or their parents
against the Rule and my vows,

I will arm myself with the thought,
*What profit would there be for one
to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?* Matt 16:26

Even if the pretext of indiscreet and ill-regulated zeal
should lead me to pursue the salvation of others
in a manner which would endanger my own,

I will resist this enemy attack with the spiritual weapon
that my Savior has placed in my hands:
*What profit would there be for one
to gain the whole world
and forfeit his life?* Matt 16:26

I beg you, my dear Jesus,
grant me your Holy Spirit and your grace
to help me in my great weakness.

The Last Three Acts When Considering a Maxim

The last three acts of this part are:

- 1) an act of union with our Lord,
- 2) an act of petition,
- 3) an act of invocation of the saints.

Act of Union with Our Lord

We make an act of union with our Lord
by uniting ourselves to his Spirit
and to the interior dispositions
with which he taught this maxim.

We ask him for a share in this Spirit
and in these dispositions,
begging him earnestly to give us the grace
to enter into the spirit and practice of this maxim.

Example of an act of union with our Lord

My divine Master, I beg you to give me the grace
to unite myself with your Holy Spirit
and with the interior dispositions
with which you taught this great truth:
*What profit would there be for one
to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?* Matt 16:26

With what aversion your Holy Spirit inspired you
for all the world's vanities
and for the pleasures of this miserable life! cf. Luke 6:24–26

What contempt you felt for the world's perishable grandeur!
You gave us a convincing proof of this when you fled and hid yourself
when the people wished to make you their king. cf. John 6:15
Although you could have possessed kingdoms, empires,
and all that the universe contains, cf. Matt 4:8–9; Luke 4:5–7
for you are in truth the Lord
and the sovereign Master of all things,
you teach us by your example
as well as by your words
to despise all that passes away with time
and to value only what can contribute to the salvation of our soul.

I unite myself with you, my loving Savior,
 and with your sentiments.
 I beg that your divine Spirit and your divine heart
 may teach my mind and my heart
 to despise all that the world in its blindness esteems
 and pursues with so much ardor.

Speak to my soul with a single, powerful interior word,
*What profit would there be for one
 to gain the whole world?* Matt 16:26

And with your Prophet Samuel may I reply:
Speak, for your servant is listening. 1 Sam 3:10

Act of Petition

We make an act of petition
 by asking God the Father very humbly
 to grant us the grace to enter into the spirit of this maxim
 and to grant this in union with our Lord.

Example of an act of petition

Eternal Father in heaven,
 out of consideration for your beloved Son, cf. Matt 3:17; 17:5
 you did not consider it beneath you to allow me to call you my Father.
 I now have confidence cf. Gal 4:5–6
 in the name of that dear Son cf. John 15:16
 to ask you in all humility to give me the spirit of this maxim,
 which our divine Master was pleased to teach us.

When he was transfigured on Mount Tabor, you declared:
*This is my beloved Son,
 with whom I am well pleased.* Matt 17:5

You commanded us to listen to him
 as to our Master sent to teach us the truth
 and the way leading to true life. cf. John 14:6

I beg you, O my God,
 by the goodness you manifested
 in choosing to be my Father,
 to give me
 the spirit of understanding and the docility of heart
 to make me welcome his holy teaching
 into the depths of my soul.

I beg you, with your divine finger,
which is the Holy Spirit, cf. Luke 11:20
engrave in the deepest recesses of my heart this divine maxim:

*What profit would there be for one
to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?* Matt 16:26

Let me not seek or desire anything
but the Kingdom and justice of God cf. Matt 6:33
through the practice of virtue.

Grant me this grace
in union with our Lord and through our Lord,
in whom alone and by whose Spirit

I dare beg this of you
with the firm hope of obtaining all
from your goodness.

cf. Eph 3:12; Luke 11:13; John 16:24–26; 15:16

Act of Invocation of the Saints

We make an act of invocation
by praying to the saints
to whom we have a special devotion
and to those who practiced this maxim most perfectly.

We beg them to appeal to God
and to ask for us the spirit of the maxim
and the help to practice it.

Example of an act of invocation of the saints

Most holy Virgin, worthy Mother of God,
you are all powerful with your beloved Son.

I beg you to obtain for me the grace
from God's divine mercy
that I may despise all that might harm
the salvation of my soul.

May I prefer my salvation
to all the goods of this earth.

Great Saint Joseph,
my holy guardian angel,
my holy patrons,
you holy Apostles
who left all to follow our Lord,

cf. Matt 19:27

especially Saint Matthew
and Saint Barnabas,
you glorious martyrs

cf. Luke 5:28
cf. Acts 4:36–37

 who preferred to die by the most cruel torments
 rather than risk losing your souls,
and you saintly anchorites and religious,
 who scorned the world, its riches, and its promises
 for the love of God
 and to make sure of your salvation,

I beg you to obtain for me from our Lord these same sentiments,
 which by his grace filled your own heart.

I have great confidence in your intercession.

Recommendations

Both the first part and the second part of the Method of Interior Prayer contain nine acts; this great number of acts might hinder those who wish to remain longer in the second part

but find the time too short to do so.

Here are some suggestions to overcome this.

Make the acts of the first part in abridged form and in a few words

without spending more than a brief time on them.

For example, an act of faith in the presence of God could be as follows:

“My God, you are present within me as in your temple!”

After this we remain for a moment recollected and attentive to God present in us.

An act of adoration could be as follows:

“My God, I adore you!”

Then we adore God interiorly and with respect for about the time of an Our Father.

An act of thanksgiving could be as follows:

“My God, I thank you!”

Then we dwell on this sentiment of gratitude for about the same length of time.

The same is true for the other acts.

Make one act, including implicitly in it the interior sentiments of all the other acts.

The sentiments are not distinctly and actually expressed in formal or verbal acts.

We present ourselves before God
 in a spirit of interior adoration
 by a simple view of faith in the divine presence
 and in God's infinite greatness and excellence,
 with thanksgiving for all blessings,
 with humility over our lowliness and nothingness,
 with remorse and contrition for our sins,
 and with application, union, and invocation,
 in view of our need
 to have our Lord's merits,
 to be united with him,
 and to be guided by his Spirit.

We ask for all these things
 by a simple desire of the heart,
 merely exposing our needs to the Lord.

All this can be done along with many other acts
 (such as acts of hope, love, and resignation)
 in very little time,
 about what is needed to recite a *Miserere*.

This manner of proceeding is easy
 for those who are truly interior,
 who remain as much as possible in the presence of God,
 who are always recollected in the eyes and in the mind,
 who are exact about silence,
 who do not bother with what does not concern them,
 and who are faithful to obedience.

Make only the act of God's presence and that of adoration,
 and then go on to the second part,
 omitting all the other acts.

Limit ourselves to making not all the acts of the second part
 during one session of prayer
 but to making only two or three or even a single one
 on which we wish to dwell.

We could make all the acts one after another in this way
 in successive prayer periods,
 shortening the acts that we have already made
 in the prayer or prayers that have gone before

or even omitting them altogether
and concentrating on those or the one that we now desire to make.

This manner of proceeding would seem to be useful
in order to permeate ourselves more deeply
with the meaning and the spirit of the various acts
and to let them penetrate us
in a more interior manner.

We must remember to make resolutions
or to renew those previously made,
for they can be continued for several days,
especially when we notice
that we have not practiced them faithfully
or that we still need them.

Finally,
when we feel interiorly and gently drawn to some sentiment
that we had not proposed to ourselves beforehand,
such as the love of God
or the desire to show God our confidence and submission,
to ask for something with earnestness and confidence,
either for ourselves or for someone else,
or to reflect on some word of God,
we ought to follow this attraction and other similar ones
inspired by God, faith, and the perfection of our state.

We follow it
for as long as God is pleased to let us dwell on it,
for this is a sign that God desires this of us at the moment.

We can know that this is the case when we leave interior prayer
with renewed zeal to do our duty,
to love God, and to please God.

This second part can also be used to consider
the Last Ends,
our sins,
one of the commandments,
or a similar topic.

**The Third Part
of the Method of Interior Prayer**

The three acts of this third part are

- 1) a review of what we have done in prayer,
- 2) an act of thanksgiving,
- 3) an act of offering.

All these acts are to take up only a little time.

Act of Review

We make this act by reviewing in our mind
the principal things we have accomplished in prayer,
the sentiments God gave us during this time
that seem to be the most practical and useful,
and the benefit we can draw from them.

Example of an act of review

My God, what have I done during this time of prayer?

I began by putting myself in your holy presence,
considering you, for example, as being within me
as in your Kingdom.

I paid my homage to God by an act of adoration,
and so on.

I applied myself to such or such a subject,
for instance, to the maxim:

What profit would a man show. . . .

Matt 16:26

I awakened such or such good sentiments,
for instance, that if I lose my soul, I lose everything,
that I must never prefer anything to my salvation.

These sentiments can surely be very useful and advantageous to me
in my state.

I made such or such resolutions. . . .

If we did not make any,
now would be the time to do so.

Act of Thanksgiving

We make this act by thanking God
for the graces received during our prayer,
for the good sentiments given to us,
and for the affections awakened in us
to benefit our soul
and to advance us in virtue.

Example of an act of thanksgiving

My God, I thank you with all my heart
for the graces I have received from you
during this time of prayer,
for the sentiments you inspired in me,
for the affections you were good enough to infuse in me,
especially for. . . ,
and for the resolutions I adopted
for the good of my soul
and for my advancement in virtue and perfection.

Act of Offering

Finally, we make this act last of all by offering God
our prayer,
the resolutions we made in the course of it,
and the dispositions we have to accomplish them.

We also offer ourselves to God with all our actions
and all that we will do
during this day.

cf. Rom 12:2

Example of an act of offering

My God, I offer you
my prayer,
the resolutions you gave me the grace to make,
and the dispositions I have to accomplish them.

I very humbly beg you
to bless them
and to give me the grace to be faithful
to put them into practice.

Also I offer myself to you, my God,
with all my actions
and all that I will do
during this day.

cf. Rom 12:2

Accept, I beg you, my God, the desire I have
to please you alone,
to glorify you perfectly,
and to accomplish your holy will unceasingly.

Invocation of the Most Blessed Virgin

We conclude our prayer
by placing under the protection of the Most Blessed Virgin,
all that we have done, thought of, and resolved
so that she may offer it to her beloved Son
and we by this means may obtain from him the graces we need
to practice the virtue or the maxim
on which we have made our prayer.

Example of an invocation of the Most Blessed Virgin

Most holy Virgin, most worthy Mother of God,
you are also my loving mother, my advocate,
my refuge, and my protectress.

I come to you with deep humility
as to the one in whom, after God, I place all my trust.

I beg you to receive under your protection
my prayer,
my resolutions,
and all that I have done during the time of interior prayer.

I very humbly beg you to give this your holy blessing
and to obtain that of your beloved Son,
offering this interior prayer to him and begging him,
out of consideration for you,
to grant me the graces I need
to keep my resolutions
and to practice the virtue or the maxim
that I have considered during my prayer,
for the greater glory of God, your honor, and my salvation.

Sub tuum . . . or O domina mea.

◆ End ◆

APPENDIX

Method of Interior Prayer¹

Preface

Interior prayer is an inner activity in which the soul applies itself to God.

There are three parts in interior prayer. The first is preparation of the soul for interior prayer, properly called recollection; the second is attention to the topic of interior prayer; the third is thanksgiving at the end of interior prayer.

The first part is called preparation, or recollection, because everything done therein helps to make the soul enter into itself and to prepare for interior prayer.

The first thing to be done in interior prayer is to become permeated with the presence of God through a sentiment of faith. For this purpose we can consider God as being present in three different ways: first, in the place in which we are; second, in us; third, in a church, going there in spirit if we are not there in fact.

We can consider God present in the place in which we are, first, because God is everywhere, saying by the Prophet Jeremiah, "I fill heaven and earth";² second, because our Lord has said in Saint Matthew, chapter 18, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them."³

We can consider God present in us in two ways. First, God is in us to maintain us in existence, as Saint Paul says in Acts, chapter 17, "God is not far from us, for we have our life, our movement, and our being only in God."⁴ Second, God is in us by

grace and by the Spirit, which is what our Lord teaches us by these words: “The kingdom of God is within you.”⁵ Saint Paul expresses the same thing when he says, “The temple of God is holy, which you are,” and, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you?”⁶

We can consider God as present in a church for two reasons: first, because it is the house of God, as our Lord tells us in Saint Matthew, chapter 21, “My house is a house of prayer”;⁷ second, because our Lord is there in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

First Part

In the first part of interior prayer, there are nine acts. The first three refer to God; the next three, to us; the last three, to our Lord.

The three that refer to God are, first, an act of faith; second, an act of adoration; third, an act of thanksgiving.

We make an act of faith by firmly believing that we are in the presence of God. To impress this truth on our mind more strongly and to keep ourselves in this sentiment of faith, we can use some of the above-mentioned passages of Holy Scripture referring to the manner in which we place ourselves in the presence of God.

We make an act of adoration by acknowledging that God is our Creator and our sovereign Lord, by showing profound respect because of this awareness, and by thinking of our lowliness and of our dependence on God.

We make an act of thanksgiving by thanking God for the graces we have received, especially for the grace to permit us to be in communion with the divine presence during interior prayer.

The three acts that refer to us are, first, an act of humility; second, an act of remorse; third, an act of contrition.

We make an act of humility by acknowledging that because we are nothing, we are unworthy to appear before God. To maintain ourselves in this sentiment, we can use these words of Abraham, “How shall I speak to my Lord, I who am only ashes and dust?”⁸

We make an act of remorse by acknowledging that because of our many offenses, we are unworthy to appear before God.

We make an act of contrition by asking pardon of God for all our sins and by firmly resolving to commit them no more.

The three acts that refer to our Lord are, first, an act of application of the merits of our Lord; second, an act of union with our Lord; third, an act of invocation of the Holy Spirit.

We make an act of application of the merits of our Lord by asking him to apply to us the merits of his Passion to make us more agreeable to the Father and better disposed to receive grace and light in interior prayer.

We make an act of union with our Lord by uniting ourselves to his interior dispositions when he made interior prayer, begging him to make interior prayer in us and to offer our prayer and to present our needs to his Father, considering us as belonging to him and as his own members, who neither have nor can have any interior life, movement, or activity except in him.

We make an act of invocation of the Spirit of our Lord by begging him to give us his Spirit, so that we will make interior prayer only under his guidance, renouncing for this purpose our own mind and our own thoughts in order to admit during the entire time of our prayer only the thoughts with which it will please his Spirit to inspire us, so that we will put into practice what Saint Paul says, that the Spirit of God prays in us,⁹ for we are unable to have any good thoughts by ourselves.¹⁰

Second Part

In the second part of interior prayer, we apply ourselves to the subject of some mystery, virtue, or maxim of the Gospel.

If the subject is a mystery, we begin by permeating ourselves deeply with the spirit of this mystery, paying attention to what is said about it in the Gospel or what the Church proposes to us concerning it, either by a simple view of faith or by some reflections on the mystery or on its subject. We then maintain ourselves in sentiments of interior respect while considering the mystery.

If the subject is a virtue or a maxim, we interiorly permeate ourselves with its necessity or its utility, whether by a sentiment of faith, by some passage of Holy Scripture that expresses this virtue or this maxim, or by reflections on the virtue or on the maxim that

will help to convince us to practice it. We draw these reflections chiefly from Holy Scripture, particularly from the New Testament.

Then, based on faith, we make nine acts. The first three refer to our Lord; the next three, to us. Of the last three, the first refers to our Lord; the second, to God; the third, to the saints.

The three acts that refer to our Lord are an act of faith, an act of adoration, and an act of thanksgiving.

We make an act of faith on the mystery, the virtue, or the maxim by firmly believing that our Lord accomplished the mystery, practiced the virtue, or taught us the maxim. To persuade ourselves of this truth, we recall some passage of the New Testament.

We make an act of adoration by paying homage to our Lord accomplishing this mystery, practicing this virtue, or teaching this maxim. With our mind thus engaged, we remain in profound respect before him.

We make an act of thanksgiving by thanking our Lord for his goodness in accomplishing this mystery, in practicing this virtue, or in teaching this maxim for our instruction and our sanctification.

The three acts that refer to us are an act of remorse, an act of contrition, and an act of application.

We make an act of remorse by acknowledging before God how great our remorse must be for not having applied ourselves to become imbued with the spirit of this mystery or of this maxim or with the practice of this virtue or for not having applied ourselves as much as we ought to have done. To add to our remorse, we call to mind the principal occasions on which we have failed.

We make an act of contrition by asking pardon of God for the faults committed against the spirit of this mystery or of this maxim or against this virtue. We resolve to be more faithful in the future to the spirit of this mystery or of this maxim and to the practice of this virtue.

We make an act of application by applying to us the mystery, the virtue, or the maxim, considering before God how necessary it is for us to enter into the spirit of this mystery or of this maxim or to practice this virtue, noting the occasions on which we can and ought to do so and taking suitable and definite means to act in this manner when such occasions arise.

When making the act of application, we form resolutions. This is what is meant by taking suitable and definite means to practice the virtue on which we are making interior prayer.

These resolutions must refer to the present, be specific, and be effective. First, they must be applied to the present, so that we can put them into effect on the same day on which we make them.

Second, they must be specific, that is, relate to a particular virtue that we can foresee some occasions to practice. Third, they must be effective: we must take care to perform them without fail when the occasions arise.

The last three acts of the second part are, first, an act of union with our Lord; second, an act of petition; third, an act of invocation of saints to whom we have a special devotion.

We make an act of union by uniting ourselves interiorly with the Spirit and the dispositions of our Lord in this mystery or with those with which he taught or he practiced this virtue or this maxim. We beg him to give us a share in this Spirit and in these dispositions, earnestly beseeching him to grant us the grace to enter into the spirit of this mystery or into the practice of this virtue or of this maxim, not merely exteriorly—as the *philosophes* and people of the world practice it, by reason of its being a moral virtue or through purely human motives—but through views of faith and in union with the Spirit and with the dispositions of our Lord and through the action of grace.

We make an act of petition by humbly asking God for the spirit of this mystery or for the practice of this virtue or of this maxim, begging that it be granted to us in union with our Lord and through our Lord, in whom and through whose Spirit alone we dare to ask for and to hope to obtain it.

We make an act of invocation of the saints by begging those to whom we are especially devoted, chiefly those who were present at this mystery, who cooperated in its accomplishment, or who frequently and perfectly practiced this virtue or this maxim, to interest themselves on our behalf with God and to beseech God to grant us the spirit of this mystery or the practice of this virtue or of this maxim, thus showing them our great confidence in their intercession.

Third Part

In the third part of interior prayer, there are three acts. The first is a review of what we have done during the prayer; the second, an act of thanksgiving; the third, an act of offering.

We make a review by thinking about the principal items we have considered in our prayer and about the sentiments God has

inspired in us that we consider the most wise and the most practical and by reflecting on the benefits that we can draw from them.

We make an act of thanksgiving by thanking God for the graces received during the prayer, for all the sentiments that were given to us, and for the affection that God enabled us to experience for the good of our soul and for our advancement in virtue.

We make an act of offering by presenting to God our interior prayer, the resolutions we have taken, and our dispositions to fulfill them, at the same time offering ourselves to God with all our actions of the day.

We finish our prayer by placing all that we have done, considered, and resolved under the protection of the Most Blessed Virgin, so that she will offer it to her dear Son and by this means we will obtain from him the graces necessary to perform all our actions and to practice the virtue or the maxim on which we have made interior prayer, all for his greater glory and with the greatest possible perfection.

Notes

1. The Method of Interior Prayer can be found in John Baptist de La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, Daniel Burke, FSC, editor, Lasallian Publications, 1993, reprinted 2007, 7–12, an English translation of *Recueil de Différents Petits Traités*, 1711 edition, *Cahiers Lasalliens* 15, 7–16.

2. Jer 23:24

3. Matt 18:20

4. Acts 17:27–28

5. Luke 17:21

6. 1 Cor 3: 7; 6:19

7. Matt 21:13; Luke 19:46

8. Gen 17:27

9. Rom 8:26

10. 2 Cor 3:5

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