

# **Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz**

## **SELECTED WRITINGS**

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## PREFACE

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Juana Inés de la Cruz is already well-known in a surprising nexus of circles—academic, artistic, and popular. After successive waves of “rediscovery” of her works, she has achieved significant recognition in recent years, but such public acclaim is not new to her. Hailed as the Tenth Muse during her day, her literary genius was prized at court as a great novelty, and her works circulated throughout New Spain and beyond. Often characterized, in the past and the present, as a woman of “singular” and exceptional talent, Sor Juana remains perhaps as enigmatic now as she was in her own day: born in obscurity, self-taught, prolific, and progressively more celebrated, until finally, embroiled in controversy over the public circulation of her provocative ideas, she fades once more into anonymity.

What has probably attracted the most scholarly attention over the past several decades is her eloquent defense of the role and place of women as authoritative religious teachers, structured around a careful appropriation of elements of the Christian tradition. When coupled with her reflections on the active, redemptive role of Mary, students of Sor Juana have seen in her a prophetic witness to a more egalitarian understanding of human personhood and community. The fact that her *apologías* for women's right to theologize and interpret scripture was followed by silence, and obscurity only begs more interpretive questions that perhaps we are now in a better position to answer.

Born of unmarried parents in a small village outside Mexico City, Sor Juana's rise to international fame was not entirely predictable. We can credit her own deep thirst for learning and the material support of her maternal grandparents for her first steps

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away from obscurity. Her desire for education led her to Mexico City, where she eventually came to live under the protection of the viceroys. In 1667, responding to her "aversion to marriage," she entered the discredited Carmelite Convent of San José and then transferred to the Hieronymite Convent of St. Paula, where she professed her vows in 1669. Thus, at a relatively early age Sor Juana found herself, perhaps surprisingly, settled in a context uniquely suited to enable the development of her spiritual, literary, and religious interests, particularly as they coalesced in her passion for writing.

Convent life in the late seventeenth century took many forms. Without idealizing Sor Juana's circumstances, it is clear that her situation at St. Paula provided her with the fundamental needs of a dedicated writer: resources for her ongoing study, time and space to compose her works, and contact with others in academic and court circles, which allowed for the cultivation and circulation of her ideas. This was particularly true by the 1680s, her most prolific period as a writer, when support by the vicereine María Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga ensured that Sor Juana's works would see new light in Spain. A versatile and "natural" writer, not unlike her self-proclaimed mentor Teresa of Avila, Sor Juana's works span many genres: poems, liturgical contributions, dramas, comedies, treatises, and hundreds of letters, most of which have been lost. Both the quantity and the style of these works testify to Sor Juana's creativity and seemingly boundless energy; and, while she is not at all immune to the literary and cultural conventions of her day, the reader can discern, centuries later, a certain *joie de vivre* and freedom of spirit embedded in her words. In the act of writing, Sor Juana clearly took full possession of herself—reveling in all of the dimensions of personal development, intellectual exploration, and self-sharing that writers are graced to experience.

As she grew more self-revelatory, however, Sor Juana also became more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of public life. When her patron María Luisa left Mexico for Spain in 1688, Sor Juana fell prey to manipulation and criticism; the explosion of works during the 1680s was followed by controversy surrounding the unauthorized publication of her famous *Carta Ateneológica* (1690),

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## PREFACE

in which she set down in writing some christological views she had shared with the bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz. Her attempts to clarify her intellectual positions and to renegotiate her position vis-à-vis the religious hierarchy resulted in the spirited and much-cited *Response to Sor Philotea de la Cruz* (1691). Read in the context of this new collection of her works, the latter can be seen not only as a carefully reasoned and passionate argument for women's equality, but also as a scripturally based rationale for a theological anthropology that assumes women's authority as spiritual and theological teachers. The *Response* has all the qualities of an explosive tour-de-force: clarity of thought, citation of and debate with theological authorities, nuanced integration of scripture, and theological positions that beg further conversation. Indeed, the *Response* invites the reader into the very process of theology itself—a process of reflection, contemplation, debate, and ongoing refinement. Sadly, this process of speculation and conversation was cut off immediately; the *Response* became Sor Juana's last major work. We can only make educated guesses about her own disposition and agency during the period of Juana's silence, from 1692 until her death in 1695, but it speaks at least as loudly as the text of her works.

Like many Hispanic religious women, Sor Juana saw herself as part of a larger tradition of female writers. However, Sor Juana appears less interested than many of them in chronicling her subjective religious experience. Autobiographical information emerges in her *Response*, but never does she characterize or analyze her experience of prayer or her understanding of God. We gain, through her writings, little sense of the landscape of her internal life; instead, Sor Juana chooses the theater of human history as the arena to chronicle her relationship with God. Sor Juana theologizes more as an astute observer of life around her, attempting to capture, in words, the dynamics of divine activity within human interactions, past and present. Her reflections on human nature and the human-divine relationship were shaped as much by social interactions, her keen sense of social and religious structures, and her understanding of history as by her attunement to her own internal world. The literary genres she chooses reflect this orientation to larger social, historical, and even ethical questions. Sor

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Soprano  
public voice

Juana was consciously aware of the social and political dimensions of her writings, and she sought a public voice. Thus, in some very real ways, Sor Juana's literary works gave her a unique role as a socio-political, religious, and even theological commentator of no little authority and influence.

Re-creating and understanding all of the nuances and complexities of that specific context is somewhat difficult. Like all female religious writers, as a woman she was self-taught. But her educational milieu in the New World was quite different from that of her European foremothers. In particular, the multiplicity of cultural and religious influences and the context of colonial Christianity with its triumphalist overtones provided Sor Juana with a host of theological issues (and assumptions) that might not have played out quite so consciously or immediately in the minds of some of her predecessors. Certainly, she, like all of us, is marked by the specificity of her circumstances and lenses of context and personal idiosyncrasies that shape her exploration of how God can be seen and known in the here-and-now. Indeed, Sor Juana's synthesis of the Christian tradition cannot help but raise anew profound and interesting questions about how theological ideas translate and are appropriated across cultures and religious traditions. For that reason alone, we should welcome this new translation of her works, designed to facilitate our appreciation of Sor Juana's contributions as a theologian.

But there are other reasons to be grateful for this new look at Sor Juana. Locating her works among the many classics of western spirituality provides her with a much needed home. Read within the context of a larger tradition of philosophical, theological, and spiritual inquiry, Sor Juana loses nothing of her originality, but the label of singularity that has dogged her for centuries can now slip gracefully away. As a voice in a larger conversation about human meaning, it becomes easier to assess and appreciate Sor Juana's contributions and limitations. Finally, she is able to take her rightful place in a chorus of voices that seeks to shed light and bear witness to the myriad manifestations of the Divine in the drama of human history.

she is not singular

## INTRODUCTION

1st intellectual autobiography in Hispanic world

In 1699, with the publication of the first volume of her collected works, *Castilian Illumination*, the Mexican nun of the Order of St. Jerome, Sor (Sister) Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-95) was called "tenth muse," indicating that she, a mere mortal, was like Sappho in antiquity, worthy of the company of the nine goddesses of the arts, the muses.<sup>1</sup> Another favorite epithet reflecting the baroque age's love of expressions of astonishment applied to Sor Juana was "phoenix," a reference to a mythical bird that regenerated from its own ashes every five hundred years. But in this case, epithets such as "muse" and "phoenix" were not mere baroque hyperbole. It is an irony of history, or perhaps rather a fitting symmetry, that five hundred years earlier, we find—as if she were the previous incarnation of the phoenix—the only other woman whose writings exhibit a comparable complexity and variety of genre, and universal curiosity: Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). Like Hildegard, whose music, after centuries of obscurity, reached best-selling levels in the late twentieth century, Sor Juana has experienced a revival of interest since the publication of Nobel laureate Octavio Paz's biography, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, or The Traps of Faith*, in 1988. Her life has been the subject of a feature film, several plays, and a novel.<sup>2</sup> Her work has also been the subject of many scholarly conferences, books, and countless articles.<sup>3</sup>

Known today primarily among Latin American literary scholars, but enough a part of Mexican popular culture to be the face on Mexico's 200-peso bill, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was a writer of astonishing range and versatility. Octavio Paz has called her one of the great poets of the Spanish language.<sup>4</sup> He also considers her *Response to Sor Philotea de la Cruz* to be the first intellectual autobiography in the Hispanic world. One of her religious dramas (or *auto sacramentales*), *Divine Narcissus*, in which Christ is

active to Hildegard

## VILLANCICOS IN PRAISE OF THE VIRGIN MARY AND THE SAINTS

### Poem II for the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady<sup>1</sup>

#### *Refrain*

Ay, ay, ay, beautiful girl  
in your lovely attire!  
Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
steps you take!

#### *Verses*

Girl, hardly had you  
begun to walk,  
when you had  
the desire to fly,  
Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
steps you take!

Up the high steps  
ceaselessly you climb,  
since ascending is for you  
a natural inclination.  
Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
steps you take!

Those who brought you,  
you leave behind,  
as you do all

Nov 21 -  
parade to be  
to church  
to conf (Song 8:1)

# SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

Adam's children.  
 Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
 steps you take! 20

Seeing you go up  
 leaves us in admiration  
 even though we don't know  
 your final destination.  
 Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
 steps you take!

Blessed your parents  
 who bring as a present  
 the best offering  
 the world has ever seen.  
 Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
 steps you take! 30

At this rate, girl,  
 I assure you, if you're  
 heading for heaven,  
 you'll be there in no time.  
 Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
 steps you take! 40

Now enter the temple,  
 if it's God you're seeking,  
 And one day he will come  
 in search of you.  
 Ay, ay, ay, what lovely  
 steps you take! (OC 2:218-20)

# VILLANCICOS AND DEVOTIONAL POEMS

## Villancico VII for the Feast of the Conception<sup>2</sup> of Mary, 1689

### Refrain

Black is the bride.  
 The sun shines on her face. (Song 1:5-6)

### Stanzas

Ebony against a red sky  
 she calls herself black  
 not for being in the shade,  
 rather constantly  
 her purity is fired  
 in the furnace of the sun. 78

Black is the bride.  
 The sun shines on her face. 10

Comparing the pure light  
 of the one to the other,  
 in the sun's divine light,  
 all creatures are dark;  
 but their beauty grows  
 as they draw closer to him.

Black is the bride.  
 The sun shines on her face.

Bathed by the sun,  
 the bride is inflamed,  
 and ever more lovely  
 in his company. 20

Her purity never fades,  
 for the sun never departs.

SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

Black is the bride.  
The sun shines on her face.

No horror of sin  
could have had such effect,  
rather the cause,  
of her radiant color  
is such, she claims  
it adds to her grace.]

Black is the bride.  
The sun shines on her face.

Black she is, she confesses.  
But this blackness, she says,  
brings even greater beauty.  
For in the first day's first light  
Grace was morning star  
to her first step.

Black is the bride.  
The sun shines on her face.

A result and no small one,  
the more she humbled herself,  
confessing herself a slave,  
the more she revealed the Master  
who had purchased her freedom,  
and so was free of any other.

Black is the bride  
The sun shines on her face.

(OC 2:105-6) 50

VILLANCICOS AND DEVOTIONAL POEMS

*Villancio VI for the Feast of the  
Assumption, 3 1676*

Clear the way for the entrance  
of the bold adventuress  
who undoes injustice  
who smashes insults.<sup>4</sup>

The sun's rays are her  
resplendent armor,  
the stars her helmet,  
the moon her boots.

On her shining shield  
with which she dazzles hell,  
a mountain is emblazoned  
and golden letters: *Tota Pulchra*.<sup>5</sup> "Not beautiful"

Celebrated for her beauty,  
feared for her ferocity  
she is jaunty and valiant,  
and angelic is her beauty:

When the wind undoes  
her blond curls' skein,  
each cascading lock  
draws a Roland to her side.<sup>6</sup>

She dispelled the charms  
of the ancient serpent  
whose conspiracy  
set us under slavery's yoke.

She avenges wrongs  
and annuls unjust laws,  
gives refuge to orphans<sup>7</sup>  
and shelter to widows.

- the poem is a "celebration"  
- typically celebrating  
knights errant,  
adventurers, even  
Criminals -

(Song 6:10; Rev 12:1)

Song of Roland  
Knight adventure

## SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

She liberated prisoners  
from that prison where,  
were it not for her daring spirit,  
still they'd await their release.

30

All hell trembles at the mere  
mention of her name.  
And they say its very kings  
fast on her vigil.

She's the one who bore for us  
a Lion whose fierce roar  
has put to shameful flight  
the Dragon and his sorcery.

(Rev 12:3-18) 40

Warrior most valiant  
amid the cheering throng,  
her service to the Holy Empire  
entitles her to the imperial crown.

The celebrated champion  
who with spirit and skill  
won over the Holy Land,  
where she triumphs forever.

She is the one, whose tread  
no demon can endure.  
When he sees her feet,  
He takes to his heels.

(Gen 2:15) 50

Crowned with glory and honor,  
the deeds that brought her fame,  
since they cannot be contained on earth,  
send her riding out of this world.

As knight errant of the spheres  
on a new adventure,  
she finds the hidden treasure  
sought by so many.

may a  
knight  
want  
(Matt 13:44) 60

50

## VILLANCICOS AND DEVOTIONAL POEMS

There with a certain virtue  
secretly sheltering her,  
she is assured  
of life eternal.

She comes just in time,  
and it would be only just,  
for her not to die like the others  
who lived like no other.

(OC 2:10-12)

### Villancico IV for the Feast of St. Peter the Apostle, 1683

Bright shepherd divine  
of noble humility,  
the humble who see you,  
as sovereign, applaud you.

Solid foundation  
on whose eternal marble  
are set the church's  
walls of diamond.

Rock wounded by the blows  
of pain so penetrating  
as to dissolve ice  
into two pure torrents,

10

Fisherman so blessed  
that you find yourself  
master of a boat,  
pilot of a ship,

Sovereign keeper  
of those holy keys,  
you close the door on sin  
and open it to virtue,

20

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## SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

### Stanzas

An asp to her white breast  
Cleopatra lovingly applied.  
Oh, how superfluous, the asp  
where the poison of love had been!  
Oh, what a pity, O God!  
Oh, what disgrace!

10

But a heroic descendant  
of her generous line  
wounded by a better love  
aspired to a higher death.  
She cannot lie  
whose love has no end.

Courageous Cleopatra  
gave up her breast to poison,  
her body immune to pain,  
so wounded was her soul.  
So perished most  
what suffered least

20

Copying this love and valor  
Catherine suffered for  
a better cause,  
having this advantage:  
Who dies for Christ,  
prolongs her life.

To foil Augustus's triumph  
Over her sovereign beauty  
Cleopatra killed herself  
Apprising life less  
than reputation, death less long  
than slavery.

30

So Catherine, heroic,  
Baring her ivory throat

56

## ILLANCICOS AND DEVOTIONAL POEMS

in the sword, foiled hell's  
triumph over her resolve,  
and so dying, prevailed  
over those who killed her.

40

They threatened with shame,  
O Death, the sweet life of Cleopatra,  
but she chose as lesser evil  
death, preferring it to shame,  
loving honor  
more than life.

Offering her beautiful body  
to the cutting blades,  
the better Egyptian,  
aspired bravely to prevan  
and so by means of death  
to attain life.

(OC 2:166-67)

50

### DEVOTIONAL POEMS

*August 13 - Feast of the Assumption*  
Dedication to the Queen of Heaven, Mary,  
most holy, conceived in grace from the first  
moment of her being.<sup>9</sup>

Today, beautiful virgin, my love  
prostrate before you  
desires to offer you that same gift  
I received from you.

Extend your hand, my Lady,  
to this love that I feel.  
Though the offering be unworthy  
the affection is true.

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SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

The talent given me  
I bring. Graciously receive  
the little I've achieved  
and pardon what has gone astray.

In you, not in me, I place my trust,  
affirming to all the world  
whatever here is good is yours,  
whatever bad is mine.

(OC 2:60)

**In which she expresses the effects of divine Love  
and proposes to die a lover, despite all risk.<sup>10</sup>**

A care I carry within me  
so elusive, though I believe  
I sense it near, within  
Myself I sense it not.

It is love, but a love  
lacking in blindness,  
so its sight serves  
to increase its torment.

It is not the object  
causing the grief I feel,  
for goodness is the object,  
but all this pain—the means.

10

If this affection that I feel,  
be lawful, even rightly due,  
why am I punished  
for returning what I owe?

Oh, how much kindness, how many  
tokens of tenderness have I known!  
For love that comes from God  
is attribute without opposites.

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20

VILLANCICOS AND DEVOTIONAL POEMS

What is true cannot contain  
contradictory concepts.  
Just so love cannot live  
in the face of forgetting.

I remember (oh, had it never been!)  
in another age the love I wanted  
was beyond madness,  
exceeding all extremes.

Since it was a bastard love,  
composed of opposites,  
easily it dissipated,  
defective in its own being.

30

But now, woe's me, this love  
is so much in its natural element,  
that virtue and reason  
fuel its flames.

Hearing this one might say  
if this be true why do I suffer?  
But my yearning heart  
would say, for that very reason.

40

Oh, how weak our humanity  
where even the purest affection  
knows not how to strip itself  
of natural emotion!

So indispensable is  
this desire to be loved,  
that, even knowing it's no use,  
we will never give it up.

Though my response  
add nothing to this love,  
try as I might, I cannot  
cease desiring to respond.

50

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**Of the loving effects of Christ in the sacrament, on the day of communion.**

Gentle lover of the soul,  
supreme good to which I aspire.  
You who understand to punish  
offenses with benefits.

Divine Magnet whom I adore,  
today, I see you so well disposed  
that you animate in me the audacity  
to call you mine.

Today, in loving union  
your fondness has deemed it  
a slight thing to be myself,  
were you not here with me.

Today, to test  
the love with which I serve you,  
into my heart in person  
you have entered.

I ask you: Is love or jealousy  
the cause of this scrutiny?  
He who needs examine all  
reveals a suspicious nature.

Oh, how ignorant this view!  
What errors just expressed!  
As if human stubbornness  
could obstruct divine Perspicacity."

To see into our hearts,  
you need not our assistance,  
for you the secrets of the abyss  
are as clear as day.

With one embracing vision  
you hold present in your mind,  
the infinite past,  
up to the finite present.

Therefore you do not need  
me to bare my heart to you.  
Since your wisdom sees its  
you enter with loving devotion.

Therefore it is love, not jealousy  
that I behold in you.

**Hymn for the Feast of the Incarnation<sup>12</sup>**

Divine Love this day  
became incarnate,  
a gift so precious as to give  
all other gifts their worth.

Though those firstborn's  
first good was to be formed,  
what good to be created,  
and not to be redeemed?

Nor can the mere partaking  
in being bring pleasure.  
What purpose to be,  
if only to suffer?

The mysteries are linked  
and for our salvation:  
redemption, the means,  
creation, the crown.

He enters into us  
knowing our whole  
heart - in  
(OC: 1:169-70) seen

March 1<sup>st</sup> Annunciate

# SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

How great was the good  
of the loving Incarnation,  
if even its justification,  
the fault, was fortunate?

Sin alone could not be the cause,  
not to mend the fault the reason,  
since Mary alone sufficed  
for God to become incarnate.

The opposite I will not admit  
and find it strange to conceive  
any power to be crime's cure  
greater than her beauty.

What consolation this,  
to a world in lamentation:  
How much greater worth a world  
with her of greater worth than heaven?

The mystery of the Incarnation  
Could have twofold motivation:  
for all, from compassion,  
for her, from love's passion.

And thus the descent to earth  
this day, for different reasons,  
was caused by the sin of all  
and by the grace of Mary.

(OC:2:21-22) 40

## Song for the Nativity

### Refrain

How can it be my God  
that I believe in you  
and believing what I see,  
do not see all that I believe?

64

*the fault was  
fortunate*

20

*Mary as consolation to  
world in lamentation*

30

# VILLANCICOS AND DEVOTIONAL POEMS

## Verses

If faith and sight are so  
conflicted, why  
does sight need faith here,  
and faith not need sight?

Child, I see you, and to know  
what you are I need to believe,  
but I also know you are great,  
though my eyes do not see it.

10

To see you in the Eucharist  
is easier for me, for there  
I know I must believe  
what goes counter to what I see.

But here, what do you command?  
That in simplicity I believe  
what I see and do not see,  
what is and what is not.

You seem human and are,  
Lord, what you seem to be,  
but though I see not God in you,  
I know you to be God.

Finally, the senses now  
do not deceive,  
but infinitely more is here  
than ever sight perceived.

(OC 2:25-26)

*the  
2 verses*

20

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DEVOTIONAL EXERCISES  
FOR THE NINE DAYS BEFORE  
THE FEAST OF THE MOST PURE  
INCARNATION<sup>1</sup> OF THE  
SON OF GOD, JESUS CHRIST,  
OUR LORD

*Annunciation*  
Dedication

Supreme Empress of the Angels, sovereign Queen of Heaven, Lady ruling all creation: As I dedicate this work at your royal and sacred feet, you know well that it is not only a voluntary offering, but is also what I owe you as restitution for belonging to you before belonging to myself. Not only because of the sacredness of the matter at hand, but because you, Princess Immaculate, inspired some souls devoted to you to order me to prepare this. As a result nothing in it is truly my own except the crude manner and the awkward style in which it is written. For this I ask pardon of your maternal clemency, not so much for the simpleness of my reasoning, as for the tepid and insubstantial nature of these meditations, and for having had the audacity to take your exalted mysteries and the holy testament of your Son into my unclean mouth and write of them with my humble pen (Ps 49:16). So I entreat you, O Mediator and Gate of God's mercy! Turn your eyes away from these faults of mine. Look rather at the fruits these Exercises can inspire in my neighbors if you perfect them by increasing the fervor of their hearts devoted to you so that they complete them in a spirit greater than mine, with greater benefit

to their souls, honor to you, and glory to your precious Son, with whom you reign for all eternity.

## Introduction

The Venerable Mother María de Jesús recounts the ineffable favors with which his divine Majesty showered his chosen, beloved mother the nine days before the loving, and never sufficiently appreciated, Incarnation of the eternal word in the pure womb of most holy Mary, conceived without stain of original sin, to provide and adorn her with the greatness she needed when he elevated her to the inconceivable position of his mother.<sup>1</sup> One of these favors was to show her the creation of the universe and to require all creatures to swear allegiance and obedience to her as their queen. Then raising her up to heaven three times, the third time in body and soul, he clothed and adorned her with glory and greatness beyond compare, summing up in her apparel the honor and glory unequalled of being his mother.<sup>2</sup> This was known to all the heavenly court, except for our great lady herself, from whom this mystery would be hidden until the happy hour when St. Gabriel announced it (Luke 1:26-38).

I, therefore, seeing this, and considering that we (for whom this incomparable benefit resulted to our advantage) think it only right that we anticipate the celebration of this feast with some devotional exercises to rectify in some measure the dull neglect with which we generally attend to such holy mysteries and such inestimable benefits, have arranged them in the following order to provide a norm through which the prayer of many may be united, so that under the protection and sponsorship of the good and the just, divine Mercy will hear and tolerate the prayers of evildoers and sinners, such as myself. Having been given, with the help of his Sovereign Majesty, this Iukewarm foundation, there will surely be those who, filled with the spirit and virtue that such holy maternal demands, will expand it and furnish it with the dignity that it deserves. All that I ask of those who use these exercises is that they pay me for this slight work by remembering me in their prayers.

so that their debt to me render me a creditor in the eyes of the Lord.

To continue with my subject, I say that I have arranged these exercises to be as mild as possible so that all types of people (even those in poor health or busy) can do them. This does not prevent those with more spirit and strength from adding whatever they wish for their greater profit and to the honor of the Lord. On the other hand, those who cannot do even these exercises can change them at will. Since they are written principally for my reverend priests and nuns, there are certain things that would be nearly impossible for some, such as reading the psalms in Latin if they do not know how to read it; or disciplines, acts of obedience, and similar things, which are an ordinary part of the life of vowed religious but not so for other people. But, as I say, the goal is that in the course of these exercises some service be done for the Lord, as a token of gratitude for the singular benefit of his becoming flesh for love of us, and that thanks be given to God for having selected such a mother. Whatever will be done in devotion and reverence to her will be pleasing to his Majesty, although that which is most pleasing is the prayer of many united in one method and formula in the manner that our Holy Mother Church recites the Divine Office, with the same prayers, psalms, and supplications, et cetera. And with that, let us proceed to the first exercise.

## The First Day

(Which would be the sixteenth of March)

### Meditation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and on the first day God created the beautiful first fruit of all creatures, saying: "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3). He divided the light from the darkness, and he named it day, because he saw that it was good. This was the first creature he made, and the first to render obedience to his most pure mother, Queen of Light, without the darkness of sin, the most radiant light of all. If light is the servant of

Mary most holy, and it cannot suffer darkness, so that God separated it and made it of its nature incompatible with darkness. How could it be possible for the Queen of Light and all creation to ever suffer the deep darkness of original sin? Let us rejoice greatly at this privilege of hers without parallel and congratulate her on her luminous and pure conception, saying:

### Offering

Queen of Light, more beautiful than material light, since you illumine the heavens with your splendor, illumine our souls with your gifts. Because you are the nearest to the faultless, inaccessible Light of the divine Essence, send us a ray of this divine light to enlighten our understanding, so that freed from the darkness of human ignorance we may contemplate heavenly things. You are our Mother. Your apostle commands us to walk in the light so we may be children of the light (1 John 1:7). Grant, most tender Mother, that our works, made in the light of your influence, shine before your divine eyes and those of your Son and our Lord, so that by possessing the light of his grace in this world, we may enjoy the light of his glory in heaven.

### Exercises

On this first day when you see the first ray of light, bless its Author, who created such a beautiful creature, and thank him with all your heart, not only for having created it for our benefit, but also for having made it a servant of the one who is his Mother and our advocate. Attend Mass with all possible devotion. Those who are able should fast and in thanksgiving say the hymn *Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino* [All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord—Dan 3:57–90]. At the verse *Benedicite lux et tenebrae Domino* [Light and darkness bless the Lord], understand that it is not only the just, who are like the light, who are called to praise the Lord, but also sinners, who are like the darkness. Let each one of you recognize yourself as a sinner and repent for having added to original sin, darkness upon darkness, sin upon sin. Bow down and reflect

on the vileness of dust from which you come. Resolve to reform and so that the most pure light of Mary reaches you, recite a Hail Mary and a Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) nine times, prostrate to the ground. During this entire day in which we celebrate the light, strive to avoid even the shadow of sin: abstain from impatience and gossip; suffer patiently that which is most naturally repugnant to you. If it is a day for communal discipline, that suffices. If not, you may engage in a particular penitential practice for this day: (1st) Those who do not read Latin should pray the Hail Mary nine times bowed down to the ground. You should fast if you are able, but if you are not, make an act of contrition so that the Lord will give you light to be able to serve him, just as he gives you material light to sustain your life. So that on this first day the first and foundation of all virtues, humility, will match the first of all sins, which is pride, make acts of humility and abstain from acts of pride, so that the first and most capital vice will be banished.

### The Second Day

#### Meditation

On the second day the Lord said: "Let the earth appear in the middle of the waters, and he divided the waters that were above the firmament, and the waters that were below the heavens." He did this, and he called the firmament heaven (Gen 1:7). This was the second work of his infinite power and immense wisdom. During this mysterious time he placed this lovely mechanism at the virginal feet of his Mother, for she alone among all the daughters of Adam was like the heavens created between crystalline curtains of grace, with no participation in anything but grace, no separation from it through the stain of sin. No, she was totally pure, totally clean between these life-giving waters. There is nothing purer and cleaner than water, for although many foul things are thrown into it, water alone casts them out and purifies itself. Not only does it purify itself, but it has the particular quality of washing and cleaning that which is thrown into it. Likewise our great queen, was not only most pure and holy, but also is the

means of our purification and sanctification. If we look at the properties of the heavens, what is more like it in its marvelous constancy? What more stable? She whom neither the common lot of original sin caused to fall, nor the struggle against temptations caused to tremble. Amid the currents and tempests of human misery, amid the squalls and storms of the sorrowful passion and death of her most holy Son and our most beloved Savior, amid the waves of incredulity and doubt of the disciples, between the reef of the treachery of Judas and the shoals of so many timid souls, she always maintained her resolve, not only firm but also as beautiful as the firmament.

According to mathematicians, the firmament has this excellent quality beyond those of other celestial spheres: not only is it ornamented with innumerable stars, all those we see with the exception of the seven planets, but those stars contained in this sphere are fixed, without movement. The other heavenly spheres rotate. This one is the exception. In addition to being beautiful and luminous it has this other quality, that is, that of being fixed, which the other spheres do not enjoy. Similarly most holy Mary was not only pure in her luminous and pure conception, but also later was adorned by the Lord with innumerable virtues, which sparkle like stars, and decorate her, the most beautiful firmament. Not only did she have all of the virtues, but they were all fixed, immovable, all well ordered and in admirable concert. If in the rest of the children of Adam we observe some virtues, they are unstable, not fixed. Today we have them; tomorrow we lose them. Today we have one virtue, tomorrow another. Today it shines. Tomorrow it is obscured. Let us rejoice in this her prerogative and say to her:

### Offering

Lady, honor and crown of our humanity, divine firmament containing the stars of the fixed virtues, grant their beneficent influence on those devoted to you, so that under your influence we hasten to acquire them. Communicate this light, which you share with the Sun of Justice, to our souls. Fix in our souls your virtues, the love of your precious Son, and your sweet and tender devotion

to your blessed spouse, my lord and advocate, St. Joseph. Make firm and deep rooted the holy intentions that your Son, our Lord inspires in us, so that by carrying them out with perseverance in this life we will merit the perpetuity of your loving company, where for all eternity we will enjoy the sight of your greatness and praise the Lord for creating you for our benefit.

### Exercises

Today you will do the same things as the previous day, except for the canticle, which today will be the psalm *Laudate Dominum de Coelis* [Praise the Lord from the highest heavens—Ps 148]. Invite all the celestial spheres to praise the Lord with the harmony of their revolutions, the concert of their movements, and the variety of their influences, for having created them to be the carpet beneath the feet of his Mother. Praise him for exchanging his starry majesty and his bright throne for the abbreviated, more worthy, and more beautiful firmament of the Virgin's womb. Consider this benefit of the divine Word with attention, because however limited your intelligence, if you reflect on this slowly, you have material for centuries of meditation. At the end of each day say the gospel passage: *In principio erat Verbum* [In the beginning was the Word—John 1:1–14], and when you reach the *Verbum caro factum* *est* [The Word was made flesh], kneel down to kiss the ground and thank the Lord for becoming human and our brother.<sup>8</sup> O gracious gift! Who could know you sufficiently to know how to thank you! Those who do not read Latin, pray the *Corona*,<sup>9</sup> beginning our great queen to deign to accept our prayers. Be filled with the desire to be before her eyes as bright and sumptuous as the stars in the firmament. In order to be even more agreeable to her, you should abstain especially from the sin of avarice, which is the second vice. Strive for the corresponding virtue, which is generosity, and give alms according to your means. O Lady, may we participate in your generosity!

## The Third Day

On the third day God said: "Let the waters below the heavens come together in one place, and let dry earth appear" (Gen 1:9). And so it happened, and God named this heavy sphere earth, and the gathering of the waters, sea. God saw that it was good and said: "Let the earth produce green plants that have seeds and trees which bear fruit each according to their species" (Gen 1:11). And so it happened, and the third day was made. On this day these two marvelous creatures appeared in their places: earth and sea. On this day they pledged obedience to their queen, and all the elements bowed down before her virginal feet. No wonder, since the highest and most exalted heavens wanted to kiss her feet! The assembled waters rejoiced to be symbols of the exalted virtues and merits of most holy Mary, the *mare magnum* [great sea] of all grandeur, and that their name was (if we add a letter) the same as that of our most exalted Queen and Lady, since its name is *mar* [sea] and that of the great Lady, Mary. Thus the Lord wished to indicate by the short name of the sea, *mar*, and the long name of Mary that the sea in all its greatness, with its great swelling waves, its many sunken caverns, its hidden minerals, its variegated monsters, with the wonder of the ebb and flow of its tides, and finally with the terrifying vastness of its body, when compared to the sea of Mary's exalted virtues, is puny, narrow, and unworthy of representing her virtues even symbolically.

The earth in astonishment venerates this heavenly fruit, and marvels that it could be her own, well knowing that she had become sterile through sin, that she was capable of only producing the thorns and thistles of sinners. She is astounded to see this pure and fresh rose of Jericho, this beautiful lily of the valley, all innocent and clean, made fertile with the dew of grace and set deep in its currents. Instead of being afflicted by the thorns of sin, innumerable angelic spirits like satellites surround her. Earth sees herself the envy of the heavenly gardens, which, though they have pure angelic substances springing forth eternally from them, have never produced a rose with beauty to equal this one of royal purple. Earth rejoices because as the center of the universe she can represent most holy Mary as the center of all virtues.<sup>10</sup> She rejoices

in being called the common mother of all living things, as our most sweet mother Mary is called with more justification.<sup>11</sup> She kisses those holy feet, and the heavens envy her glorious expectation. She revels in being the symbol of Mary's admirable humility when she calls herself *dux*. Grieving, she received the beautiful and holy body of the Lord and won back through this good fortune the curse under which the serpent had humiliated her.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us love humility very much. If she who was totally heaven, and heaven more truly than the heavens themselves, called herself dust, what do we, who are dust, do in confessing the same? The nine days will pass. Let us at least retain this love of humility. See, ladies and gentlemen, our queen, who is the compendium of virtues, the archive of merit, the treasury of all holiness, who never praised herself, never boasted, only spontaneously demonstrated her humility. She did not do it out of mortification, like those who call themselves dust and worms, but by way of merit, giving her humility as the reason for her exaltation. "Because he saw (she says) the humility of his servant, and for this reason all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). This is the virtue most prized by Mary most holy and is the one that should be most appreciated by all who are devoted to her. His Majesty had all the virtues, and to a superlative degree, but this one is Mary's prize. Ladies and gentlemen, whoever is not humble strives in vain to be devoted to our Lady. There is no love of her without humility, for how could it be that she, who is humility itself, would be served by pride? No, brothers and sisters, whoever is not humble or does not at least attempt to be so, should take leave of our Lady. Let us be humble because we are servants of Mary, and because we cannot be so without her intercession, let us say to her:

## Offering

Our Lady, loving Mother, ocean of perfections, Mother of the living! Since it is only through your intercession that we live the life of grace, acquire for us from your precious Son your virtue of humility, and remove from our hearts every thought of pride, self-love, vanity, and the desire for honors in this world. Grant

that here, in imitation of you and out of respect for you, we humble ourselves, so that in heaven in your company, enjoying your honors and privileges eternally, we will praise the Lord who gave them to you and who honored us by assuming our nature in your most pure womb.

### Exercises

Today you will do the same prayers as yesterday. In addition, because you have called upon the most sweet name of Mary, pay attention to how mysterious it is and pray her Divine Office of five psalms. You should also say Psalm 95: *Cantate Domino canticum novum* [Sing the Lord a new song], requesting that our Lady, who is the star of the sea, liberate the seafarers from its dangers. Ask our Lady as Lady of the earth to quiet the earthquakes, which a few years ago threatened us with such terror. This we entreat also of our advocate the most glorious St. Joseph, on whose feast day the most dreadful one we have seen occurred.<sup>13</sup>

Those who do not read Latin, should pray the *Camándula*,<sup>14</sup> the *Dios te salve* [Hail Mary], *Hija de Dios Padre* [Daughter of God the Father], and so forth, and give thanks to the Lord for creating the earth that sustains us. Remember that we are made of the earth and will return to it. With this in mind pay special attention to refraining from any immodest thought, which is the sin of lust, and whose contrary virtue is chastity. Fast in order to help develop this virtue, and flee those objects that can arouse the contrary vice. Wear a hair shirt if possible.

## The Fourth Day

### Meditation

And God said: "Let there be two great lights to illumine the firmament and divide the day and the night, and let them be signs of the time of the days, and the years, and let them illumine the Earth." The greater light shall preside over the day, and the smaller one over the night. And he made the stars and put them in

the firmament, so that they shed light over the earth and he divided the light from the darkness. And so it was, and God saw that it was good (Gen 1:4-18). And thus the fourth day was made. These two beautiful creatures, the sun and the moon, which preside over all the celestial bodies and are sovereign over the republic of the other luminaries, came forth this day from the perfect exemplar of the eternal Idea to enlighten the universe and to reveal the light of the Lord. On that mysterious day they acknowledged their divine queen, shown in times past in visions and symbols as clothed by the sun, shod by the moon, and crowned by the stars. Now with astonishment they beheld the perfect original of the portrait in the Apocalypse (Rev 12:1). The sun saw that she was the more singular and exceptional than all its brilliance. The moon saw that she was more beautiful than its shining simplicity. The sun would have clothed her as before but found her illuminated by the sun of justice. The moon would have served as her footstool but saw her feet elevated not only over the empyrean, but also above all the angelic choirs. The stars would have crowned her but found her already crowned by the rays of the holy Trinity. What a sight it would have been to see the way these luminous yet insensate creatures rendered their queen homage! What a sight to behold our great Lady's supreme wisdom, through which she knew with perfect intuition all the natures and qualities of these luminous bodies: their influences, rotations, motions, retrogradations, eclipses, conjunctions, the waning and waxing of the moon and all the effects that can be produced in sublunary bodies, the generation of rain, hail, ice, and the terrifying flash of thunderbolts! She knew with absolute clarity and understanding all the causes of these marvelous effects that for so many centuries have held in abeyance and fatigued the understanding of the most scrupulous of men without their arriving at a perfect knowledge of them. With greater reverence than when it followed the command of Joshua (Josh 10:12-14), the sun halts its luminous chariot before the authority of the sovereign empress of the angels! Let us rejoice in her greatness and power, in her admirable infused wisdom! The pure angelic intelligences are struck dumb with wonder and enchanted with her perfection as they behold her. That we

may acquire from her most precious Son, our Lord, this gift of wisdom, let us say to her with tender and warm affection:

### Offering

O Queen of Wisdom, more learned and wise than the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chron 9:1-12), since you enjoyed the instruction of the true Solomon, from his Majesty acquire for us true wisdom, which is virtue, and the intelligence of heavenly things in order to inflame us with love of you and of your Son. For nine months your most pure womb was the chamber and sanctuary of Eternal Wisdom. Illuminate our souls, most gracious teacher, and liberate us from all error, the deceptions of the devil, and the cunning of his sophistical arguments. Grant us knowledge of your Son, our Lord, and of your merits, so that we may become truly devoted to you, serving you here on earth as we ought, and hoping through divine mercy and your intercession to enjoy your presence in heaven.

### Exercises

If the day is a Friday when you would normally say the Stations of the Cross, use them as the exercise. Afterwards say the Magnificat nine times to our Lady. If it is not the day for the Stations, you should scourge yourselves and say Psalm 103: *Benedic, anima mea, Domino* [Praise the Lord, O my soul—Ps 103:1, Vulgate]. Those who do not know Latin, pray the Creed nine times, making lively and fervent acts of faith as you profess it. Consider especially the manner in which God created the universe. Bow down to the ground when you pray the sacred words: He was conceived by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit and born of the Holy Virgin Mary. Give thanks to the Lord for becoming human for love of us. Take time to ponder the indescribable nature of this great gift. Do not say it from habit, skimming over it quickly, but reflect and consider: If the king came to our homes and called us brothers and sisters, if he suffered much travail for our sakes, going as far as to give his life for us, how amazed, how

astonished, and how thankful would we be. How much more thankful ought we to be when the King of kings, the Lord of lords, does this very thing? Unless you have hearts harder, colder, and more insensitive than stones, it is impossible to consider this with due deliberation and not desire to change your life. Today you should abstain from the fourth vice, which is anger. Try to exercise patience by enduring everything that offends you and that you find loathsome. If you have quarreled with others, settle your differences with them. Seek their friendship without paying attention to the small points of honor of this world or whether you are right and they do not seek amends with you or want to humiliate you. Because if you are in the right, so much more will it be for God's sake that you will be doing it. You will confound and edify others all the more. How much more important is this fruit than all the honors and riches that the entire world has to offer! The less obligatory an action, the greater are its merits. Those who do so imitate God, who humiliated and abased himself without needing to. With this in mind, resolve to pardon forever all your enemies, past, present, and future, for the love of God and for the honor of his holy Mother.

## The Fifth Day

### Meditation

"On the fifth day God said: 'Let the sea produce different fish, and the air bring forth birds that fly beneath the firmament.' God created whales and all the different species of fish in the waters, and all the birds of the air, each according to its species. God said that it was good. He blessed them and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the sea; and the birds should multiply over all the earth and thus the fifth day was made'" (Gen 1: 20-23). Since on the third day God gave a vegetative soul to the plants, on the fifth day he brought into being fish and birds that possess sentient souls, thus step by step increasing the exquisite works of his immense wisdom. God gave his Queen these even more noble creatures. The fish with rhetorical silence did her homage by

praising her as the Star of the Sea. The birds saluted their new Dawn with harmonious song, surrendering as they swooped down before the Royal Eagle who soared up to the throne of the holy Trinity. They bow before the dove of creamy white, whose ruby beak brought back to the world the olive branch of peace (Gen 8:8-11). They bow before the industrious bee that formed in its womb the honeycomb of Samson (Judg 14:8).<sup>18</sup> How appropriate that the fish and the birds are servants of Mary most holy! The fish because they dwell in the purity of the waters, as Mary dwells in the purity of grace. The birds because they soar to the stars and against the natural gravity of their bodies, rising up and searching the heights, as does holy Mary, the bird of purity who (although born on the earth) always inhabited the heights of heaven with soaring flights of contemplation and the outstretched wings of her fervor. Her advance in virtue was never in steps but flight so rapid as to be imperceptible, even to the seraphim. Mary was a bird so light that with one bound she arrived above all the choirs of angels. Like the heron she soared to hunt the eternal Word and brought it to earth so that we could satiate ourselves with his flesh and blood. Like the true phoenix that rose from the dead ashes of Adam, she rose beautiful and exquisite from the blazing fires of grace to become privileged like no other. Let us render her obedience like the birds and say with sincere affection:

### Offering

*Ave, ave, Reina de las aves!* Hail, Hail, Queen of birds! Hail, bird crowned and soaring above all creatures! *Ave gratia plena!* (Luke 1:28), as the archangel St. Gabriel saluted you with this name, and so we invoke you with the same! Teach us, divine bird, so that our affections take flight. Teach us like the eagle who teaches her chicks by flying above them. Inspire the flight of our contemplation so that we may drink in the rays of the sun of justice and protect us beneath your wings from the infernal serpent. Grant that in the secure nest of your fervent devotion and under the sovereign refuge of your maternal vigilance, we may pass through the perils and troubles of this life to fly to the heights of glory in your company. There we will enjoy the clear light of the

Lord, the beatific vision, which we hope to possess in your company for all eternity.

### Exercises

Say the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and an Ave Maria [Hail Mary] with attention. Read the gospel: *Missus est angelus Gabriel* [the Angel Gabriel was sent—Luke 1:26-38], genuflecting at the words *Ave gratia plena* [Hail, full of grace] as a sign of gratitude for the gift of a pure creature whom the Lord elevated to the dignity of his Mother, filling her with grace. We ask our Celestial Princess to enfold us in the grace that abounds in her majesty. Say the psalm *Cantate Domino canticum novum, quia mirabilia fecit* [Sing the Lord a new song, because he has done wondrous things—Ps 97, Vulgate].

Those who do not read Latin should pray the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, and since it is the day when the Lord created the birds, greet Mary, the bird most pure, full of grace. Today abstain from the vice of gluttony with special care, not only fasting but omitting the foods that are most to your taste and contenting yourselves with satiating the desire of your soul with this celestial bird. In place of the vile material food from which we abstain for love of her, beset her to inflame our souls with the influence of grace and to beg effective help for us from her most precious Son, so that we resolve to do his will on earth in order to enjoy his presence in heaven.

## The Sixth Day

### Meditation

"God said: 'Let the earth produce animals and different species of beasts.' And it was so and God saw that it was good and said: 'Let us make humankind in our image and likeness to rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the sky and the animals of the earth.' And God created humankind in his image and likeness, male and female, he created them, and blessed them, saying: 'Be

fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, take possession of it and dominate over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over all the animals that move over the earth.<sup>1</sup> And God said: 'See I give you all the plants to be your nourishment, and also for the nourishment of the fish, birds and animals.'<sup>2</sup> And so it was. And God saw that all the things that he had made were very good. And thus the sixth day was made, and the heavens and the earth were complete with all their ornaments. God completed his works and on the seventh day he rested from all the things he had made" (Gen 1:24—2:2).<sup>16</sup>

God finished his creations *ad extra* and perfected them when he formed humans in his likeness as rulers over the entire world. The creatures created on this day (the animals of the earth and humans) rendered obedience to the one who the Lord predestined and distinguished as Mother of his Son as an act of justice rather than grace. When Adam was created in original justice and grace, it was his nature to be ruler over all that was created on the earth, and so all the lesser creatures rendered him obedience. When he sinned and transgressed against God he was rejected by his inferiors. The elements and the rest of the creatures rebelled against him. Therefore, if Mary most holy was preserved from this original poison, in justice she would be owed all the privileges due her because of being conceived in grace. Therefore, as a matter of original justice all creatures would be subject to her, because she did not participate in that sin which caused their rebellion against Adam and all of his children. This benefit is not to be considered as a new gift but a manifestation of the benefit that her Son and our Lord gave to her by preserving her from original sin. And all the homage rendered her by the creatures of the earth resulted from the grace of her conception, like the grace of the original creation of Adam, and is a testimony to her being immaculately conceived. She alone was the one in whom the image and likeness of God, erased by the sin of our first father, the perfection of all the universe, was restored. Holy scripture calls Adam "the perfection and ornament of all creation"<sup>17</sup> (Gen 2:1) either because the final creature is the crown of the entire work or because the rest of the creatures were created for his sake. All the other creatures were left imperfect through the sin of Adam. Divine Omnipotence

is to be credited not only with restoring human nature, by redeeming it, but by making use of human nature, by predestining and preserving in his eternal mind a pure creature adorned with sanctifying grace from the first instant of her being. Through her the image and likeness of God was restored, perfecting the rest of his work and restoring it to its rightful order. For this reason it is not only human beings who are in Mary's debt but all the other creatures as well because she gives them perfection and nobility. They all owe her their service for this, if for no other reason. On this day, therefore, all the brute beasts render her obedience.

On this day also the Lord made her our Lady, sovereign over all,<sup>18</sup> although at that time they had no sense or knowledge of the benefit which God did for them by giving them such a ruler, sovereign, mother and refuge. Let us, then, who are so blessed in our time when the Lord had given us the knowledge of such deep secrets and admirable signs of his omnipotence, make up for the lack of attention in ages past to the mysteries operating in the world. Let us lift up our spirits to the Lord in recognition of so many graces and offer him sacrifice of praise. Let us swear obedience to our great queen, kiss the holy hand of our sovereign empress, acclaim her as our legitimate ruler, our mother, and our advocate. Let us make haste to do it so that we will not be less than the irrational creatures who have already sworn fealty to her as their lady. Let us repeat: Long live the queen of all humanity, the honor of nature, the crown of the human race, the restorer of our honor lost through Adam, the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the supreme honor of our Christian people, the restorer of the image of God in nature, the ultimate perfection of all creation. Let us cast ourselves with prostrate hearts and burning affection before her royal feet as we say to her:

### *Offering*

Our Lady and Queen, our honor, our consolation, and our goodness, Mother of our God and Savior, door of heaven, means of our redemption, we regret our tardiness in rendering you the obedience you deserve and in recognizing that we are unworthy of being your servants. However, trusting in your maternal clemency,

we dare to put ourselves at your divine feet, pledging ourselves to you as our true and legitimate queen, absolute sovereign, our particular advocate, and our unique refuge and help. We render you homage by becoming your perpetual servants and slaves and by welcoming with all possible fervor everything that results in your honor and the glory of your Son, as well as the spread of sincere devotion to you. We offer our lives in defense of your privileges, and we swear by the holy gospels of your Son to keep and to observe especially the privileges of your Immaculate Conception. We vow to defend it to the fullest extent possible, even to the point of spilling our blood in defense of this doctrine, and we hope, our Lady and our supreme good, to merit dying in your service. We entreat you as our queen to keep us beneath your protection and defend us from our spiritual and temporal enemies, especially our adversary the devil (the angel who rebelled against your Son and our King), whose proud neck you, our Lady, crushed. As such, we give you dominion over all our concerns to reign and govern according to your holy will, so that, by obeying your will, we your servants will merit seeing you in your kingdom, where you live and reign with the blessed Trinity, for all eternity.

### Exercises

Today you should pray the Magnificat nine times and the canticle of Habakkuk, *Domine, audisti auditionem tuam, et timui* [Lord, I heard your pronouncement and I feared—Hab 3:2], and then the litany to the blessed Virgin and *Alma Redemptoris mater* [Soul of the mother of the Redeemer], the verse *Angelus Domini* [the angel of the Lord], and the prayer *Gratiam tuam* [Your grace].<sup>19</sup> Those who do not read Latin should say fifty Our Fathers, with *requiem aeternam* [eternal rest] at the end, or without it, if you do not know it, for the souls of the dead who were devoted to the Virgin, offering up the prayers to her Majesty so that she applies them to whomever she wants. Entreat her through her intercession to restore in us the image of her Son and our God. So much did God love human beings, so much hunger to be like them, that seeing it was not enough to create them in his image and likeness to ensure that ungrateful and ignorant humankind

would not erase his image with sin, he looked for another means to establish the likeness, a means even more beautiful and precious than before. And so it was that his Majesty took on the image and likeness of a sinner. Since he knew that all things love their equal, and since he so desired that we love him, he did not spare himself the effort of becoming like us so that we would love him. Oh, what a great gift! Oh, what design! Oh, the beauty of divine Love! How poorly we respond to you! How long will this blindness, this gross insensitivity of ours endure? What more can God do in order to lovingly solicit our friendship! Thus says this same Lord when speaking of his vineyard: "What could I have done for you that I did not do?" (Isa 5:4) What ingratitude! There are no words to express, nor mind capable of conceiving, how monstrous this ingratitude is! If the being of God, infinite, immaterial, invisible, exceeds the power of our primitive understanding, we cannot know how to meditate appropriately on the infinite perfections of his immutable, immense, and unchanging being. However, to reflect on the holy humanity of Christ, on his passion and incarnation, and to acknowledge all that we owe him, how difficult can that be? Come, gentlemen! Let us be inspired at least to some effort! At the ringing of the noon bells and the call to prayer, let us make an act of love and thanksgiving, as we say: "Blessed are you Lord, who for love of us became human. And blessed is the womb of our Lady, in which you became flesh."

Today it is especially appropriate to abstain from envy, because if we need to love the image of God and if this image is in other people, it is clear that we need to love them, and loving them and envying them are in no way compatible. Let us consider how if an image of the Lord made of wood or bronze moves us to veneration and reverence, how much more the living image and likeness which is that of our neighbors? Do you dare to wish evil to a child of God and of the Virgin, and a brother or sister of Christ? Furthermore, all of us are, although not naturally, sons and daughters of God and Mary and brothers and sisters of Christ our Lord. They are images made in the likeness of God, and Christ is the image of God made in the likeness of humankind. Behold this mutual loving relationship! So how can you hate and desire evil for someone whom God loves and desires the good? I

believe that with God's help you would not commit the sin of envy, which is so foreign to human nature and which is only truly proper to the devil, whose sins all have their origin in hate. Even more so, this sin is so vile that it dishonors the one who commits it, and so dangerous that it brings forth its own evil from the good of another. To flee this very wicked sin, strive today for the opposite virtue, which is charity, by visiting and consoling someone who is sick, doing that person a favor or giving alms. Considering that by attending to these wounds you are assisting Christ, as the same Lord revealed to the venerable Mother María de la Anigua,<sup>20</sup> or even without this revelation of hers, as the law of charity instructs us.

## The Seventh Day

### *Meditation*

On the seventh day, as the holy book of Genesis says, God rested from all his works. But in this mysterious description of creation, God did not rest from granting favors to his dear chosen Mother.<sup>21</sup> He added favor upon favor and honor upon honor because he wanted everyone to know that Mary's privileges were not limited to being like Adam in paradise, a king of lesser creatures, but that the immense sea of her merits broke the bounds of nature. Their waves surged not only to heaven, but once there inundated the pure angelic substances. He raised her up in spirit to the eternal city so that the celestial citizens could render obedience to that queen whose rights and privileges, ages before, had made them take up intellectual weapons against that rebellious spirit who with his schism and strife brought discord into the tranquil kingdom, into the peaceful and well-governed republic of the stars. The Celestial Princess was raised up to them and adorned by the angels with innumerable mysterious jewels and secret signs, indicating the dignity of the Mother of the Most High. They swore allegiance to her as queen of all the eternal princes, and as the one who enjoyed the unutterable favors of the blessed Trinity. Although in the divine court there is no precedence in rank or sen-

iority of one angelic choir to the others, to me it seems that for the purpose of the method of these remaining three days we will divide them into three hierarchies according to the three prerogatives that were communicated to her by the three divine Persons: power, wisdom, and love.<sup>22</sup>

Today, then, we celebrate the power Mary enjoys over all creation and especially over the angelic choirs. The first level, according to the glorious St. Gregory, is divided into another three: angels, archangels, and virtues.<sup>23</sup> To the angels belongs the safekeeping and care of humankind, to the archangels the proclamation of great mysteries and enterprises, and to the virtues the working of miracles. In the first choir they honor God as Spirit, in the second, they manifest God as light, and in the third they operate as virtues. These three sovereign choirs of pure intelligence render obedience to their solicitous, mysterious, miraculous queen.<sup>24</sup> In her greatness as Mother of God they recognize the communication she enjoys with this same Lord, which inspires the angels, illuminates the archangels, and operates in the virtues. They recognize from the perspective of their perfections the excessive profit they gain through her in their ministries: she keeps and shelters humankind with more care and love than the angels; she participates in the divine secrets and proclaims them better than the archangels; she performs greater marvels and miracles than the virtues. Her majesty alone represents the incomprehensible mystery of the most blessed Trinity with a perfection greater than the three sovereign choirs of angels.

Oh, gentlemen, the contemplation of the greatness of our queen can fill us with wonder and amazement! Considering that the little that I understand of her greatness leaves me stunned and astonished, how much more amazing would be the knowledge of what she is in herself, a greatness that exceeds even the comprehension of the angelic substances! When I think of this, I do not know how I have the heart not to spend every instant of my life in the service of the Lord, who created her for his glory and for our benefit. My dear ladies and gentlemen, even if we did not owe God any more than the benefit of having created her, would we not want to spend our entire lives in his service? At least I, the most ungrateful creature ever created by his Omnipotence, must

say that there is not one day when I awake and thank him for the gifts I have received that I do not thank him especially for having created his Mother and for having created me under the law of grace, where I enjoy her protection. I believe firmly that all of you, men and women, already do this with great devotion, but should there be one among you who has not yet done so, I pray that you do so now, and remember me in this sweet act.

Returning now to our original purpose, let us bow down in worship to our Queen, petitioning the angels, archangels, and virtues, especially our guardian angels, to make up for our ignorance and repidness by rendering obedience for us. Let us say in their company:

### Offering

O Lady of the angels, O Queen of archangels, O Empress of virtues! We rejoice exceedingly in your greatness and power over these three exalted choirs. We also rejoice in seeing our human nature in your person lifted above that of the angels. We rejoice that not only do you have dominion over creatures equal or inferior to you in nature, but also that you reign over the pure angelic substances, who, though by nature superior to you, are only worthy to be servants of your purity, which far exceeds their own. Because of your exalted dignity, we who are of the dust of the earth by nature entreat you that we become like angels in our thoughts so that we may be worthy of contemplating your perfection. We beseech you to command these three choirs, sovereign spirits, especially our guardian angels, to guide and accompany us to the height of perfection, so that here and in eternity we may rejoice and praise you in their company forever. Amen.

### Exercises

Let us pray the following today in their name: Nine times the Magnificat; the psalm *Confitebor tibi, Domine, in toto corde me, quoniam audisti verba oris mei. In conspectu angelorum palam tibi* [I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart, because you have heard the

words of my mouth. In the sight of the angels I will sing to you—Ps 137; the three antiphons *Ave, Regina coelorum* [Hail, Queen of Heaven], *Alma Redemptoris mater* [Mother of the Redeemer], and *Sabe, Regina*, [Hail, holy queen];<sup>25</sup> the hymn *Tibi, Christe, splendor patris* [To you, Christ, splendor of the Father];<sup>26</sup> with the prayer *Deus, qui inter caeteros angelos, ad annuntiandum* [O God, who from among various angels to announce...];<sup>27</sup> and so forth.

Those who do not read Latin, will say:<sup>28</sup>

Hail, Queen of Heaven,  
and of the angels, queen!  
Hail, root of Jesse,  
light's clear gate!  
Rejoice, Virgin most glorious,  
most beautiful of all.  
Hail, most exalted one,  
pray Christ for us.  
So that I may sing your praises  
give dignity to my tongue,  
and against your enemies  
give me your virtue and strength.  
And you, powerful Lord,  
grant us your mother  
as our advocate to defend  
us in our weakness,  
so that with the help  
of her maternal clemency  
we may raise our heads  
above our iniquities.

Today you should visit altars with the Blessed Sacrament and venerate that holy and sovereign Lord sacramentally present there in the bread, which is the bread of the angels. Consider with reverence how many thousands of sovereign spirits are there entrapped at this presence. Entreat them to make up for our repidness and to offer up our prayers to the Lord. We should ask our guardian angels, especially, to teach us to venerate the Lord and guide us to perfection, as we say: "In the presence of the angels I

praise you, Lord: I adore you in your temple and confess your name."<sup>29</sup> Try to avoid the seventh sin, sloth, source of all the sins of omission and impediment to all good works. It is in opposition to and contradiction of all God's positive commandments, causing lethargy of soul, torpor of mind, failure of will, slumber of the heart, and death of all the good movements of our spirit. Try to do everything possible to expel it with its opposite, which is diligence, because the Lord condemns those who are negligent in doing his works. Let us imitate today all the holy angels, who neither cease nor tire of praising the Lord and beseech them to attain the Lord's help so that we may be diligent in his holy service.

## The Eighth Day

### *Meditation*

The second hierarchy, according to the same St. Gregory, is divided into three other choirs, which are powers, principalities, and dominations. The powers restrain and subject the demons. The principalities direct the heads of nations. The dominations direct the offices of the angels. In the powers God is present as salvation. In the principalities God reigns as preeminent. In the dominations God dominates in majesty. Today these sovereign choirs will render obedience to their powerful, supreme, and dominant queen and ruler, recognizing in her majesty a power greater than subjecting demons: crushing the dragon's proud head. The principalities recognize the power with which she governs and directs the nations. For this reason Holy Church applies these words of wisdom, as related to her person: "Through me the kings rule, and through me princes govern, and the powerful distribute justice" (Prov 8:15-16). The dominations recognize in her a greater wisdom through which she enlightens and distributes the offices of the angels. Let us give our triple allegiance to these three choirs, praying that they rule, govern, and enlighten. Let us entreat these three sovereign choirs to make good our defects, and let them celebrate her glory and the obedience we owe her with the offering of our hearts.

### *Offering*

O Lady, more powerful than the powers! O Princess, who rules the principalities! O Lady, who dominates the heavenly dominations! We delight and rejoice in the depths of our being at your exaltation and greatness, and we celebrate the joy you experience to see yourself sworn as queen of these lofty princes and of these monarchs most high. With profound humility, and sincere joy, we entreat you to assist us. With heartfelt charity and love we swear to you the obedience we owe, and we ask that these three choirs render you homage in our name. And you, most elevated and high queen, we implore you to assist us with your maternal protection. Subject and check with your power our perverse inheritance as well as your rebellious, treacherous vassal, the devil. Command the principalities to rule and govern the heads of your Christian people, especially our most Catholic king. Command the dominations to illuminate the offices of the lesser angels, so that all the creatures with one voice praise the Lord, who created you for his glory and for our good. With you as our model, help, and example we will serve you in this life and rejoice in your company in life eternal where you reign forever. Amen.

### *Exercises*

You should pray the Magnificat nine times, and the psalm *Qui habitat* [Who lives—Ps 40], and the antiphon *Ave Regina coelorum* [Hail, queen of heaven],<sup>30</sup> the gospel *Missus est angelus* [The angel was sent—Luke 1:26-38], the hymn *Placare, Christe, Servulus* [Have pity, Christ, on your servants],<sup>31</sup> and the prayer *Deus, qui ineffabili providentia* [God, whose ineffable providence].

Those who read Latin, pray the third decade of the joyful mysteries of the Rosary, which commemorates the Incarnation. Today you should try not only to abstain from mortal sin but also from venial ones, imitating angelic purity, which is free from all sin. Abstain especially from lying today, even in the most minor way or by chance, because any kind of lie is intrinsically bad and born of the devil. It is not good during these days that in our hearts, where we are endeavoring to have the holy angels influence

us with holy thoughts of love, and love of the eternal truth, which is God, we consent to bad angels engendering abominable evils in the form of lies. Let us undertake sincerely to uproot from our hearts this base vice, which not only stains the soul but also discredits reputations. I don't know what kind of enjoyment the liar could obtain, given the confusion and the shame of being discovered that accompany every step. This is a vice so evil and vile that those who do it are not united among themselves, as happens with other sins, but detest each other, since each one fears being deceived by the other. Even the world holds a poor opinion of those known to be liars. If the world, which is all deceitfulness and falsehood, detests lying, how much more must God detest it, who is the highest truth. How much greater the guilt of the liar when it is so easy to free oneself from this plague! Doing so requires no action, but only omission. Thus it is easier, more advantageous, more honest, and more delightful to tell the truth. I will never tire, gentlemen, of persuading you of this, which of itself contains its own persuasion. Who cannot see that this fiendish, bleary-eyed and base sin has so many enamored that there are persons who, without any need to do so, lie merely from habit, to the great detriment of their reputations as well as of their souls. They pay no attention to lies in small matters, as though they do not know that for venial sins there are rigorous punishments awaiting them in purgatory. Let us flee, then, all possible forms of lying and ask the holy spirits we honor this day, and their queen and our mother, to grant us the gift of not only speaking but of knowing and loving the eternal truth that is God, in whom we will delight for all eternity.

## The Ninth Day

### *Meditation*

The third hierarchy according to this same holy doctor [St. Gregory] is divided into three choirs: thrones, cherubim, and seraphim. The thrones consider the justice of God, the cherubim the power of God, and the seraphim the goodness of God. In the

first choir God resides as justice; in the second God is known as truth; in the third God is loved as *caritas*. These elevated spirits, these beautiful creatures, admirable examples and extraordinary manifestations of divine omnipotence, humble themselves and prostrate themselves at the feet of a pure human creature. What tongue is sufficient to praise, what mind sufficient to comprehend the merit of this miraculous Lady who possesses such greatness? Certainly even the angels are not equal to the task. Since we do not know how exalted the privileges of these spirits, how elevated their greatness, how sublime the thrones they occupy, how pure and perfect their nature, how much glory they enjoy, neither can we understand to the smallest degree the merit of their great queen and our Lady. Oh, what a privilege we enjoy by her being of our nature! Who would doubt that if the angels were capable of envy, they would envy this good fortune? I, for myself, know that if it were possible to exchange the miseries of my human nature with the privileges and perfections of angelic nature, thereby losing the relation we have of family ties with Mary most holy, I would not accept them, even if I could, in view of this, and in consideration of the fact that I cherish and appreciate with all my heart being of her lineage. I say, therefore, that today thrones, cherubim, and seraphim do her homage. The thrones are entranced to see the perfection of the seat of the justice of God; the cherubim are in astonishment at her incomparable virtue; the seraphim at her burning love. Finally, all see in Mary the summation of incomparable advantages, all her privileges, honors, and perfections. Let us render homage again to this great lady and entreat these three choirs to do her homage in our name, so that their sovereignty will supplant the defects of our baseness and ignorance.

### *Offering*

O Lady, whose throne is above the thrones! O Lady, full of wisdom greater than the cherubim's! O Lady, inflamed with love greater than the seraphim! In the company of these three choirs we render you obedience as your most indebted servants. We entreat you in your magnanimity, remember, divine Esther, your

afflicted people and your oppressed lineage. Liberate us, sovereign Judith, from the dominion of the devil. Reward our works according to your justice. Enlighten our understanding with your wisdom so that we may contemplate your greatness. Inflame our hearts with your love, so that filled with the fervor of your sweet devotion, illuminated with your light, and aided by your maternal protection, we will know in this life the means of serving you and of fulfilling the will of your most holy Son, so that we merit entering the glory where we will enjoy your company forever by passing through the portal of your intercession. Amen.

### Exercises

Pray the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), the hymn *Christe sanctorum decus, angelorum* [Christ, glory of the holy angels],<sup>32</sup> *Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus* [Give thanks to the Lord for he is good—Ps 135], the antiphon *Angeli, Archangeli*,<sup>33</sup> or the prayer *Deus qui miro ordine Angelorum*.<sup>34</sup> And because this is the ninth day of the novena and the eve of the feast of the Annunciation, you will engage in ascetic practices. As for fasting, those able will do it even without this devotional exercise because it is Lent. Make arrangements for a good confession today in order to be worthy to receive communion tomorrow, since it is on that day that we commemorate the great mystery of the Incarnation which was brought about for our benefit. Let us ask the Lord with tender hearts and burning love, just as he digned on that day to lodge his immense Majesty in the virginal womb of his most pure Mother, after adorning her with many virtues, that he purify and adorn our souls, so that we deserve to be the dwelling of his body in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Let us implore our great Lady and teacher to instruct us on how to prepare ourselves to receive the immense majesty of the Lord, just as she was prepared to receive the Eternal Word, without ever having expected this benefit but only that of always conceiving him in her soul. Our Lady, lend us the rich jewels of the royal fortress of your pure soul to adorn the lowly hovels of our hearts so that they become decent dwellings for such a visit. Endow us with the treasures of your virtues so that we may give lodging to and entertain that Lord, who delights in

the children of humankind. Let us strive for this through her merits and those of the Incarnation and passion of the Lord. Today it is clear that we need to abstain from all vices, since we detest all of them forever in confession.

Those who do not read Latin should pray the *Crown of Flowers*: "Blessed be God, because he made you his Mother," engage in ascetic practices, and omit the conference on spiritual matters, since it is the eve of communion. Abide in the grace of the Lord. Amen.

### Day of the Incarnation

#### Meditation

Today's subject would be more appropriate matter for the most learned eulogist, the most eloquent orator, the most elegant rhetorician, than for the feeble instrument of my discourse. But what eloquence, what elegance, or what learning would suffice to elucidate (although all the sovereign angelic choirs may try to explain it) the greatest of the gifts, the crown of all graces, the highest privilege God could make and concede to a pure creature: to elevate her to the incomprehensible dignity and grandeur of becoming his mother? How believable do they seem, how easy to imagine, and how apt do the great gifts we have considered during these nine days appear to us now! If she were to become the mother of the Word, no wonder she was blessed and honored with all the privileges that we know and the infinite number of which we are ignorant! Well, it was fitting and necessary that it occur to one of such great purity, that only God's is greater. After God there is no holiness, no virtue, no purity, no merit, no perfection like Mary's. Therefore, after God, there is no grandeur, no power, no privilege, no exaltation, no grace, no glory like that of Mary most holy. Therefore, although the ineffable graces of these days are in themselves so admirable, they are not admirable when compared with the dignity of God. Oh, may that same Lord help me, who enclosed himself in this phrase: Mother of God! Mother of God? No wonder she is the queen of the world! Mother of God!

Of course all people must render her homage! Mother of God? No wonder the elements become her vassals! Mother of God? For this reason the heavens bow down before her! Mother of God? It is only just that the angels swear her allegiance as their queen! All this is appropriate, all is included, all is embraced, all is merited in the one who is Mother of God! For this purpose God created her, for this he preserved her *ab aeterno* [from eternity], for this he adorned her with so many gifts, for this he granted her so many perfections, for this he animated her with so many helpers, for this he enlightened her mind, for this he exalted her with such graces and favors. What greatness, what excellence, or what prerogatives can be conceived that our great Lady does not have? Oh, how many are there? To what supreme degree of perfection do they need to be? Only God, who created her, can understand them, and only our Lady could allude to them when she said that his Majesty had done great things for her (Luke 1:49). Our devotion to her is such that we believe all are possible.

But look, gentlemen, God did many favors for his sacred mother, graciously, and as the theologians say, without considering her merits, such as preserving her from original sin. By so doing he preserved her from all movements of nature inclined to evil through sin, so that all her actions were balanced by reason without resistance from the inferior part. He infused her soul with intelligence before setting limits on intelligence as he did for all other living creatures. However, the remainder of her privileges were given out of justice to her high merits, supreme fidelity, burning love, and the extreme courtesy with which she responded to the divine benefits, rendering herself worthy to conceive in her womb the eternal Word because of having first conceived it in her soul. And that is the reason the glorious St. Augustine said that it was more blessed to conceive the faith of Christ than the flesh of Christ.<sup>35</sup> Also St. Bonaventure in the eleventh chapter of his commentary on St. Luke says: *Beatus ventur qui te portavit* [Blessed be the womb that bore thee]. It was not so blessed for Mary to hold Christ in her womb as it was to hold him most perfectly in her soul. His conception in her soul preceded his bodily one. Her own conception was more ancient, since it was from the first instant of her being. Thus she was made ready and worthy to be the natural

mother of Christ, who this blessed day became incarnate in her virginal womb for the love and good of humankind. He assumed our nature, clothing himself in the semblance of a sinner. Oh, what wonder, what tenderness consideration of this mystery evokes! What heart does not dissolve, and whose eyes are not wet with tears when they repeat: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us?" (John 1:14). What nation, however great, enjoys such familiarity with its gods as our God grants to us? O mystery of the Incarnation! O Incarnation of the Word! O union most happy for us, that of God and humankind! O wedding celebrated by the eternal king of his only begotten Son with human nature! When will we be able to understand you? When will we be able to reciprocate such a favor? When will we be able to make use of this benefit? O Mother and Virgin, whose womb was three times privileged: to conceive without sin, to sustain the divine burden without trouble, and to give birth without pain! As St. Bonaventure says, you were the subject of three miracles: uniting the infinite with the finite, nourishing the one who created you, and containing what is limitless.<sup>36</sup> O Mother and Virgin, in your pure and holy womb occurred those three admirable works, those three incomprehensible combinations: the reciprocal union of God and humanity, motherhood and virginity, faith and human knowledge. In the virginal bridal chamber of your pure womb is enclosed the one who cannot be contained by the wondrous mechanism of the heavens! Teach us to meditate and be grateful for this favor, so that thankful for this great benefit that was done for love of us, with tender and loving voices, we can say with that woman of the Bible, Elizabeth:

### Offering

O Mother of the Eternal Word, and so merciful, that you design to be the mother of humankind! Blessed be your name and your most pure womb that was found deserving to be the tabernacle of divinity for nine months! Blessed be your holy breasts, which fed the one who maintains and sustains the entire universe with the sweet nectar of your most pure blood! We rejoice to see you already in your most exalted position as Mother of God. We

congratulate you on the dignity to which you have risen and through which you have exalted us so that we have become related to your Son and our Lord. It is through you that we see ourselves, as entitled to be part of the royal house of the Lord, who treats us as and calls us his kin. O my Lady, grant that we know how to attain the dignity you have achieved and are grateful for, as we ought to be! Grant that we recognize the flesh and most pure blood that today you gave to the Eternal Word, as the same flesh and blood that was the price of our redemption on the cross, so that we can see the part you played in that redemption! How can we repay you, my Lady, all that we owe you? You see our poverty and our ignorance. Enrich us with your treasures and with your wisdom illumine us, so that we may be able to repay you in some small measure or reimburse you a small part of what we owe you. Beseech your Son and our Savior that just as today you receive him in your womb most pure, we do the same through the sacrament in our unworthy breasts. Let us thus receive and conceive him perpetually in our souls, so that we may attain the promise of eternal bliss that your Majesty made to those who hear the word of God and keep it. You possess this word of God with such an abundant excess of glory greater than that of the other blessed souls, which can only be measured by the Lord, with whom you reign in all eternity. Amen.

### Exercises

Today we will pray the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) nine times; the hymn *Ave, maris stella* [Hail, star of the sea];<sup>37</sup> the Cantic of Zachary: *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel* [Blessed be the Lord God of Israel—Luke 1:68–79]; the gospel text *Missus est angelus Gabriel* [The angel Gabriel was sent—Luke 1:29–38]; and the prayer *Deus, qui de beatæ Mariæ Virginis utero* [God, who in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary].<sup>38</sup> The priests who pray at home can pray the Holy Office, at least vespers, on their knees out of reverence for this great mystery.

Those who do not know Latin should pray the fifteen decades of the Rosary; if that is too much for them, a third of that, the joyous mysteries. Pray the Hail Marys with great devo-

tion, considering how much was included in that mysterious greeting to our Lady by the holy angel, Gabriel. At the end pray the following:

God, who from the womb  
of the lovely Virgin Mary  
caused your Eternal Word  
to take on human nature  
as Gabriel proclaimed,  
grant those who confess  
her ever Virgin  
and truly Mother of God,  
that her intercession  
help and protect us  
through the Word and Love  
who live and reign with you.<sup>39</sup>

For the time remaining, give thanks to God for the holy communion that he has allowed you to receive. Use a devotional book to help you, as there are many that treat of this material. For the greater glory of God offer with all your being not only the exercises of these days, but also the works of your life past, present, and future, for all intentions that were for the greater pleasure of his Majesty and for the advantage of souls. Try not only to refrain from sin on this day but to resolve with all your heart never to sin again for the rest of your life. And if we do sin because of our weakness, we should not lose heart or diminish our love for this mystery. We should ask our great Lady to grant us the graces to raise ourselves up. Let us try at least to retain some benefit from these exercises for the rest of our lives, by abstaining forever from one of the vices and acquiring a virtue, as well as cultivating the most lively affection for the holy mystery of the Incarnation. Through the mystery of the Incarnation and the love with which he carried it out for love of us, and through the intercession of his holy Mother, let the Lord be so kind as to give us his grace in this life and his glory in the next. Amen.

# OFFERINGS FOR THE ROSARY OF THE FIFTEEN MYSTERIES TO BE PRAYED ON THE FEAST OF THE SORROWS OF OUR LADY, THE VIRGIN MARY

## First Offering

When Mary arrived fatigued and weeping, she saw the inhuman executioners take the cross off the shoulders of the Lord. She saw how in haste they tore off his garments, pulling with them pieces of his torn flesh and leaving his virginal body, once again naked, exposed to the view of the multitude.

## Offering

O Mother most holy, you are the most afflicted and shamed of all women because of the insults suffered by your beloved Son and our beloved Redeemer! We offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the incomparable pain that pierced your tender soul and for the blush of unspeakable shame that suffused your holy face when your virginal eyes saw naked in such a public and dishonorable place the One who was the clear mirror of all chastity and purity. For his sake we implore you to intercede with his Majesty so that the insults and wounds of our sins and the nakedness of our merits will be covered over and replaced by the dishonor suffered by our Savior and by your tears. With these as our adornment may we appear with all modesty before the tribunal of his justice, and through your intercession be taken up to eternal joy, where you reign forever!

## Second Offering

### *When She Saw Him Crucified*

O most holy Mother, become center and target of all sorrows! We offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the shuddering of your maternal heart as it was pierced at the sight of your precious Son, our Lord's delicate and tormented body, nailed with three nails to the hard wood of the cross. Through him, my Lady, we beseech you, pierce our thoughts. Nail them with the holy fear of your Son, so that they do not increase to offend his Majesty. Thus secured by the nails of his commandments to the narrow cross of our obligations, may we merit eternal liberty and freedom in your company in heaven, where you reign eternally. Amen.

## Third Offering

### *When They Lifted Him up on the Cross*

O Mother most afflicted, mother submerged and drowning in the immense sea of torments of your precious Son! We offer these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the pain that passed through your tender heart when you saw the holy body of your precious Son so heedlessly and hurriedly raised up on the cross. You saw the living streams of blood pouring from his feet and hands, new wounds torn open by the weight of his body and by the pitiless jerking of the cross. You saw his other wounds created anew by the instruments with which they raised the cross. We beseech you to intercede with his Majesty to give us an intimate appreciation of his pains and of yours. In compensation for that ignominious exaltation may he be truly exalted through the adoration in our souls and in our hearts made pure and loyal, so that in the days to come we merit being lifted up into his glory, and in your company, where you live and reign forever, etc.

## Fourth Offering

*At the Words Christ Said*

O Mother most afflicted and thus become the consolation of all those in distress, we humbly offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the most deeply felt pain that went through your loving heart when you heard your precious Son, the refuge of all people, reproach his Eternal Father for having abandoned him (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-30) and commend you, my Lady, to his disciple (John 19:26-27). With profound humility and resignation you accepted this exchange, so unequal, the exchange of God for a man. For this sorrow, my Lady, we beseech you, look not upon our sins, but accept us as your children. Assist and protect us in the abandonment of the hour of our death so that through your intercession we will pass through death's dark door to freedom and the joys of life eternal with you forever. Amen.

## Fifth Offering

*Gall and Vinegar*

O Mother bereft of consolation and afflicted by the incomparable torment our Savior and your Son, we humbly offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the bitterness that shrouded your most holy soul at the sight of the torture that they inflicted on your dear Son. Instead of giving him relief and refreshment from his burning thirst, they gave him wine mixed with gall, whose bitter sting was more deeply felt in your maternal heart than on his delicate tongue (Matt 27:48; Mark 14:36; Luke 23:36). In view of this pain we entreat you to give us the will to endure the bitter humiliations of this life with patience and to nourish our souls with the sweet food of grace, so that thus fortified we will direct our steps along the path to eternal glory, where you live and reign forever. Amen.

## Sixth Offering

*When She Saw Him Die*

O Mary, sea of grace and virtues, and now an immense sea of sorrows where pain and suffering flow in like rushing rivers! We offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the unspeakable sorrow that penetrated your anguished soul like a vicious knife when you saw that head incline as he committed his sacred soul to his Eternal Father as it left his tormented body (John 19:30). Your own soul would have doubtless been severed from your holy body had it not been miraculously maintained in life by the Lord of life—this pain leaving you beside yourself and transfixed. You would have needed the strengths of many lives to be able to bear it without accompanying him into death had not the Lord protected you from the experience of even greater pain. Because of this pain, our Lady and our Mother, we entreat you to give us the strength and courage to die to the things of this world and to live only in the Lord, so that when we arrive at the necessary and feared hour of death, prepared and comforted through your intercession, we will have the courage and the permission to pass through that narrow gate where we hope, due to your son's mercy and your protection, to move on to a better life, where you live and reign forever, etc.

## Seventh Offering

*When She Remained Alone at the Foot of the Cross*

O Mother, alone and forsaken! Humbly we offer these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the abandonment and poverty in which you found yourself at the foot of the cross. You saw hanging the One on whom all that is depends for its being and could find no way to take him down, no shroud to enfold him, no tomb for his burial? You saw him hung like a criminal, exposed to the inclemency of the weather, an ignominious spectacle to the eyes of the passersby. Allow us, my Lady, to participate intimately in your

loneliness, poverty, and abandonment. We beseech you, do not cast aside our company, wretched though it may be. Accept our crude and rapid compassion. Inspire in our souls an intense awareness of your sorrows, so that as you joined us in the afflictions of this life, we merit joining you in eternal joy, where you reign forever, etc.

### **Eighth Offering**

#### *When He Was Pierced by the Lance*

O most sorrowful of mothers! O woman of sorrows, intended in all things to be a copy of your suffering Son! We offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the unimaginable pain and cruelty you saw inflicted on your dead Son, as his most loving heart was pierced with a hard and pitiless lance (John 19:34). Your own maternal heart felt his wound so deeply that it is called by extension, yours (Luke 2:34-35). For this sorrow, my Lady, we beg you to intercede for us with your precious Son. Make us partakers of the fruits of his open side, which are the sacraments of the Holy Church, through which we are restored to the grace, lost through our sins. May we persevere in this grace, through your intercession, so as to merit eternal glory, where you live and reign forever, etc.

### **Ninth Offering**

#### *When They Lowered Him from the Cross and Put Him in the Arms of His Most Holy Mother*

O Mother drowned and debilitated in the flood of your own tears, consumed by your own suffering, we humbly offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the pain you felt when you received the inert and disfigured body of your holy Son in your virginal arms. Oh, how different and how other was that Son, reflection of all beauty, as you took him in your arms to nurse him,

your whole soul filled with bliss! How different a dwelling those arms of the cross than your arms! How unrecognizable the body now returned to you! O most tender Mother, what would have been your thoughts at that moment? We beseech you to lend us your vision and instill in us your kindness, so that we see and examine honestly those divine wounds suffered for love of us. Help us respond as we ought to both his and your gifts so that we may serve him in this life and merit accompanying you in the next, where you live and reign forever, etc.

### **Tenth Offering**

#### *When They Buried Him*

O Mother alive only to torment and dead to all consolation! We humbly offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for the pain you felt as they took the broken body of your beloved Son from your arms to place in the grave, depriving your weeping eyes of even the presence in death of the one who had been their light. How different his final resting place from the first! Instead of your pure, maternal womb, the cold, hard stones receive him. Woeful, the stone sealing the tomb falls with more weight on your wounded soul than on his dead body. Most clement Mother, we ask you to cleanse our hearts of the impurity of our sins. Subdue and soften them in consideration of your suffering, so that they will not be like the cold tomb, but rather like your pure and tender womb, as we receive your Son in the Eucharist, our present food of grace, and future food for eternal life in glory, where you live and reign forever, etc.

### **Eleventh Offering**

#### *When They Returned to the Place of the Last Supper*

O most lonely Mother weeping over the best Son, widow of the best spouse, and orphan of the best Father! We offer you in

humility these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for those dolorous steps you took through the bitter streets as you retraced those you took as you followed your beloved Son. You contemplated and adored each of his footsteps and washed the traces of his precious blood with your bitter tears. The sight of these places brings ever more vividly to your suffering soul what you saw the sweet Lamb suffer at the place where he knelt down, where he fell, where he was dragged down, where they gave the cross to Simon the Cyrenian for help (Mark 15:21; Matt 27:32; Luke 23:26), and where his tender, penetrating gaze pierced your holy soul. As you contemplate all his afflictions in your heart, your own sufferings become a substitute for his.<sup>4</sup> Grant us a true knowledge of his suffering, direct all our steps to your greater service, to the honor and glory of your Son, and for the benefit of our souls, so that by following your steps through the bitter street of mortification on the path of this life we will arrive at the peace and tranquility of the Last Supper of glory, where you reign forever, etc.

## Twelfth Offering

### *For What She Felt for Those Who Die without Baptism*

O sorrowful mother, not only for a Son dead to temporal life, but grieving even more for the infinite number of those dead to eternal life! Oh, how monstrous and atrocious, how unbelievable your suffering at their fate! Our Lady and our Good, was not the suffering of your Son enough? Were the daggers of your Son's humiliation and torture, which stabbed your heart, too few to saturate your capacity for suffering? Were you thirsting for more pain as you turned your eyes on the most sorrowful object there is, turned your generous and royal heart toward the sight of the innumerable multitude of those without knowledge of his goodness and redemption, and without the life-giving waters of baptism, who will be fodder for eternal death? O Lady, you whose wisdom understands fully the extent of this harm, what a dagger's thrust to your heart was this, given your burning love for all people, and given your acceptance of the torture of your only begotten Son for

their salvation! How did you feel to see wasted the fruit of his blood and the salvation of the unenlightened pagans in the darkness! For this, my Lady, we offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father and beseech you to intercede with his Majesty to give the light of the gospel to the peoples in the darkness of paganism so that his name will be praised and known, and all peoples will live in his service, possess the glory for which they were created, in your company eternally. Amen.

## Thirteenth Offering

### *What Our Lady Felt about Heresies*

O Mother, martyr to the three most noble but most inhuman scourges: your indelible memory, your infused wisdom, and your ardent love, through which you are aware of, ponder, and feel all the pain of all those who have ever been born. Your suffering grows by degrees as you see the perdition not only of the blind pagans, ignorant of redemption, but also the loss of those already on the road to life, already on the path of light, who turn back and defame the baptism they have received with heretical teachings, splitting like ungrateful serpents the womb of Holy Mother Church in which grace is conceived. Not only do they tear the seamless garment of your Son, but they bring discord to the harmony of the members of his mystical body, Holy Church, by falsely interpreting holy scripture. Sorrow for you, my Lady, more intense for being lost from the flock branded, marked, stained no less with the blood of its shepherd. For this reason, my Lady, we offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father, beseeching you to intercede with your Son to return these erring sheep to his flock, delivering them from the mouth of the eternal wolf, so that reconciled here with the church militant they will all enjoy the church triumphant, where you live and reign forever. Amen.

## Fourteenth Offering

### *Of Christians Condemned*

O Mother of the Son of God, you so much wanted to be our mother that this costs you more than to be the mother of your Only Begotten One! How can we repay you, our Protection and our Good, for what you have suffered for us and the pain you felt when your most lucid understanding perceived that not only will the infernal caverns be filled with those who sin against faith, but also with those who sin against love. There many believers die in a state of mortal sin and are lost forever. Does not this pain exceed all the others in infinite degree? Honoring this pain, we offer you these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father, entreating you as a merciful mother to enlighten those in such a miserable state and provide them the aid of your most Holy Son, so that they will escape this peril. Do not permit especially those who are near to death to be trapped in such an unfortunate circumstance, but allow them time to repent and do penance so that they merit being cleansed of their sins and go to the heavenly glory where you live forever. Amen.

## Fifteenth Offering

### *What She Felt Seeing the Sins of the Just*

O Mother tireless in suffering! O valiant woman! O most holy soul! Whence comes your capacity for such immense pain? Where can you turn your eyes, when, instead of coming to your aid, we afflict them with more suffering? Who would not think that the virtues of the just would be a relief from the anguish that the ingratitude of the wicked causes you? But since this was not a time of comfort for you, our Lady and our Refuge, you saw only what is painful, contemplating the faults and sins with which even those predestined to heaven offend your Son. You experienced the denial of St. Peter (Matt 26:59-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27) and the cowardice of the disci-

ples (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50). You felt their faults all the more than more serious sins of others because the ingratitude of children is more keenly felt than that of slaves. This was even more the case because (although you are the compendium and queen of all virtues) with your profound humility when you turned to look upon yourself, it appeared to you that you also were ungrateful toward your Son. You reproached yourself as a sinner and as an ungrateful creature, accusing yourself all the more pointedly and severely because of your more intimate connection to the Lord. O Queen of humility! Who can know how to ponder the pain that these judgments caused you? In recognition of this we offer you humbly these ten Hail Marys and one Our Father. We beg to attain a fervent love of your Son, so that we do not offend him even in the smallest things (which never are truly small since they offend him). Grant us also a perfect humility so we recognize our defects, so that by doing penance for them in this life, we enjoy his love forever in life eternal, etc.