

The Sermons Of Saint John Mary Vianney

Part Eight: On Making Life Consistent with our Religion.

By Saint John Mary Vianney.

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IT IS NECESSARY TO BE CONVERTED.

No, my dear brethren, let us never forget that in order to receive Holy Communion it is necessary to be converted and strong in a true resolution to persevere. When Jesus Christ desired to give His Adorable Body and His Precious Blood to His Apostles, in order to teach them how pure one should be before receiving It, He even went so far as to wash their feet. By that, He wishes to show us that we can never be purified enough of our sins, even our venial sins. It is true that the venial sin does not make our Communions unworthy, but it is a cause of our profiting hardly at all by such a great blessing and happiness. The proof of that is very clear when you consider how many times we have received Holy Communion during the course of our lives. And have we become any better?... No, not at all, and the real cause of that is that practically all the time we are holding onto our bad habits; we do not break ourselves of any one of them more than another. We have a horror of the big sins, which kill our souls, but all those little fits of impatience, those grumblings when some worries or troubles befall us, or some disappointments or setbacks — these mean nothing to us. You will admit that in spite of so many Confessions and Holy Communions, you are always the same, that your Confessions are nothing else, nor have they been for years, than a repetition of the same sins, which, although venial, are none the less damaging to the merit of your Holy Communions.

You have been heard to say, with good reason, that you are no better one day than another, but who is stopping you from correcting your faults?... If you are always the same, it is simply because you do not want to make even small efforts to improve yourself. You do not want to endure anything or to be opposed in anything. You would like everyone to be fond of you and to have a good opinion of you, which is a difficult enough thing.

Let us try hard, my dear brethren, to destroy all that could be in the smallest way displeasing to Jesus Christ, and we shall see how our Communions will help us to make great strides towards Heaven. And the more we do this, the more we shall feel ourselves becoming detached from sin and inclining towards God.... This is what I desire for you.

HAVE A CLEAN FACE.

I have told you that you should have neat and clean clothes when you come to Mass. I do not mean expensive clothes, but only ones, which are not soiled or torn. That is to say, the clothes should be washed and mended if one has no others. There are some who have nothing to change or who, through laziness, do not do so; they do not change their linen, that is, their shirts. For those who have no other clothes, there is nothing wrong in that.

But those who have, do wrong, for it is lacking in respect to our Lord, Who wishes to come into their hearts. Your hair should be combed and tidy and your face and hands clean. You should never come to the altar without stockings, good or bad – this is my advice.

One should not approve of those young people who, in going up to the altar, appear no differently at that moment than at the time when they are going to a ball or a dance. I do not know how they go to receive a God Who was humbled and despised by all, with such a parade of vanity and style. Dear Lord, what a contradiction this is!...

MODEL YOUR DEATH UPON THAT OF JESUS CHRIST.

If we were required to die twice, we could jettison one death. But man dies once only, and upon his death depends his eternity. Where the tree falls, there shall it lie. If, at the hour of his death, someone is living in some bad habit, his poor soul will fall on the side of Hell. If, on the other hand, he is in the state of grace, it will take the road for heaven. Oh, happy road!... Generally speaking, one dies as one has lived. That is one of the great truths, which Holy Scripture and the Fathers repeat in many different places. If you live as good Christians, you will be sure to die as good Christians, but if you live badly, you will be sure to die a bad death. The prophet Isaiah warns us that the impious man who thinks only of doing evil is in a woeful state, for he will be treated as he deserves.

At death, he will receive the reward for the work he has done. It is true, however, that sometimes, by a kind of miracle, one may begin badly and finish well, but that happens so rarely that, as Saint Jerome puts it, death is generally the echo of life. You think that you will return then to God? No, you will perish in sin...

The Holy Ghost tells us that if we have a friend, we should do him some good before we die. Well, my dear brethren, could one have a better friend than one's soul? Let us do all the good for it that we can, for at the moment when we would like to do our souls good, we shall be able to do no more!... Life is short. If you defer changing your ways until the hour of your death, you are blind, for you do not know either the time or the place where you will die, perhaps without any assistance. Who knows if you will not go this night, covered in your sins, before the tribunal of Jesus Christ?...

Yes, my dear brethren, as life is, so is death. Do not hope for a miracle, which God but rarely performs. You are living in sin; very well, you will die in sin...

If we desire to die a good death, we must lead a Christian life. And the way for us to prepare for a good death is to model our deaths upon the death of Jesus Christ.

Can the life of the good Christian be anything other than that of a man nailed to the Cross with Jesus Christ?

IF MAN KNEW HIS RELIGION.

Neither wealth, nor honors, nor vanity can make a man happy during his life on earth, but only attachment to the service of God, when we are fortunate enough to realise that and to carry it out properly. The woman who is held in contempt by her husband is not unhappy in her state because she is held in contempt but because she does not know her religion or because she does not practice what her religion tells her she should do. Teach her religion, and from the moment that you see her practice it, she will cease to complain and to consider herself unhappy. Oh! How happy man would be, even on this earth, if he knew his religion!...

What power that person who is near to God possesses when he loves Him and serves Him faithfully! Alas, my dear brethren, anyone who is despised by worldly people, who appears to be unimportant and humble, look at him when he masters the very will and power of God Himself. Look at a Moses, who compels the Lord to grant pardon to three hundred thousand men who were indeed guilty. Look at Joshua, who commanded the sun to stand still and the sun became immobile, a thing which never happened before and which perhaps will never happen again. Look at the Apostles: simply because they loved God, the devils fled before them, the lame walked, the blind saw, the dead arose to life. Look at Saint Benedict, who commanded the rocks to stop in their course and they remained hanging in midair. Look at him who multiplied bread, who made water come out of rocks, and who disposed of the stones and the forest as easily as if they were wisps of straw. Look at a Saint Francis of Paola who commands the fish to come to hear the word of God and they respond to his call with such loyalty that they applaud his words. Look at a Saint John who commands the birds to keep silent and they obey him. Look at many others who walk the seas without any human aid. Very well! Now take a look at all those impious people and all those famous ones of the world with all their wit and all their knowledge for achieving everything. Alas! Of what are they really capable? Nothing at all.

And why not? Unless it is because they are not attached to the service of God. But how powerful and how happy at the same time is the person who knows his religion and who practices what it commands.

Alas, my dear brethren, the man who lives according to the direction of his passions and abandons the service of God is both unhappy and capable of so little! Put an army of one hundred thousand men around a dead man and let them employ all their power to bring him back to life. No, no, my dear children, he will not come to life again. But let someone who is despised by the world, but who enjoys the friendship of God, command this dead man to take up life again; immediately you will see him arise and walk. We have other proofs of this, too. If it were necessary to be wealthy or to be very learned to serve God, a great many people would be unable to do it. But, no, my dear children, extensive learning or great wealth are not at all necessary for the service of God. On the contrary, they are often a very big obstacle to it. Yes, my dear brethren, let us be rich or poor, in whatever state we may be, learned or otherwise, we can please God and save our souls...

Listen to me for one moment and you will see that only the service of God will console us and make us happy in the midst of all the miseries of life. To accomplish it, you do not need to leave either your belongings, or your parents, or even your friends, unless they are leading you to sin.

You have no need to go and spend the rest of your lives in the desert to weep there for your sins. If that were necessary for us, indeed, we should be very happy to have such a remedy for our ills. But no, a father and a mother of a family can serve God by living with their children and bringing them up in a Christian way. A servant can very easily serve God and his master, with nothing to stop him. No, my dear brethren, the way of life, which means serving God, changes nothing in all that we have to do. On the contrary, we simply do better all the things we must do.

THOUGHTS ON THE WAY TO CHURCH.

When our duty calls us to a holy place, might not anyone say that we resemble criminals being led before their judges to be condemned to the worst possible tortures, rather than Christians whom love alone should lead to God? How very blind we are, my dear brethren, to have so little heart for the things of Heaven, while at the same time we are so taken up with the things of the world!

Indeed, when it is a question of temporal matters or even of pleasures, everyone will be preoccupied with them. They will think about them in advance. They will meditate upon them.

But, unfortunately, when the question is one of the service of our God and the salvation of our poor souls the whole thing becomes a matter of routine and inconceivable indifference.

Suppose someone wants to speak to a very important or influential person and to ask him some favour. He will dwell upon the matter for a long time in advance. He will consult others whom he thinks better educated or more experienced than himself in order to find out in what way he should approach this person. He will appear before him with that modest and respectful bearing which, generally speaking, the presence of such a personage inspires. But when he comes into the house of God, ah, there is no more of that sort of thing. No one thinks then of what he is about to do or of what he is about to ask of God.

Tell me, my dear brethren, who is there who, as he is going along to the church, is saying to himself: Where am I going?

Is it to the house of a man or to the palace of a king? Oh, no, it is into the house of my God, into the dwelling place of Him Who loves me more than Himself, since He died for me, Whose compassionate eyes are aware of my actions, Whose ears are attentive to my prayers, always ready to hear my prayers and to forgive. Filled with these blessed thoughts, why would we not exclaim with the holy King David: "O my soul, rejoice that you are about to enter the house of the Lord," to give Him your homage, to show Him your needs, to listen to His divine words, to ask Him for His graces.

Oh, what things I have to say to Him, what graces I have to ask of Him, what gratitude I have to pay Him! I will speak to Him of all my worries, and I know that He will console me. I will admit my faults to Him, and He will forgive me. I am going to talk to Him of my family, and He will bless it with all sorts of mercies. Yes, my God, I shall adore You in Your holy temple, and I shall return from there filled with all sorts of benedictions.

Tell me, my dear brethren, is that the sort of thought, which occupies you when your religious duties call you to church?

Are those indeed the thoughts you have, after having wasted the entire morning in discussing your sales and your purchases, or at the least, some other entirely useless matters? You come along in a hurry to hear a Mass, which often is half-finished.

Alas! If I dare to put into words how many go to visit the god of drunkenness before their Creator; and, coming to church full of wine, they will talk and concern themselves with temporal matters right up to the very door! Oh! Dear God! Are these Christians, who ought to be living like angels upon earth? What of you, my good woman, are your thoughts any better, now that you have occupied your mind and part of your time in thinking how you were going to dress, so that you might please the people you know; and then you come to a place where you should come only to lament for your sins? Indeed, too often the priest is ascending the altar while you are still turning around and around, looking at yourself in front of a mirror. Ah, dear God! Are these really Christians who have taken You for their Model, You, Whose whole life was spent amidst scorn and tears?

Listen, my dear young lady, to what Saint Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, has to teach you. As he was in the doorway of the church one day and saw a young person approaching dressed with the

greatest of care, he spoke to her.” Where are you going, young woman?” he asked. She told him that she was going to church. “You are going to the church,” the holy Bishop said to her, “but one might rather think that you are going to the dance or to a play or a spectacle.

“Go away, sinful woman, and weep for your sins in secret, and do not come to the church to insult with your frivolous adornments a crucified God.”

Dear Lord! How our century has provided us with so much vanity. How many people, when they are coming to the church, think of nothing else except themselves and their clothes and styles.

They enter the temple of the Lord saying from the depths of their hearts: “Have a good look at me.” When we see such wrong dispositions, how can we help but shed tears?

And you, fathers and mothers, what are your dispositions when you come to church, to the Mass? Alas! We must admit it with sorrow, that most frequently the fathers and mothers that we see are coming into the church when the priest is already on the altar, or even in the pulpit! Ah, you will tell me, we came as soon as we could. We have other things to do.

Undoubtedly, you have other things to do. But I know very well, too, that if you did not leave until Sunday the one hundred and one things in your homes which you should have done on Saturday, and if you had got up a little earlier in the morning, you would have done them all before holy Mass, and you would have arrived at the church before the priest had ascended the altar. It can be the same thing, too, with your children and your servants: if you had not been giving them orders until the very last stroke of the Mass bell, they would have arrived at the church at the beginning. I do not know whether God will receive all these excuses easily; I hardly think so.

But why, my dear brethren, should I speak of particular cases? Surely, it is the majority of you who behave in this way.

Yes, when you are called to church so that the graces of God may be administered to you, anyone may see this lack of enthusiasm in you, this indifference, this boredom, which consumes you, this practically general inattention. Tell me, where will you see the majority of the general congregation when the services are beginning? In the evenings, are the Vespers not half said by the time you arrive? We have work to do, you tell me.

Well, my friends, if you were to tell me that you have neither faith, nor love of God, nor the desire to save your poor souls, I would believe you much better. Alas! What can anyone think of all that?... There is a great deal to lament in what is to be seen of the dispositions of the majority of Christians! A great many seem to come to church only in spite of themselves or, if I dare to put it that way, as if someone were dragging them there. From the house to the church, temporal matters only are discussed. A group of young girls together will talk about nothing except style, beauty, and all the rest of it; the young men only of games and amusements or of other matters which are more evil. The fathers or the masters of households will chat about their property or business, about buying and selling. The mothers are preoccupied only with their households and their children. No one will go so far as to deny that. Alas! Not a single thought will be given to the happiness they are about to have, not a single reflection on the needs of their poor souls or those of their children or their servants! They enter the holy temple without respect, without attention, and a great many of them as late as is possible. How many others do not even go to the trouble of coming in at all, but stay outside, in order to find better ways of distracting themselves? The word of God does not trouble their consciences: they look around at those who are coming and going...

Dear God! Are these really the Christians for whom You suffered so much in order to make them happy? And this is all they think of it?...

With dispositions like that, how many sins must be committed during the services? How many people must commit more sins on Sunday than during all the rest of the week!...

Listen to what Saint Martin has to tell us... While he was singing the Mass with Saint Brice, his disciple, he noticed the latter smiling. After it was all over, he asked him what had made him smile. Saint Brice replied: "Father, I saw something extraordinary while we were singing the holy Mass. Behind the altar I saw a devil and he was writing on a huge sheet of parchment the sins which were being committed in the church, especially gossip, and his sheet was rather full before the Mass was finished. In fact, he needed more space. So, the devil took the sheet of parchment between his teeth and tugged it so hard to make it bigger, but instead he tore it into shreds. That was what made me smile." What sins, and even mortal sins, we commit during the services by our lack of devotion and recollection!

Alas! What has become of those happy times when Christians passed not only the day but even the greater part of the nights in the church, mourning for their sins and singing the praises of God? See, even in the Old Testament, see holy Anna the prophetess, who withdrew into a tribune in order to leave the service of God no more. Look at the holy old man Simeon. See again Zachary and so many others who passed the greater portion of their lives in the service of the Lord. And note, too, how marvelous and how precious were the graces, which God bestowed upon them. To reward Anna, God willed that she should be the very first to recognise our Lord.

The holy old man Simeon was also the first, after Saint Joseph, to have the happiness, the very great happiness, of holding the Savior of the world in his arms. The holy Zachary was chosen to be the father of a child destined to be the ambassador of the Eternal Father in announcing the coming of His Son into the world. What wonderful graces does God not grant to those who make it their duty to come to visit Him in His holy temple as much as they possibly can...

YOU ARE SURPRISED, BUT NOT I! (A story of two artisans.)

Why is it, then, you are going to ask me, that we assist at so many Masses and yet we are always the same?

Alas, my dear brethren, it is because we are there in body but not in spirit and that rather our coming there completes our condemnation because of the bad dispositions with which we assist. Alas! For all those badly heard Masses which, far from insuring our salvation, harden us the more. When our Lord appeared to Saint Mechtilde, He said to her: "Know this, my child, that the saints will assist at the death of all those who have heard Mass devoutly, to help them to die well, to defend them against the temptations of the Devil, and to offer their souls to My Father." What wonderful happiness for us, my dear brethren, to be helped at this formidable moment by as many saints as we have heard Masses!...

No, my dear children, we need never fear that the Mass hinders us in the fulfillment of our temporal affairs; it is altogether the other way around. We may be sure that all will go better and that even our business will succeed better than if we have the misfortune not to assist at Mass.

Here is a splendid example of that. It concerns two artisans who belonged to the same trade and who lived in the same little town. One of them, who had a very large family and never missed hearing Mass every day, lived very comfortably by his trade, but the other, on the contrary, who had

no family, worked all day and part of the night, and very often on the holy day of Sunday, and still had the greatest difficulty in the world in making ends meet. The latter, when he saw how well things were going for the other man, asked him one day when he met him how he managed to make enough to maintain so comfortably a family as large as his. As for himself, he said, although there were only his wife and himself and he never stopped working, he was often short of everything. The other replied that if he so wished, he would show him the following day where he made his profit. Delighted with this good news, the unsuccessful artisan could hardly wait until the following day so that he might learn how to make his fortune. True to his word, his friend called for him. So there he was, setting off in great heart and, full of confidence, following his friend who brought him to church, where they heard Mass.

When they came out the friend said, quite at his ease, "You can go back to your work now." The same thing took place the following day, but on the third day, when the friend came to bring the unsuccessful artisan along to Mass, the latter objected.

"What is all this about?" he asked. "If I want to go to Mass, I know the way without your taking the trouble to come and get me. That is not what I wanted to know, but the place where you find all the money that enables you to live so comfortably. I wanted to see whether, if I did the same as you, I could get something out of it, too."

"My good friend," said the other to him, "I do not know any other place than the church, and no other method than that of hearing Mass every day of the week. I assure you that I have never used any other means to acquire the money, which surprises you. But have you yourself not seen where Jesus Christ tells us in the Gospel to seek first the kingdom of God and that all the rest will be added unto us?"

Are you surprised at this story, my dear brethren? I am not. It is only what we see every day of our lives in those homes where there is some religion. Those who come often to holy Mass manage their affairs much better than those whose weak faith makes them think that they have no time for Mass. Alas, if only we put all our trust in God and relied on our own efforts for nothing, how much happier we should be than we are!

Yes, you will tell me, but if we have nothing, no one is going to give us anything.

What do you want God to give you when — as is shown by the fact that you do not give even the time to saying your morning and night prayers and that you are quite content to come to Mass once a week — you depend solely on your own efforts and not at all on Him?

You have no knowledge of the resources of the providence of God for anyone who confides and trusts in Him. Do you want a more striking proof of this? It is before your eyes. Look at your pastor and examine his case in the light of God's providence.

Oh, you say, that is because people give to you.

But who gives to me, unless it is the providence of God? That is the source of my treasures and nothing else. Alas, that man should be blind enough to worry and fret so much as to damn himself and yet be quite unhappy in this world. If you have the great happiness to think a lot about your salvation and to assist at holy Mass as much as you can, you will soon see the proof of what I am telling you.

WHEN YOU GO BACK HOME.

On her return to her kingdom, the queen of Sheba could never weary of relating all that she had seen in the temple of Solomon; she talked of it unceasingly, with fresh pleasure. The same thing should happen to the Christian who has assisted properly at holy Mass. When he comes back to his house, he ought to have a talk with his children and his servants and ask them what they have retained of it and what touched them most. Alas! Dear God, what am I going to say?... How many fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses are there who, if someone wanted to talk to them about what they had heard at Mass, would laugh at all that and say that they were tired of it, that they knew enough about it... Although generally speaking it seems that people still listen to the holy word of God, the moment they come out of church, they fall into all sorts of careless and frivolous ways. They get up with a sudden rush. They hurry. They jostle at the door. Often the priest has not even come down from the altar when they are already outside the door, and there they give themselves up to discussions upon all sorts of secular subjects.

Do you know what the result of this kind of thing is, my dear brethren? This is it. People derive no profit and gain no benefit from what they have heard and seen in the house of God. What graces have been lost! What means of salvation trodden underfoot! What a misfortune that is, to turn to our loss what should have helped so much to save us! You can see for yourselves how many of these services are a burden to the majority of Christians! For those few moments, they stay in the church as if it were some kind of prison, and as soon as they are out, you will hear them shouting at the door, like prisoners who have been given liberty. Are we not quite frequently obliged to close the door of the church in order not to be deafened by their continual noise?

Dear God, are these really Christians, who ought to leave Your holy temple with minds filled only with all kinds of good thoughts and desires? Should not they be seeking to engrave these in their memory, that they may never lose them and that they may put them into practice as soon as the opportunity presents itself? Alas! The number of those who assist at the services with attention and who try to profit from them is a little like the number of the elect: ah, how small it is!

CLEAR YOUR MINDS.

If you desire the worship that you give to God to be pleasing to Him and valuable for the salvation of your soul, put it properly into practice. Begin by preparing for holy Mass as soon as you are awake, uniting yourself to all the Masses which are being said at that moment. When the bell rings to call you to the house of God, consider the fact that it is Jesus Christ Himself calling you. Start out immediately, so that you will have a moment to meditate upon the tremendous act at which you are about to assist. Do not say, like those people who have no religion, that you have plenty of time, that you will be there soon enough. But say, rather, with the Holy Prophet: "I rejoice when I am told that we are going into the house of the Lord."

When you come out from your home, think about what you are going to do and what you are going to ask of God. Begin by clearing your mind of earthly matters so that you will be thinking of God only. Avoid all sorts of unnecessary conversations, which serve no other purpose than to make you hear Mass badly. When you enter the church, recall to yourself what the holy patriarch Jacob said: 'How awesome is this place! How holy it is! It is truly the house of God and the gateway to heaven!'

When you get to your place, humble yourself profoundly as you think of your own unworthiness and the greatness of your God, Who, nevertheless, in spite of your sins, wishes to suffer you in His holy presence. Make an act of faith with all your heart. Ask God to give you the grace to lose none

of the many favors, which He grants to those who come here with good dispositions. Open your heart so that the word of God may enter it, take root in it, and bear fruit there for eternal life.

Before leaving the church, do not fail to thank God for the graces He has just given you and go straight home, fully occupied with the thoughts of what you have seen and heard.

Yes, my dear children, if we conducted ourselves in this manner, we should never come away from the services of the Church without being filled with a fresh desire for heaven and a new disgust for ourselves and the things of this earth. Our hearts and our minds would be given over altogether to God and not at all to the world. Then the house of God would truly be for us the gateway to Heaven. That is what I desire for you.

WE ARE KEEPING A FEAST.

In the early days of the church, the faithful of one province, or district, used to come together publicly on the feast day of a saint in order to have the happiness of participating in all the graces which God bestows on such days. The office of the vigil was started. The evening and night were spent in prayer at the tomb of the saint. The faithful heard the word of God. They sang hymns and canticles in honour of the saint. After passing the night so devoutly, they heard Mass, at which all those assisting had the happiness of going to Holy Communion. Then they all withdrew, praising God for the triumphs He had accorded the saint and the graces He had bestowed in response to the latter's intercession. After that, my dear brethren, who could doubt but that God pours out His graces with abundance upon such a reunion of the faithful and that the saints themselves are happy to be the patrons of such people. That was the way in which the feast days of patron saints were celebrated in olden times. What do you think of that?

Is it thus that we celebrate such feasts today? Alas! If the first Christians were to come back upon this earth, would they not tell us that our feasts are no different from those that the pagans kept? Is it not the general rule that God is most seriously offended on these holy days? Does it not seem, rather, that we combine our money and our energies together to multiply sin almost to infinity?

What are we concerned with on the vigil of such feasts, and even for several days beforehand? Is it not with spending foolish and unnecessary money? And all this time poor people are dying of hunger and our sins are calling down upon us the anger of God to the point where eternity would not be sufficient to satisfy for them. You should pass the night in repentance and remorse, in considering how very little you have followed the example of your patron saint. And yet you consecrate that time to preparing everything that will flatter your gluttony! Might it not be said that this day is one for pure self-indulgence and debauchery? Do parents and friends come, as in former times, to enjoy the happiness of participating in the graces, which God bestows at the intercession of a patron saint? They come, but only to pass this feast day almost wholly at the table.

In former times, the religious services were much longer than they are today, and still they seemed always too short. Nowadays you will see even fathers of families who, during the performance of the offices, are at table filling themselves with food and wine. The first Christians invited each other in order to multiply their good works and their prayers. Today it seems rather as if people invite each other so that they can multiply the sins and the orgies and the excesses in which they indulge in eating and drinking. Does anyone think God will not demand an account of even a penny wrongly spent? Does it not seem that we celebrate the feast only to insult our holy Patron and to increase our ingratitude?

Let us look a little closer, my dear brethren, and we shall realise that we are far from imitating Him whom God has given us for a model. He passed His life in penance and in sorrow. He died in torments. What is more, I am sure that there are parishes where more sins are committed on those days than during all the rest of the year. The Lord told the Jews that their feasts were an abomination and that He would take the filth of their feasts and throw it in their faces. He wished to make us understand by this how greatly He is offended on those days, which should be passed in weeping for our sins and in prayer. We read in the Gospel that Jesus Christ came on earth to enlighten souls with the fire of divine love.

But we can believe that the Devil also roams around on earth to light an impure fire in the hearts of Christians and that what he promotes with the greatest frenzy are licentious balls and dances. I have debated for a long time whether I should speak to you about a matter so difficult to get you to understand and so little thought upon by the Christians of our days, who are blinded by their passions. If your faith were not so weak that it might be extinguished in your hearts in the blink of an eye, you would understand the enormity of the abyss towards which you precipitate yourselves in giving yourselves over with such abandon to these wretched amusements. But you will tell me: 'For you to talk to us about dances and about the evil that takes place at them is just a waste of time. We will indulge neither more nor less in them.' I firmly believe that, since Tertullian assures us that very many refused to become Christians rather than deprive themselves of such pleasures as was offered in the debauched pagan temple dances of his day.

THE ARMED CROSSES.

The sign of the cross is the most terrible weapon against the Devil. Thus the Church wishes not only that we should have it continually in front of our minds to recall to us just what our souls are worth and what they cost Jesus Christ, but also that we should make it at every juncture ourselves: when we go to bed, when we awaken during the night, when we get up, when we begin any action, and, above all, when we are tempted. We can say that a Christian who makes the Sign of the Cross with genuine religious sentiments, that is to say, when fully aware of the action, which he is performing, makes all Hell tremble. But when we make the Sign of the Cross, we must make it not by habit but with respect, with attention and thinking of what we are doing. Ah, dear Lord, with what devout awe we should be filled when we make the Sign of the Cross upon ourselves and recall that we are pronouncing all that we hold holy and most sacred in our religion!

THE BELOVED CROSSES.

The saints, my dear brethren, all loved the Cross and found in it their strength and their consolation.

But, you will say to me, is it necessary, then, always to have something to suffer?... Now sickness or poverty, or again scandal or calumny, or possibly loss of money or an infirmity?

Have you been calumniated, my friends? Have you been loaded with insults? Have you been wronged? So much the better! That is a good sign; do not worry; you are on the road that leads to Heaven. Do you know when you ought to be really upset? I do not know if you understand it, but it should be precisely for the opposite reason — when you have nothing to endure, when everyone esteems and respects you. Then you should feel envious of those who have the happiness of passing their lives in suffering, or contempt, or poverty. Are you forgetting, then, that at your Baptism, you accepted the Cross, which you must never abandon until death, and that it is the key that you will use to open the door of Heaven? Are you forgetting the words of our Savior: "If any man will come

after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Not for a day, not for a week, not for a year, but all our lives.

The saints had a great fear of passing any time without suffering, for they looked upon it as time lost. According to Saint Teresa, man is only in this world to suffer, and when he ceases to suffer, he should cease to live. Saint John of the Cross asks God, with tears, to give him the grace to suffer more as a reward for all his labors. What should we conclude, my dear children, from all that? Just this: Let us make a resolution to have a great respect for all the crosses, which are blessed, and which represent to us in a small way all that our God suffered for us. Let us recall that from the Cross flow all the graces that are bestowed upon us and that as a consequence, a cross which is blessed is a source of blessings, that we should often make the Sign of the Cross on ourselves and always with great respect, and, finally, that our houses should never remain without this symbol of salvation.

Fill your children, my dear brethren, with the greatest respect for the Cross, and always have a blessed cross on yourselves; it will protect you against the Devil, from the vengeance of Heaven, and from all danger. This is what I desire for you.

HARVEST CROSSES.

Blessed crosses are put in the fields or in open spaces, in places where a crop will be harvested. The purpose of the blessing is to implore God not to turn His merciful eyes away from the fields where they are placed but to spread His blessings there. That, however, is not all there is to planting crosses. It must be done with reverence, with faith, and, above all, it must not be done in a state of sin. You may be quite sure that if you plant them with the right sentiments, God will bless your lands and preserve them from temporal harm.

If your crosses do not produce the effect, which you should expect from them, it is not difficult to imagine that it is because you went to plant them without faith and without religion. It is because, when you were planting them, you did not perhaps say even an Our Father or a Hail Mary on your knees. Or that, if you did say your prayers, it was possibly ‘with one knee only on the ground’. If that is the case, how do you expect God to bless your harvest?... Oh, my God! In what a dreadful age do we live!... [Saint John now goes on to speak of and condemn certain abuses that had grown up around the custom of ‘planting’ and ‘reaping’ little wooden crosses in the fields.]

When the Church instituted this holy ceremony, everyone longed for the happiness of placing these crosses in his field and behaved with the utmost respect. When they were found, either during the reaping or the vintage, people bowed down to the earth to adore Jesus Christ, Who died on the Cross for us, and in that way they expressed their recognition of the fact that He had desired to bless and preserve their harvest. All, with tears in their eyes, kissed the sacred sign of our Redemption.

Alas, my God, that it is no longer in that way that Christians recognise You! For, when you find them again... that is indeed another abomination! Instead of expressing your gratitude to God for having graciously blessed and preserved the fruits of the earth, do you not, rather, offer Him an insult by laughing when you are kissing the cross? Is it not performing an act of derision, or rather of idolatry, to offer a handful of grain as if you were incensing the person who is holding the cross?

Carry on, unhappy sinners; God will punish you, either in this world or in the next! Fathers of families, have I not been telling you for the past two years that when the time comes for the reaping you should gather up all the crosses, which are in your fields in order to save them from

profanation? Have I not suggested to you to put them together in your barns and, when you have threshed your grain, to burn them, lest they be profaned? If you have not done that, you are very much to blame, and you must not omit to mention it in Confession.

Alas! There is no counting all the horrible things, which are done at the time of the harvest or of the vintage, at those very times when God, in His abundance and His love, covers the earth with the gifts of His providence! Nevertheless... Ungrateful man seems at that time to redouble his insults and to multiply his crimes. How have you the impertinence to grumble if your harvests are short because the hail or the frost have harmed some of them? Ah, much rather should you be very surprised that, in spite of all your many sins, God still wants to give you the necessities of life and even more than is necessary too! Oh! My God! How mean and blind man is!...
