

MY RETREAT according to the Spiritual Exercises
Our Lady of Grace, Codogno, August 15, 1884

"My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast" (Ps 108:1). Yes, my heart is ready, my God—speak! Ask whatever pleases you! I will accept any sacrifice in order to grow in your love and promote your glory. Heart of Jesus, I surrender myself to you. "Set me in the way of your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me" (Ps 25:5).

I belong to God and must serve him. The good I do is the work of God who does it in me, like the child writing because someone else is guiding her hand. Afterward, she can only really call her own the scribbles she has made, in spite of the teacher's guidance. *"We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:7).* So it

is with me in all that I do: all I can claim as my own is the weakness coming from my ignorant and sinful nature. How then could I glory in any success God grants me?

God is my Master. He can do with me what he wants—console me or trouble me at his good pleasure. As his devoted servant, I must be indifferent to however he wishes to treat me, to rejoice in the bitter as well as the sweet, reflecting that the Heart of my loving God is full of tenderness for me. Whatever he permits is for my greater good! Thank you, dear Lord, for afflicting me in those situations where I desired and thought it only right to expect your consolation. Pardon me for the many times that I have not bowed immediately before your holy will!

If I surrender to what is repugnant to my nature or intellect, I will gain true merit. On the other hand, if I submit only to what pleases my human nature or self-love, I will gain little or no merit and many times just pile up kindling for purgatory. From now on, in order to know that I am always doing the will of God, I resolve to cultivate an inner and outer spirit of that joy that should characterize a true spouse of my Jesus crucified. In order not to fall into sin, we need to distrust ourselves and the virtues which self-love makes us believe we have acquired. Instead, we need to trust wholeheartedly in God's help.

My life no longer belongs to me, but to the Institute. I am therefore obliged to conserve my health as much as possible, by promptly obeying when I am told to take certain precautions. For example on Friday, instead of abstaining from wine, I will strive to go against my

self-love four or five times. The faults of which we have repented will appear covered with jewels on the last day. Without faithfulness to the practices of our prayer life, it will be impossible to be freed from our faults. The most important of these practices are the general and particular exam of conscience.

We need to curb our self-love untiringly because it always disguises itself as a greater good. Especially in matters of obedience, self-love may continue motivating us until it causes us to fall into some internal or external fault. We must not be deceived by great appearances, but attend solely to what is pleasing to God, even though it may seem small and insignificant. St. Joseph and Mary were not engaged in great deeds, but pleased the Most High so much that he came to dwell with them. Mary and Joseph, through your great holiness, bind me closer to Jesus so I can enjoy peace of soul.

The person following Jesus Christ must be steadfast in any circumstance or event, however joyful or sad as it may be. If she becomes upset or glad according to how things change, she does not yet have the spirit of God in her, but a spirit of self-love, harmful to those who want to grow in holiness. It is essential to invoke the Holy Spirit frequently in order to strengthen our spirit and enlighten us to walk on the straight path.

Christ in the Garden teaches us how to endure suffering, even the total loss of every human comfort. Instead of running to creatures in our troubles, we must go to our loving Jesus. If he does not give us enough comfort,

then we should turn to those who represent God for us. But how can the person who is the spouse of Jesus claim that her Beloved does not comfort her enough? That would be a great and unpardonable error. Our Beloved Jesus can do with us as he wants, even placing us in the crucible of tribulation, but he should always be the center of our love. If he is not our “enough,” it is a bad sign. Loving Jesus, with all my heart and soul, I entreat you to preserve me from such a disgrace.