

# THE SERAPH

December 2017

Vol. XXXVIII No. 4



Adoration of the Shepherds  
Charles Le Brun

# The Seraph

Vol. XXXVIII No. 4

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# December

Bishop Giles, OFM

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The month of December is to sacrifice the enjoyment of mostly filled with the season of these material things for a time, Advent. It is a time of penance enduring sacrifice and self-and mortification, but it is denial, only to deliver to us true principally a time of hope. Our joy and fullness of life. The mortifications and self-denial are choice is in our own hands. We all done with a purpose or goal can follow the deceptions of the in mind. This penitential time world, or we can follow the truth is a preparation for Christmas of God.

when we welcome Jesus Christ into this world and our very lives. We have purged out the old man in Advent and now we put on the new man in Christ Jesus. Our fasting and prayers are not without purpose. The goal should always be in front of us. Keeping this goal before us and striving to obtain it, is the practice of the virtue of hope.

There is much in this world that tempts us to abandon hope. The materialism of the world during this season tempts us to selfishness; and selfishness leads to disgust, loathing, depression, and despair. It is truly a paradox for many souls. The world promises us happiness and satisfaction in material things, only to deliver sadness and emptiness. God asks us

In the world, hope takes on very materialistic aims. The world would have us hope for riches or material gains, worldly success or power. These are not worthwhile aspirations as they leave the soul empty and starving. God instructs us to not only hope in Him but to hope for Him. Our desires are to be to receive Him or to be received by Him. The only true hope is to become one with Him. Hope is principally the desire to be eternally united with Him in Heaven.

Christmas is not about family and friends, nor about parties and celebrations. Christmas is about welcoming Christ into our world – into our lives. The materialism of the world tends to do just the opposite. Surrounding ourselves

with things or even other people tends to leave very little room for God. The goal of Christmas is not to make up for all that we gave up during Advent. It is not about filling up a material void or a social void that Advent created. Having purged these things during Advent, it is foolishness to begin amassing them once again with ever more or “better” material things.

The material and social void that Advent creates in our lives makes room for God to enter in. He is the only One that can truly fill our hearts and souls. If we immediately start returning to the material world, He is soon forgotten and we no longer have the time or resources to entertain Him in the depths of our souls. Christmas is lost when this happens, and Advent – if it was followed – is wasted.

Our ultimate hope is to one day enter into the eternal blessedness of Heaven. Our more immediate hope and goal is to welcome and receive Jesus Christ into our bodies and souls – striving to keep Him there and never drive Him away again. It is with this in mind that we purge so many worldly, material, or social things from our lives during Advent.

Those who do so grow in the love of God – they do not count the cost. Actually, the very loss of these things is considered a gain to them. The things this world treasures are considered as dung to those who treasure God and Heaven. The materialistic world considers treasures of Heaven and God to be as dung. The children of the world and the children of God are at opposite extremes.

Yet, the children of God must use the things of this world. We cannot deny our need for material things. Nor can we say that these material things are bad or evil. All that God has made is good. All that God has given us is good. All these material things are good. The only evil is sin. Sin is the absence of grace. The principal grace is charity or love; hence, the principal sin is the lack of love for God. It is the inordinate love of material things that is sinful, not the things themselves. Hence, St. Paul admonishes us to use the things of this world as if we used them not.

We do not desire that families should forego Christmas trees, Christmas lights, feasts, celebrations, or gift-giving.

Christmas is truly a time of joy and all that brings this joy to the hearts of men should be employed. We only say that the joy must be properly directed and must not be lost sight of. We must not seek or put our ultimate happiness in these material things or even in others around us. All these people and things should direct our thoughts and hearts to God. We are to love them for God, in the presence of God, and with Him.

It is our desire that we find the joy and happiness of sacrificing, giving and serving one another in Jesus. It is not in receiving that we find happiness, but it is in giving and serving one another as Jesus taught and showed us by His life here on earth. Our children are never too young to be shown this joy. They need to be brought to experience this joy as soon as possible. There is nothing that can replace this happiness. The joy of receiving material gifts is short lived and hollow. We should teach them and ourselves to deny ourselves, to make sacrifices so that we have something to give to those who are in need as well as to those whom we may love. Ultimately, we strive

to love everyone as God loves them. In this, our hearts and souls are filled. In this, we find satisfaction or peace in our lives. In this, we are filled with love – we are filled with God – we are filled with true happiness.

Our hope is that on this Christmas we will have spiritually matured. We hope to know Him better than we have ever known Him. We hope to love Him more than we have ever loved Him (more than we love anything or anyone else). And we hope to serve Him better than we have ever served Him before. Our hope is that we will spend every moment of the rest of our lives here on earth increasing in this knowledge, love, and service of Him. This is the solid foundation for a true hope of everlasting happiness with Him in Heaven.



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# Question for the Editor

Bishop Giles, OFM

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***“How do I teach my children the true meaning of Christmas when they are given many gifts? My husband and I try to limit the amount we give them but our families also give gifts and it is becoming too much. Is there something we could do as a family to offset this trend?”***

This is a very serious and real problem. While the gifts of this world are blessings from God, they are truly as two-edged swords. With great wealth comes great responsibilities. To whom God has given much – much will be required. When we have more than we actually need or can even use, our fallen nature tends to devalue all these things and to become wasteful of these material blessings as well as all that God has given us. Sudden extreme wealth is the dream of many, yet it is the downfall or destruction of most who receive this “blessing.” Our modern world is filled with many examples of this.

On the one hand, all material things are good – all that God has made or given us is good. On the other hand, material possessions are often impediments to our love of God. We spend so much of our lives and energies obtaining and preserving these things that we neglect our obligations to God. While filling our lives with things we leave no room for God.

The safest mode, for the chosen few that God calls to the religious life, is to follow the instruction of Christ: Go sell all that you have and give it to the poor, and come follow me. To abandon all things for Christ to avoid the opposite extreme of abandoning Christ for all things. There is a balance between these two extremes – where we use the things of this earth as if we use them not. We accept the material blessings that God places at our disposal and use them to promote His greater honor and glory. This is what we wish to promote as a solution to this dilemma.

One option is to refuse the gifts of so many well-meaning loved ones and thus offend them and cause hurt feelings or even hatred where there should be love and understanding. The other option is to suffer the spoiling of your children and handing them over to the temptations of materialism and self-centeredness – watching the riches of this world become stumbling blocks to the very souls of those that God has entrusted to your care to lead back to Him. Yet, there seems to be another choice. It does not have to be an either-or situation.

Suppose we allow our children to accept all that is offered to them. Then, we help/encourage them to set aside some of these gifts that they can part with, and give them to the poor, or donate them to a worthwhile charity. There are many children who are suffering during this time of year and a gift from another child will truly bring joy to their lives. It is a way we can put the Gospel within reach of even the smallest of children. They learn self-sacrifice, love for their neighbors, and most importantly they learn love for God. This is, truly, faith put into action. In many places, children's hospitals welcome donations of new toys

or gently used toys to be given to children being treated in their facilities.

The practice can be adapted to the age and temperament of each child. Most importantly it provides an opportunity for great spiritual growth and maturity even at very young ages. The children can have the joy of receiving gifts and appropriately showing their gratitude for the gifts, then they can receive an even greater blessing in giving these very things to others – it is in giving that we receive. We believe that they will gain more happiness and satisfaction from giving than they ever do in receiving.

If there are objections from the original donors we should kindly and gently explain the motives and how their gift is truly appreciated and it is now a gift that keeps on giving.

We should strive not to have our children give away what they don't truly want or like, but rather to give things that are worthwhile. We do not want to receive junk, so we should not choose to give junk. God wants us to give the best that we can. It is a hard sacrifice, but it is truly a

rewarding one. If you have ever experienced the joy of giving, you should be able to appreciate the joy that even the youngest of children are capable of receiving when they are able to give to another. During this season, we should not be striving to deprive our children of the opportunity to give so that they may receive – on the contrary, we should strive to provide them with ways that they can give and give from the heart so that they may truly receive the blessings and rewards of true charity.

In addition to this, we might ask grandparents, godparents, etc. who make these sacrifices for our children to do something a little differently. Perhaps, they could actually work with our children in this plan. They could take our children shopping with them to buy a gift that our children could pick out, wrap and deliver for some other needy child or needy charity. This we believe would be a more precious gift than any material thing. It will give a time and opportunity for them to bond with our children in a good work – it will be both materially and spiritually rewarding for both the adult and the child.

We can learn together to see Jesus in one another – especially in His poor or suffering children. Children who would otherwise not have the ability to give some material gift are enabled or empowered to be able to give a physical gift to Jesus living in their fellow men. This, we believe, is the greatest gift anyone can give our children.

There are many other things that we can do to impress upon our children the sacredness of this season and also avoid the self-centeredness that often accompanies the worldliness that keeps working its way into our lives. We can take them to visit shut-ins or the elderly – maybe pray with them. Visit the church and pray for someone in need – maybe make a donation and light a vigil light. They can go out Christmas caroling. If they are old enough, they could help neighbors shovel snow, carry groceries, walk dogs or help care for their pets. It does not have to be things that cost money. Some of the best gifts are from our hearts. Just knowing that someone is thinking of them, that someone cares, is a great gift in itself. When our children first experience the look of joy, appreciation, and love on



the face of someone that they have given to, they will soon want to do it again.

Look for ideas from your child. They have great imaginations and some truly great ideas – not always practical, but good as they come from the heart. Do your best to encourage them and help them to fulfill as many of these as you can. The world is giving them ample opportunity to turn into themselves and become miserably self-centered – promising them happiness, but generally delivering sadness and depression. We should do all that we can to provide them with opposing opportunities. This will improve the lives of all that they touch, especially their own.



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THE SERAPH

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# What Exactly are We Celebrating?

Fr. Joseph Noonan, OFM

---

Do you know the difference between St. Nicholas and Santa Claus, between a holyday and a holiday, between the Advent and Christmas Seasons? We live in a society where these and other similar ideas have been twisted and turned on their respective heads. The real tragedy is so few have an understanding of their true meaning.

The Advent Season has nearly been forgotten – judging by the actions of the pseudo-Christians who begin celebrating Christmas on Thanksgiving and stop celebrating it on December 26th. The dead Christmas trees put on the street curb one or two days after Christmas expose these fake Christians as nothing more than one of the mindless mob who is more interested in looking Christian rather than actually being one.

Suggesting the necessity of penance and preparing the soul for Our Lord’s Birth is like expecting a third-grade student to do advanced physics. Not only is it hardly possible to consider a student of such an

age to comprehend physics, the concepts of the subject would be totally foreign to him.

Some of the basic fundamentals of true, genuine Christianity (Catholicism) are no longer known to Modern Catholics. Little or no education over the past 50 years has dumbed-down the “Catholic” masses to such an extent that the Baltimore Catechism would seem like St. Thomas’ Summa!

It ought to be clearly understood by the readers of *The Seraph* that the godless antichrists who are only interested in making a fortune could not care less about the sacred Advent Season. This again is quite evident by the Christmas articles which are placed in the stores prior to the beginning of the Fall Season. The pitiful effect of these money-hungry methods is that it has duped the naïve, gullible “Christian” in such a way that their one and only concern is to finish their “Christmas shopping” as quickly as possible. How many such persons take the time to consider the purpose of Advent

and take advantage of its graces and blessings? It is here that we ought to ask the question, “what exactly are we celebrating?”

The feast of St. Nicholas, Dec. 6th, is generally considered a feast for Germans and related cultures, but it has been learned that it does extend beyond the Germanic people. St. Nicholas is the true “Santa Claus.” It is from the name Saint Nicholas that we derive “Santa Claus.” Surprisingly, we are able to find statues of St. Nicholas in stores today, but then the money-changers will sell anything for a buck.

How many Catholics in the United States celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas today? If my experience is any indication, very few. They know little or nothing of the feast and its significance. It is from this late bishop and saint that we learn how to quietly help others with little or no fanfare. The example of charity he gave us has been passed down to us for many centuries, only to be subverted by secular Protestants (under the guise of the Coca-Cola Co.) who apparently wished to not only eliminate the Catholic example and cover up the true history but secularize St. Nicholas as Santa Claus to the unaware masses.

Catholic families are encouraged to renew or to begin a true Catholic custom. This custom is the practice of putting out stockings or socks to receive gifts from St. Nicholas. Children wait anxiously for the morning of December 6th, St. Nicholas’ Day for their gifts of various types. The early memory of this writer as a young boy was of chocolate and other candies!

The most important lesson on this feast day is one of supernatural charity. If parents took a few minutes on this feast to read and explain the deeper meaning of this feast, it would go a long way to instruct children – it is better to give than to receive. They would think less of themselves when it comes to gift-giving rather than gift-receiving. Once again, “what are we celebrating?”

A better time for gift-giving seems to be the feasts of St. Nicholas and the Epiphany, rather than Christmas Day. Are there any families willing to change their ways to a more fitting Catholic approach during the Holy Seasons of Advent and Christmas?

Lastly, the terms holyday and holiday have been confused if not purposely distorted. The First

Sunday in Advent begins a Holy Season leading to a holyday, the Birth of Our Lord. Catholics need to be aware of the secular terms which over a period of time influence the Catholic mind. We are not able to recall the number of times our own Catholics speak of the holidays instead of the Holy Season.

The world would have us believe the time from Thanksgiving to Christmas is the “holidays.” This, of course, is nothing but a ploy to condition the masses to a secular, godless outlook, hoping to have these same masses forget completely about the Birth of Our Lord.

An example of this conditioning is the salutation “Season’s Greetings.” Although one may understand what is implied, it is an empty, meaningless method of avoiding that which should be said, “Merry Christmas” or “Blessed Christmas.” If one takes the words seasons greetings literally, they should be used at the beginning of each of the changing of the seasons! Try that on March 21st, June 21st or September 21st and people will think you’re crazy! It should be obvious on December 21st this same reaction will not work, being four days prior to Christmas.

Words are an expression of ideas. If a person uses objectionable terms for a length of time, the person will no longer consider them objectionable. For that person, they have become an accepted norm. Catholics should never allow themselves to be influenced through such devious snares.

As Catholics go through the Holy Seasons of Advent and Christmas, they should understand and live these seasons as Catholics, not the masses of pagans which surround us. Refrain from celebrating the Christmas Season until December 24th. This Holy Season continues until January 13th, the feast of the Commemoration of the Baptism of Our Lord. Be Catholic in your approach to such matters and have the courage to stand up for that which is right and good.

The Advent Season is meant to prepare us for the Nativity of Our Lord, not celebrate it four weeks in advance. It is during the Christmas Season that Christ’s Birth ought to be celebrated. Don’t allow the non-thinking masses to persuade you to distort and pervert the Holy Seasons of Advent and Christmas. You need to know exactly what you are celebrating!

# Corpus Christi Construction Update

Dear Friends,

It is with great joy that I am able to announce that we have reached our building fund goal of \$275,000.00. We began collecting donations approximately three and one-half years ago and have now completed this monumental goal. I would like to thank all who have contributed to the building fund and have made this new church possible. Be assured that I am deeply grateful for your sacrifices and charity. All benefactors are remembered in the Holy Mass I say each day.



The church interior is now able to be completed, hopefully in November and December 2017. As the interior is being completed, our attention will now turn to the church parking lot. The City of Lubbock, TX will not allow the church to be used until all of the requirements of the parking area are met. This means the parking surface will need to be completely reconstructed. The old asphalt will be taken up, the area will be regraded and a new surface will be laid. In addition, the driveway ramp (entrance) will need to be completely reconstructed. The city requires a thirty-foot entrance and at present, it is only twenty-four feet.

The estimated cost of the parking area work is about \$15,000.00. There are also construction costs above the \$275,000.00 which is estimated to be about \$5,000.00. Once again, we are calling upon our benefactors to assist us with these final costs. Our hope is to begin saying Mass in the church in January or February 2018. May God bless you for your generosity!

Father Joseph Noonan, OFM

***Donations may be sent to:***  
Corpus Christi Church  
1114 30th St.  
Lubbock, TX 79411



# Spiritual Melancholy

Bishop Giles, OFM

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While December is a truly hopeful and joyful time of year, we often are tempted to the gloominess of soul if not sadness and depression. In the seminary, Bishop Louis OFM (RIP) used to warn us to be aware of this wherever we go. It invariably happens that during times of great joy and celebration, there will be one or more souls that will become upset or melancholy. These tend to put a damper on the spirits of everyone around them. While there are some things that we can do to avoid this for ourselves or to help others who are struck with this disorder, we cannot avoid it all together.

There are natural causes at work here as well as supernatural ones. There is truth in what has become known as SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). The cold and long nights of winter combined with the limited daylight, often tend to dampen our spirits. Medical doctors have some suggestions for this. Exercise and healthy eating are key to good health all

the time, but these are especially necessary during the cold and dark days of winter. Just getting out and going for a walk can lift our spirits tremendously.

On the spiritual side, we should understand that evil spirits understand and can manipulate our physical environment to hinder our spiritual joys in the love of God. The Devils are very good and very clever in taking advantage of these opportunities provided by nature and our fallen natures to lead us away from God. Not everything is from the devils, nor is everything in the environment, some come from within ourselves. As strange as it may seem, people often become very attached to and even love their miseries.

The season of Advent directs our thoughts to our past sins and offenses for the purpose of exciting us to greater acts of repentance, penance and increased appreciation and love for God – especially in His Son, Jesus Christ. Sadly, many uncover their sins only to fall

into deeper ones. The sight of their crimes against God fills their hearts with despair. Along with this, they often develop a kind of mistrust of God – “How could He do this to me?” or “Why did He let this happen to me?” “What did I do to deserve this?” (Hopefully, we all can see the evil of pride lurking in this.) Despair and gloominess follow closely on the heels of such ideas. From disordered self-love, pride, and vanity, it is a sudden and very hard fall to the depths of despair and desperation. The thinking often goes from: “How could I have done this?” to: “How could God have done this or allowed this?” then to: “I am absolutely no good at all. I am damned and there is no way to turn this around.” Quickly following this self-pity follows resignation to remain in sin and no longer fight against it. It is a very fatalistic obsession to conclude: “I am damned anyway so I should not worry about it and enjoy sin in this life while I can.”

There is a flip side to this fatalistic depression, which Martin Luther proposed. Rather than fall into despair with the struggle against evil, Luther taught that we cannot help ourselves, it is

not our fault and it is prideful to think that we can ever do right or even avoid evil. All the work of our salvation was done by Jesus and there is nothing we can do for ourselves. His demonically inspired suggestion is to: accept that Jesus has already pre-paid the price for your sins and then sin on bravely. It does not take a genius to see that this leads to anarchy and is truly insane (unhealthy).

Most Catholics have enough faith to reject such misguided ideas. But, many find it very hard to lift themselves out of spiritual darkness. Please note, that we are not speaking of the “dark night of the soul” as the great mystics experienced. This is more of a mundane self-made (often demonically inspired) depression rather than a purifying work of God.

The gloom and darkness that overwhelms us during the Advent and Christmas season should be resisted physically as well as spiritually. We are composed of both body and soul. We cannot really heal one without healing the other. If our souls are sick, it is generally not long before our bodies become ill also. We know, and natural science proves, that sugars,

simple starches and generally junk foods give us a quick burst of energy followed by a sudden and often drastic drop in our energy and our moods. When this is combined with dark and gloomy weather, we are almost certain to become depressed. God in His mercy has instructed the Church to make this time of year (Advent) a time of penance and have us not indulge in these treats. We are encouraged to do good works and/or acts of charity. This helps us to stop focusing on ourselves and mentally lifts us up. We have in the season of Advent the tools on a natural level to prevent the destructive effects of “treats” as well as the positive effects of exercise and focusing our attention and love outside of ourselves.

In getting out and helping others, we find great relief in our own miseries. It is very true that it is in giving that we receive. A kind word to another, visiting someone, doing some kindness for another, all give us greater peace in our own souls. The more that we give, the more we gain. True charity is never depleted, on the contrary; the more that we give or share it, the more we have to give or share. In blessing others, we bless ourselves. When

darkness starts welling up in our hearts, we simply need to reach out to another – not so that they can help us, but rather to offer help to them. It is not so much another’s sympathy that we need (this often builds up greater self-pity and depression as they try to console us); it is giving or doing something for them that will raise our spirits. A cheerful: “Hello,” “Good Morning,” “Blessed Christmas,” or “May you have a blessed day,” all work wonders in lifting our own souls as well as theirs.

On the spiritual side of Advent, we find not only our sins and repentance for them in our souls; but we find forgiveness in the sacraments given to us by Jesus Christ; we find hope in His coming into our lives as He came into the world. We find His love for us, and this inspires us with a greater love for Him. The darkness of the days speaks to us of hidden treasures that will soon be revealed. The devout soul is often like the child that has learned that his mother is going to have a baby. There is a secret hidden inside her – a mystery that will soon be revealed. Anticipation, mystery, suspense all bring joy to the hearts of



little ones. During Advent, we learn of Christ's coming. We see the expectant Mary and piously meditate upon the great Mystery she carries within her. We see a similarity in our own souls. Christ is hidden in there (we are made in His image and likeness). During Advent, we prepare for Him to come forth more clearly into our lives – both our bodies and souls. We look forward to Christmas day as little children filled with awe for Christ's birth. We welcome His birth on Christmas day with hearts that are filled with the joy of the new Life within us.

May this Advent and Christmas become the brightest, happiest, and holiest that we have ever experienced. To accomplish this, we only need follow the lead of the Church – let us do penance and mortify our appetites and get out and do things for others – preparing our hearts and theirs for the coming of God into our lives. We should see the darkness as sacredness and mystery of Christ's life hidden within us and fill our hearts with awe, suspense, anticipation, joy, and love. Then with His Birth, our joy should be made full, but our hearts are to continue growing as we increase day by

day in the love and joy of Christ living in us. There are no limits to the happiness that we can reach. If we will only share what we have, we will not lose what we have given and we will be given even more. Our joy will always be full as we increase it from day to day right into eternal happiness in Heaven.



## The Sunday Sermon

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# A Chance to Live

Monsignor John P. Carroll-Abbing

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## IV

### THE LOST CHILDREN OF THE WAR

*“ ... They had no longer any wish  
for play ... for anything ... all they  
wanted was a miracle that might  
make them warm again ... ”*

*(Continued)*

These, thousands of them, not far from me still slept under the open sky, or, if lucky, in a cave or among the stones piled around a space where the trees had been cleared by hard work, and often having eaten nothing except a bite of bread, and perhaps not even that. What about them? What about the thousands crowded in army barracks, drafty, wet, cold, where tuberculosis was rampant among the weak and undernourished? How many thousands? Who could tell? It was impossible to reach even a comparable figure. In the towns that had been destroyed there were no offices, no books, no tabulations. The individual had lost all identity, and life and death were no longer subject to the laws of statistics.

In November 1944, the first relief material — food and clothing — came from America, voluntary

offerings gathered by the American Relief for Italy. This generous aid was particularly providential at the time, as an unusually cold winter added considerably to the hardships of the population.

Never will I forget the poignant scenes I witnessed that Christmas of 1944, while going from town to town distributing the first gifts of clothing from America to the children.

On December 22nd, we happened to be in a small village, Valmontone by name. It was a day bright with sunshine, but lashed by a cold, biting wind that made it difficult to breathe and froze our ears. Valmontone looked deserted, gray, dusty. Time and time again we had heard its name mentioned in the war bulletins. It lay as if passive in its squalor and poverty under the cold December sky.

We saw a few brave souls dragging away at stubborn rubble, searching hopelessly for what were to them the riches of the long ago. Each blow of the pickax marked a step toward another lost hope.

One house was still standing, slightly damaged, but there was not a single pane of glass in its windows. It had been assigned as a school.

The children were waiting for us. They had come alone or in groups of three or four, from caves in the hillside, from cellars, from no one knew where. Some were crying. All of them ragged, dirty, covered with lice, pale, anemic, trembling and shaking, cold and feverish.

Did I say ragged? Some, many in fact, were clothed in wrapping paper, held together with wire! They sat together, close together, on a long bench, feet held high so as not to touch the icy coldness of the ground below them.

Naked in December! One small boy — Rocco was his name — was only seven! He was weeping bitterly. There was no room for him on the bench and his feet were almost frozen!

All of them were livid from the cold, eyes ringed in deep black circles. These were the small mischief-makers of yesterday! They had no longer any wish for play, no wish for anything, whether fun or frolic. All they wanted was some miracle that might make them warm again.

The miracle did happen. America had worked it.

“Here . . . and here, and here . . . yes . . . this is for you . . . all for you. Take this package . . . sweets . . . a bar of chocolate . . . a dress . . . a coat and a pair of shoes . . . yes, it’s yours. . . .”

“Mine? All mine?”

“Yes. . . .”

“Do I put these shoes on?”

“Are they too big for you?”

“No . . . no.”

And the child runs away, afraid it may not be true, holding onto his treasure.

Smiles, smiles at last! Smiles in payment for wool, for leather . . .

We watched him and the others and we felt happier than we had been for weeks. Happiness is often brought about by very small things.

The women wept more frequently now. During the war, they had borne the hardships of their lives with strength and resignation. Hope had still held sway in their hearts.

“My husband will return. . . .”

“My son will no longer sleep on the bare ground. . . .” The war is over now. It may be going on somewhere else, but here it has ended. And yet anguish remains.

“What shall I do? I am alone. . . .”

Her son still sleeps on the bare ground. Her husband has not returned.

“If this goes on, my son will die.”

They mourn for the children who have disappeared, the boys who have suddenly vanished, leaving no trace, no clue that might help in finding them.

Armies file by, tanks, endless columns of trucks, all wending their way toward the North. And boys of village and town follow them, lead by a beckoning mirage which for them spells food and life. It means adventure, bread, excitement, and the kindness of the soldier boy from Texas, and Tony's Neapolitan dialect. It holds out the forbidden fruit and they go.

The reason might have been loneliness, hunger, broken family ties. They hoped the soldier they followed might give them care, affection, an almost certain meal. The women — mothers, wives, sisters — struggle on, the boys go toward the unknown that holds out to them a ray of the sunlight that for so many weary months the world has denied them.

Christmas Day of 1944, I returned to Naples, so as to be present at the arrival of a number of ships bringing supplies from the A.R.I.

Along the way, we stopped the car and began to eat our lunch.

Across the road stood a small badly damaged cottage. It was high noon. The air blew cold and brisk. Two men and a woman came out of the cottage and walked toward the car. They asked us many questions, anxious to hear any news we might have to give them.

From them we learned plenty. In the country roundabout, bands of boys, driven by hunger, had entered homes and held up the inhabitants for whatever they could get. They were always fully armed and their daring was beyond belief.

We heard that on the preceding day a number of them, from twelve to fifteen years of age, had succeeded in robbing the headquarters of the carabinieri and had escaped with a good supply of guns and ammunition. It sounded incredible, but we were told later it was true.

On the Appian Way, it was a frequent occurrence to meet scores of these roaming youngsters, bound from the South of Italy toward the capital. During the conflict, they had learned all the tricks of their trade, as they helped in the fight against the German invaders. Now that the Germans were gone, hunger and want had

become the enemy and had driven them to repeat past performances.

However, although many acts of vandalism were committed, by far the greater number of these lost children just sat and begged by the side of the roads, waiting, hoping that some kind driver of a jeep might come along, take pity on them, and give them a lift.

I had seen Naples after the liberation, but I had had little time at my disposal in which to form any definite opinion of the situation, or study its most serious aspects.

In that short space of time the number of wandering children had grown enormously. Naples could be called the meeting place for these youngsters from the South. Here they gathered and planned their exploits. These young adventurers, the *scugnizzi* of old, bright and intelligent, joined the *sciuscia*,<sup>1</sup> of today, ready for any work, any service useful to anyone and often dishonest.

Crowds of barefooted adolescents, wearing the most outlandish clothes, more often than not mere rags, the caps of every army in the world on their heads, were to be found anywhere and everywhere on the sidewalks, in front of barracks, offices, stores. Their

favorite spot was the harbor.

In the Piazza Matteotti where headquarters of the Allied Command were situated and nearby, in the “Galleria,” a place far from adequate for great crowds, it was a hopeless task to try to count them. They were all over the place, always carrying their “shoeshine” box and with clothes bulging with stolen goods. Some laughed, others wept, but all showed the unmistakable signs of malnutrition and disease.

Nothing was safe from these small human termites, who entered forbidden areas, stole everything on which they could lay their hands, useful or not, from automobile tires to uniforms, sheets, and cigarettes.

City Hall Square had been surrounded with barbed wire fences to protect the automobiles of the Allied Commands. Guards watched, standing where they could see every corner. In spite of them, the *sciuscia* succeeded in getting through and making away with car parts, unbreakable glass, clothing. . . .

A jeep stops in front of a door. A soldier gets out and goes through the door intent on his errand. He returns after a few minutes and one of the tires is gone from his car!

1 Italian version of “Shoeshine,” the cry of the shoeshine boys of postwar Italy.

Comical incidents often occur.

A gang of boys stands guard on a deserted street. Hands in pockets, hats askew, they keep watch over a young colored American G.I. lying in drunken stupor at the curb, probably a victim of the poisonous liquor then on sale.

A second group of boys makes its appearance.

“Who’s that?” one of the new arrivals asks.

“He belongs to us,” is the astonishing reply.

“How come?”

“We paid for him . . . two thousand lire . . . want him?”

“Sure . . . how much?”

“Three thousand. . . .”

The bargain is concluded. The new owners take up the watch waiting for the third customer.

They walked through the Galleria offering their wares: chewing gum, cigarettes, a pair of shoes. Some of them had little luck and, after long hours of effort, they were exhausted, white, and spent. Then the older ones, the huskier ones came to their aid, in a spirit of solidarity and charity that is probably not so frequently found among adults. They took care of the small fry, fed them, worked harder in order to give them the

necessary bread to sustain life. Each small gang worked alone, sometimes fought one another, but when it happened that a battle had to be fought against big odds, against big fellows, then they joined together and usually won.

The harbor of Naples was their favorite field, the goal of their ambitions. Here came the wealth, from overseas. No guards, no barbed wire, no fences, not even electrically charged wires could keep them away, or back the invading tide of the young desperadoes, battling alone in a world that to them spelled only tragedy.

The emotions of the past years had piled up in their hearts and bodies during the bombardments, the food rationing, the death in their families, the breaking-up of close ties, and exploded. In the breakdown of social values, in a new vision of what life might be, the emotions of the period of terror rose to the surface and recognized no restraint.

After all, it must be remembered that in the not far distant past, the radio itself had incited the citizens of town and city to sabotage, to the procurement by any means at hand of material needed for the war effort. At that time the risk had been taken and surmounted, the success of the enterprises

had meant not only personal satisfaction, but also prizes and praise.

In Rome, during the German occupation, I happened to be crossing a bridge over the Tiber when I noticed a German truck stop just across the river from where I stood. A soldier stepped out and walked over to a fountain for a drink. Three boys suddenly appeared out of somewhere and with monkeylike movements, faster than my eye could follow them, they clambered up the sides of the truck, stole several tools and spare parts, and disappeared in a flash. The soldier fired after them, but to no earthly use. The boys safely carried away their contribution toward the resistance movement with no thought of personal gain.

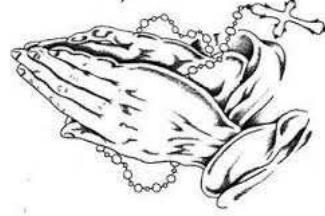
In Naples, in 1944, from the point of view of these boys, conditions had not changed. There was among other things such an abundance of supplies, such a waste, that temptation was too hard to resist. There was hunger, the hunger of years of want. The indifference of well-fed, well-dressed, well-cared-for people exasperated them. And besides it was so easy to get a package of cigarettes or two tin cans of meat! “There are so many! Why is it wrong to take a few?” they wanted to know.

The war was over, but suffering for them was still present and to a greater degree. So many chances had to be taken in order to obtain even a little of all that was needed! How often had a small twelve-year-old Neapolitan returned home at night, tears in his eyes because he had been unable to bring home to his sick mother even a piece of bread or a bottle of medicine that she needed so much!

The majority of those who could still boast of a home kept religiously in their hearts the love of their own firesides. The family tie was strong, although on the surface it seemed as if anything with any value had been suppressed.

Life was tough. It was difficult to pay too much attention to conventions, and the actions of adults offered such bad example!

*To be continued.*



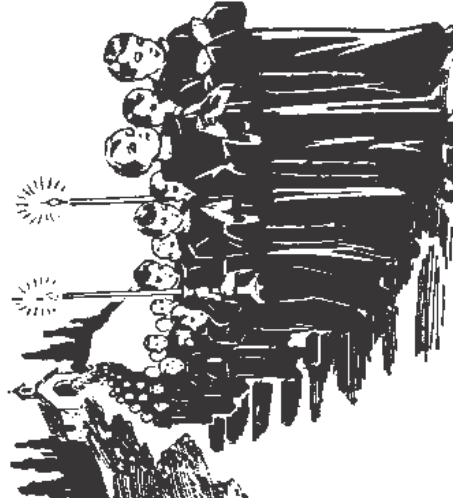
## *Sister Agnes' Favorites*

### ***Prayer to Jesus in the Manger***

*O Divine Redeemer Jesus Christ, prostrate before Thy crib, I believe Thou art the God of infinite Majesty, even though I do see Thee here as a helpless babe. I humbly adore and thank Thee for having so humbled Thyself for my salvation as to will to be born in a stable. I thank Thee for all Thou didst wish to suffer for me in Bethlehem, for Thy poverty and humility, for Thy nakedness, tears, cold and sufferings.*

*Would that I could show Thee that tenderness which Thy Virgin Mother had toward Thee, and love Thee as she did. Would that I could praise Thee with the joy of the angels, that I could kneel before Thee with the faith of St. Joseph, the simplicity of the shepherds. Uniting myself with these first adorers at the crib I offer Thee the homage of my heart, and I beg that Thou wouldst be born spiritually in my soul. Make me reflect in some degree the virtues of Thy admirable nativity. Fill me with that spirit of renunciation, of poverty, of humility, which prompted Thee to assume the weakness of our nature, and to be born amid destitution and suffering. Grant that from this day forward I may in all things seek Thy greater glory, and may enjoy that peace promised to men of good will.*





# Franciscan Saints

DECEMBER 14

BLESSED  
BARTHOLO

*Confessor*  
*Third Order*

Bartholo, the last descendant of the ancient and illustrious house of the counts of Mucchio, was born at San Gemignano in northern Italy in 1228. For twenty years his pious mother, who had been childless, prayed God to give her a son. St. Peter, whose intercession she had invoked, appeared to her in a dream and assured her that her petition would soon be granted. She bore a son, who was given the name Bartholomew, or Bartholo, in Baptism. The child grew up in innocence and piety.

When he reached young manhood, he felt that he was called by God to the priesthood. But his father, the count, a proud and worldly-minded man, preferred his son to be a stately knight and famous soldier. He became very angry at his son

and used every means to break his resolve.

Matters went so far that the boy fled from the anger of his parent to the convent of the Benedictines at Pisa. There he did duty as an infirmarian although still in secular clothes. As his eminent virtues became manifest, the fathers offered him the religious garb. Then one night he was vouchsafed a vision. Our Saviour, covered with wounds and holding a scourge in His hand, addressed the young man: "Bartholo, not in this habit are you to attain the celestial crown; it is to be through suffering and wounds, and in the garb of penance."

Bartholo then resolved to request the habit of the Third Order of St. Francis and to embrace the life of a secular priest. After

several years of preparation he was ordained by the bishop of Volterra and appointed assistant priest at Picciola, and twelve years later, pastor of Pichena. In this capacity he labored with extraordinary zeal. All the income of his parish was used for good purposes, especially in works of mercy towards the sick and needy. One night he met a poor traveler, whom he invited to spend the night with him. At midnight he heard a voice say: "Bartholo, you have given hospitality to Jesus Christ." Going to the room where his guest had been lodged, he found that the guest had disappeared.

When Bartholo was fifty-two years old, he was attacked by the dread disease of leprosy, which was so rampant at that time. He resigned his parochial duties, and withdrew to the leper hospital near San Gemignano. He lived there nearly twenty years, gradually wasting away from suffering and leprosy, but always displaying the most heroic patience. It was a marvelous circumstance that no one ever showed any disgust for his wounds, but rather perceived a sweet odor emanating from them.

A week before his death our Lord appeared to him, to tell him that the end of his terrible suffering was at hand. He died December 12, 1300. His body was laid to rest in the church of St. Augustine at San Gemignano and numerous miracles occurred at his tomb. He was beatified by Pope Pius X. His feast is observed on December fourteenth.

## **ON BEHOLDING CHRIST IN THE NEEDY**

1. In the lives of the saints there are frequent instances such as Blessed Bartholo experienced, when Christ in the form of a poor man accepted charity at his hands. Our Lord does that as a reward to the saints and a lesson to us. They trained themselves ever to see Christ in the person of the poor and the destitute. To reward their charity, Our Lord sometimes showed them that He accepts such charity as rendered to Himself. But for us it should be a good lesson. The works of mercy can prove meritorious only if they are rendered to the needy for love of God and as to God. That is why the Apostle writes: "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). -- Have

you always practiced the works of mercy with such sentiments?

2. Consider that Christ makes it our duty to practice the works of mercy with such Christian sentiments. We have received from His hands invaluable benefits for body and soul. We owe Him thanks and counter benefits for these blessings as far as lies in our power. But Christ is not in need of our gifts. So He leaves us the poor and the needy, and we are to share with them, in God's stead, the good things we have received from Him. Whoever refuses to do this is in danger of the judgment of God: "As long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to me. Depart from me into everlasting fire" (Matth. 25:41).

3. Consider that Blessed Bartholo was deemed worthy at the last to become like Christ in his suffering and dread illness. Just as unmistakably as the marks of the wounds present St. Francis to us as an image of the Crucified, so do sickness, poverty, contempt, and persecution make us like Christ if we bear them cheerfully for love of Christ and after His example. — God grant that in such circumstances we may recognize our likeness with

Christ and our filial relationship with God Himself!

## **PRAYER OF THE CHURCH**

*Preserve, O Lord, Thy family in Thy continued goodness; that we, who rely solely on the hope of Thy heavenly grace, may also be defended by Thy heavenly protection. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**THE MAKING OF A GOOD  
WILL OR TRUST:  
HAVE YOU REMEMBERED  
GOD?**

**LET YOUR BLESSINGS  
CONTINUE TO BLESS  
OTHERS BY  
REMEMBERING**

**THE FRANCISCANS AND  
THEIR WORK IN YOUR  
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# THE PRUDENT CHRISTIAN

OR,

CONSIDERATIONS ON  
THE IMPORTANCE, AND  
HAPPINESS, OF ATTENDING  
TO THE CARE OF OUR  
SALVATION.

BY THE REV. J. FLETCHER, D.D.

“Give me understanding, and I  
shall live.” — PSALM cxix.

1834.



## CONSIDERATION XVII. ON THE NECESSITY OF WATCHFULNESS.

It is a misfortune which, although everywhere prevalent, ought to appear to us singular, — that instead of our being, each of us, watchful over our own conduct, we are, generally speaking, far more so over the conduct of our neighbors. In regard of these, there is hardly any error that escapes our notice. We measure all their ways, their weaknesses, and their humors. Nay, we scan and penetrate their very motives, and intentions. And we do all this, noting usually each slender deviation from the rules of virtue, with a degree of censure,

and severity, which would seem to imply in ourselves the strictest regard, and observance, of Christian piety. And what, meanwhile, is the nature of our practice, in relation to ourselves, and to our own faults, and imperfections? Alas, blinded by our self-love, we either do not see; or seduced by our passions, we do not know ourselves. According to that common, and just observation — we carry our own faults behind our backs, whilst those of our neighbors we place always before our eyes. Hence, also, that reproach of our Savior, that “we see the mote in the eyes of others, but discover not the beam in our own.”

I. Among all the various arts of Christian wisdom that contribute to our sanctification, there is not anyone more necessary, or more efficacious, than the exercise of habitual watchfulness over ourselves. It is only by this means, that we can acquire the important science of knowing ourselves; of improving our hearts; correcting our errors; and avoiding the snares, which almost everywhere surround us. Our hearts, as we know too well, are weak, and our inclinations selfish; whilst such also is the nature of our passions, that the contact with almost any danger, or incentive, is sufficient to raise them into a flame. If, therefore, to these considerations we again add the contagious example of the world, and the insidious artifices of our spiritual enemies, — we cannot but, in such case, be sensible that if we wish or wisely expect, to shelter, or secure, our virtue, we can only do so, by carrying with us everywhere, and on all occasions, the spirit of watchfulness, and prudence. Without these guardians, our security is impossible. It is for these reasons, therefore, that among all the different warnings which the divine wisdom has inculcated to us, there are not

any that it has recommended more frequently; nor more forcibly pressed upon us, than those of unabating watchfulness, and circumspection. “*Watch; Beware; Be prudent,*” &c. — are admonitions which continually recur in the Sacred Scriptures: — while such also, of course, are the instructions of the saints, and the language of all spiritual writers. All these incessantly warn us, that if we really look forward to future happiness, we cannot, with any just reason, pretend to do so, unless by the aid of watchfulness and Christian fear.

II. The first subject, then, of our watchfulness, and fear, is to be particularly attentive to the motions of our hearts. This is the advice, and admonition, of the wise man: “*My son, with all possible care, preserve thy heart.*” The reason of this advice is obvious. It is the heart, that is the source, and the center, of our affections, and desires; and the principle, therefore, of our actions, and conduct, likewise. It is in it (that is, in the heart) that are molded our dispositions, and inclinations, — our love, and aversions; our likings, and dislikings; our tastes, sentiments, and opinions. Whence, —

considering its weakness and its propensities to sin, — it is manifest that unless we do watch carefully over it, it must, of course, become the easy prey of vice and the dupe of self-love and sensuality. It is, therefore, in order to encourage, and animate, us to this spirit of watchfulness, that the Apostle assures us, that provided we do watch carefully we shall not only be secured from the contagion of sin but be moreover, “blessed.” *“Blessed,”* he says, *“is he, who watched.”*

To watch over our hearts is to attend assiduously to all their motions; and to study well the nature and bearings, of their propensities and affections; and taking them, as it were, into our hands to examine impartially and severely all their weaknesses and defects. To watch over our hearts is to shut against them, as much as we can do it, all the avenues of sin so that nothing may steal in upon them, either to defile or hurt them. But, above all the best and most effectual method of watching over our hearts is to keep them united to God by our endeavors to walk always in His presence; and by seeking earnestly to do His will. Ah! had we only the prudence to do this, then the security of

our virtue would be certain; and we should enjoy that assurance of the Apostle — *“Blessed is he, who watcheth”* Without this vigilance our hearts are an undefended and defenseless region, exposed to the attacks and ravages, of every artful and insulting enemy.

III. Next to the obligation of thus watching over our hearts, comes the almost equally essential duty of being alike assiduous in guarding ourselves against the dangers of the *world*. This, too, is a precept which is urgently and often inculcated to us, both by the authority of our Redeemer; by the charity of His Apostles; and by the prudence of spiritual writers. Describing to us the character of His followers, our Redeemer depicts them as men who are not of this world; but as beings detached and separated from it. “You are not,” He says to His disciples, *“of this world; but I have chosen you out of the world.”*

*“Wherefore,”* says St. John. *“love not the world; nor the things, that are in the world; for, all, that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the eyes; and the lust of the flesh; and the pride of life.”*

Certain, indeed, it is, that almost everything here is an object of danger and temptation. The world is an atmosphere filled with pestilential vapors, which blast whatsoever they chance to breathe upon. It is a scene scattered all over with spells which cheat the senses; — a field sown thick with opiates which lull the mind to sleep. Here vice prevails in every form of depravity; pleasure in every shape of seduction, extravagance, folly, and dissipation in every attitude that the ingenuity of the passions can suggest. Such is the world, above all at the present day. Whence, living as we do, in the midst of all these dangers; — loving the charms or social life; and unfortunately loving most what is most flattering to our self-love; or congenial to our passions — the consequence, under such circumstances, must be that unless we do carry with us everywhere a spirit of our watchfulness, the ruin of our innocence is inevitable. “*He, that loves danger, shall perish in it.*”

And neither is it in the broad walks of vice and dissipation alone, that this watchfulness is required. It is required in

those very circles, from which everything is excluded, that we look upon as immoral and indecorous. For, what is now very generally, even in these, the nature of the example and the subjects of the conversations that we are almost sure to meet with? Why; although it may be true, that there is nothing in these, that we consider either as scandalous or immoral — yet, there is nothing in them to edify us; nothing to awaken piety; to inspire a love for religion; or any interest for salvation; — nothing hardly that is serious or of any moment to the Christian. The chief aim and object of these associations is amusement; — the chief, if not the only, themes of conversation are the trifling passing events of the day — its pleasures, its comforts, its interests, and so on. Such, even in our more orderly circles, is now the almost universal character of our societies. To introduce in them any subject of piety; any awful reflections on the state or prospects of the life to come, would in these days, be considered either as the effect of bigotry; or as a piece of affectation.

It is for these reasons, therefore, that it is alike our duty to bring

with us into these assemblies, as we ought to do into the seats of dissipation, all the prudence of watchfulness — the serious recollection that we are everywhere Christians; and everywhere bound to conduct ourselves as the disciples of a sanctified Master. Perhaps even is it sometimes more necessary to carry about with us a spirit of watchfulness into these circles, than into the very assemblages of vice. In vice there is always something to alarm the mind; something to create disgust; and something, therefore, to put us upon our guard. To a well-formed mind, vice, (so frightful are its features) — is very frequently an antidote to vice. Whereas, in regard to our mere worldly parties; as there is nothing in these, that appears sinful;—nothing to distress our piety — so we enter them without either fear or precaution — above all, meeting in them as we frequently do, individuals whom we respect as strictly virtuous. And yet, what, after all, is the case? We are not, it is true, taught to love vice; — but we are not taught to cherish virtue. We are not instructed to insult God — but we are not encouraged to serve Him as we should do. There

is in nearly all our associations a something or other — a spirit of worldliness; of vanity; or levity that is inconsistent with the severity of Christian discipline. Thus — appealing to our own experience — have we not sometimes remarked, that on our quitting such parties we have found something or other to regret — some trifling stain at least; or some subject for self-reproach? It was, perhaps, some resolution shaken; some pious sentiment weakened; some new desire excited: — so that altogether we have come home with a less share of piety and recollection than we had carried with us into them. This is even the observation and complaint of one of the most prudent of the wise — the pious author of the *Following of Christ*. He — although the societies which he frequented were distinguished for their virtues, — still tells us, that he retired from them, “*less a man,*” — that is, less recollected, and perfect than he was before he entered them. So frail, indeed, and so very delicate, is the nature of our virtue, that we can hardly move anywhere without some danger; scarce touch upon the world, without contracting a stain.



IV. Besides the aforesaid enemies of our salvation, there is still another very formidable host of foes — the devil and his angels — against whom it, moreover, behooves us to guard ourselves with the most careful circumspection. This too is again the warning of our Savior; and the frequent and urgent admonition of His apostles. The truth is, that, not only is the power of these evil spirits alarmingly great but along with this power they retain still that same foresight, all that same sagacity and vigor with which originally they were endowed by the omnipotence of their Creator. And then also, (this is another awful consideration) these frightful qualities are accompanied with the deepest malice; and the most inveterate envy of our happiness. Hence, they are depicted to us in the Scriptures under every form of artifice, strength, and terror. They are described, as the very **“Gods, and princes, of the earth;”** as **“adversaries,”** that never sleep and are never vanquished; — as **“serpents,”** putting on every shape; even the form sometimes of **“the angels of light;”** as **“lions,”** roaring, and seeking, to devour

us. If then, we are aware of these circumstances, how essential ought it not to appear to us — if we hope to preserve our virtue — to be on all occasions, armed with watchfulness and prudence? Without these precautions our ruin is inevitable. For, knowing as these beings do, the corruption of our nature and the peculiar tendencies of our passions; — prepared too, as they are with every means and instrument of assault; and animated at the same time with the most rancorous hostility against us — they are sure to attack us on our weakest side. Yes; we should still watch, and tremble, even when we have come off victorious: for, it is then that, often they lay the deepest plots against us. Thus, in regard of our divine Savior Himself, — although the evil spirit was, three times, repulsed, he still, three times, boldly renewed the charge upon Him. Surely, then, having to contend with enemies such as these, it is only by employing all the care that both our prudence, our piety, and our very timidity can suggest, that we can wisely expect to escape with security from them.

Wherefore, sensible that we are thus living in the midst of dangers, and surrounded by

hosts of enemies all formidable and intent upon our ruin — let us manfully arm ourselves against them. Let us, in the first place, watch carefully over our hearts — which, being weak, selfish and corrupted are easily, without this precaution, seduced into disorder. Let us next guard and fortify ourselves against the example of the world — which, being the region of infection will, without this care, infuse its poison into our breasts. Let us too, be always well prepared against the assaults of the evil spirits, — *having* on “the buckler of faith,” and in our hands “the sword of the spirit.” And then, let this watchfulness of ours be regular and constant: because any moment’s neglect may suffice to prove fatal to us — may suffice as it has done many a time, to change the saint into a reprobate. A place besieged, if not constantly guarded with care, may be easily taken by surprise. Therefore, let us watch: for, “*blessed*,” says the apostle, “*is he, who watcheth*.”

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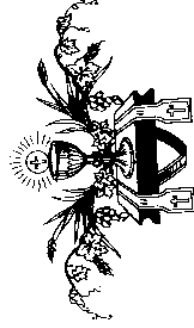
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