

Vocations Explained: Matrimony, Virginity, The religious state, and the priesthood.

by a Vincentian Father.

An abridgement of 'Questions on Vocations?' approved by Cardinal Gibbons and Cardinal Satolli.

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VOCATIONS EXPLAINED

CHAPTER I.

DEFINITION. - EVERY PERSON HAS SOME SPECIAL VOCATION.

Q. What is a vocation?

A. A call from God to some state of life.

Q. Which are the principal states of life?

A. Matrimony, virginity, the religious state, and the priesthood.

Q. Has every person a vocation?

A. Yes; God gives a special vocation to each person.

Q. How is this doctrine proved?

A. St Paul says: "Every one hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, and another after that. . . . As the Lord hath distributed to every one, as God hath called every one, so let him walk."

Q. Is it not beneath God's notice to give a particular vocation to each person?

A. Not at all; for even the birds of the air are objects of the providence of God: "Yea, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Q. What do Father Faber and St. Alphonsus say on this subject?

A. Father Faber says: "Every man has a distinct vocation." St Alphonsus says: "We must embrace that state to which God calls us."

Q. What does St. Augustine teach concerning special vocations?

A. St. Augustine says: "He who does little, but in a state to which God calls him, does more than he who labours much, but in a state which he has thoughtlessly chosen: a cripple limping in the right way is better than a racer out of it."

CHAPTER II.

NECESSITY OF FOLLOWING A VOCATION.

Q. Are we obliged to follow the vocation which God gives us?

A. Yes; if we should wilfully neglect to follow our vocation we would be in danger of losing our souls.

Q. Why so?

A. Because God attaches to our vocation special graces to help us to resist temptations and to discharge our duties properly. Hence, if we neglect God's call, we lose also His special graces; we then easily fall into temptation, and thus we are more liable to lose our souls.

Q. Can you quote reliable authority for this doctrine?

A. St Alphonsus Liguori says: "In the choice of a state of life, if we wish to secure our eternal salvation, we must embrace that state to which God calls us, in which only God prepares for us the efficacious means necessary to salvation."

St Cyprian says: "The grace of the Holy Ghost is given according to the order of God, and not according to our own will."

Q. What does St. Vincent de Paul say on this point ?

A. St Vincent de Paul says: "It is very difficult, not to say impossible, to save one's self in a state of life in which God does not wish one to be."

Q. Has any one of the Popes given his views on this subject?

A. Yes; Pope St. Gregory the Great teaches that our salvation is closely connected with our vocation. The Emperor Maurice having published an edict forbidding soldiers to enter the religious state, Pope St. Gregory the Great wrote to him these remarkable words: ?This law, forbidding soldiers to enter the religious state, is unjust, because it shuts heaven to many; for there are very many who cannot enter heaven unless they abandon all things.?

Q. Can this doctrine be explained by a comparison?

A. Yes; a master feels a just indignation against those servants that do as they please and neglect the particular duty assigned them. The work done by such servant may be very good in itself, yet it is not pleasing to the master, nor will it be rewarded by him, because it is not in accordance with his designs. The same principle holds with regard to God: ?Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of My Father Who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.?

Q. What is to be said of those that know nothing about vocations?

A. If they are ignorant of the matter without any fault on their part, God will not hold them responsible for such ignorance. By providential circumstances many are, without adverting to it, in the state of life in which God wants them to be.

Q. What is to be said of those who, having opportunities, give this subject little or no thought?

A/ We answer with St Alphonus: ?In the world this doctrine of vocation is not much considered by some persons. They think that it is all the same whether they live in the state to which God calls them, or in that which they choose of their own inclination; and therefore so many live bad lives and damn themselves. But it is certain that this is the principal point with regard to the acquisition of eternal life. He who disturbs this order, and breaks this chain of salvation, shall not be saved.?

Q. What is the remarkable saying of St. Gregory Nazianzen on this subject?

A. St Gregory Nazianzen says: ?I Hold that the choice of a state of life is so important that it decides, for the remainder of our lives, whether our conduct shall be good or bad.?

CHAPTER III.

MATRIMONY - IS IT A VOCATION?

Q. How do you prove that matrimony is a vocation?

A. Matrimony is a fixed manner of living, established by Almighty God: ?What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.? St. Paul, speaking of matrimony, says: ?This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church.?

Q. If matrimony is a vocation from God, why are many married people unhappy?

A. Because many of these people do not correspond with the graces of this state; some enter it without the proper motives, others embrace it without being called to it by Almighty God.

Q. Is a special vocation necessary in order to secure salvation in the marriage state?

A. Most certainly, because the state itself is from God, and a person;s consort should be the choice of God: ?Houses and riches are from parents: but a prudent wife is properly from the Lord.? God made special choice of Rebecca to be the wife of Isaac: ?Let the same be the woman whom the Lord hath prepared for my master?s son.? Sara was God?s choice as the wife of young Tobias: ?The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you, and may He join you together, and fulfil His blessing in you.?

Q. Can you give a Scripture example illustrating this doctrine more forcibly?

A. Yes; when the Angel Raphael advised young Tobias to take Sara for his wife, Tobias answered: ?I hear that she hath been given to seven husband, and they all died; moreover, I have heard that a devil killed them. Now I am afraid, lest the same thing happen to me also.?

The angel then showed Tobias that those seven husbands had been given over to the power of the devil because in their marriage they lost sight of the designs of God, and were guided by unworthy motives. ?The angel said to him: Hear me, and I will show thee who they are, over whom the devil can prevail: They who in such manner receive matrimony, as to shut out God from themselves, and from their mind, and give themselves to their lust; . . . over them the devil hath power.?

Q. What is the doctrine of St Basil on this subject?

A. St Basil says: ?What means ?to marry in the Lord? except to embrace that holy state only in accordance with the will of God, consulting only reason and faith, to learn whether you follow the course to which God calls you??

Q. What is the proverb, or ?saying,? among the old folks about marriage?

A. There is a ?saying? among the old folks that ?happy marriages are made in heave? (made by Almighty God). This ?saying? is in fact the summing up of experience, of the teaching of the Fathers, of the Sacred Scriptures, and of the Church on this subject.

If Jesus and Mary do not preside at marriages, the devil will surely usurp their place. ?He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth.?

Q. What does the venerable Louis de Ponte teach on the subject of matrimony?

A. The venerable Louis de Ponte says: ?God is not only the author of matrimony, but He brings to that state, by a special providence, those who He wishes to be in it. He acts thus both of the good of society and for the happiness of individuals; and, although according to the teaching of the Church, ?it is better and more perfect to observe virginity than to engage in matrimony,? yet Divine Providence is not less admirable in the matter of vocations to the marriage state than in vocations to perpetual continence.

CHAPTER IV.

MIXED MARRIAGES.

Q. Are mixed marriages vocations?

A. Not from God. Mixed marriages are suggested by ?the world, the flesh and the devil,? the three great enemies of man?s salvation.

Who ever heard of a person entering mixed marriage because his conscience told him that God gave him avocation to that state, or because he was convinced that God chose for him that state in order that he might sanctify himself therein and avoid damnation?

Read again the story of Tobias, and the seven husbands of Sara, who were strangled to death by the devil because of the unworthiness of their motives. Those who enter mixed marriages evidently ?shut out God from themselves and from their mind;? they do not follow a vocation from God; they exclude the will of God. How, then, can they be excepted from the class of persons of whom the Holy Ghost says: ?Over them the devil hath power??

The Church speaks very plainly on this subject, and teaches that mixed marriages are forbidden; and Christ said of the Church: ?He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me.?

Q. Why, then, does the Church grant dispensations in this matter?

A. For the same reason that a prudent mother would prefer to see a wayward daughter do a bad thing than a worse thing. What parent would not prefer to see a child sick than dead? There is some hope for the life of a man hanging over a precipice and clinging even to a handful of grass, but there is no hope when his brains are dashed out on the rocks beneath.

When persons have fully made up their minds to enter mixed marriage, they are so blinded by their passions and preferences that, if the Church should not tolerate their step, many of them would marry out of the Church, and thus commit mortal sin, and in most cases incur excommunication.

The only difference, then, is this: There is at least a possible hope of salvation when mixed marriages are tolerated by the Church; whereas, if these persons should die in their rebellion against the Church, their damnation would be certain.

The Church, like a prudent mother, would prefer the less of these two evils.

Q. Are not conversions often brought about by mixed marriages?

A. Misplaced affections often make candidates for marriage think so, but this is not their chief reason for insisting on such marriages. Temptation, passion, and personal preference have more to do with them than the will of God. Conversions from the faith are more frequent in mixed marriages than conversions to the faith. God's will is not their foundation, and yet, "unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." God and the Church desire and teach Catholics to take no such risks.

Q. What do the Sacred Scriptures say of mixed marriages?

A. "Bear not the yoke with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath light with darkness, or what part hath the faithful with the unbeliever?" "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them. Thou shalt not give thy daughter to his son, nor take his daughter for thy son; for she will turn away thy son from following Me; and the wrath of the Lord will be kindled, and will quickly destroy thee."

Mixed marriages are the fruitful source of numberless evils: the loss of faith to countless generations, immorality, attachment to the things of earth, and godless lives; and "as a man lives, so shall he die."

Q. What is the best remedy for these evils?

A. To remove their cause. Parents, young folks, and even advanced school-children should be taught the evil of mixed marriages before their minds become warped by company-keeping, passion, and bad example.

Many pastors obtain excellent results by frequently instructing the children concerning mixed marriages and by teaching them the doctrine of the Church on this subject.

CHAPTER V.

VIRGINITY

Q. How is it proved that the state of virginity is a vocation?

A. St. Paul mentions virginity as a special state of life, and recommends it in preference to matrimony. In the heading of the seventh chapter of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians we find these words: "Virginity is preferable to the married state." In this whole chapter St. Paul speaks strongly in favor of the state of virginity: "I would that all men were even as myself;" that is, as the Fathers of Trent explain, "that all embraced the virtue of continence."

Q. Why is virginity to be preferred to the marriage state?

A. Because virginity is more pleasing to God, and more conducive to salvation.

Q. How do you prove that virginity is more pleasing to God?

A. St. John says: "These are they who are not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb."

St. Jerome says: "As soon as the Son of God came down upon the earth He created a new family. He chose a virgin Mother, Mary, and a virgin foster-father, Joseph; also a virgin disciple, John, and a virgin apostle of the nations, Paul; so that He who was adored by angels in heaven might also have angels to serve Him on earth."

Q. Do the Fathers of the Church recommend virginity?

A. Yes, in the highest possible terms. St. Augustine says: "The joys of the virgins are not given to the other saints of God."

St. Cyprian says: "Virginity is the queen of all other virtues and the possession of every good."

Speaking of virginity, St. Ephrem says: "If you have loved it, you will be favored by the Lord in all things."

St. Bernardine of Sienna, teaches that "virginity prepares the soul to see her spouse, Jesus, by faith in this life and by glory in the next."

Q. What is the exact teaching of the Church on the comparative merits of matrimony and virginity?

A. The Church teaches that it is of faith that virginity is preferable to matrimony. In the 10th canon of the 24th session of the Council of Trent we find this doctrine: "If any one saith that the marriage state is to be preferred before the state of virginity, or celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony, let him be anathema? (that is, accursed).

CHAPTER VI.

THE THREE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS.

For the better understanding of vocations we shall give a brief explanation of the evangelical counsels.

Q. What are the evangelical counsels?

A. They are Gospel advices or recommendations.

Q. Why are they called counsels?

A. Because they are not commanded but counselled by Our Lord, and recommended as means of greater perfection.

Q. Why are they called "evangelical counsels"?

A. Because they are recommended in the Gospel. Evangelium is the Latin word for gospel.

1. Poverty

Q. Which is the first of the evangelical counsels?

A. Voluntary poverty. That means renouncing the use of money and possessions by our own free will to follow Christ.

Q. What is the advantage of this counsel?

A. The practice of this counsel uproots a most dangerous passion: "For they that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition."

Q. Is there any special blessing promised to those who follow this counsel?

A. Yes: "Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting."

Q. Is this counsel given to all?

A. The Fathers of the Church teach that this counsel is recommended to all. The above words of Our Lord are unrestricted: "And every one that hath left house, or brethren," etc.

2. Perpetual Chastity.

Q. Which is the second evangelical counsel?

A. Perpetual chastity; that is, a voluntary abstaining from marriage in order to dedicate one's self in a more special manner to the love and service of God and to the great work of salvation.

Q. Is this counsel recommended in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Fathers?

A. It certainly is, as we have seen in the chapter on "Virginity".

Q. Is this counsel of chastity recommended to all?

A. This counsel, as well as the other two evangelical counsels, is recommended to all. The Fathers say that these words, "He that can take, let him take it," mean, He that is willing to take this counsel let him take it. And St. Paul says: "I would that all men were even as myself."

Q. What if one should exhort people in general to choose matrimony as a state preferable to perpetual

chastity?

A. Such a one would be speaking against faith, as we have seen in the chapter on ?Virginity.? The ?Catechism of the Council of Trent? says: ?As it is the duty of the pastor to propose to himself the holiness and perfection of the faithful, his earnest desires must be in full accordance with those of the Apostle when, writing to the Corinthians, he says: ?I would that all men were even as myself;? that is, ?continue the Fathers of Trent, ?that all embraced the virtue of continence.? The marginal resume of this paragraph in the ?Catechism of the Council of Trent? is: ?A life of continence to be desired by all.?

3. Obedience.

Q. Which is the third evangelical counsel?

A. Entire obedience; that is, a total subjection of one?s will to that of lawful superiors in all that is not sin.

Q. What Scripture warrant have we for this counsel?

A. The life of Christ was a continual model of perfect obedience. From twelve to thirty years of age all that we are told of Him in the Sacred Scriptures is that ?He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.? Obedience is a most effectual means of subduing self-will and self-love, which are our most fatal enemies. ?An obedient man shall speak of victory,? because obedience draws down a most special and abundant grace; for so pleasing is it to God that He says of it: ?Obedience is better than sacrifices.?

CHAPTER VII.

THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

Q. What is the fundamental principle or essence of the religious state?

A. The three evangelical counsels, which we have just explained. Those who enter the religious state take vows to observe the counsel of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Q. Why do so many people enter the religious state?

A. First, to promote the honour and glory of God; second, to escape the dangers of the world, and the more securely to work out their salvation; for, ?What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?? Our blessed Lord Himself assures us that ?many are called, but few are chosen.? ?Strive to enter at the narrow gate.?

Q. Why are religious happier and more cheerful than others?

A. On account of their peace of mind, and their greater hope of the eternal rewards promised to those especially who leave all to follow Jesus Christ.

Q. In what other way do you explain the happiness enjoyed by religious?

A. There is a marvellous happiness to be found in holiness of life, because the various degrees of holiness are so many steps towards God, the centre and source of all happiness. Therefore the happiness of the religious state is like that ?treasure hidden in a field, which a man having found, hid it, and for joy thereof goeth, and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.?

Q. Are religious useful to others as well as to themselves?

A. Religious bring many blessings to mankind by exercising the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and by ?instructing many unto justice.?

Religious follow in a special manner the admonition of the Apostle: ?Labor the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election.?

Besides making their own salvation more secure, religious undoubtedly contribute to the salvation of thousands of souls.

Q. This thought is certainly very startling, but how can the matter be explained?

A. Next after the priests of God, religious contribute much to keep up the faith and the spiritual life of the Church.

The principal cause of the loss of innumerable souls is the want of early religious teaching and religious training. By the various teaching communities of religious priests, brothers, and sisters, thousands are saved; for in youth their pupils acquire a love and a practical knowledge of faith; they are nurtured in purity and piety, and they are enlightened and encouraged in habits of industry and sobriety.

The good that religious teachers accomplish is not confined to one class or to a life's work; for through the pupils, the result of religious training will extend to generations yet unborn.

Q. Can you illustrate this principle by particular instances?

A. Yes; a certain religious sister has been instrumental in the hands of God in fostering vocations in numerous young men, eight of whom have already become priests; and out of a number of girls taught and trained by her during thirty years, sixty-four have become religious sisters. These latter have been for years teaching, and moulding the characters of children, and thus protecting them against the deceitful snares of the world; and, besides the countless hosts of good Christians prepared by them for the Church and for society, these sixty-four sisters have, in their turn, fostered many vocations to the priesthood and to the religious state.

In Father Abbelen's beautiful biography of Mother Caroline we read many such elevating sentiments as the following: "it was above all, her ardent, faith-inspired love of children that gained their hearts and exercised an irresistible influence over their affections. Thus did Mother Caroline unconsciously attract young girls and inspire them with a wish to become sisters."

Q. In what other way do religious contribute to the salvation of souls?

A. From thousands of hospitals and other asylums of mercy and charity numberless souls go up daily to heaven after having reformed their lives under the nursing hands, the hopeful words, and the prayerful hearts of religious men and women.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARKS OF A VOCATION TO THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

Q. Which are the marks of a vocation to the religious state?

A. No mark, or set of marks, is equally applicable to all, because God calls persons to the higher states in various ways; yet a firm will to enter religion is a safe mark of a vocation to the religious state, provided that the motives are good and no serious obstacle exists. This firm will itself is a special grace of God, "for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will." In the invitation to the counsels the will is the only condition mentioned by Our Lord: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Q. Is a firm will the only mark of a vocation to the religious state?

A. No; for the grace of a vocation to a higher state may be offered to persons of weak will, as was the case of the young man of the Gospel who was evidently called to be a disciple of Our Lord, but "he went away sad, for he had great possessions." His will was not firm enough to reject the temptations caused by the riches and pleasures of the world. Instead of corresponding to his vocation he tried to hush the voice of conscience speaking to his heart.

Q. By what other mark may a person recognize a vocation to the religious state?

A. The interior voice of conscience, soliciting the will through the intellect, and suggesting the religious state, is a mark of a vocation.

Q. But how are we to recognize this voice of conscience?

A. This voice of conscience, which is nothing else but the grace of God speaking to the heart, is heard and recognized in various ways: with some it has been lingering in the heart since childhood; to others it comes later and more suddenly. This prompting of grace may result from reading, from a sermon, a mission, a conversation, an example, the death of a friend or an acquaintance, or even from misfortune and

disappointment. In a word, this interior voice may be occasioned by the thoughts and reflections of our mind, no matter what caused these reflections.

Q. Can you give some examples showing the effects of this interior voice?

A. Yes; St. Anthony, hearing at Mass the words, ?If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.? became so inflamed with the desire of securing his salvation that he gave away all his vast possessions and led a long life of penance and prayer in the desert.

By meditating on the life, passion, and death of Jesus Christ St. Francis of Assisi was filled with such a burning zeal for God and his neighbor that he renounced his great wealth, and his right to an honorable inheritance, and spent his life in inflaming others with zeal for the salvation of souls.

The foul sight and the stench of the corpse of the Empress Isabella opened the eyes of Francis Borgia to the folly of a worldly life. He renounced the world and entered the Society of Jesus, where he sanctified himself, thinking often of the eternal torments of hell.

Q. What, then, is the principal difference in the feelings or emotions of those called to the religious state?

A. Some people, having their will inflamed with a love for the religious state, enter it with great pleasure, and without any questions about the matter; others enter it only when their understanding has become so enlightened as to discover the vanity and dangers of the world, and when they see clearly, the greater security of salvation in the religious state. These latter persons may even be somewhat dull in their affection for this state and not so inclined, humanly, to follow that which reason and faith point out to them; in their lower, animal feelings they may even experience a kind of repugnance to do what their higher reasoning powers dictate to them. This second kind of vocation is better than the first, and more generally approved by those who are experienced in such matters; for, being grounded on reason and faith, it is less subject to error, and more likely to attain the crown of perseverance.

Q. Which are the proper motives for entering the religious state?

A. The first motive should be the greater security of our own salvation; the second to promote the glory of God by a good life and by contributing to the salvation of others.

Q. Which are the impediments to entrance into religion?

A. The ordinary impediments are ill health, unsuitable age, and the obligation of supporting poor and helpless parents.

CHAPTER IX

DOUBTS ABOUT A VOCATION TO THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

Views of St Ignatius and St Francis de Sales.

Q. What should be done by a person who thinks of entering the religious state, but fears that he may not be called to it by Almighty God?

A. St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit Order, gives an excellent answer to this question. He says: ?If a person thinks of embracing a secular life, he should ask and desire more evident signs that God calls him to a secular life than if there were question of embracing the evangelical counsels; for Our Lord Himself has evidently exhorted us to embrace His counsels, and, on the other hand, He has evidently laid before us the great dangers and difficulties of a secular life; so that, if we rightly conclude, revelations and extraordinary tokens of His will are more necessary for a man entering upon a life in the world than for one entering the religious state.?

Q. Is this doctrine of St Ignatius supported by Sacred Scripture?

A. This doctrine is in perfect harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures. Our blessed Lord says: ?Woe to the world because of scandals;? and St John, the beloved disciple, says: ? If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh,

and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.?

Q. Can you quote other reliable authority on this matter of uncertain vocations?

A. Yes; Lehmkuhl, a standard theologian, says; ? In order that a person may safely embrace the religious state probable signs of a vocation are sufficient, together with a firm will of fulfilling the obligations to be assumed.?

Q. What does St Francis de Sales teach on this point?

A. On this subject St Francis de Sales says: ?To have a sign of a true vocation it is not necessary that our constancy be sensible; it suffices if our good intention remains in the superior part of our soul. And therefore we must not judge that a vocation is not a true one if a person does not feel sensible movements.?

Q. What if this divine call should change to coldness and repugnance?

A. St Francis de Sales answers: ?It is enough that the will remains firm in not abandoning the divine call, and also that some affection remains for this call, even though a person should feel a coldness and repugnance which sometimes cause him to waver and to fear that all is lost.?

Q. What does St Francis de Sales say about expecting direct proofs from God?

A. St Francis says: ?To know whether God will have a person become a religious it is not to be expected that God Himself should speak, or send an angel from heaven to signify His will. It is not necessary that ten or twelve confessors should examine whether the vocation is to be followed. But it is necessary to correspond with the first movement of the inspiration, and to cultivate it, and then not to grow weary if disgust or coldness should come on. If a person acts thus, God will not fail to make all succeed to His glory. Nor ought we to care much from what quarter the first movement comes. The Lord has many ways of calling His servants.?

CHAPTER X

ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO ENTER THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

Q. Is it allowable to encourage those who give signs of a vocation to enter the religious state?

A. St Thomas, the angel of the schools, says: ?Those who lead others into religion not only commit no sin, but even merit a great reward; for it is written: ?He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins?; and, ?They that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity.??

Yet coercion or forcing in this matter, is forbidden by the Fathers of the Council of Trent.

Q. We know that St John Chrysostom, as well as St Thomas, eloquently defended the religious state; what does this holy and learned doctor say on this point?

A. St Chrysostom says: ?If we knew that a place was unhealthy and subject to pestilence, would we not withdraw our children from it, without being stopped by the riches that they might heap up in it, or by the fact that their health had not as yet suffered? Among seculars shipwrecks are more frequent and sudden, because the difficulties of navigation are greater; but with anchorites storms are less violent, the calm is almost undisturbed. This is why we seek to draw as many as we can to the religious life.?

Q. St Jerome read every known author of his time, and summed up in himself the doctrine of all; what does he teach about exhorting others to embrace the religious state?

A. St Jerome writes thus to Heliodorus: ?I invite you: make haste. You have made light of my entreaties; perhaps you will listen to my reproaches. Effeminate soldier! What are you doing under the paternal roof? Though your mother tear her hair and rend her garments, though your father stand on the threshold and forbid your departure, you must be deaf to the voice of nature, and hasten with unmoistened eye to enlist under the banner of Christ; love for God and fear of hell easily breaks all chains.?

Q. Does St Augustine teach the same doctrine?

A. Yes; St Augustine says: ?I have been passionately fond of the perfection of the evangelical

councils; with God's grace I have embraced them. With all the power I have exhorted others to do the same; and I have companions whom I have succeeded in persuading.?

Q. What does St Bernard teach about this question?

A. Enumerating the advantages of religious above persons living in the world, St Bernard says: "They live more purely, they fall more rarely, they rise more speedily, they are aided more powerfully, they live more peacefully, they die more securely, and they are rewarded more abundantly.?"

The influence which St Bernard exercised by his letters and burning words was so effectual, so irresistible, that he was soon surrounded by a company of young men, who not only changed their way of life, but bound themselves to him to follow the holy path which God had traced out for him.

His biographers tell us that the doctrine and eloquence of St Bernard concerning the religious state were so powerful and convincing that, when he preached, mothers concealed their sons and wives hid their husbands, and companions kept one another out of Bernard's way because he persuaded so many to renounce the world and to embrace the religious state.

Q. Is entrance into the religious state more important for some than others?

A. Yes; entrance into religion is a moral obligation for some, whilst it is a privilege for others.

The two following sections will make this point clear.

This section explains the Obligation.

Some are so evidently called to the religious state that they are morally obliged to obey the call.

Proofs of this doctrine:

1. The principle itself of special vocations. "Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His Grace." GAL. i. 15.

"The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit ... dividing to everyone according as He will." 1 COR. xii. 7, 11.

2. "There are very many who cannot enter heaven unless they abandon all things." ST GREGORY THE GREAT.

3. "If we wish to secure our eternal salvation, we must embrace that state of life to which God calls us." ST LIGUORI.

4. "The choice of a state of life decides whether our conduct shall be good or bad." ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN.

5. "It is very difficult to save one's self in a state of life in which God does not wish one to be." ST VINCENT DE PAUL.

6. "You run well, but out of the way; he who does little, but in the state to which God calls him, does more than he who labours much, but in a state which he has thoughtlessly chosen; a cripple limping in the right way is better than a racer out of it." ST AUGUSTINE.

7. "O hard-hearted father; O cruel mother; you wish rather that we perish with you (by remaining in the world) than be saved without you." ST BERNARD.

This section explains the Privilege

There are yet many more persons who have the privilege of entering the religious state without a moral obligation of doing so.

Even though persons should have vocations to the marriage state in the sense that God would not require anything higher of them, yet they are privileged to enter the religious state if no impediment exists.

Proofs of this doctrine:

1. The MIND of Church. The Church sacredly guards for all her children the privilege of entering the religious state, even after promise of marriage: ?Be zealous for the better gifts. And I shew unto you yet a more excellent way.?
2. It is of faith that virginity is preferable to matrimony: ?If anyone saith that the marriage state is to be preferred before the state of virginity, let him be anathema.? COUNCIL OF TRENT.
The religious state is a more usual and a safer way of preserving virginity than a life in the outer world.
3. The invitation to the counsels is general ; it may be accepted by anyone who is not prevented by some particular impediment, as marriage, sickness or home obligations.
The three counsels - of poverty, chastity and obedience - constitute the substance of the religious state.
SUAREZ.
4. ?I say to the unmarried, and to the widows: it is good for them if they continue, even as I The unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband.? ST PAUL.
5. ?As it is the duty of the pastor to propose to himself the holiness and perfection of the faithful, his earnest desires must be in full accordance with those of the Apostle when, writing to the Corinthians, he says: ?I would that all men were even as myself;? that is, that all embrace the virtue of continence.? CATECHISM OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT, page 225.
6. ?A life of continence to be desired by all.? Marginal resume of the above paragraph, CATECHISM OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT, page 225.
7. ?In the world there is a vast number of women who damn their souls; the number of those who damn their souls in convents is very small.? ST LIGUORI.

CHAPTER XI

MEANS OF PRESERVING A VOCATION TO THE RELIGIOUS STATE - SOME OBSTACLES.

- Q. What are the means of preserving a vocation whilst preparing to enter the religious state?
A. Prayer, retirement and promptness in entering religion.
- Q. Why is retirement, or seclusion from the world, necessary in order to preserve the grace of a religious vocation?
A. Because an apparently trifling circumstance often causes the loss of such a vocation. A day of amusement, a discouraging word, even from a friend, an unmortified passion, or a conversation, especially with a person of the opposite sex, often suffices to bring to naught the best resolution of giving one's self entirely to God.
- Q. Why should a vocation to the religious state be followed promptly?
A. St John Chrysostom, as quoted by St Thomas, says: ?When God gives such vocations, He wills that we should not defer even for a moment to follow them; for when the devil cannot bring a person to give up his resolution of consecrating himself to God, he at least seeks to make him defer the execution of it, and he esteems it a great gain if he can obtain the delay of one day, or even of one hour.? ?Because,? continues St Liguori, ?after that day, or that hour, other occasions presenting themselves, it will be less difficult for the devil to obtain greater delay, until the person, finding himself more feeble and less assisted by grace, gives way altogether, and loses his vocation.? St Jerome gives this advice to those who are called to quit the world: ?make haste, I beseech you, and rather cut than loosen the rope by which your bark is bound fast to the land;? that is, break at once all ties

that bind you to the world.

Q. What other reason may be given why a religious vocation should be followed promptly?

A. Like other graces, the grace of a religious vocation is transient; it may be offered today, and if not accepted, it may be withdrawn tomorrow: ?Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.? ?Exhort one another every day, whilst it is called today, that none of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.?

CHAPTER XII

CHILDREN AND THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

Q. At what age may children enter the religious state?

A. The Council of Trent teaches that young persons are permitted to take their vows in the religious state at the age of sixteen, after making at least one year?s novitiate.

The mind and the spirit of the Church show that youth is the best time to make this agreeable sacrifice to God; and even the Holy Ghost Himself testifies to the same: ?It is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke from his youth.?

Q. Do not a larger percentage persevere when subjects enter the religious state late in life?

A. No; the superiors of several of the largest and best organised communities testify that a larger percentage persevere of those who enter young.

The young are more easily formed to religious discipline. When persons are twenty years of age, or older, their minds and characters are less pliable; it is harder to unbend and remold them: ?A young man, according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it.?

Q. Is it, then, a mistaken principle to try the vocations of young persons by permitting them to acquire experience in the ways of the world before entering the religious state?

A. Yes; because ?he that loveth danger shall perish in it.? As reasonably might you place enticing liquors before a man struggling against intemperance.

When these youth are left to the mercy of so many enticing and dangerous influences, with their passions growing within them, and an enchanting world smiling upon them; when others around them are ?marrying and giving in marriage;? when all are speaking of the world and thinking of the world, they will naturally be influenced by the moral atmosphere in which they live.

Facts confirm this doctrine; for if, through their own fault, or through the fault of their parents, those having vocations to the religious state remain in the outer world until the end of their ?teens? a large percentage of them lose their vocations and stay in the world.

Persons having thus lost their vocations usually live worse lives than other Christians on account of the abuse of grace.

Q. What is to be done when subjects cannot enter religion at an early age?

A. In given instances, when children are unable to pursue a religious vocation at an early age, the greatest precaution should be taken, both by themselves and by their parents and confessors, to keep alive those higher and holier inspirations which the Holy Ghost diffuses more liberally at the age of First Communion, and for about two or three years afterwards.

Q. Does not the Holy Ghost disuse such special graces with equal liberality later in life?

A. If such special graces have not already been abused, the Holy Ghost may offer them at any time; but later in life this divine seed does not usually find such well prepared soil in the heart. The early lessons of faith and piety, and of the fear and love of god, easily become effaced by contact with the world.

Religious vocations often share the fate of the seed that fell by the wayside and the seed that fell among thorns: ?And the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things entering in, choke the word, and it is made fruitless.?

Q. Does Our Lord manifest any special preference for the young?

A. Yes; He makes the conduct of children the standard for all who would be saved: "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," Again Our Lord says: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."

Q. What practical conclusion may be drawn from these words of Our Lord?

A. Commenting on these words of the Gospel, St John Chrysostom says: "If children are driven from Christ, who will deserve to go near Him? Now it is evident that we get near Jesus Christ mainly by the practice of the counsels. Children, therefore, should not be kept from Christ by hindering them from practising these counsels."

Q. What is the doctrine of St Thomas with regard to religious vocations in the young?

A. On this matter St Thomas says: "This teaching is clearly the outcome of what occurs every day among men. For do we not see children put early to those avocations, arts, or trades which they are to follow in after life? Candidates for the sanctuary begin in youth to acquire the knowledge which will help them later; those destined for a military career are trained to arms from their earliest years; and the future tradesman is apprenticed when only a boy. Why, then, should a rule so well observed in other spheres be neglected in the case of the religious life? I say even more: when a state of life is attended with many difficulties, the greater is the need to habituate one's self from youth to overcome them. Hence we read in Jeremias: "It is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke from his youth.""

Q. Are children obliged to obey their parents in the choice of a state of life?

A. St Liguori says: "It is certain that in the choice of a state of life children are not bound to obey their parents; thus St Thomas and the other Doctors teach unanimously." Both parents and children should remember the reply of the apostles to the unjust rulers who had forbidden them to preach Christ crucified: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Example.

When St Bernard and his brothers were bidding a final adieu to their home and their father, they saw their youngest brother at play with other children in the castle yard. The oldest brother embraced him, saying: "My little brother Nivard, do you see this castle and these lands? Well, all these will be yours - yours alone." "What!" replied the child with more than a child's thoughtfulness, "are you going to take heaven for yourselves, and leave earth for me? The division is unequal." From that moment little Nivard could not be restrained by either his father, his relatives, or any human influence. He joined St Bernard, who, with his brothers and companions to the number of thirty, set out for the monastery of Citeaux.

CHAPTER XIII

DUTY OF PARENTS REGARDING THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN.

Q. Are not some parents unjust towards children that wish to enter the religious state?

A. Yes; unfortunately some parents are both unjust and unreasonable with their children in this matter.

Q. How is this unjust and unreasonable conduct of parents more clearly shown?

A. When there is a question of marriage with a rich or an influential person, many parents not only make no objection, but even urge the matter, whether such a marriage is the will of God or not; and yet when the children are evidently called by Almighty God to higher and holier states - to become spouses of Jesus Christ - these same parents object, and place obstacles in the path of their children. Many parents, having allowed their own faith to become deadened by contact with the world, lose sight of the snares and pitfalls before the feet of their children.

Q. What do the Fathers of the Church say of parents who oppose children that wish to enter the religious state?

A. Speaking of religious vocations, St Thomas says: "Frequently our friends according to the flesh are opposed to our spiritual good."

St Liguori says: "Parents often prefer to see their children damned with themselves rather than to be saved away from them."

On this subject St Bernard exclaims: "O hard-hearted father! O cruel mother! Unfeeling souls! You are not parents, you are murderers; for you grieve to see your son saved, and you rejoice at the sight of his eternal perdition."

This one of the ways in which, as Our Lord tells us: "A man's enemies shall be they of his own household." Hence the touching admonition of the Holy Ghost is particularly applicable to a person called to the religious state; "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thy people and thy father's house."

Again, our blessed Lord says: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me."

Q. Do parents commit sin in preventing their children from entering the religious state?

A. If children themselves incur imminent danger of losing their souls by neglecting a divine vocation, parents that prevent a vocation to the religious state incur the danger of damning both themselves and their children. Such parents will have to answer also for the eternal loss of all the souls that their children would have saved in the religious state.

Q. What is the exact teaching of theology with regard to parents preventing their children from entering the religious state?

A. St Liguori gives the following, not only as his doctrine, but as the teaching of theologians in general: "Parents who, without a just and certain cause, prevent their children from entering the religious state cannot be excused from mortal sin; and not only parents, but any one who prevents another from following a religious vocation, sins mortally."

Q. What does the Council of Trent teach on this point?

A. The Fathers of the Council of Trent place under anathema (as accursed) "those who shall in any way, without a just cause, hinder the holy wish of virgins or other women to take the veil or make their vows." (18th chapter, 25th session.)

Q. Does God, even in this life, punish parents for having prevented the higher vocations of their children?

A. Yes; in punishment for thus thwarting His designs God often punishes parents by some misfortune, such as the premature death or the reckless life of their children.

Q. Is not long deliberation as well as the advice of many friends necessary in order to avoid mistakes?

A. St Thomas says: "Long deliberation and advice are required in doubtful matters, but in those things which are certain and evident no counsel is required."

St Thomas concludes his article on the religious state with these beautiful words; "It is a sweet yoke, and those who bear it on their shoulders have the promise of being one day consoled by the delightful enjoyment of God and the eternal repose of the soul."

CHAPTER XIV

VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD.

Q. Is it necessary to have a special vocation in order to enter the priesthood?

A. Yes; for St Paul says: "Neither doth any man take the honour to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was." Our Lord said to his disciples: "You have not chosen Me; but I have chosen you, and have appointed you, that you should go, and should bring forth fruit, and your fruit should remain."

Q. Which are the marks of a vocation to the priesthood?

A. The principle marks are: 1, a virtuous life; 2, a pure intention; 3, a desire of becoming a priest.

Q. Are not great talents necessary in order to enter the priesthood?

A. No; a person of ordinary talents may become a very useful priest.

Q. Why is a virtuous life necessary in one who aspires to the priesthood?

A. St Thomas, the angelic doctor, gives the following reasons: "We must place the sublime burden of the priesthood only on walls already dried by sanctity; that is, freed from the malignant humour of sin." In another place the holy doctor says: "As he who takes orders is raised above seculars in dignity, so should he be superior to them in sanctity."

Q. What is meant by a pure intention?

A. The intention of securing one's own salvation and of promoting the glory of God by contributing to the salvation of others.

Q. What is meant by the desire to become a priest?

A. It means an interior feeling or impulse of grace inclining a person towards the priesthood.

Q. How may this desire be obtained?

A. By considering the goodness of our blessed Lord, His life of zeal and labour, and His burning desire to save souls; the honour and the reward of continuing His work; by meditating on some passage of the Sacred Scripture or the truths of eternity; by reflecting on the shortness of life and the dangers of secular pursuits.

Q. May this desire be acquired by external means?

A. Yes; this desire may be the result of a sermon, of the instructions of pastors and teachers, or of advice and example. It may come also from the prayers, the good example, and the encouragement of parents.

Q. How may a person know that this desire comes from God, even indirectly?

A. He can judge by the motives which prompt this desire; a person evidently has a divine vocation when his desire of becoming a priest is fairly continuous; when the motives are good, and no serious obstacle exists.

CHAPTER XV.

DO VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD COME DIRECTLY FROM GOD?

Q. Is it necessary that vocations to the priesthood should come directly from God?

A. No; generally speaking, God selects and prepares His ministers through those whom He has appointed to watch over the interests of His Church. Even St Paul did not receive his vocation direct from God. he was converted directly, but to his question: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" he received this answer: "Arise, and go into the city, and there it shall be told to thee what thou must do." God made use of Ananias to communicate to St Paul his vocation.

Q. Did all the other apostles receive their vocations directly from Our Lord?

A. No; in their first call several of the apostles were brought to Our Lord by indirect means: St Andrew and St John the Evangelist were sent to the Saviour by St John the Baptist: "Ecce Agnus Dei? [Behold the Lamb of God?]. And the two disciples heard him [John the Baptist] speak, and they followed Jesus."

"He [Andrew] findeth first his brother Simon, and said to him: We have found the Messias; and he brought him to Jesus."

"On the following day he [Andrew] would go forth into Galilee, and he findeth Philip. Philip findeth Nathanael, and said to him: We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth." At first there is a disagreement of views and sentiments between Philip and Nathanael, so that Philip had to use persuasion to bring Nathanael to his own way of thinking: "And Nathanael said to him: Can anything good come from Nazareth? Philip saith to him: Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and He saith of him: Behold an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile. Nathanael saith to Him: Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said to him: Before

that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.?

Many excellent subjects, many like Nathanael ?in whom there is no guile,? may be found loitering under the fig-tree of the world, awaiting for some zealous Philip ?to call? them to Jesus.

CHAPTER XVI

FOSTERING VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD.

The Fathers of the Council of Baltimore on Fostering Vocations.

Q. Is it allowable for priests, parents, teachers and others to foster and encourage vocations to the priesthood in the youth committed to their care?

A. It is not only allowable, it is in some measure a duty.

Q. How is this proved?

A. The Fathers of the late Plenary Council of Baltimore, after the example of the Fathers of the Council of Trent, give very clear and practical instructions in this matter. The Fathers say: ?We exhort in the Lord, and earnestly entreat pastors and other priests, that they would diligently turn their minds to searching after and finding out, among the boys committed to their care, such as are fit for the ecclesiastical state and seem called to it.?

Q. Are not some parents to be blamed for their indifference or their opposition with regard to higher vocations in their children?

A. Yes; the Fathers of the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore gently rebuke certain worldly minded parents for not fostering vocations to the priesthood in their sons. Deploring the lack of such vocations, the Fathers say in their pastoral letter: ?We fear that the fault lies in great part with the many parents, who, instead of fostering the desire so natural to the youthful heart of dedicating itself to the service of God?s sanctuary, but too often impart to their children their own worldly-mindedness, and seek to influence their choice of a state of life by unduly exaggerating the difficulties and dangers of the priestly calling, and painting in too glowing colours the advantages of secular life. To such parents we would most earnestly appeal, imploring them not to interfere with the designs of God on their children when they perceive to them a growing disposition to attach themselves to the service of the altar.

?If God rewards the youthful piety of your sons by calling them to minister in His sanctuary, the highest privilege He confers on man, do not endeavour to give their thoughts another direction. To those whom God invites to co-operate with Him in the most divine of all works, the salvation of souls, the words of Christ to His apostles are applicable: ?Amen I say to you: everyone that hath left house, or brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children, or lands for My name?s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting.??

CHAPTER XVII

PREVENTING VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD.

Q. Is it a sin to prevent a person from following a vocation to the priesthood?

A. Yes; because, as we have seen, the salvation of one who does not follow his vocation is greatly endangered; also because in such a case the designs of God would be thwarted.

The late Archbishop Lynch, of Toronto, is authority for the statement that the average priest secures the salvation of five thousand souls. This means that on the average, for every young man that becomes a priest there will be five thousand souls less in hell, and five thousand more in heaven, for all eternity. Hence he who prevents a vocation to the priesthood shall be responsible for the loss of numerous souls.

Q. Is it right to pray for the grace of a vocation to the priesthood?

A. Certainly; this grace, as well as other special graces, may very appropriately be made the object of prayer. Our Lord, pointing out the great number of souls to be saved, said to His disciples: The harvest

indeed is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth labourers into His harvest.?

Many parents have by fervent, humble, and persevering prayer obtained for their sons the grace of being called to the sublime dignity of the priesthood.

Q. When a young man ascertains that he is called to the priesthood, is his vocation fully decided?

A. No; because the secular priesthood and the religious priesthood are distinct states of life, each having its advantages and its responsibilities, and therefore a special vocation and special graces are necessary for each of these states. Hence in deciding between these two states a person should think earnestly, and ask the grace to know whether he is called to the secular or to the religious priesthood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MEANS OF KNOWING OUR VOCATION.

1. Prayer.

St James says: ?If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given to him.?

This wisdom, according to Cornelius a Lapide, is the knowledge of our last end and the means of attaining it. Young people without experience, and having yet to choose a state of life, have great need of this wisdom. ?All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.?

Prayer is the divinely appointed means of obtaining grace. ?Ask, and you shall receive; that your joy may be full.? ?Know ye that the Lord will hear your prayers, if you continue with perseverance.? ?Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.?

?Who is the man that can understand his own way?? God alone knows both the obstacles and the helps that you are to meet in your way. Cry out, then, with the Royal Prophet: ?Make the way known to me, wherein I should walk; for I have lifted up my soul to Thee.?

St Liguori says: ?We should pray earnestly to God to make known to us His will, whatever may be the state He has in store for us. Do not fail to recommend yourself in a special manner to our holy Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, beseeching her to obtain for you the grace perfectly to fulfil the will of her divine Son.?

?In all your doubts and anxieties,? says St Bernard, ?think of Mary, call upon her name.?

2. Freedom from Sin.

When mortal sin reigns in the soul, it acts like a dark cloud ceiling from us the light of heaven: ?For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins.? ?Your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you.?? ?The way of the wicked is darksome; they know not where they fall.?

God loves to communicate Himself to those whose hearts are free from the defilements of sin: ?Blessed are the clean of heart; for they shall see God.? ?The clean of heart? shall see God, not only in heaven, but even in this life; they shall see Him in His works and recognize His providence in all His designs: ?To them that love God, all things work together unto good.?

Hence he who wishes to ascertain the state of life which he should embrace ought to keep himself constantly in the friendship of God: ?Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.?

3. Humility.

?Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord.? ?God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.? ?The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds; and he will not depart till the

Most High behold.?

4. Retreat.

God loves to communicate His choicest favours in the silence of retreat: ?I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart.?

If you cannot make a regular retreat, at least avoid all dissipation of mind; retire into the solitude of your heart, after the example of St Catherine of Siena and other saints, always remembering that God is near you and that He wishes to speak to your heart.

5. Counsel.

?My son, do thou nothing without counsel, and thou shalt not repent when thou hast done.?

Your best adviser is your confessor. Through his own vocation he receives special help from God.

To know and to do God?s will in the choice of a state of life is a grace which parents should earnestly invoke upon their children even from infancy; and it is important that the children themselves, especially from the time of their First Communion, should daily ask of God the grace to know their vocation.

For this purpose they would do well to say daily three Hail Marys, or the following beautiful prayer of St Bernard, which might be appropriately said in common; for ?where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.?

Prayer of St Bernard.

Remember , O most pious and compassionate Virgin Mary, that from all ages it is unheard of, that anyone was forsaken who, placing himself under thy maternal protection, implored thy assistance and begged the favour of thy prayers. Animated with the confidence which this inspires, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins and Mother of my God, and in the bitterness of my sorrow I throw myself at thy feet. O Mother of the Eternal Word, despise not my humble supplication, but listen graciously, and mercifully grant me the request which from my heart I make to thee. Amen.

An indulgence of three hundred days.