

Leopoldina Naudet



Spiritual Diary

Volume I

1800-1806

[Fr. Nicholas Paccanari – Spiritual Director]

[ed. M. Bonato and P. Accordini]

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Superior General's Letter of Presentation

It is only in relatively recent times that research and the deeper study of the writings of the Founders and the Foundresses of Religious Institutes and Congregations has been in vogue: it seemed that the works of these Communities were more urgent than such studies, at least for the women religious!

In the aftermath of the IInd Vatican Council, the consecrated life seeks a renewal that would be anchored in the original charism, while being re-interpreted creatively according to the times in which we presently live. Furthermore, today, and this seems to be a widening phenomenon, even those who have very little familiarity with the religious life in the strict sense, do seek points of reference for the spiritual journeys which might accompany the quest for meaning among modern men and women.

Leopoldina Naudet is indeed a teacher of spirituality. She is her own person, despite her sense of urgency of 'rendering an account'- and in writing - of her interior journey, and thus she has left us as our inheritance a precious treasure. To write about herself was for her much like 'leaving open a bottle of some precious liquid, destined thereby to evaporate'.

We are grateful to her for having been able to sustain such a challenging undertaking. And so will those who come to know her in these pages will likewise be grateful. This Diary simply unfolds without any pretense, or quest for scientific precision. While these personal Reminiscences are now no longer 'secret', but precisely for this reason, they are offered as an experience of God to appreciate and to savor.

Gratitude and appreciation are also owed to the Sisters who, from the time Leopoldina lived, up to this present day, have lovingly preserved these manuscripts. We thank also those who in any way put their hands and heart to bring about the publication of these Reminiscences, which are now finally being offered in a form that permit of a much more orderly consultation.

*Sister Marisa Adami
Superior General
of the Sisters of the Holy Family*

To the Readers

These personal reminiscences are the most precious composition for anyone who would want to come to know the spirituality of Leopoldina Naudet, and to approach her with religious respect.

Mother Leopoldina is quite transparent, frank, humble, when she manifests her interior life to her Spiritual Director. Her purpose was always that of being illumined and assisted to come to know and to carry out God's Will. She often feared misunderstanding, of deceiving, and of being deceived, of not corresponding. And she experienced profoundly the abyss that opened up between what she saw as her own nothingness, her sins and the greatness and the light of God.

Despite this, she is irresistibly drawn toward Him, toward Jesus Christ, who was for her, her Spouse. She felt that the Lord was being quite demanding of her: he wanted all. And Mother Leopoldina gave herself over with total commitment in order to remove even the smallest imperfections, in order to maintain constantly her recollection and the sense of the presence of God. She did this in order to fulfill His divine will – even in those most acute sufferings of spirit. On the other hand, God attracted her sweetly but powerfully to Himself, from the time when she was a young woman. He purified her with every kind of trial, deprived her often of all human support, because *He Alone* [*Dio solo*] was to be her Master and Guide.

He gratified her with graces of mystical union, and made her more convinced of her mission as a Foundress, and strengthened her the more in the contrasts that she experienced, and often endowed her with his consolations.

She understood the divine plan placed upon her and throughout her life. She entrusted her person and her endeavor to the merciful love of the Father in an act of complete abandonment in Him, which served as the prelude to the mutual and definitive possession of Him in the Beatific Vision.

These **Personal Reminiscences** are different notes, written by Leopoldina herself, beginning in the year 1800. Her writings are contained on sheets of paper of varying format, upon which she registered her own deepest sentiments. They have a spiritual character and for the most part, they are auto-biographical. They were brought together after her death, and presented in a volume of some 186 different sheets of paper. However, these manifested rather serious empty spaces, and also exhibited a rather unique chronological order.

They were called *Secret Reminiscences*, from the expression that Mother Leopoldina herself used to describe them in the course of her manuscripts. The original is kept in the Archives of the Mother House of the Sisters of the Holy family in Verona. They cover that period of time from 1800 until 1831. As noted in the Table of Contents, these notes may be distinguished into two periods:

- **1800-1806**: that period of time in which she followed the Spiritual Direction of Fr. Nicholas Paccanari;
- **1811-1831**: that time when she followed the Spiritual Direction of St. Gaspar Bertoni.

These Notes are indeed the principal source in order to come to know the interior journey of Mother Leopoldina and to follow her original inspiration and progressive clarification of her vocation as Foundress.

In coming to know these *Secret Reminiscences* one experiences a rather profound impression. It is received as one who comes to be standing before the wonders that God has deigned to fulfill in a soul, who entrusted herself totally to Him.

An Invitation to read

1. Personal Reminiscences

The papers, finally put in order and gathered here with loving care, always bring surprise to the attentive reader. Some seventy years ago, these papers came into the hands of Fr. Joseph Stofella, a Stigmatine, competent student and biographer of St. Gaspar Bertoni, of St. Madeline di Canossa, collaborator in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, a musician of genuine value. He was born in Aldeno, in the province of Trent, and died at the age of 80 in Verona¹.

The great interest that he brought to the considerable effort to these papers [an effort which has been partially spared us, due to this much awaited edition] he describes for us himself. The difficulties he faced were manifold: very small hand-writing, a truly difficult text, because of the errors in grammar, the challenging hand-writing, written in a language not perfectly possessed by the authoress... and not forgetting that her concepts are of a sublime nature, and hence, not an easy reading... and to all this, there must be added, from an historical point of view, the challenge of verifying some dates, and then guessing about some of the others.

And yet, little by little, as the attentive reader leafs through these pages – and this is Father Stofella's own confession – one experiences being 'occupied, as though invaded, by a solid and appealing current.'

Fr. Stofella emphasized:

... 'I say, an attentive reading is necessary; since, as is well known, the pages where certain souls attempt to trace an idea of that which God is working within their deepest selves, always escape too many readers, as they so often prefer, as an inattentive reader is no reader at all².'

After having spoken of the limits of his work, from the 'very meek pretensions' [we are speaking of 80 full pages, put together by one who was genuinely competent and with an authentic, unrestrained enthusiasm], he added:

'The writer of these pages feels much encouraged by an example, of whom there is no Stigmatine who would not recognize her authority: but, one who is also human. Leopoldina Naudet's pages, or, to be more exact and on a surer footing, the most important part of their content, was already taken quite seriously by Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. To follow behind in his footsteps means to hurry along more decisively, and with a lighter heart.'

From the Royal Court to the Cloister

At the age of fifteen, Leopoldina Naudet had a clear experience of her being called by God: *You are not made for this world. I want you in a whole and entire manner*³. From that moment on, her life was one continual ascent.

¹ cf. L. MANTOVANI, *P. Giuseppe Stofella, Stigmatino. On the Centenary of his Birth*. Verona 1985.

² G. STOFELLA, *Il Diario Spirituale di Leopoldina Naudet, Fondatrice delle Sorelle della sacra famiglia e il Venerabile Don Gaspare Bertoni, Fondatore degli Stigmatini*. Supplemento al BERTONIANO. [A Bulletin for the internal use of the Stigmatines], on the 77th anniversary of the death of the Venerable Gaspar Bertoni. Tipo-Lito Bertinelli. Verona 1930. The citations are from pp. 293, 294.

Hers is a rather uncommon life-story, well expressed in the title: *From the Royal Court to the Cloister*⁴ Orphaned by her parents at a very tender age she was led by circumstances and by the need of a primary education and then of work. She came to live in addition to Florence [where her father had been working for the Arch-Duke Leopold], she also dwelt in France, in Vienna and at Prague [imperial cities, where Leopoldina and her sister Louise were in the retinue of the Arch-Duchess, Marianna]. She later returned to Italy, and dwelt in Rome, Padua and Verona.

She received her education from various religious institutes, and thus was prepared by the many valuable elements of formation that served her in good stead over the years. She familiarized herself with the consecrated way of life, persistently experiencing the desire for it. The attractions inherent in the imperial court, the suppression of the Institute of the *Beloved of the Lord*, in which she had thought she had found her manner of life, and the difficulties of being finally able to realize her own nest... never tarnished her decision for the Lord. Her spiritual life is a pathway comprised of humility, confidence, abandonment: *You, o Lord, are my strength, my support*⁵.

A happy synthesis of all this may be found in that slogan that was very familiar to her and which she often wrote on the top line of so many of her writings: *God alone!* From this total and constant quest for God, there unfolded the spiritual outlines of her entire life⁶. She remained ever faithful to her ideal. Her strength rests in those words which the Lord had resound in her heart: *From you, I want the most sublime perfection, and nothing else is possible, unless there is an abuse of My graces, since these are infinite*⁷.

As a result, she had no doubt regarding her ideal, and she often repeated: *The Lord wants me to be a saint. So, I want to be a saint!*⁸

After having been elected the Superior General of a nascent Congregation at the tender age of only 27, she found herself primarily responsible in the resulting storm associated with her task. Despite all, she was able to keep herself serene, decisive, and continued in her complete fidelity. She proved to be a great support for her Sisters who were unsure of their vocations, and continued on with the *remnant* of the *Beloved of the Lord* in her life of consecration to God. On their invitation, she accepted hospitality to live for a while with the new Institute founded by Madeline de Canossa, all the while awaiting a sign and the hour of God, holding on dearly with confident abandonment to Him, Who through trials purified her and brought her to spiritual maturity.

³ Letter dated July 18, 1799. cf. N. Dalle Vedove, *Dalla corte al chiostro. Donna Leopoldina Naudet, Fondatrice delle Sorelle della sacra Famiglia*. Verona 1954, p. 84.

⁴ N. Dalle Vedove, *Dalla corte al chiostro. Donna Leopoldina Naudet, Fondatrice delle Sorelle della Sacra famiglia*. Verona 1954.

⁵ p. 35.

⁶ The Congregation of the Causes of the Saints. Verona. *The Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Leopoldina Naudet, Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, of Verona [1773-1834]. The Position on her Virtues, II*. Roma 1994, p. 1257.

⁷ Dalle Vedove, *Dalla corte...*, p. 37.

⁸ p. 64.

As a Foundress, she had occasion to take counsel from a number of gifted individuals in the Church in order that they might assist her in knowing and in following the will of God. However, in all this she always availed herself fully in interior reflection in the light of the Holy Spirit, in that clarity of perception which she felt she had received as a gift. She once stated:

... I have a certain assurance of clarity with which it seems that I am able to develop an outlook, and a sense of justice that I feel that I have in making judgments. However, my own self-love keeps me in a lowly situation, because I fear that as punishment of the satisfaction that I experience occasionally, the Lord removes from me this gift, that I know comes from Him. ⁹.

Dialogue with God and with her Spiritual Director

Mother Leopoldina wrote these pages which cover more than thirty years of her life, giving us thereby an insight into the marvels of God transmitted to her. She wrote about herself and of her spiritual journey in these pages which she herself has preferred to call by the title of *Private Memoirs* ¹⁰.

In her life, Leopoldina experienced the truth of the words of Jesus: ***If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and my Father will love him, and We shall come to him and make Our home with him*** [Jn 14:23]. She had a realization of the wonders that God accomplished in her and, in her humility, she made of all this a permanent reason and inexhaustible source for her gratitude. From those pages which are chronologically the first of her *Spiritual Diary* we can take note of the real vexation brought to her in speaking of her own profound experience of God's action within her. This trial became for her a real torture. She noted during her Retreat of October 1801 [while she was in Rome, serving as Superior General of the Community of the Beloved which had just begun]:

... The fact that I did not have the obligation of speaking about those interior experiences, and about which I do think, and those insights that I have about certain matters, brought me great pleasure...

Is it possible that Leopoldina was thinking of self love in this regard?

... When I am before the Lord and that these experiences happen to me, it serves as a distraction to me when I think that I will have to speak about them and this brings a certain repugnance. I feel that when I think of desire to speak about this, it is always outside of prayer: this seems to be more self love than anything else...

However, her Confessor [at this time of her life it was Fr. Nicholas Paccanari, Founder of the ***Fathers of the Faith*** and also of the ***Beloved of Jesus***] invites her to put these experiences in writing, whenever she found it difficult to manifest them by voice:

... I felt that I was disposed at that moment to do this, but the repugnance that I experienced from then on, every time I had to put something down in writing about these matters, I could not express

⁹ cf. p. 56.

¹⁰ **Translator's Note:** In English *Spiritual Diary* seems to be a translation that would communicate the ideal of Mother Leopoldina presents.

*them very well, and today I had to bring particular violence upon myself in order to do it, because it seems to me that otherwise I would be lacking in obedience.*¹¹

However, was it perhaps the fear of revealing to others the strident contrast between the wonders worked by God and her own sense of wretchedness that held her back? She was not able to decide this. If the prospect of writing all this down the difficulty remained for her, Leopoldina would not have been much help to her:

*... I experience a great difficulty in speaking of my own interior life and so, of whatever it is that I hold within. Certain matters seem to me to be so in the depths of my soul, that it is not even possible to explain them as they are experienced [...] It helps me greatly to overcome myself and to seek outside of myself God's assistance*¹²

The many pages that she wrote out for her Spiritual Director show her power of analysis of the most hidden aspects of her soul, the solid spiritual formation, and at the same time, - and this is a decisive trait in her writing - her obedience to the Minister of God:

... I repeat to him that the most helpful thought that can be present in order to serve God with greater zeal and fervor would be to have me do everything that would be suggested to me, no matter how contrary this might be to my own personal tastes...

*On reflection, I thanked the Lord for having found in you that which from my childhood on I had desired, i.e., knowing the ways of the Lord concerning me, you are not easily contented. Rather, you continue to motivate me to move forward by pointing out to me that I do nothing for the Lord, Who from me merits so much and Who has bestowed on me so many means and graces.*¹³

When she received an observation from her Confessor, she almost immediately put in writing:

... In permitting me to continue what I was doing, reverend Father, you said to me that you were not happy with me; unfortunately, I feel that if you have the zeal, the concern for my soul, this cannot be; and this persuasion and understanding of the foundation with which you could tell me this brought me that affliction that it seems to be that I also manifested. I feel deeply what it is that I should do; or to put it more truthfully, I do feel it, but without knowing clearly precisely in just what it consists.

*I realize that I am placing impediments to this knowledge due to my own wretchedness and at the same time to my own bearing within that which I do know: and I cannot see not even in miniature in just what my misery consists. The inability of seeing it convinces me all the more of my own weakness and blindness and keeps me in great humiliation*¹⁴.

However, Fr. Stofella points out: this is not the case of that subtle torture that paralyzes her tongue and her pen when she strives to repeat that which God is achieving in the depths of her being, where her self-love has no place¹⁵.

It helps us to understand also an additional confidence which Leopoldina shared with her Confessor: *...Gratitude is the sentiment which has always been the most pronounced in*

¹¹ cf. p. 49.

¹² cf. pp. 52-53.

¹³ cf. pp. 46-47.

¹⁴ cf. p. 45.

¹⁵ cf. Fr. Stofella, p. 297.

me... ¹⁶ She had at long last met the spiritual guide whom she had always sought. It had not been easy for her to be contented in this important matter, but she had been inspired to keep looking and once this solid direction had been discovered, she wholeheartedly committed herself to it: ... *I will submit everything to the Father General...* ¹⁷. *Please note well, as you have my soul in your hands....!* ¹⁸

She further wrote to her Spiritual Father:

... As far as my duty is concerned which pertains to this Undertaking to which the Lord has called me, you may be assured that I will be faithful to it, that I will do the very best that I can and that, beyond all sense of mere duty, I will always have a supreme fulfillment in carrying it out, assisted by your counsels... ¹⁹

It seems that for her this was a challenge, that went far beyond the very dark times which were coming.

In her *Spiritual Diary*, there are not lacking certain hints and worries regarding her Enterprise that were indeed approaching, particularly because of the founder of the group to which she belonged from whom there emerges the rectitude and clarity of Mother Leopoldina. It could very well be that it is to this matter that she is referring in her writing to Fr. Paccanari:

... when they relate to me certain matters in your regard, this brings me great suffering in not being able to respond and to say that which is in accord with the truth... ²⁰

She continues:

... There comes to my memory very powerfully all that I suffered from the time that I had joined the community of the 'Beloved'... ²¹

Dating from 1803²², would not these comments of her provide special significance?

... I experienced a certain disturbance from recalling to mind those past events, all that I had to endure in those two years ... In those days, I experienced much melancholy of these matters and following a certain maxim that I always retained that whatever it is that disturbs the spirit comes from the Devil. I did all I could to overcome these feelings, struggling onward with the help of God ... Grace came into my heart which led me to love all the more in detail the spiritual good of those persons, who with their weakness, were able to take from me such displeasure... ²³

¹⁶ **Dalle Vedove, *Dalla Corte...*, o.c., p. 61**

¹⁷ **o.c. p. 66.**

¹⁸ **p. 63.**

¹⁹ **p. 62.**

²⁰ **The question arises regarding Mother Leopoldina's writings that pertain to these crucial years whether or not they have all been destroyed. Is it not true that the plan of God goes on anyway, and not fruitlessly, even in the midst of the most trying circumstances?**

²¹ **p. 58.**

²² **The accusations against Fr. Nicholas Paccanari began in 1801.**

²³ **pp. 85-86.**

She would write later in September 1806:

... *I firmly hope that the hour of the Lord will come in which we will be consoled ...* ²⁴

In all these trials, she seems to have been sustained also by her reflection and innate wisdom:

... *repugnance leveled at certain persons is not always evil, but derives from a difference of characters which only the constancy of dealing with them, does one overcome the trial... There have been saints who in their dealings with others were not able to be in harmony, and experienced a profound diversity of character: in such a circumstance it suffices to maintain charity and to pardon the defects of others, attributing to them excessive consideration for themselves ...* ²⁵

These events to which Mother Leopoldina alludes, took a dramatic turn with the condemnation of Fr. Paccanari and the consequent partial dispersion of the Community of the *Beloved of Jesus*.

What would prove to be the lot of this *Work of the Lord*, for good to which Leopoldina had offered her life? ²⁶ God's Plan matured in the midst of uncertainties and hopes, up until her meeting with Mother Madeline di Canossa, with her arrival in Verona, and taking up residence with a group of Leopoldina's companions at the Convent there dedicated to St. Joseph. This was a stage for the project which was being kept alive until the time set by God had arrived. For the better realization of this effort God placed along the path of Mother Leopoldina the wisdom and the counsel of the still relatively youthful Fr. Gaspar Bertoni.

For Mother diCanossa the arrival of Leopoldina Naudet and her companions proved to be providential. They brought with them to the fledgling foundation a notable, even though much traveled, experience of religious life. Mother Leopoldina was given the responsibility of local Superior. Surely she would have met many times that prudent priest who frequently came to the Community, first as Confessor of the nascent Institute, and she would have often celebrated with Fr. Bertoni, the Sacrament of Confession.

Her Meeting with St. Gaspar Bertoni.

Totally unexpected by Mother Leopoldina, and somewhat upsetting to her, she received an inspiration from on high, which she noted on January 9, 1811: ... *Entrust yourself to him...* This was a Wednesday, the day of their first meeting. Regarding his role in their conversation, she notes:

... *It seems as though the presence of God hovered over him...*²⁷ ... *I manifested to him the desires that I had of obeying, and the thought came to me that the Lord would have wished that I would have done that from the moment that I was offering this to Him alone: but, now it seemed to me that I needed some external help. I expressed to him my many difficulties, that I experienced a certain pleasure which I have in God Alone in all matters. And therefore, in a moment of prayer, in saying*

²⁴ p. 89.

²⁵ p. 87.

²⁶ cf. p. 38.

²⁷ cf. Fr. Stofella, o.c., p. 299.

*to the Lord that I was all right with Him, I experienced deep within me that all this was so that I might stand in even greater harmony with Him is what He wanted. He made clear to me how this obedience to my director was to be realized: that this was all in order to assist, to further from the outside these interior operations. And it was established in this manner, how I was to make use also of this means as a means only, and to keep my eyes only on the end...*²⁸

Fr. Stofella wrote in this regard: ... *I re-construct this inexpressible dialogue: and may God pardon me!. [Entrust yourself to My minister!]' – 'O, Lord, I am all right with You!' – '... Entrust yourself to him: and you will stand in even greater harmony with Me!*²⁹. This is a most significant text regarding a conversation in which the Other is only presupposed. To Leopoldina *it seems* that what really counts is that which God wants. ... *It was established in this manner...* - and in a very discreet manner Fr. Gaspar enters into the conversation. Up until this point, he had listened silently and attentively. And what could be more in accord of serving only as a means, and nothing more? She then goes on in her *Spiritual Diary*, beginning anew right on that day:

... Following this..., I returned to my room to attend o other duties, and I experienced a call within me to turn to prayer ... What I experienced then was the approval of the manifestation of my conscience made to him and the manner that it all happened to carry this out.

She records that her prayer returned during the night and with a tone of tenderness which in the light of the spiritual experience that Leopoldina had received, might be termed *spousal* :

*... It seemed to me that the Lord had consoled me by having willed that I should submit myself to this external assistance. I would almost say that this even justified itself, by having me understand that He would not have asked this of me, from any other person; the sole purpose of this of the person under whose direction He placed me, following that which He wills from me, assuring me that He wanted to be the Master of my spirit... I came to realize the good from this and I experienced supreme consolation that all would have come from the Lord, as the Center and Principle of all...*³⁰

In these thoughts, the Lord challenged Leopoldina for two and one half hours, and she records that the time *passed very soon*. She offers one more thought in this regard:

... It seemed to me that He was saying to me that, in order to direct me, there is not needed knowledge so much, because it is one reality at work within me, that is, Love: this is the principal operation. There is needed assistance for this, which can be drawn from the same font, namely, from God and not from knowledge...

This is the harmony that dominates in the light of God!

In his own *Spiritual Diary*³¹, three days after their conversation, St. Gaspar notes:

... That you do not have to study so much for her spiritual direction, but you should address yourself to the Source of light. This will accomplish wonders for you. You must not precede, but

²⁸ p. 93.

²⁹ cf. Fr. Stofella, p. 300.

³⁰ Pp. 93-94.

³¹ This is known among Stigmatines as his *Memoriale Privato*.

follow the Lord, Who illumines her and will suggest to you, once you make recourse to Him, on how best to have her proceed and correspond to this...

Her spiritual life is a pathway made up always of humility, confidence and abandonment: ... ***You, o Lord, will be my Strength, my Support...***³² Hers was a happy synthesis of that motto which was familiar to her and which she often placed at the head of all her writings: ***God alone!*** From this total and constant search for God there were developed the spiritual outlines of her entire life.³³

Her ***Spiritual Diary*** is often the echo of this web of dialogues, where the divine signs and words are recognized and accepted. In all this, there are exchanged the faith, insistent prayer to the point of sharing, to the collaboration in the divine plan.

Very soon, Leopoldina would experience in her meetings with Fr. Gaspar, in what manner the Lord would still remain her Guide, even if the light would pass through His minister; while still in her recognition of her own incapacity, she would experience her being challenged and consoled:

... While it has been said to me that I must busy myself in reading Constitutions and Rules, and to reflect upon these, I came to understand in this once more how much in accord all this was with what the Lord a few days before had led me to understand. I found consolation in having to realize in all this ever more that which the Lord assured me as He willed that I should subject myself to His Minister. I came to see that from him there would be obtained that direction and that He would be that Center from Whom He would still derive everything – both that which he would lead me to know immediately, as well as from His minister...³⁴

Fr. Bertoni was very convinced that God is to be followed and not preceded, by never assuming attitude of one with all the answers, but always approaching Him humbly, most often through texts from Sacred Scripture or from the teachings of the Church and the Saints. He was capable of considering as a great gift also for himself when the Lord would come into the hearts of individuals entrusted to his spiritual direction. Witness of all this would be the numerous letters of his spiritual direction that have been kept, for as long as he remained spiritual father, or in a relationship of intense friendship that developed from this.³⁵ From her ***Spiritual Diary***³⁶ we read:

... In prayer today, like yesterday, I experienced a confirmation of what God's minister had said to me and it was as though God Himself had brought me to understand many times, that he wills by means of prayer and of that particularly where I am only passive where He does all the work. To see that the Lord comes always in support of what His minister tells me, and that this follows the divine will in my regard pertaining to all that he counsels me, has renewed within me the desire to obey always more – and also the thought, which has occurred to me many times, to bind myself by vow to such obedience ...

³² p. 35.

³³ Cf. the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Verona, *The Cause of the Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Leopoldina Naudet, Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Verona. [1773-1834]. Positio super Virtutibus. II. Rome 1994, p. 1257.*

³⁴ pp. 110-111.

³⁵ *Epistolario Bertoni*, published by Fr. Joseph Stofella. Verona 1954.

³⁶ cf. *Spiritual Diary*, July 1811 – p. 144.

The Lord brought her to understand eventually that there would be no need for such a vow:

*... He bestowed upon me an understanding and an intellectual grasp, through a mediated source which came from Him that this obedience and submission that I ought to give to His minister and this seemed to me that I had an even greater obligation than that which I would have had if by vow I had bound myself ...*³⁷.

2. Characteristics of her Spiritual Journey.

After all that has been remarked here, this is not the place to take up again and to present the spirituality and the various steps of this long spiritual journey taken together by these two holy Founders. My role is only to extend the invitation, composed of hints and fragments that are most significant, to take up the reading of the text of Mother Leopoldina's *Spiritual Diary*, to fathom the depths of all that this would unfold to us. Without any pretext of even collecting the main points that come to the fore, I will simply ponder a series of her images which might also be found partially in an earlier study offered by Fr. Joseph Stofella, emphasizing this, or alluding to these points in a broader context.

With Sails unfurled.

The opening page of her *Spiritual Diary* for January 1812 is one totally dedicated to the Lord's action which Leopoldina joyfully noted, and brought to this her availability and recognition:

... There was presented before my eyes all that which He was accomplishing and internally this inspired me to let it happen through Him. There came a certain insistence, so to speak, not to lose time...Lord, what would You have me to do? And I added: Teach me to do Your will because You are my God!

The marvels that God was achieving provide the reason for her *supreme ease* and *sweetness of spirit* :

*... This month passed for me with many continuous graces of the Lord, and there followed me at almost every instant the sentiment of His intimate presence. This assisted me in every activity, where really it seemed to me that He was accomplishing everything in me, and that I was expected to do nothing else than to further His operations and to follow them ... I had to make a real effort in order to busy myself with other matters. In speaking, all seemed to be to be darkness and shadows, all that was happening around me, in comparison to that light which only by certain rays it led me to grasp something...*³⁸

This was Holy Thursday, the thought of the Mass and of the Communion overtook Leopoldina who felt as though she was being *drawn* into the Cenacle, and lived the profound experience of the attraction of the Lord and of being dispossessed of herself. This reached the level of reacting, by distracting herself from such reflections in order to be more present to herself:

³⁷ **ib.**

³⁸ **pp. 165-166.**

... I was drawn in spirit into the Cenacle, and into the contemplation of what occurred there within myself. However, in the very act to which internally I abandoned myself and gave into the power and the sweetness of this attraction, experiencing that this was being communicated even physically, so that I began to experience a total separation within myself, I then distracted myself...

³⁹ ... I felt that He was at work within me and that I felt my heart broadening under His actions, and I did not limit them ... And in these sentiments of trust, with all confidence in the Lord, I said to Him: I am not good for anything but You and I together can accomplish great results! ⁴⁰.

In March of 1813, Leopoldina began her annual retreat, ... *bereft of all assistance*’, but not deprived of the loving care of the Lord. This broadened her heart, communicating to her a firm confidence and hope. Following the Introductory *Hail, Mary*, she committed herself to prayer, and she experienced the coming of the Lord:

... The Lord led me to abandon all into His hands, and He attracted me fully to Himself in a manner that I was unable to do anything other than to make acts of love and to rejoice, experiencing that He possessed me totally. And that He was holding me close to Himself... ⁴¹.

Rowing on

... I much desired to serve God at my own expense, but I noted with all this, it was always at His expense that I worked: by knowing clearly that these desires and this will proceeded from Him, since I was simply incapable of having them ...

We are already in the month of February – Leopoldina writes:

... I experienced in this month aridity in prayer but some effects remained with me of that quite vivid sentiment that I experienced throughout almost all of the past month; with the memory of this, it was of some help and it seemed to me that the Lord, by not having me navigate any more without real effort with the sails, He offered me, then, the oars, giving me the desires also and the pleasure of being able to work for Him in a time in which I did not experience that usual consolation... ⁴².

In the month of March, we find the text concerning the sponge and then on March 26th that of her *restrained* ecstasy, notwithstanding the opinion of her spiritual director!

The Sponge

Leopoldina was blessed by God with mystical gifts. Her notes in her *Spiritual Diary* bear eloquent testimony to these as do her letters to her director. The Spirit operates continuously in her spirit to the point of having her exclaim:

... It seemed to me that I was being engulfed and taken over fully by the Lord, and I do nothing other than receive all this and express my love... ⁴³.

³⁹ p. 170.

⁴⁰ p. 174.

⁴¹ pp. 193-194.

⁴² cf. p. 167.

⁴³ p. 94.

With simplicity and clarity she notes her experience of the presence of the Spirit, the graces of union that she was receiving, the constant invitations from Jesus and the assurances that came to her regarding her life and her Institute. All of this is manifested in her encounter with the Lord and nourished her spirit of prayer:

*... In my prayer of this day [March 3, 1812], I had the experience of being immersed in God with the desire of His Holy Spirit and of being so imbued by this that my every action, my every thought and word were being directed by this, and it seemed to me that I was something like a sponge all full of this Spirit and I asked the Lord that He might give me help, so that following prayer, there might be conserved within me the effect of all that He was then giving me to experience...*⁴⁴.

The Hedge

He wished to be the *Center*, the Principle of everything is what the Lord led Leopoldina to understand in that moment when He was inviting her to entrust herself to the guidance of Fr. Bertoni. The divine inspiration became even more explicit:

*... The day after, the Lord also led me to grasp that in order to protect that Center where He dwells within my soul, it was necessary to place a hedge there... It seemed to me that by this word that there was to be understood mortification. And since the state of my health would not permit me to undertake any, I thought all this over. But I know that the Lord that the Lord was not asking penances of me, but rather custody. That which can only be accomplished by way of virtues, which can exercise custody over that charity which the Lord has infused into the soul ...*⁴⁵.

The One Who remains in the *Center* of Leopoldina's heart was quite capable of making her a faithful instrument and on the full harmony under the guidance of her spiritual teacher. Fr. Bertoni found himself in complete accord with that inspiration: once speaking to the faithful as a young priest, he confessed that the thought of the divine indwelling was so fixed in his mind for as long as he could remember and that this had remained with him always with great constancy so that he would be able to share this with others⁴⁶.

This is her almost immediate account of his spiritual direction:

*... A few days later, as I had been given for my particular examen of considering that we are always in the presence of God, and of doing whatever is according to His pleasure, I came to understand, in beginning to practice it, that this would be that hedge which could protect that Center ...*⁴⁷

The sentiment of the presence of God, is for spiritual authors, the fundamental characteristic of mystical union, as this contributes mightily to introducing one and keeping one in contemplation. Custody accompanies depth, and interior solitude: ... *I felt myself called to a great interior solitude...*

⁴⁴ p. 168.

⁴⁵ p. 95.

⁴⁶ *Pagine di vita Cristiana*. p. 302. [The early sermons of St. Gaspar Bertoni. Verona: AMB 1951]; cf. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, *From the Court to the Cloister*. p. 205.

⁴⁷ p. 95.

In October of 1812 the Lord led her to understand with greater depth His invitation: ... *Think only of Me and I will think of you, and for you.* Thus we see returning often her reference to *internal solitude*, which leads her to *exclude every thought*, by rendering herself *abandoned with a greater confidence in God. This confidence and abandonment*, Mother Leopoldina adds, *is what renders me happy and at ease*⁴⁸.

Mystical Nuptials

Leopoldina lived her communion intensely with her Divine Spouse, Jesus Christ. Beyond the explicit texts, which can be found with a certain frequency, her entire spirituality is geared toward this presence and intimacy.

I believe that one of the most significant passages are those from her Retreat in March of 1813, which I mentioned already. Leopoldina made this retreat alone but she seems to have been graced by an internal voice:

*... I will be the One Who will help you and you will experience marvelous blessings ... love is that means by which the Lord wills to accomplish all in me...*⁴⁹

St. Gaspar had already preceded her in this:

*... Do not be afraid, Reverend Mother ... you should not forget the honor which his Divine Majesty has bestowed on you by admitting your soul into the arrangements and the promises of nuptials ... give space only for love, and make the offering of yourself in love, which means to keep yourself in a state of readiness to carry out whatever you might come to know is pleasing to God. This is not to be done out of fear, but principally out of love ...*⁵⁰.

Further on, following the Ignatian meditation on the Two Standards had enkindled in her the desire of following Christ and of bring to Him many souls, she makes this note: ... *At Communion time, the Lord expanded ever more my heart to follow Him along the path of love ...*⁵¹.

St. Gaspar encouraged her to go along these paths of loving abandonment, of nuptial intimacy. There is to be noted here the rapport that is marked out between charity and order, that harmonious fulfillment of the Divine Plan which is also beauty, a motive that was quite familiar to Fr. Bertoni:

*... This is the school, this is the Teacher, which Sacred Scripture points out to us: **He brought me into the cellar of wine; He set in order charity for me...** and His banner over me is love [cf. Ct 2:4]. It is necessary to allow oneself to be directly introduced by this King Who calls us, invites us, waits for us, so that we might enter into the cellar of His love with those beautiful words: **...Hearken, o daughter, and see, and incline your ear; and forget your people and your father's house. And the king shall greatly desire your beauty ...** [Ps 44:11-12]... When the soul has reached this level*

⁴⁸ p. 178.

⁴⁹ pp. 193-196.

⁵⁰ *Epistolario*, March 6, 1813. pp. 72-74.

⁵¹ p. 200.

*through its marvelous good fortune, He inebriates it with the wine of His charity. This precious wine rejoices, fortifies, transports the soul outside itself, and by uniting it with God, He ordains it in a most perfect manner. He set in order charity in me...*⁵²

The Work of the Lord

During that Retreat of 1813, Leopoldina was meditating on the scope of religious life, admiring the Mercy of God which not only had called her to become a religious Sister, had chosen her for an enterprise that was as great as that which He had placed in her own hands. The term that she had just employed – the *call*, she then adds a further thought:

... He called me to Himself [this is her vocation] and He said to me: I want to establish a Work, an institute in which I wish to be served with perfection, and this enterprise, I want to be for you the external help. I will do all, you look only to Me, in order to follow along according to the norms of My will.

*I pondered over the consideration of this choice ... and I was taken over by my poor correspondence that I brought to the endeavor ... But, I also assumed supreme confidence in Him ... since it was all His undertaking, in which I am simply the agent, who ought to be ready to execute only the orders of her Master ...*⁵³

On December 6, 1811, still consumed in the thought of her Institute, she wanted it to prosper only before the sight of God. She noted:

*... The Lord has bestowed on me the many desires to establish everything on profound roots of humility, and it seemed to me that to these there should be added a mental view of the depths of humility, upon which I ought to plant so great an edifice which the Institute is. I yearned to do all this with utmost ardor that it would be great before the Lord, and yet, be as small as possible in the view of human beings ...*⁵⁴

It is interesting to see the decisive emphasis which the vocation of Foundress has had in Leopoldina's spiritual journey. This was an insight that was acquired, and the forms of its realization had to be patiently awaited, protected by discretion and hidden even from unveiling it which would have meant an insuperable impediment. The Lord's Work is the name⁵⁵ which accompanies Leopoldina:

*... Regarding the Institute, He gave me sentiments of great confidence in Him, particularly one morning in my approaching Holy Communion, it seemed to me that he was saying to me that such should be my confidence in Him on this, that even in those occasions where it might seem to me that I am unable to overcome the obstacles, I ought to hope that he might be able to work even miracles and that my faith should never be wanting...*⁵⁶

⁵² *Epistolario*, January 26, 1813, pp. 56-57.

⁵³ p. 195.

⁵⁴ p. 163.

⁵⁵ It is in the spirit of the Ignatian exercises that it seems that there could be expressed by this term, the specific vocation of Mother Leopoldina. [cf. e.g., H. Alphonso, *Tu m'as appele' par mon nom. La vocation personnelle du croyant*. St. Paul: Paris 1995.

⁵⁶ p. 167.

The confidence in the Lord generates further insights as she herself hastens to add:

*... A genuine sentiment of the knowledge of myself, of my own misery and lack of ability ...*⁵⁷

*... The Lord granted me in prayer a particular fervor regarding the Institute, and I desired most ardently that it be established, and all with a genuine desire of procuring the glory of God with this... From this light, I drew ever greater trust in God that he would always be there to bestow on me at the opportune time all the means and lights necessary for this undertaking, without it even being necessary that I would ever have to anticipate these moments ...*⁵⁸

Even the concern for taking care of the Sisters was substituted for by the confidence and the certainty of the Lord's will:

*...which led me to understand how pleasing to Him it is that I should occupy myself regarding my Companions, since those very few times that I did this, it seemed that fervor increased within me and this gave me an even greater appreciation of the perfection with which He willed to be served in this Institute ...*⁵⁹

Leopoldina commented on all this, to the point of her stating:

*... felt that my heart was expanding toward the Lord. [This was from her certitude, as she states] of those mercies that he wills to shower on this Institute, and how many matters He will bring to success on account of which I will always new reasons to admire and to praise His infinite goodness...*⁶⁰

Love for her neighbor is the purpose of her apostolic charity and the scope of the Instituted founded by her. She yearned for the spiritual good of the Sisters consecrated to God: *... I would wish that we might all be saints,* she wrote once to Fr. Paccanari, on January 14, 1800. Together with her Sisters she dedicated herself to the Christian formation of young girls and to the deepening of the faith of the People of God through instructions, retreats and teaching catechism in parishes.

The Holy Family

Inseparable from her Work is her *devotion* to the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the true *Founders* of her Institute. Speaking of her meditation on the private life of Jesus Christ, during her Retreat of 1813, Mother Leopoldina writes:

*... I experienced a great desire that the virtues lived by Him might be those very virtues that might be exercised in our Institute and that our life might be an authentic imitation of that of Jesus Christ ... The thought consoled me that the Lord willed a very great perfection in this Institute...*⁶¹

A few days after noting this thought, she writes:

⁵⁷ p. 168.

⁵⁸ pp. 171-172.

⁵⁹ p. 192.

⁶⁰ p. 193.

⁶¹ pp. 199-200.

... There came to me a few thoughts regarding the Institute. It seemed to me that this should be totally in harmony with the life of Jesus Christ also with His public life and in preparation for this, there is need to take up the practice of the virtues and retreat and prayer – in brief, just everything...
62

In 1815, during the month of March, we find that her plan is maturing in her, which for years had been already taking shape, regarding her Work:

... in prayer, thinking of the devotion that the Lord had given me toward the glorious St. Joseph and of the graces which came to me by means of this Saint, these words came to mind: 'We founded the Society of Jesus' - and it seemed to me that the Lord has bestowed this devotion for the Holy Family might serve as a kind of pledge that he willed, and also by this means, to found the Society for which He had made my heart zealous ...
63

In the Will of God

Her yearning to come to know and to fulfill in everything the Will of God is one of the fundamental characteristics of Leopoldina's spirituality. This was the fruit of her love and abandonment of *trusting* in Him. How many times does one see repeated on the pages of her *Spiritual Diary*, this trusting in God! On February 2, 1811, the Feast of the Commemoration of the Presentation of Jesus, she experienced the sentiment of imitating Mary and Joseph, of offering all the sensible as well as internal consolations of which Jesus granted her possession, but she also felt at the same time as somewhat restrained in this:

... But, the Lord, Who is of such goodness and mercy toward me, that he smoothes over everything for me from the outset. This reminded me that Mary most Holy paid His purchase price with five sheckels: so, I was able re-purchase this offering by submitting myself to His most holy Will, by means of which I did re-purchase it, having come to understand that this was making use, in every moment, of all that was within me that could join me to Him in an ever more intimate way. And with this, I was contented and most disposed to the sacrifice or the oblation...
64

On December 10, 1812 she is rather suddenly over-taken by fear that

... a person to whom the Lord had given much care and a commitment, for this Work, who had directed me much in it and one who was of great assistance to me, now will no longer be able to offer this, since he is occupied in other matters ... However, the Lord gave me the grace to overcome this unpleasantness that this thought gave me, with reflecting that he had given to this person such concern and commitment, that coming therefore from him, I am to remain at peace. I thought further that this person was now committed to other responsibilities of importance for the glory of God, I ought to be happy about this, by being more forgetful of myself in order to think only of this ... the Lord gave me a great desire of looking solely toward His glory. And to procure this with all my strength. In prayer, I experienced a great desire of making myself uniform in all areas to the divine will...
65

In January 1813 she writes:

62 p. 201.

63 p. 205.

64 pp. 103-104.

65 pp. 188-189.

... In presenting myself once to the Lord in prayer, with the desire of knowing His most holy Will, concerning the taking of a step which pertained to a matter, He took me aside and seemed to say to me: 'that I ought to live according to the spirit, and to spiritualize everything, in a way that all which falls under the senses I ought not to give much heed to them, and by rising above them all, that I ought to stand with Him to the extent that having trusted in His infinite mercy and goodness, and that from this I should never remove myself no matter what might happen here below...' ⁶⁶

Abandonment in God

The spirit of filial abandonment in God characterized Mother Leopoldina's whole life, her choices, her self-denial, her delusions – both those personal ones as well as those regarding her Institute. In 1820, after fifteen months of continual *disturbance*, which Fr. Bertoni's irrevocable decision to suspend his spiritual direction of her ⁶⁷, she noted:

... On concluding the Novena to the most glorious St. Ignatius, it seemed that I felt that I should make an act of abandonment in God, and of trust in the loving and paternal protection of God. From this, I had experienced so many times its effects also in a wondrous and unexpected manner...

With this comment, it seems clear that she was by now in her full spiritual maturity when she was able to make this ***act of abandonment***, without a vow, without being under any obligation regarding sin, *but only inspired by love toward my God*. This is based on the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola, in which Leopoldina was profoundly nourished, and expressed far beyond the wording of this intense text composed by herself, the originality of her own dialogue with the Lord Jesus ⁶⁸.

The written text is witness to this, as is also the rather poor condition of the paper she used ⁶⁹, which she would carry over her heart, as a reminder and as an inspiration of that incessant yearning which translates the meaning of her entire life, her confident abandonment in His Infinite Goodness. St. Gaspar Bertoni, who accompanied Mother Leopoldina so closely and for so many years, said to her sister Luisa: ... *Your sister is a conspicuous container of the most special graces* And to the Sisters of the Holy Family, who wept at her passing, he described Leopoldina as

... one of those not ordinary souls, the prolonging of whom in life has been a great grace which Our Lord God has granted, and these are not restricted to the few with whom they lived, but they are for the multitude for whom they have lived ⁷⁰.

Leopoldina lives on, and transmits her spirit as her precious inheritance, a gift that is made present along the way of her daughters, for the multitude of those who share in her spiritual riches.

Fr. G. P. DePaoli, Stigmatine November 4, 1998.

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A Biographical Note

Leopoldina Naudet was born in Florence on May 31, 1773. Following the loss of her mother, in 1778, with her sister Luisa, she was accepted in the Convent of the Augustinian Tertiary Oblates. Five years later, in accord with her father's decision, the Naudet sisters

⁶⁶ p. 191.

⁶⁷ Fr. Bertoni's reason for this seems to be rooted in the context of the rule that he wished for his sons, the exclusion of the perpetual spiritual care of Nuns.

⁶⁸ cf. pp. 213-215.

⁶⁹ G. Stofella, *The Spiritual Diary* ... , p. 365.

⁷⁰ *Epistolario*, Letter of August 17, 1834, p. 290

moved to France, and were living in the Convent of the *Madames of Our Lady* of Soissons, for the continuation of their studies.

In 1789, Leopoldina returned to Florence and lived once more with the Nuns of her childhood years. After a short time, the Grand-Duke of Tuscany, Leopold I, chose her to be the instructress of his own children. And it was at this time that Leopoldina began her experience as a school teacher. This experience in education would remain as the specific apostolic finality for the foundation of the *Sisters of the Holy Family*.

1790, the Naudet Sisters followed the grand-Duke to Vienna. After a few years, when Francis II's sister, The Arch-Duchess Maria Anna Ferdinanda, was named to the responsibility of the Abbess of the noble Chapter of the *Canonesses of St. George* in Prague, the Naudet sisters were chosen as ladies of honor. Thus, Leopoldina would conduct even within the royal palace an extremely retired way of life and one totally committed to charitable works.

In 1799, after nine years had passed since their arrival in Austria, the Naudet sisters and the Arch-Duchess, all manifested the interest in a foundation for women in the Ignatian spirit, of the so-called *Beloved of Jesus*, and very soon they gave their lives to this project developed by Fr. Nicholas Paccanari. A variety of vicissitudes immersed this new congregation, even before its coming to Vienna. It then later arrived in Italy. Moreover, their charism was encouraged and affirmed by Pius VII, and the group of the *Beloved of Jesus* established a residence first in Padua, and then moved to Loreto, Spoleto and Rome. Leopoldina Naudet was elected the Superior, and in the meantime, there came into being the filial communities in France and in England.

However, Fr. Paccanari fell 'into disgrace', and the congregation of the *Beloved* was dissolved. The group in France, guided by St. Sophie Barat, became the Congregation of the *Madames of the Sacred Heart*, and the few sisters who remained in Italy, followed Mother Naudet, and they brought into being the *Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family*.

In 1805, Mother Naudet and her companions began their pilgrimage once again. They were in Padua for a while, and then moved to Venice. In this Venetian capital, they met the Apostolic Missionary, Msgr. Louis Pacetti, who invited them to make their contribution to the initiative which was then under the direction of Madeline di Canossa.

In 1808 Leopoldina and her companions eventually came as guests of Mother di Canossa in the Convent of Sts. Joseph and Fidentius in Verona. It would be here that Mother Naudet would come to know St. Gaspar Bertoni, a 'key' figure for her spiritual experience. While maintaining distinct their own proper spiritualities, Mother di Canossa and Mother Naudet collaborated for eight years, consolidating the Canossian experience of the foundation of the Schools of Charity.

In 1816, Mother Naudet, with a group of her companions, left the Canossian retreat and brought into life the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy family in the Convent of St. Teresa, in Verona as well.

The new Congregation while also maintaining the Cloister, was committed in their new quarters to the apostolate of the school for the benefit of the young girls of noble families; they included the care of the poor children, who attended the tuition-free schools; they taught catechism in the parishes for the preparation for the reception of the sacraments of Christian Initiation; they also welcomed young girls and ladies for spiritual meetings and for retreats. In the foundation of her Congregation, Mother Naudet was convinced - as Fr. Joseph Cappellina, Stigmatine, and a student of Mother Leopoldina's spirituality - *that only a serious foundation in culture and the Christian conviction would have permitted the young to overcome the dangers and the contradictions to which women were exposed in the society of that time.*

Not even a year passed from the approbation of the 'new religious order', on the part of Gregory XVI, when Leopoldina Naudet rendered her soul to God, on August 17, 1834. She had just stated: ... *This is enough. God does not anything more of me. I can now say: ;Now dismiss Your servant...*

During her lifetime she was totally abandoned to the divine will; she allowed herself to be guided in total abandonment, convinced that *it is always God Who accomplishes everything* : now she could close here eyes to conclude in perfect joy her union with God.

Robert Marzocchi

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Presentation

There are presented here her various spiritual insights, inspirations and sentiments which came to the fore during her meditations, or from some period of recollection or her retreats. In this booklet, Leopoldina opens up her spirit, almost reluctantly but confidently, in her assuming the office of Superior of the Community the Beloved of Jesus. In some of her manifestations of her spirit, addressed to Fr. Paccanari, she manifests her innate difficulty in narrating her own gifts of grace with which God had been favoring her. There is also hinted, with much discretion, the profound suffering of her spirit because of the very unpleasant situation which had begun to immerse her Spiritual Director and Ecclesiastical Superior, because of the contrasts and accusations that he provoked.

Leopoldina's soul fervently was directed toward God, and she immersed herself in Him. She came to seek God alone, despite the complications and the contradictions within the environment in which she was living.

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The Spiritual Diary of Mother Leopoldina Naudet 1800-1806

[Under the Spiritual Direction of Fr. Nicholas Paccanari]

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1800

May 31st ⁷¹

With You, O Lord, my heart desires to pour itself out in the affliction that it experiences. I see in this moment my own wretchedness laid wide open; and this view, which is Your grace, renders more burdensome my responsibility, which I must bear. However, Lord, it is not that it lacks confidence in You, as it has never dreamed that it could ever do anything of myself.

No, because my confidence is still on a par with my distrust of myself. However, as this moment comes, my human nature feels all of its weakness, and I experience a fear that surpasses in some manner the contrary reflections and sentiments, which I make concerning all this. May You, o Lord, be my strength, and my support.

§

June 1st

Here I am, Lord, on the very day that I must begin my task of presiding over the other Sisters, and how this thought worries me only You know, because You see the depths of my heart. I am just overwhelmed. It seems that I see my Companions far superior to myself. I have not been able to concern myself with any other thought in my meditation, than with the responsibility which I must now assume.

I experience fear of bringing some harm to the community and to become a hindrance to the good of all, and each and every one in particular with my sins: do not let this happen, O Lord! The desire of my heart would be to be able to lead all of them to You. But, how to do this? I can do nothing of myself! Oh! How I would consider myself happy to be the very least of all and to live totally hidden in You and for You! That is the life for which I have always yearned! But since You are asking me to act, and to work, I do not refuse the charge. I sacrifice to you my repugnance in carrying this out in this way and in resignation I say to You, and it seems to me with all my heart: *'Not my will, but Your will be done!'* ⁷² Be mindful, o Lord, of the promise, which I have often experienced in my heart that You would be the One Who would do all for me, that You will assist me, and that I should not be afraid, but in every occasion, that I should have recourse to You in utmost confidence.

§

June 2nd

I thank you, O Lord, for that sentiment with which You have inspired me this day, to do much for You. I would really like to correspond to this desire. However, along with the power of grace, I also experience all of my natural weakness. However, I do not feel this as much as that of doing something for You, but only in so far of not being able to understand, nor imagine what it is that I should do. This sentiment You have led me to experience on this

⁷¹ At this time, Leopoldina was in Padua, living as a guest in the Convent of a group known as the *Dimesse*. Making use of a place set aside for them, the *Beloved of the Lord* were able to give some thought to setting up a genuine and authentic religious community. Leopoldina was re-elected Superior, and so she allows to shine through these notes her sentiments of humility and confidence in God, joined to a profound sense of her own responsibilities.

⁷² cf. Lk 22:42

day with so much power in order to satisfy it in some manner, I have offered myself wholly to You, in order to accomplish much for You. And I have promised You to renew this offering every day of my life, without the moment ever arriving when I would not have something more to offer to You – not empty desires, but good works.

§

Wednesday

At Holy Communion, in committing myself to the Lord, for the sake of knowing God's Will in order to advance along the way of perfection, I made known to the Lord the suffering that my spirit experiences in this moment, in seeing myself so ungrateful for His benefits. It seemed that I heard this interior voice that was saying to me that I ought to make good use of this affliction of spirit in order to base myself all the more in the realization of my own nothingness since this will unite me all the more to the Lord.

O, if you only knew [it seemed that I heard these words] *how much good these sufferings bring to your soul!* As a result, it seemed that from this I became all the more persuaded, that I responded: Lord, so that I may not offend You, I accept all that I suffer now and whatever You might want me to experience further; I take it all on for the expiation of my ingratitude and as an act of justice toward me, as I have offended You so.

Later on, while before the Most Blessed Sacrament, in humbling myself before the Lord, it seemed as though I heard that I ought not only think of the wrong that I have done, and still do, but while the Lord wants much from me and with so much mercy that He has granted to me so many times that I understood from His speaking in the depths of my heart: *From you, I want the most sublime perfection, since it is not possible otherwise not to abuse My graces, since these have been infinite.*

On this day I have failed in perfection a number of times; except that I did carry off a victory in a matter which would have been useless to say, and so I kept silent about it.

§

Thursday

I have been much concerned in my Holy Communion and in my other spiritual exercises before the Blessed Sacrament, of my own great state of wretchedness, as also for my own sins that place an obstacle to the general good of the Work, and of each one in particular I thought that I should say to the Father General that if the Lord should let him know that he does not want my services, I am ready to be whatever he would want: I would be most happy even to be a Coadjutor Sister.

Of course, I do desire that the Lord might give me the grace to commit myself to His Work, but for the good of this enterprise I am ready to renounce myself in order to move ahead. I this thought I found myself immersed in such wretchedness that I thought that perhaps I would be a burden to the Institute and that, if it were not for the compassion extended to me, I would merit to be expelled from it.

This thought afflicted me but with all that I had thought about concerning this, I moreover also felt that as much as I would merit this, they will not do it.

Still going further with such thoughts concerning myself, I experienced a very powerful motion of zeal for this Work of the Lord, that I prayed that if it should not be His most holy will that I should be thus assigned that He would not permit that I would ever be an impediment to my companions and that rather He would let me die. With a powerful sentiment, I accepted death to be so disposed that I will not be of harm to the Work of the Lord.

The Lord let me understand this day the temptation that one of my companions was suffering; this thought afflicted me and inspired me to give a conference in order to animate all of them to have that companion make a manifestation of conscience.

This knowledge did not result in any negative effect against her, and I find myself so wretched that I would not be surprised that there would not be in me the weakness to be able to be so tempted.

This line of reflection brought forward in me a great pity for my companion.

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A Few Questions

May I not still admit the fault in the conference and follow the sentiment that I have of humbling myself?

While at prayer, in experiencing either deep within, or that I was raised up in this, should I allow myself to develop this sentiment? Regarding certain lights in the intellect I pondered on how I should regulate myself, since, in matters of the imagination many times I neither pay much attention to it, or distract myself from it.

During prayer I am often occupied in those matters which refer to my companions and about what I still have to do – all this comes before me: in that moment, how such I conduct myself?

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Friday

On this day, the Lord illumined me on what I should say in the conference and He gave me at the same time the sensation of being penetrated with all that I said, and above all, everything that I said about myself. I experienced a great consolation on seeing the temptation of my companion overcome; I committed myself much to the Lord, while I spoke to Him about this intention and I also offered a penance. After I had experienced the consolation which comes when the Lord deigns to make of us His instrument for some little good – which notwithstanding all else, He always performs Himself. Once He led me to experience and to see all this as it really is, He also gave me such a great zeal for my companion; I prayed much for her, and I felt quite sure in that which I requested through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ.

While praying after Communion and asking of the Lord to bring me to understand what I am lacking, I said from my heart and with fervor, that in that moment Jesus gave me: ‘Lord, make me understand my defects, the obstacles that You may find, and make me advance in perfection. If I do know them, I will place them in the fire of Your Love, which You allow me to feel and the desire with which You inspire me to sacrifice myself to you totally for Your greater service; and in this all will be consumed. But, I do not know my own faults.’ In saying this, I experienced within my heart an interior voice which said to me that vigilance is that to which I need to apply myself so that the devil fears this sentiment and the assistance that the Lord gives me of renouncing that which I know is contrary to my advancement; for this reason, the devil will try to make me blind. So, I made a strong resolution to exercise this vigilance.

I experienced in all the spiritual exercises of this day a great spiritual consolation and a more intimate union with God that made me very happy. In assisting then at a service in honor of the Sacred Heart, I experienced a very intense interior joy in seeing this homage rendered to the Divine Heart of my Lord, Jesus Christ.

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Saturday

On this day, I received some light concerning my prayer, as well as on the great benefit there is in prayer and on all that I understood and grasped in a very intimate and sensible manner.

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Sunday

At Holy Communion I prayed to the Lord insistently that He might grant me to grow in His love. I felt an abundance of sentiment and so great an affection, that I responded to the Lord, that I could not resist the desire that this love might grow in me. I suffered a great deal, also physically. I felt as though I was burning up and being consumed. In this state I heard an interior voice which said to me that this will to love and to understand makes clear that it is never possible to love God as much as He merits. The desire to go ever onward consumed the Saints. And that this is a real suffering. As for me, I confess that I am very weak; and so, no matter how imperfect this desire may be I can hardly endure its power. I beseeched the Lord to consume me totally for Him, and to have me accomplish much.

During the meditation that I made on this text: *Knowing Jesus that His hour had come*, ... [cf. Jn 13:1], I considered Jesus Who always had kept this Hour present and that moment when He would be giving His most precious blood to us. He yearned to the utmost that this moment should come and He manifested this yearning in His moving toward that time when the moment would come, in Jerusalem. After having paused a while to consider Jesus for a bit of time, I turned deep within myself. I thought just how much and for how many years I desired to serve God, to work and to suffer out of His love. But, I asked myself whether the coming of this much desired moment that it would find me as I was in my desires.

I set out on my way, it is true, in the state where I hope to accomplish all, but with what coldness did I not do this? How are my dispositions in all this? To this last question directed to myself, I poured out my heart to the Lord and I said to Him that these are truly superior to the occasions that have come forth. I asked that he might give me more desire to do something, that my actual accomplishing anything. I asked Him profusely to give me this last request and that I would like to prove to Him my intentions with the deeds of my love. In this meditation, I experienced much fervor and I found the hour just a little time in which to do it.

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Monday

Having been impeded to make the morning meditation, I went before the Blessed Sacrament after lunch, in doubt whether to make the meditation, or to use the time for adoration and prayer. I asked the Lord which would please Him the more and which would be for my greater spiritual profit. And I asked light of Him in order to advance in His divine service. In the few moments of indecision that I thought in this way I heard it said that one obstacle, which I had within me for a greater communication with God, was my lack of simplicity. And in that moment I received a clear light on how and when I was lacking in this. With this insight, I experienced such great gratitude toward God, that I poured out to Him my affections in recognition, but I felt at the same time that everything was of little consequence for such a benefit.

I thought that simplicity is indeed a gift of God, but that with what He had given me to understand, I realized though that it was one manner of being able to correspond to grace in this; and that it would come in striving to remove whatever I saw that was not in accord with

this virtue, in working, and so on. I proposed to myself every day to make a particular examination on this point and to make up for what I recognized that I was lacking.

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Tuesday

Today, the Feast of St. John the Baptist, I made my meditation on the life of this great Saint. I pondered over the spirit of mortification and penance that he had, even though he was sanctified before he was born. I paused long on this, reproving myself strongly with all my heart on the difference that is found in me, who – sinner that I am - I avoid penance and I am so far from mortification in the least matter ... In the various circumstances I pondered a while and this was the thought regarding his very intense mortification which he performed even being so close to Jesus Christ and notwithstanding the fact that he remained in the desert. This is what made me reflect on this Saint as one of the greatest of the martyrs. I thought that also in this I can take him for my model in that which pertains to the active life that takes away that facility of remaining as one would like at the feet of Jesus reserved in the Blessed Sacrament.

St. John, although bodily far from the Lord, he will be united with Him in all that he did and all that he would have directed toward him. The Lord granted me this grace of rejoicing continuously in His Divine Presence in my heart, and in that internal union with Him. However, this is a special gift of His, which He has bestowed on me so that I might further make that use of being assisted in everything in my own activity. However, I recognize that this is not in complete harmony with this grace and all my actions remain imperfect. I have to fear that the Lord might withdraw this favor from me in order to grant it to so many others who would make such good use of it ...

In these reflections, and in others like them, I passed the hour of meditation and I prayed that the Saint might obtain for me the spirit of penance and that of working always for the sake of God and that perfection that this demands. On this day, I had occasion of exercising charity and patience with a companion and the Lord granted me the grace of doing this with pleasure and always with my intention directed toward Him. There was rejoicing on this occasion that I was able to do something for Him.

In one matter in a particular manner, I did fail, committing an imperfection in speaking, where there was really no need to do so. And I feel that even these very useless words that Lord wishes that I not utter them.

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Wednesday

I made my meditation on these words: ... *With desire, I have desired to eat this Pasch with you, etc...* [cf. Lk 22:15]. I passed through it in total admiration, recognition and similar affections.

At the hour of adoration the Lord gave me further light regarding the necessity that I had regarding the simplicity needed in order to be endowed with a clearer grasp of Him and to enter into a more intimate union with Him. And after a brief moment, I had such a clear mind, that it is not possible to express this with words. This only lasted for a few moments, and I came to know that I would enjoy this even more if I had a greater simplicity of intellect, which would restrain all the complicated processes of my reasoning. It seemed to me also that I experienced that my defect resides in this, and that from the aspect of the heart there are no obstacles: therefore, to all that pertains to the intellect is what I should attend. For this realization and clarity I felt such gratitude to the Lord because it seemed to me that this was all His doing and He had thus instructed me.

In the same hour, I came to realize that I ought to concern myself with matters involving the work at a fixed time every day with the Lord and from Him, I need to receive those lights in order to proceed in accord with Him in everything; I thought of taking for this the time of concentration.

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August 11th

I come, o Lord, to confess to You my ingratitude I feel this in a powerful manner, and that I am moved toward this recognition by Your goodness. Yes, my God, I experience that when I want to raise up my spirit, my mind to You, to go out from my wretchedness and weakness, I find you in the depths of my heart, always the same, ready not only to listen to me and to pardon me, for being the sinner that I am, but also to assure me, that always, despite my ingratitude and negligence in serving You. You have always retained toward me that particular manner, that makes me experience a more intimate union with You. I experience that I receive from You a newness in this confidence with a kind of attraction, which comes across to me that You are taking me and that you go ahead from me, more than I from You. This opens up my eyes concerning myself and allows me to see that abyss of misery that I really am!

How many times, o Lord, I have merited that You should go far from me! And yet, I feel you still very close to me! What can I do, o Lord, for You? O, how much I would like to do for you in this moment!. However, my

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To God alone!

In what Your Reverence has left for me ⁷³, you said to me that you were not content with me. Unfortunately, that if you have zeal, concern for my soul, this cannot be. And this persuasion of grasp of the foundation with which this could be said to me, this has brought about that affliction that it seems to me that I have already demonstrated to you. I feel what I ought to do, or to say this better, I do feel it but without knowing clearly in what it consists.

I do see that I place obstacles with my wretchedness in the way of this recognition and at the same time, for the execution of that which I would know: and I am not even able to detail what these miseries are. The failure to see them convinces me all the more of my weakness and blindness and this has been for me a great humiliation – in fact so great, that only when I find myself among my Sisters, that the thought does not come to me that they are all the more advanced than I am before the Lord; at least, they correspond to that which the Lord wants of them. And a flood of thoughts and comparisons come to me, all in favor of these companions hold me occupied so much so that I really have to hold myself back so that I do not make these sentiments known to them, and I would like sometimes to humble myself before all of them and recommend myself to their charity.

Each time that they obey me is for me a reason to humble myself before them and admire them. These sentiments, that are ever more frequent with regard to my companions, I experience them also toward every other person and I am now at the point of humbling myself toward any person that I might see.

Therefore, what you said to me has done me a great good. Since I have discovered within me the persuasion there has awakened in me the sorrow [not the restlessness] that I

⁷³ These are some notes from spiritual direction, which Leopoldina addresses to her director, Fr. Nicholas Paccanari. These are found on sheets of paper that were tied together and they bear her familiar D.S. [translated: To God alone!] and which were then signed by her.

find in me so many impediments to the abundant graces which the Lord grants me. And this very night I thought that I had to place the remedy, where the wrong appears. I proposed to reflect this morning and then not to delay any further in doing some penance for my sins, that place obstacles to all that the Lord wants from me.

In realizing that disposition that I have explained above, I thought that it was to make me more disposed to receive also that which you, reverend Father, would say to me, particularly regarding the work entrusted by the Lord to you. And I experienced the disposition to do something in order to show you what I want to do for the Lord, that with all my heart and with all perfection I desire to serve, no matter what the cost. It seems to me that I have said to you as much as I hoped from you in this matter, and all my yearning proceeded in hearing from you those means necessary in order to move ahead. And so, since it has been said to me that I desire that these helps come from the Lord, I will await them from Him and I will seek them with all confidence. In those reflections made this evening, I have to confess that I have had some temptations still coming from my manner of thinking and of acting in the past. Since I thought that in fact God alone has to operate in me and that human beings cannot help nor assist in anything. I truth, I have not placed in you such a confidence as to believe that you could do it all, but having been consumed by the desire of serving God, I saw with pleasure the power of going ever onward. And I found fault with myself for having neglected this help, in the past, which God had me find in you.

I repeat to you that the thought of being helped, that all would be done in order to serve God with greater zeal and fervor. This would have made me accomplish all, that you might have suggested to me, no matter how contrary this was to my own self. This disposition, though, Father, I will conserve it and I promise to you whatever you will require of me: and all for the greater service of my God, Who bestows on me the grace of not willing, loving, desiring anything other than what I know would serve this purpose which is the scope of the activity.

This temptation, of which I speak which led me [contrary to the other days preceding your departure] to find fault with myself for having hoped from you some help, did not last long, since on the following morning, I thought the contrary. On reflecting, I thanked the Lord for having found in you that which from my childhood I had desired, i.e., one who, knowing the ways of the Lord in my regard, would not easily be contented, but one who would encourage me along by showing me that I really do nothing for the Lord - He, Who from me merits so much and has bestowed on me so many graces and means not only to save me but these would be sufficient for making me already truly holy, if I had only profited by them.

The memory of what I suffered with Confessors, who did not understand this, enabled me to overcome this temptation and I found that this same matter [i.e., in saying to me that I was not accomplishing anything, and that I was not going ahead] is really a help to me: for the sentiments that this has occasioned in me, for the proper reflections and the examinations that I carry out concerning myself, and the like.

In reflecting on myself, I saw that I do everything with much imperfection and I thought of this to remedy it with the Lord's help, by carrying out the contrary and seeking to bring the greatest perfection in the smallest matters. This care, accomplished for the Lord, will bring me to recognize that having overcome these same imperfections and, I hope from the Lord, also the obstacles, which I place to God's grace, the Lord will grant me the greatest of all; that of corresponding to His benefits and not leaving the grace He bestows without fruit.

There returned to me very powerfully the desire that I have often experienced for so many years, that of making the vow to do all in the most perfect manner possible. My wretchedness always makes me fearful, but the thought of the stimulus that this gave me and then of doing something that the Lord demands of me, to do this as far as will be possible for me within a certain time and with following its conditions. And if the Lord helps me, with the permission of the one who is directing me, I hope then directly to accomplish it. Each time that I ask the Lord with confidence the reason which keeps me from spiritual advancement, I always experience that it is the negligence and imperfection with which I do everything.

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God alone,

I do not know if you will recall that when I asked you two months ago if it would be all right not to speak with you and manifest to you in Confession the obstacles, that I can experience in my nature with regard to virtue, the means that I employ, the inspirations and graces of the Lord at work in my interior life, you told me I should manifest these things.⁷⁴ However, in telling you that I had some difficulty in doing so, I did not wish to pause on many details, but, you responded to me that I should write them down and that I should then give them to you, so that you might have been able to tell me whether these were matters necessary to tell you as Confessor.

I felt disposed at that moment to do this, but the repugnance that I experienced later every time I wanted to write these things down, I am not able to express clearly enough and today I exerted a particular violence upon myself in order to do this because it seems to me that otherwise I would be lacking in obedience.

I will say, therefore, that this difficulty comes from a sentiment that makes me desire to conserve all within myself, to keep it all hidden. And it seems to me that everything pertaining to the interior life which then is made manifest, is something like a bottle of liquor and that once the cork is removed, it evaporates.

Furthermore I am somewhat afraid [persuaded as I am now that all is evil within me] that this proceeds from self-love, because just as the lights and good sentiments that I do have, surprised even myself, considering the sheer quantity of my weaknesses. It could be that this fear is that maybe others bear the same judgment and they might not believe this. I cannot describe the obstacles that I have within my own nature for virtue: they are many! However, I give them little attention when the means of overcoming them succeed within me – and that neither on the contrary, do I consider them, but much more am I concerned about the virtue that I should practice to go counter to these. Thinking of my defects has never helped me to correct them, because there are so many of them that I am disheartened, so much so that it seems to me the many passions are within me like so many dragons in chains. And I often beg the Lord not to permit this chain to be loosened. Very often these defects would like to come out and I experience an irritation that harms me within my nature. My miseries then seem to me to be like a mass of mud. I pay little heed also to these, because they overwhelm me. What seems to help me the more is to think of the contrary virtues and to attach myself to these. Therefore, I need to overcome myself and outside of myself, I find help in the Lord, while remaining in my own mud, I seem to get muddied all the more.

The helps that I do have in the spiritual life I garner from a great faith, that the Lord bestowed on me many years ago. This is such that I see everything being ordained toward a good in everything that happens to me [however, it is here that my nature often complains], and from certain interior convictions that I have. These do bring me interior quiet in the midst of inner battles. I will explain all this.

This life of faith places me at times in some doubt regarding the motive of my actions, because the majority of the virtues that I do exercise, I come to think that I will not be able to succeed in those matters that I desire to, if I do not practice it, as would be purity of intention. It seems to me that the good I desire to achieve, I do not accomplish, if I do not have this

⁷⁴ Leopoldina's difficulty remains in following Fr. Paccanari's advice regarding the manner of his spiritual direction.

virtue in act. And I entertain great fears in those activities that do not have this purity, because I have at hand those undertakings, that, humanly speaking, do not succeed. While, though, as has already happened to me, if I do have this purity of intention in saying certain things and that this done out of a desire for good, I remain at peace. And even if for the moment all seems to have gone poorly, the Lord however, sees to it the good that I sought, does occur.

This faith that I do have, then, offers me a certain frankness in my actions, and contributes to my interior quiet. However, as I was saying, at times this fear is present and this is for this motive in that I exercise the virtues for the certainty [which to me hardly seems to be faith] that I have of these matters. I often have temptations particularly in thoughts, but I do not pay any attention to them. And there serves me as a great help that habit which I have had now for about a yea that for every thought, and desire that comes: to pray immediately the '*Hail, Mary*' which I do internally. In this way I get distracted from what I was thinking. And the Madonna does help me, so that ever since I have had this custom, which has become almost second nature to me, I cannot say that I have passed a single instant on this same thought, when I was so evil, either of self-love or bereft of any other virtue. And it is the horror for a certain vice, and thoughts of this category, that have led me to this practice. At times, I have to say almost 50 of these a day because the devil tries when I finished with one temptation, to return with another. And I laugh at him and we proceed in this way to see who tires first. I am persuaded that with the devil, one wins more in this way than to try to reason with him even if the discourse is geared toward sending him away.

The manner that I maintain in order to defeat the internal restlessness and disturbance, is that of being persuaded that what creates being upset for the soul comes from the devil. I read this years ago in St. Teresa and I have always made use of it so that when something does disturb me, even if it is hidden under some mantle of good, and that many reasons clamor for this, and a zeal which moves me, I do not believe it until I am eventually disturbed. And in all sincerity, I protest to the Lord of not being able to accomplish so great a good because since I am upset in my disturbance, my intention is not entirely pure. And should it be His Holy Will that I do this, I rid myself first of that disturbance with which I cannot continue to carry on. And since is a temptation, as long as it is there, I am not able to proceed until it passes.

My health, which places me in this situation often to do certain things, which are contrary to the rule, as to get up a little bit later, and other such things, led me to think in order to restore quiet to myself, to ask this of you. But, the reflection that I experience that brings me displeasure, in not being able to do as the others do, has led me to think, that I could accept this as a Cross, which the Lord gives to me: which is even more of a cross, if I do not say anything about which I am doing, in that I am already approved in this, which seems to me that this would bring me pleasure. And as a result, I did not want to do it.

I desire to know if this is all right, in order to regulate my activity in other occasions, because there are other matters about which at the moment that I feel the burden of them, I say to myself to suffer them as a Cross and often, after having received them thus, I no longer feel the weight.

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God alone.

I have a great difficulty in speaking of my interior life and also, of all that I hold within me. It seems to me that certain matters are so intimate to the soul, that they cannot

even be explained in the way they are experienced. The doubts, therefore, seem to me that in not saying anything, one would merit the more. I do not say all. But those that I have which indeed are few, because it seems to me therefore that I do suffer something. All the more so that these are not matters that give me much disturbance and I think that they would favor the more my own self-love if I were to do certain things with greater security.

As a general rule, then, the inclination that I have to maintain silence about certain matters which are within, seems to me that it is for a sentiment that I have that internal matters, once they are manifested externally, are very much like a bottle of liquor which, once the cork is removed, it all evaporates. This furthermore could happen also from my own self-love, because persuaded as I am of my own wretchedness and that I have many defects, it surprises even myself to note the light and the good sentiments that the Lord gives me. And I think that this ought to do the same thing in you. I do not know how to decide this.

I have a nature that bears great obstacles to virtue. But, I pay little heed to them, but rather to the contrary virtue. The reason is that the thinking of my defects has not helped me much, because they are so many that I get discouraged.

It seems to me that my passions are within me as so many mad dogs, that are chained. And I often beg the Lord to keep these chains quite strong so that the passions do not come forth [this is what I feel they would often like to do] and this irritates me, which is my principal reaction.

These miseries of mine seem to me to be a mass of mud. I do not pay much heed to them, because it seems to me that they are quite active within me, and they muddy me all the more. And it helps me very much to overcome myself and to seek outside of me for the help of God.

The helps that I do find in the spiritual life I find from a great confidence in God and from a faith of persuasion that the Lord has granted me already for much time now. The result is that I see all ordained by God for my profit and I do all I can to bring this about, persuaded that this is His Will. The fact is also that my memory places me in mind of the wrongs received, and these never change over into resentment, persuaded of the good they bring me. I can explain this faith only with difficulty because it enters into all things and is my continuous life. I hope everything from this and I never pray to the Lord without it. There is an interior security of being heard, having experienced great proofs that a prayer, offered with this intimate confidence that God is set to accede to this, and obtains all.

Concerning this, and generally regarding faith, I have never had any temptation, and consequently, no merit, because so to speak this does not take place, since there is a persuasion concerning divine matters and of the spiritual life, which go toward virtues. This helps me even more toward that quiet in the interior battles that I experience at times.

However, at times, this life of faith put me some times in doubt regarding the motive for my acting because those few virtues that I do exercise, I do because not being able to succeed in the things that I desire, if I do not practice them, as would be the purity of intention. I strive to have this in whatever I do and that I say, thinking that the good that I desire comes from my activity and cannot succeed if it is not accompanied by this purity.

And I fear even the least aspect that might be lacking in this because I see clearly that, even when humanly my endeavors do not succeed, while, as has happened to me many times, if I had faith in those things that I said, and had acted through the desire for good, even though initially all had gone badly for me and that I did have to suffer, I would come to recognize later that the ultimate effect is really what I desired. Generally speaking

it is this faith in everything that leads me to go on. And the Lord has granted me the grace to consider everything in Him and in accord with Him. This is what for some time now leads me to act with greater frankness, because I trust more in God and I fear creatures less.

I often have temptations, particularly in thoughts to which for a little while I have paid attention. It is the horror of a vice, in which the demon tormented me with thoughts, which led me to find a means that has helped me very much, and still helps me now: this is the practice, that I have taken up, of reciting immediately the '*Hail, Mary*' in the instant that I think the least thought which is not of God. This habit gives me no bother, I mean, does not cost me any effort. It is now almost natural to me and presents itself almost at the same time as the thought. I do this internally, without it being seen. At times, I have to pray 50 of these a day, because the devil strives, just as soon as I have finished one to go back and start over again. And I laugh at his efforts and we strive together to see who will tire first. At times, it is sufficient to say only these words: 'Hail Mary', in order for the mind to be no longer upset. I believe that the demon is conquered the more by deceiving him, rather than by discussing with him even though reasoning serves to send him away.

The manner that I employ in order to overcome the inner restlessness and disturbances is to be persuaded that, what causes disturbance for the soul, comes from the devil: this is what St. Teresa claims, and which I have always taken for my rule of conduct. So it is when something arises that disturbs me, even when it disguises itself under the mantle of some good and since many things might be considered in this way and in the zeal which moves me, I give no credence to it, as long as it disturbs me. And, with all sincerity and confidence, I protest to the Lord of being unable to accomplish that good because since it is accompanied by a disturbance, it is not wholly pure. And if it is His Holy Will that I do this, then He must first take from me that disturbance with which I cannot undertake my work. And I look on the thing as a temptation, until it passes.

My health situation makes me often to do those things which are contrary to the regular observance, as to get up later than the others, and other practices. There is a suffering that makes this necessary for me, since I am most attached to the Rule and I would like to give an example of it, and not be content just with words. All this led me to think – and this has been going on for a while – and to explain to you this need that I have, and thus to be able to go ahead with more security with the approval that it would give me. But, seeing that I do experience greater suffering in doing this, it led me to decide that I need this, on this principle I have decided not to speak of it. This same happens in so many ways, that pertain to me personally. It happens where I would have some pleasure in receiving a response and some assurance: the thought which I suffer from the more, that if I do not do it, engages me.

And all these things I undertake as a Cross even though they are not more than little crosses, but since I am not good for carrying the more heavy ones, I do my best not to let the little ones slip away and from the moment I undertake them with this in view, I no longer feel their weight at all.

I have still another Cross, one, though, that I feel only slightly: this is my ready judgment and my free spirit. I love both, but, at the same time, that I do love them, they keep me in humility and lowly, because I think often of the deception that they can bring me in judging myself: that which unfortunately does happen. And often I have said to myself that I ought to tell everything to you, in order not to fall into this mistake. But, I am not very good at consulting and I am accustomed to regulate myself according to the internal sentiment, which I have of things. So much so that should I wish to begin to consult, I would be more restrained and even more limited in thinking and working, because many things,

passing through my mind, I only pay attention to them once in a while: that could not happen if I had to put them down into words.

My self-love torments even a great deal. I then no longer have any concern for virtue. In other words, the failures that I have committed with regard to this, have created in me the intimate persuasion, rooted in my own wretchedness and evil inclination of my nature. This is true to the extent that this has given me a certain diffidence regarding myself and great understanding for my neighbors with whom, every time each time I have any dealings with them, even concerning their defects, I have always found more virtue than I have myself.

I maintain a certain satisfaction of the clarity with which it seems to me to see matters, and of the justness that I feel I have in judging them. However, this self-love holds me very low because I have the fear that in punishment of the pleasure that I feel, on occasion, the Lord removes from me this gift which I know comes from Him. And as I esteem this very much I fear also very much losing it, because I believe that the Lord in His Mercy and to humble my pride, has allowed that I might have the experience, from the failures that I have committed, of the evil which remains within me. And since **He alone** is what keeps me from committing even greater faults, in that I have the full disposition for this in my own nature.

For some time that I have been making this reflection the Lord has given me, the fear of which I have mentioned, that is quite clear, and which it seems to me that I might in an instant lose that clarity of mind so easily as one might lose a pin. And this helps me very much. That which I have said above about this follows me in so many other temptations: so that the Lord has me find the remedy. And this accustoms me not to say anything. I desire, therefore, to know if this suffices, or whether I ought to consult further in matters and in temptations, which with these helps, pass from me quite soon.

For about a year now, I have been making a great effort on myself with the help of the Lord and I find myself more quiet in my morale. And as I feel very much every mortification, in the place of the activity that my imagination did at other times, and the harm of the weakness that came to me from that, I try to sacrifice immediately to the Lord all these things in a way so that I do not fall into these defects. But, my nature is so wicked, that each time I feel even sensibly the passage which this makes from the realm of the morale to that of the physical sphere and which more or less does me harm each time: this is for me a great humiliation!

Some time ago there came to me a strong temptation to afflict myself with disciplines and to think that it was precisely those efforts on myself which brought me such weak health. But, the Lord in an instant came to my help. And I protested that I would rather die, than to leave any opportunity of overcoming myself.

I thought that this was a Cross for me and the thought of it always brings relief. I do not know whether I can ask the Lord to remove it from me, because I hold more dear the suffering in the body than that in the soul. And I experience a very great hope in God, that by Him I will not be impeded in working for Him, and whenever I do set down to work, He will assist me.

In fact, for that little that I have to do now for my companions, my health has not stood in the way, and this is for me a relief.

I have always desired humiliations and mortifications, no matter what difficulty they would bring with them because through them I hoped to overcome that repugnance. But now I confess that, even when the inspiration comes to desire them, I remain at peace because I

know that they do not do me any good. Whereas, with a thought I bring myself more easily to victory over myself more so than with all the mortifications that may be imposed on me. These irritate me, more than they help me. It was this way also in my infancy. And I no longer followed along that path, from the moment that the effects were seen as now, that my state of health suffered a great deal. All this I have to say to my great confusion, nor can I explain to myself where all this comes from.

I feel that my will is continuously aimed toward God for everything, but it only operates according to the goodness in all this. Rather, I find that I often do that which I would rather not do and that I do not do what I would like to do. And I believe that I am all the more culpable because my will is not contrary to good, rather I always find myself firmly directed in my pursuit of it.

I am lacking in submission of my own judgment because of my defect of language, because, as you know yourself, I was always one to speak little and therefore my own inclination drew me to an order where silence would be practiced. But from the moment that I was in this community, I have tried to overcome this. And I often found success, when I am at recreation, or at work, I seek the words to show that I am at ease. However, this remains true; whenever others say something to me of what is going on in you, I experience a great pain in not being able to respond and to say that which is the truth. I realize that this is a great defect but, I took this more out of self-love, than for a defect in speaking much. On this matter I do not want to judge further and leave it to you.

It happens further that there is the desire to speak when the conversation is on matters with which I am familiar, and since I do have a good memory, there comes almost naturally the need to speak about that which I have learned, or read. I would like to know whether it would be good to keep silent, even in those occasions, for my greater humility and mortification.

Another thing, which torments me is that every two or three months, as also the anniversaries, there comes back to my mind with very much power, all that I have suffered from the time that I became a member of the *Beloved*. Every word that you have said to me is recalled, not those for my ordinary mortification, but those hard things which you have believed and said about me. In a word, all that was to happen to me from the moment that I set out from the love of **God alone**: and regarding this, it was all very just.

This memory affords me a certain self-pity which I do not like, nor do I absolutely wish to have. I work as best I can against all this, but at times I feel, every once in a while, as I said, greater difficulty in order to overcome it because it is accompanied by a certain melancholy. For the glory of God, Who sweetly regulates all, I ought to say, however, that this seems to be diminishing with the passing of time, and even though I still suffer from it, I have greater power of reasoning in order to conquer it, and I am hoping that it will totally pass with time.

For that which pertains to zeal, I have much for others, particularly for my Companions, so that every good thought that comes to me, every desire of perfection in virtue, all the graces that the Lord grants me, it seems to me that all this is for their advantage, and in consideration of my charge. Thus, I have such confidence in this, that it seems to me that the Lord has taken me to protect me to the extent that this will be necessary for me.

I have at heart the good of all the Sisters. I do what I can to increase their fervor in practicing those special virtues of which they need. Once there was a time in which [my sins would have been the reason] I did not see all the fruit that I desired. So, I committed to this

my prayer, and prayers which no matter what the cost was, they are always efficacious, because of my confidence in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, through which I obtain all.

For about a year now, the Lord consoled me very much regarding the zeal that I have for my companions and I bless it and am grateful for it every day. I do not say all that I should do to vent it, as the Lord has granted me grand desires. But, from obedience I await that which I ought to do.

I find myself in an interior disposition of peace, confidence, and persuasion that the Lord wants me holy; and for this, He gives me so many stimuli, inspirations and counsels, never losing for a moment the thought and the sentiment of god's presence, and so on.

At the same time, in the depths of my soul, there is the view of my miseries. As for the past wretchedness it seems to me that the Lord inspires me to make use of them as the foundation of holiness, with the humiliation that this causes me, the knowledge of myself that all these matters have given me and that diffidence, which I feel that I ought to make use of it all with security. I do experience a great fear of failures that I could commit in the future, now that I find myself endowed with the experience of so many lights, as also with that interior strength to keep me from these, that I am willing to suffer all, whatever it may be, in order to avoid even the least imperfection on those past things.

This fear makes me think that I could [if in the place of following the path that the Lord wants of me, i.e, mortification, that I would be overcome by weakness] – I might, in place of the holiness that the Lord makes me see, to serve the world as an example of ingratitude with my infidelities, meriting that the Lord might take away from me His lights. And thus abandoned, or at least very little sustained, I could indeed fall into every vice, into every excess, that even right now I see that I am capable of and then to receive eternal damnation.

The eternal truths are always present to me. I do not meditate on them, nor do I ever read books about them. But, in all things I think on them and stand in great fear before them, whenever I have committed some infidelity before the Lord. These are also at the source of certain fears and trepidations that I have which I did not used to have in the past, because the thought of dying in these, seems to me that with the dispositions and the helps of the Lord which I do have, I am more culpable and obliged than others may be. If it ever should happen that I would not practice mortification, and that I would let myself give in before some human feeling, but I feel myself corrected in prayer. And this is very bitter for me, because it offends that love that God wants from me. And this bitterness remains in me, and brings me some pain, so that willingly I would undergo any sacrifice, rather than to receive this correction.

My self-love and my weakness make me suffer at times. But no matter how afflicted I might be then, it is not something which remains. And it does not have that depth and intensity of displeasure which I experience in those matters which I addressed earlier: I cannot even draw a comparison. In suffering anything at all, there is relief and the greatest is that of offering it to the Lord, of discounting the faults, and so on. But, when I have been unfaithful to God and that I experience that the Lord regrets in having a spouse so weak as I am and who corresponds so poorly, this wounds me in a way that I cannot express. It is not that I am scrupulous, that I think that I have sinned. But, it saddens me and seems that this is too little, since I am consecrated to God, that of just avoiding sin.

Gratitude is the sentiment so blessed by God and having in view my ingratitude, this has moved me. And I am unbearable to myself, when I do not correspond. It seems to me at times that all creatures ought to rise up against me in order to find fault with me.

This sentiment is also dangerous for me, humanly speaking, because I am grateful for the good that has been bestowed on me. But this gratitude I have proposed to retain in the manner that I believe the most advantageous, i.e., for my soul, with my beseeching the Lord and with my asking Him that he might render abundantly all that for love of Him, I do not demonstrate. And for Him, Who has every good and Who is rich in mercy, I will surely do it.

You will understand well, dear Father [§]⁷⁵, that my prayers are for you. For you for whom I am very attached in the way that is permissible for me for one who is not my sole love, namely God. But, my attachment is based on Him: this has been the reason for my having so many times afflicted you against the sentiment of my heart, but following the desires of my spirit, that tend to see you as truly holy and of contributing to this in so far as I am able.

In my afflicting you with my words, my spirit is directed toward eternity, and not at the brief time of this wretched life. And because I desire that you and I not seek any consolation other than in God, in Whom only here is realized that we can be blessed one day for eternity after having been mortified for Him.

I feel that for me this is still hard. And it is only recently that I have resolved to offer a sacrifice of so many things, which, being of a spiritual nature, I yearn for them, but with excessive ardor. And, in fact, I have not been able to have them, because I am not indifferent toward them. As a result, I say that it is hard, but that the saints supported life patiently and accepted death, with consolation, even with joy: and this is what I also desire to do.

I ask you, pardon, my Father, of all that I have done and said, which have brought you any displeasure. You know now my motive and will pardon me for the intention that I had. The means employed, the manner, were indeed evil, but it all came forth from a zeal, which would like immediately that which it ardently desires. Please pardon me, then, I beg you. Extend to me the charity of responding to me, as you said to me you would do yesterday, while hearing my confession. I hope that my sincerity will not be displeasing to you. I have considered it my duty, having already stated that I would do it.

As for my duty which regards the Work to which the Lord has called me, rest assured that I will be faithful to it that I will do the very best that I can, and that I will always have, above and beyond the sense of duty, a supreme pleasure in carrying it out under your direction and assisted by your counsels. In short, I want to be a saint with the help of God, and this using the means of the virtues. I am far from this, but God can do all things, even this miracle.

Please respond to me, Father, in all frankness. Keep in mind that you have my soul in your hands.

From the sentiments that you expressed to me yesterday in Confession, I trust that you will speak to me as to what seems best and this matter, and I will submit myself to it.

Your most obedient daughter in Christ,
Leopoldina of the Lord Jesus.

⁷⁵ She is writing to Fr. Nicholas Paccanari, to whom Leopoldina opens up her soul, but not without real difficulty, as may be seen in the many repetitions in these notes.



Resolutions

To be more vigilant and attentive to maintain the resolutions which the Lord gives me the grace to make.

Therefore, to ask every day for the divine assistance and to invoke the Saint who has been given to me as my Protector, St. John, the Evangelist. To think often that God wills that I be a saint, and that of this I have received infinite proofs, that even when [as this very year] I have become relaxed, I always felt a stimulus toward perfection.

To the extent that it is not, so to speak, within my own power to give up the thought of this, because I cannot be happy other than by corresponding to the divine call.

Therefore, *I really want to be a saint.* This thought ought to follow me in my activity and for this I want to subject the examinations of conscience which I will do regarding my deeds, words and thoughts.

I wish to love God with all my heart, and to love **Him alone** because this is what He wants of me. To battle every human sentiment which would like to find a place in me: to do all for Him. And since He sees all, I will never speak of what I have done, or what I will do, but I desire all that is known by **Him alone**.

I propose to begin immediately penance for my sins and weaknesses, because I do detest them. This I wish to do every day, nor ever to go to bed without having done something toward this end and intention. I will also make the examen every day about this.

The zeal that I feel within me, the virtue that was given to me to practice from the beginning when I came to the Institute, I wish to carry out for my own soul. With genuine sentiments and zeal I will watch over the custody of my senses, and so also I will castigate my body. I will battle within me all that I do not wish that there be.

I will practice interior mortification. In a word, I will do all that can be pleasing to God, animated by this. I will have also for my neighbor, exercising charity with them. I will place this also within my charge, this zeal, keeping careful vigil with every care.

I will ask the Lord that this zeal be discreet and prudent, that it be in accord with what He wills of me, desiring in everything, His good pleasure and to act in accord with His Divine Will.

I do not want to answer back when I am contradicted, but to receive the correction even if the reality should be different from that which is being judged, thinking, therefore, that I really merit even worse and if it were known the favors that the Lord has bestowed on me, and how ungrateful I am to Him, all would hate me.

And, if there were not charity, they would not suffer me to be among them. This sentiment is such now in my heart and I hope to retain it, as also the remorse for my sins and weaknesses. Being so wretched, as I am, should I fall into some failing, on all that I have proposed for myself, I will strive not to be disheartened, nor to be afflicted, but I will humble myself before God, renewing my resolutions with more strength than ever and recommend myself to the Lord.

When the memory and the remorse for my faults will bring me to melancholy, I will strive that that this not be known, but by **God alone**. And I will bring every effort to remain joyful and well disposed, preparing myself also for this before the common exercises. And also I will not seek out human consolation but I will fortify myself with courage, thinking among other things that the Lord will have permitted all this which has happened to me, so that, once reconsidered, I will serve Him with greater commitment and without danger of self-love, having the motive to humble myself for the entire period of my life.

I wish to have a conformity to the Will of God such that I would not desire anything other than His most Holy Will. In my spiritual desires, too, I want to be submitted, being content with offering them to the Lord, striving always to purify them, seeking in everything the purity of intention.

This is what I proposed for myself in this year, which I desire will be one of penance and reparation, as also one of making my way along the path of holiness which God wants of me. I submit all to the Father General, whom I beg to remind me often of them, particularly when he might notice that I am lacking even in some small matter. This is something that will happen often, because I am quite miserable. However, I trust in God.

During prayer the other night, the Lord led me to understand that I was lacking, in telling you the day before so many things about assisting me and helping me, and the fears that I expressed [which at that time I really had] that your humility might take up this whenever I might have need of it. And I was lacking because I should not have mistrusted the Lord, and rather, I should have trusted the more that He, having willed that I might depend on you, provided that nothing would interrupt this.

The Lord has also brought me to realize that I ought humbly to await and to receive those helps that you will be giving to me and not to have presumption of demanding them, which is what is derived from my pride. But I can only, under the title of charity, ask you to assist me in the desire that I have of pleasing the Lord.

So, I ask pardon also of you, since notwithstanding the charity that you have employed in my regard up to the present and having accepted it to do the will of God, I entertained these fears.

I beg you to offer me the charity, when you see that I might fall back into these failings, to correct me with all that authority, which the Lord has bestowed on you.

My soul, put yourself in the presence of god. Above you, is always God, under you is God, beside you is God. You are totally enveloped by God as in a house.

O my god, who are You? And who am I? I am only human and you are God. Who are You? The Lord of heaven and earth.

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My Advocates: St. Joseph and St. Ignatius. My Medatrix: Mary Most Holy and Sorrowful. Always invoke the Holy Spirit before the Retreat. Vocal Prayers: the Dolours of Mary, the Rosary the Joy of St. Joseph. 3 Our Fathers, Hail Mary's and Glory be's.

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The Annual Retreat ⁷⁶, begun on October 10th:

As on the days that have passed, and so this day, I experienced a diffidence in all that pertains to fervor, sentiments, and the like. And this is because on rare occasions I am lacking regarding one or the other and despite the fact that I am not always the same, full of

⁷⁶ These are notes taken during a course of Retreat. This was the first and also the last noted by Leopoldina during the time of her belonging to the Community of the *Beloved of Jesus*.

self-love and of all that goes into putting this to mortification. This mortification either little or none at all has helped me up to the present, rather it has always irritated even more that interior contrariety which I experience for all that disturbs me.

Another attachment to myself is that love for the interior peace and quiet of soul, which I love much and so I do not like it when it is over-turned. In a word, I find myself composed of misery and it is thus that I enter into this Holy Retreat without even feeling that consolation which provides the hope of fervor, because I have always seen it fixed on time, which will come later, in which only will I be able to experience the fruit of these days, if I find myself disposed for virtue [because by the grace of God, I am always], but by practicing it on certain occasions. The Introduction prescribed a General Examen of the benefits of God towards us, and our failings and ingratitude toward Him, from the moment of our birth.

The Benefits: I cannot even number the general and particular benefits that I have received, because they are immense. And no matter how often I have rendered myself unworthy with ingratitude, one such worse than the next, they benefits still continue to come, so much so that often I see myself constrained, in recognizing them, to say: 'but, Lord, You are deceived! You think that I am that faithful servant of yours, while I am only a very wretched person, one who is ungrateful!'

Often, that reflection on myself leads me to detach myself from that which I experience, because I fear that it is all an illusion since my actions does not correspond to that which I feel.

In a word, the benefits that the Lord bestows on me in other areas also, I will consider them in these days, in which I have such ease in this, and in which the Lord grants me the grace of being able recall them before my spirit. The failings, that I have committed, how numerous they are, o God!

You, who know the depths of hearts, you know that what this proves only in recalling them to mind in general and even more, in particular. It seems to me that this is like a wound that I have in my mind, which then re-opens, causing sorrows even more violent than when these were fresh. And I experience this in a sensible manner. I feel also that the greatest sorrow is that of sins, failings and ingratitude which I have committed since I have been a religious. In comparison to these, those committed in the world seem light and it seems to me that these displease the Lord even more.

From the time I have been a religious I had stimuli even more strong not to offend Him, being able to be reminded that he had chosen me for His spouse, and that even prior to my infancy, He had disposed me for this happiness, having ordained all in His admirable Providence and preserved me for ten years of Court life to attach myself to nothing other than to Him alone.

What can I possibly bring forward to excuse myself? Even in the world, I felt that my nature was rebellious, that it would have wanted at times to seek human satisfactions and to love creatures, but sustained by the intimate sentiment that made me feel even then that I already belonged to God, I overcame every affection, every thought - in summary, even the least reality that was not God alone, not permitting even time to pass in any other sentiment.

And so it is not that my nature was different, but I was different because I did not allow myself to be surprised and with the grace of God I kept the weapons continuously in hand, without any victory won ever making me foolhardy to take on others, but rather, I remained attentive and on the defense. What confusion for me, when I think of what I have done from the time that I am in the religious life!

But still, Lord, I have to thank You, because You have not yet punished my boldness in offending You, You have awaited my penance, my conversion, and for these You have provided all the means. And You have also held me internally all Yours: if You had even loosened the reins on my passions, oh! What would I ever have been or what would have become of me! Yes, Lord, I am confused in having been so guilty a sinner and I thank You also for the worse state from which You have preserved me!

§

October 11th - Meditations on the End of Man

1st: The End for which we have had our Beginning.

2nd: The Principle of the End that we will have, according to we will have done.

Everything around us leads us to think that we are created for a more noble end than that which all other creatures are: we are the work of so great an Artist!

And, all that is created, has been created for us and not we being created for them: we are only for God! That all which is created cannot fully satisfy our heart, is a proof what we have not had our beginning for that, but that God is our end.

Oh! This truth I have experienced and felt this each time that I yearned to be able to enjoy some consolation in creatures. It seems that, therefore, without even willing it, these have responded to me: 'I am not enough for you. They cannot bring contentment to a heart that is made for God and that has tasted the consolations of a God!'

Yes, Lord, I confess before You that I was never able to call myself happy in the love of creatures, because I knew of Your love and that, convinced of the inconstancy and instability of man, I was not able to see happiness in that which does not last and I did not see this in anything but You alone, sole genuine Happiness. And so was my heart in the sweet necessity of confessing that we have been created for a more noble end.

Reform of Perfection, more necessary for a religious person: negligence of the rules, necessity of their observance, because a Sister who does not observe them falls into carelessness and tepidity.

Make today the examen over the observance maintained.

My examen is that I feel the whole necessity of this observance and that I hold to it exactly so that it will be. But, to that exactness that I have with regard to the community and which is my task, I fail regarding myself, dispensing myself sometimes without sufficient reason from some little matter under the pretext for my responsibility.

The resolution to be more attentive and to subject myself [when I do not have any need to do otherwise] to observe them to the letter and in all perfection, doing this out of love for God, even in that from which I could dispense myself.

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Second Meditation

The End of a Religious: to die to the world, to die to herself.

To die to the world and to that which is of the world, of the heart, this seems to me to be the easiest. And therefore, as I have never lived with my heart in the world, I also seems that I had no need to die to it.

There come then, certain ones that unfortunately do have still to ask from others if there is not something of the world that still remains in them? Let this die, then: that all this is nothing, and nothing indeed! This is how I have always thought that I have done nothing at all when I left the world.

To die to oneself: this is the difficult challenge. And I am not yet dead in this way yet, but to the exact opposite, I find myself very much alive in all the occasions. And what

would all this mean for me, to think of myself, if I were indeed already dead to this world? But, because I am not dead in this way, I feel this very much.

In the unfolding of this meditation, O Lord, I said to you from my heart that I wanted to die, really and truly this time. I really do not want to be feeling any more of 'my own self'. But, o God, the diffidence is that which accompanies every resolution of mine, my every sentiment.

It seems to me that I can see in all these proposals that I have only one time left. And that might be only this period of my Retreat. And then what? And then I am always the same: much alive as I was even before these Exercises! Can I hope, o Lord, that this my diffidence might find mercy before you, so much so that You will extend compassion and give me the grace which, hoping in You alone, that my hopes might not be deluded?

§

October 12th – Meditation on Mortal Sin

This meditation moved me only a little: this is the result of my hardness, insensibility, and the like. I have these always with regard to this material, which usually, those subjects which require material figures and imagination, which make this effect on me.

Reflections: I thought that my self-love, my freedom of spirit perhaps have hidden in me on many occasions the true gravity of my faults and that with these two things I have often been able to deceive myself on the judgment that I have made about myself.

I feel somewhat ill at ease regarding this judgment of mine and this I have felt now for several days. And I propose to myself to inform myself of that which I ought to believe, either regarding my conscience, or my heart, which makes me feel quite strongly every imperfection and makes me desire to go to confession, or regarding my judgment, or my intellect, which coming to the examination of conscience concerning the matter, leads me to think it over.

God knows how many Communion I received in sin! This has struck me very much. O Lord, have pity on me, mercy! It seems to me that my will is disposed to be more vigilant, more attentive, in the future regarding myself in order not to offend You even in a slight matter, but ... You know that I am worse than nothing, and can do nothing without You.

Reform: ***He has done all things well...*** [cf. Mk 7:37].

Diligence in all things that have to be done, because we serve a God and not any boss in this world.

The greatest penance for a religious person ought to be the common life. The Examen prescribed regarding myself every action of the day in which there is seen how many failings are full of the lack of diligence and attention needed to bring to these.

Examen: I know that I have almost always been found lacking in this diligence regarding my activity, so much so that if I have also done some things well, this has nonetheless been found wanting in that intention of doing it to serve God and of the application which leads naturally to this thought, that subjection and penance, that bring with them that precision of times, to the call.

It seems that I have been exact for all that was held in common, but not with that same exactness that I had in more particular matters. And often I shifted an exercise from one hour to another, whenever the superior had said that I could do this, the reason being that my charge asks and demands these changes. I ought to interpret his intention in doing this, only when there are reasons for so doing.

Proposals: A supreme diligence for everything, rejoicing and sustaining me with the thought: 'I have to serve God in this matter!' And so to repeat to myself in all things, not only with the tongue but with the manner in which I will carry these things out. Never to take on a pretext [when there is no necessity for doing so] from my charge in order to dispense myself from that exactness of the rules.

Reform: on humility: that all that is accomplished is really nothing, if there is not humility in it.

There is a comparison with a cruet, or flask, which contains a spirit, or oil, etc. Humility, is the cruet which conserves the other virtues, which without this are poured out and are lost. There are three characteristics of humility: to love criticism; to desire that our faults become known by others, and to make them known; to hide the good that one accomplishes. A proposal to make an examination on these three points.

Examen: Far from loving criticism, it upsets me, if others do not have, or demonstrate that esteem for me that I desire, by deceiving, or rather, desiring to deceive since I pretend an esteem from others, concerning myself, that I do not have myself, because I know that I am unworthy of this.

2nd. I hide, whenever I can, my own defects and if ever I commit one before others, it displeases me very much. Of all this, I offer excuses about my charge, which does not imply that my companions might see that I have so many defects. And thus I deprive myself of the humiliation that I might have.

3rd. Since I do not do anything good, I do not have the occasion to make it known and there is too much self-love to talk about it, if I should ever do anything well. But, if I have been accused of something, I then begin with these considerations and I say and speak of myself in order to make excuses and to make it known that I am innocent, so much so that the moment passed in examining myself on what I do, I ought to be ashamed.

Proposals

2nd Meditation on Venial Sin.

This made a great impact on me and moved me much. It would take too long to note all that there is more in particular, since all was well. The goodness of God, offended so gravely, made me continuously to promise internally the Lord that in such and such an occasion I will do my utmost to resist.

I have not found in my self that tenderness of tears that these considerations used to bring to me. It has seemed to me that it is this way because, after having come to realize that tears up to this moment have helped me very little and had me remain in my wretchedness, taking from me the strength to unburden myself of that which is necessary in order to work, I placed myself in this state that my mind centers upon the practical act and does not pause any longer over my sensibility.

§

October 13th – Meditation. The Means that we have to save ourselves.

This Meditation went well to prove how many of these there are, and how easy they are to employ.

Reflections: I knew that the Lord had given so many of these Means to me that I did not have need of any others to make me a saint. I was lacking neither in the means, nor the lights, nor that grace and had all of these in abundance. Indeed, I proceeded as though I was sure of having them all each time I would have had need of them, but I did not guard them.

Reform of obedience.

There is that promptness that should be had. There is great merit in this. It is better not to make known that which is desired to superiors because then we do our own will, and not theirs. The examples that confirm also the little quiet that is experienced.

Examen : I am aware of many failures in this matter. And having realized that I desire often to have my own Sister Superior, to whom I might ask about those indifferent matters to have the merit of so doing, while in those matters in which I do have a superior who commands me, my judgment is not persuaded and desires to be so. It wants this satisfaction. And if it is not totally persuaded,, it rebels against obedience and I seek with words to distance certain matters and, when I can, even to make sure they all work out in accord with what pleases me.

It is true that I do not do this with the intention of doing my own will and out of the will of not wishing to obey. But, this is done out of a presumption that leads me to believe that I can see reality more clearly and that I have the experience in some matters: all of this is the effect of self-love that makes it still seem that there should not be the defect of being silent, while it is really only this self-love that moves my tongue and that if this were not teased it would prefer remain without speaking up.

I also ought to say that the Lord, having bestowed on me the grace to reflect on what happens, I often observed that those matters which pertain to me have turned out to my displeasure, whenever I have not held myself to obedience and that I was more concerned with my own interests, from the experience I have had.

I would have much more to say on this point but it would be too long. I only hint that I am doubly culpable, and for the light and judgment that the Lord grants me and for the scandal that has come to my companions from my negligence of obedience to the superior.

Reform of mortification.

There is need of this, even of that external mortification. This has been practiced by all the saints. A day should never pass without practicing some mortification of the flesh.

Examen : Also in this matter the light is not lacking to me and I hear this often in my heart: ‘ you ought to do this, or that’. But, often I have turned a deaf ear and I went ahead anyway now matter how many times the Lord knocked, with His grace, and no matter how loud this was that I heard and I endured the struggle not to respond to Him.

What ingratitude mine is! Is it possible that Your sublime goodness has not tired of me? Ah. How I have merited this! But, You are full of mercy! The earth is full of Your mercy and I am enveloped in it!

§

October 14th – Meditation on the Final Judgment

What struck me the most in this meditation has been that reflection which, on appearing in the presence of God, after death not having any longer our own body, we will have such clarity that we will grasp without obscurity our whole selves and the gravity of our faults.

Reflections . How sad this is for me having committed so many! What embarrassment and confusion! All the more so, once freed from the body, which is what draws us toward this earth and toward fault, I will realize with greater ease where I worked well.

I desire to present myself at times before this judgment and rigorously judging myself, to live then in a manner to avoid it; or, rather, to make myself favorable before the judgment of God.

Proposals : I wish to mortify my passions, to avoid within me the occasions, that can place me in a close danger of offending God. I will not seek them any more of myself, and whenever I feel the pull of them, I wish to punish myself with some particular mortification and to resist. I do not wish to give way to that which my own judgment might claim, in order to persuade me to do the contrary, providing me with excuses and reasons which might appear sometimes good to me and have authorized me, but I wish to be attached to God alone with all my heart.

The instability of human beings, as this has not brought me any wonder, so I still desire that it does not afflict me. The abandonment that I have feared for so much time, far from turning me against others, if it should succeed, ought not to have this effect in me any more, because I ought never to attach myself to this, not enter into such weaknesses. And therefore, I should end in this way.

Reform : of interior mortification.

This is absolutely necessary. To mortify our senses cannot take place without our feeling something on the interior. How much benefit and sweetness there may be found in this mortification, which then brings us to the point of no longer feeling the weight of it, and so on.

Examen : I already knew the truth of all that was said in this *Reform*. I, too, had experienced it at times, when through the grace of God I felt as though I had to practice it, how much consolation there is in it, whenever any and every motion is mortified reaches the soul and it seems that it wounds it. But, since it would no longer then be mortification, nor the practice of virtue, if one does not feel something of that suffering [which is the proof that it is being practiced] it consoles very much the spirit and makes it rejoice.

I experienced also the contrary, because the light which the Lord gives to carry out certain measures, when it is not followed, it always leaves a regret, which cannot be compensated for by anything else and satisfaction, which we could have had.

Proposals : to be more attentive and vigilant regarding myself in order to practice continuously this mortification and to punish severely my body, whenever I will not have practiced it.

Reform concerning prayer.

Consult all with the Lord in prayer, since that is the real Director of souls. And after some conclusion has been drawn, and this has been talked over with the Confessor, just do it. One can always offer prayers in all the tasks and occupations of the day, if our heart is directed toward the Lord, recollected in Him, and the like.

We have so many miseries that, if we would wish, we would always have so much to talk over with, and to pray to the Lord,

Examen : This brought me great fear because I feel a great pleasure in not having the obligation to speak of these matters, that I experience and which I think, of those lights that I have in these areas. And when I am before the Lord and these experiences happen to me, this thought serves me as a distraction that I ought to speak of them and I do have a certain repugnance for all this. And I feel that, when I think or desire to speak of these matters, it is always outside of prayer and rather self-love than anything else.

2nd Meditation. On Hell. The penalties of sense, the sufferings of damnation. The eternity of these sufferings.

Reflections : the second point made a great impression on me. It is the first that I had first felt so strongly, before the Retreat. That which struck me the more has been that

sentiment that the soul would have and going to God and which will be experienced as rejected by him.

I thought of the consolation that I feel, every time that I committed a failing and when I had trusted in creatures, of going and pouring out my heart to God, saying to Him that He knows well that He is my sole and true Good, that my heart wants only Him. I experience so much consolation, because it seems to me that I feel, deep within, that which is genuine. I feel assured of this and it seems to me that I see that my interior life, my will is such. And if I experience being borne toward creatures this has not been with prejudice of the interior sentiment and of the will, that is all of God, but because I have desired to have someone with whom to speak of God, to inspire me to serve Him. This has been the beginning. I felt, then, it is true, in a quantity and a terrible number of infidelities and weaknesses, but always in the midst of these I desire God and I have never experienced being rejected.

§

October 16th – Meditation on Mercy

I was somewhat distracted in this meditation, as my imagination was led to regret some of my human dimensions. However, the whole undertaking brought me to admire the difference between the Goodness of God and so I sought to recollect my spirit and to recall it to that which then ought to occupy it.

The sentiments that I have generally for the breadth of God's mercy are grand, but still not as expansive as this is, since it is so to speak incomprehensible.

Reform : on patience.

This is a virtue that is so necessary more particularly with ourselves, since this is the object for which we have the greatest need.

Examen : Unfortunately, I have known the truth of all this reform. I still feel that I need a great patience with myself and that I am the most frequent object of my impatience. I would like to enjoy always internally peace of soul, so that every motion, which brings me to experience my rebellious nature so often in spirit, and it brings me pain and disturbs me. This would not be if I had patience.

My self-love is that which torments me the most and gives me impatience, when I fail, and so I am always impatient. The mortifications, when they last, also make the same effect in me. If I then examine myself regarding my charge, I find that the external matters, the defects of others, do not bring me the same impatience and this because I ought always to recognize that theirs are less than my own. And so, no matter how I am obliged to address them, they do not disconcert me.

But, when they do not understand and with those who are by nature not able to comprehend well these matters, or the details in what they are doing, then I also experience some impatience, which, though, is not to be compared with that which I have regarding myself.

Proposals: I wish to make every effort to acquire for myself a great patience toward myself, to support my bad nature, as also that impatience which I have, when I see a difficulty of understanding.

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October 17th – Meditation on the Passion:

As beautiful as this is and the object which usually strikes me the most, has not had for me the same effect and I did suffer some aridity. I offered this pain to the Lord and did all I possibly could in order to recall my attention and its sentiments.

I experienced the same in the second part, having made this in the morning, with more fervor however, and very little sensibility. The reason is because this is a subject upon which I need to remain very recollected in order to meditate upon it, and to experience it well. And, so to speak, I ought to enclose all deep within, since it is a matter that is the more experienced, rather than speak about, and words do not help me here.

Reform : of sweetness.

This was very good and beautiful. I recognized in myself those failings and I thought that they were generated by self-love, because that which renders me impatient and not very meek. On this, I made my proposals.

Reform: on simplicity.

Reflections : I know how lacking I am in this virtue and in what my intellect has the greater part. In many matters that were said, I believed that I understood that I am indeed simple of heart: I am particularly with the Lord, to whom I go with a simplicity and great confidence but in my intellect I lack greatly in simplicity.

That explanation that I heard that ‘the simple souls, as they do not ponder over many things, are more united to God because they believe more in every light, which comes from Him, and so on...’ – I know that this is true, because I do experience it. In my heart, as I said, I have this simplicity but then, when I subject things to my intellect, which looks for some explanation in everything, this practice then obscures matters. Generally, the Lord grants me the grace of feeling how I should mistrust my own judgment.

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2nd Meditation on the Most Holy Madonna

Even though I was not feeling very well, this meditation pleased me very much, because I recognize a quantity of graces, received from this our Mother. But these are recalled to my mind with great sensibility of my heart and with a sentiment of gratitude. I would have liked to make them public in order to render Him glory for them. And continuously I am receiving them! In this retreat particularly, in which I have had many temptations, it has helped me very much to resist them and to remain strong.

On other occasions, beyond and above these, whenever I felt myself becoming disturbed, and in pain, from which human beings surely would not be able to lift me up out of them, She is the one who brought me help.

Furthermore, I remembered with supreme gratitude that grace which was bestowed on me all the years that I remained in the world, of giving me such a purity of mind, after which in the convent I read so many novels, so many other things.

And yet, there never came to me the least bad thought! However, after I had left the world, I reflected on my self and realizing this, I remembered that as a young girl I had great devotion to Mary Most Holy and that all the time that was in the convent I recited every day her Office and committed my companions to do the same.

As still now, in the hours of recreation to be all the more secure that they would do this, I brought them with me into a remote place in order to do this. In the world, it is true, I was not as precise in this devotion, nor in others.

But Mary, who is beneficent, while I was forgetting her, she would remember that little that I had done to honor her in the past.

§

5th Day. 2nd meditation. The Two Standards.

Preparatory Prayer :

1st Prelude : There are in the world two parties, two vocations, two standards. One is of Christ, and the other is of the devil.

Both call out to all men and women.

2nd Prelude : Represent to yourself a very spacious field around Jerusalem, on which Our Lord Jesus Christ assists you as the Captain of all good human beings. And then there is another field in Babylon where Lucifer presents himself as the Captain of the wicked and the rebels.

3rd Prelude : Ask for the grace to be able to explore the deception of the evil Captain. Having invoked together the divine assistance in order to know His ingenious customs and to be able to imitate them by grace.

First Part:

1st Point : To imagine before my eyes, near the Babylonian camp, the captain of the evil empire - on a fiery and smoky chair - he is seated, a horrible figure, and terrifying visage.

2nd Point : to notice how he, with numberless demons convoked around him, throughout the world, he spreads them out to bring harm, not leaving any cities, or villages of level of persons immune.

3rd Point : to pay attention to the harangue that he delivers to his ministers: whom he instigates and who, having taken up and cast about snares and chains, they draw in first of all those human beings [this is what commonly happens] toward cupidity of riches, and then more easily they are sucked into ambition of worldly honor, then they trip over the ditch of pride. So there are three principal stages in temptations based on wealth, honors and pride, from which their rushes forth and hastens all the other kinds of vices.

Second Part

Similarly, from the opposite perspective, consider the supreme, excellent and our first captain and Emperor, Christ.

1st Point : Look at Christ on a beautiful meadow near Jerusalem, established in a rather humble spot, but very beautiful of form and supremely lovable of aspect.

2nd Point: Imagine how the Master of the universal world, the chosen Apostles, disciples and other ministers, whom He sends throughout the world, who before every class of humanity, state and condition, who impart His sacred and salvific doctrine.

3rd Point : Just listen to Christ's Discourse in which He exhorts all His servants and friends, destined to such an undertaking. He commands that they strive to help everyone. And first they must imbibe the spiritual love of poverty. And furthermore, if the reason of the divine service [*ossequio*] and election should bring them there] to follow then in reality, that poverty.

Afterwards, they will be lured by the desire of shame and of disdain, from which springs the virtue of humility. From this come forth three degrees of perfection, i.e., poverty, disdain of oneself and humility. These are all diametrically opposed to riches, honors and pride and at once, all the other virtues are introduced.

Colloquy to the Blessed Virgin Mary: beseeching her to beg for this grace from her divine Son, in order to be able to be received and to remain under His standard. First with spiritual poverty, , and then in a real poverty and despoilment, and then, from this, the abjection and ignominy to imitate Him more closely.

This first colloquy is then brought to a close with the Hail, Mary.

2nd Colloquy: Jesus Christ as man, might beseech from His Father the same, and in the end offer the prayer, *Anima Christi*.

3rd Colloquy: To the Eternal Father by the same petition, with an *Our Father*.

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Thursday. The 5th.

3rd Meditation. Meditation on the Three Classes of Men.

Preparatory Prayer

1st Prelude : that there are three distinct classes of human beings Each of these has procured a sum of ten thousand ducats with no other purpose than to serve and love God. Now, each one yearns to have god placated and to save their own soul, by removing any and every disordered and harmful affection as well as any impediment of salvation.

2nd Prelude : Imagine each one of us being in a spacious field, all recollected in one's own thoughts and with very vibrant faith and humble prayer, and imagine that one can see with the eyes of faith God, our Creator and Jesus Christ His Son, our Redeemer with all His Servants and blessed, with reverent loving and persevering faith, with the desire of knowing in what way you might the more greatly please Your God and Lord.

3rd Prelude : Ask for the grace to choose that which to God is the most acceptable and for me, what is the most salutary in order to succeed. *Make me know the path to follow* ⁷⁷

1st Point : the first class, then, desires very well to despoil the affection for those acquired goods in order to be able to be reconciled with God. However, this group does not then put into act the means and the necessary precision throughout one's life.

2nd Point : The second class then also yearns to remove all disordered affection, but would nonetheless like to hold on just a bit [in a most restrained manner] to what it possesses, and to draw God rather to its desire, rather than leaving behind the impediment for the way and for the more expedient state, to tend directly to Him.

3rd Point : the third class finally, wishing to reject all affection that is not sincere, is equally ready and prepared to remove, or to hold all possession in accord with the more fitting divine service [*ossequio*], or through the divine instinct, or through that dictate of reason that is noted. And so, leaving behind everything in its state, this along is thought and sought, nor does it admit any other cause to leave or to retain what has been acquired, beyond what reason, or the desire for the greater glory of God.

Three Colloquies : in accord with those of the meditation of the two Standards.

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Proposals and Resolutions

Having known the advantage that comes into my spirit from mortification, and the wrong and harm that self-love wreaks upon it, I resolve, after so much time that I am under this tyranny to submit perfectly my judgment and to rejoice in humiliations, which may come to me. I also resolve not to lose therefore freedom of spirit, understanding that is the deception of the devil to allow myself to be disheartened by mortifications. I wish to place myself in opposition to my pride, not losing the occasion to disarm it and which has brought so much harm to my spirit, which this has heaped upon it up to the present.

There is much hindrance in that sensibility in which my sister nurtures for me. I think, therefore, that I should tell her these in clear terms because I am resolved to die, and that I truly want to be mortified. Hence, I will ask the Father General not to pay any attention

⁷⁷ cf. Ps 143:8 – Latin Vulgate

to that which my nature might suffer, wishing nothing other than salvation and life of my soul.



1803 – 1806

*God alone*⁷⁸.

In the first days of the Novena of the Sacred Heart, I experienced a certain disturbance from the recollection of past happenings, i.e., all that I have had to suffer in these two years. There came before my mind all the words that were said and all that was really unjust, as far as the truth of the matter is concerned, but surely not regarding all that I merit before God for those offenses that I have committed against God and my infidelity to the love of Him alone.

And I confess that all suffering is justice, whenever one becomes distant from Him alone. Who can make one happy both in this, as well as in the other world, Who alone has the right to our affections. In these days, therefore, I felt quite melancholy regarding these matters and I followed a maxim, that I have always maintained, that that which causes disturbance in my spirit comes from the devil. I strove to overcome myself, battling with the help of God and with the persuasion that notwithstanding all the good and the salutary reflections which gave me the occasion to carry on, I could not have trust because of the internal movement that I experienced.

Therefore, I promised God to battle on and not to desire to listen to anything that would suggest to me these recollections, which since they had been frequent, they did not serve up to now than to lead me to fall into more weaknesses. And I begged Him to take this disturbance from me, if He wished for me some profit from these, since otherwise I protested that I would consider everything as a temptation, that I ought to struggle against, as I had always tried to do up to the present. These protestations brought a certain calm to me, as they had always done for me. But, on Saturday, at Communion, not thinking any more of these matters, I asked as always from the Lord that indifference for all else that was not Him and only Him, in all things and I experienced many lights. It seemed to me that it was the Lord, Who spoke to my heart lovingly and not with corrections, as I merited.

I recalled the happiness that I had always tasted when it was only for Him [a happiness that was never disturbed by the thought of the injustice of men - nor from the movement of my own passions], the love with which He loved me in a particular manner, especially in these two years, since in place of having me feel that tepidity that bears with it passion and human attachment, He made me experience for all that is of the spiritual life,

⁷⁸ These years were a time of much suffering for Leopoldina and for all the members of the *Beloved of Jesus* due to the serious accusations leveled against Fr. Paccanari. These began to surface in 1801, and in some way aspersions were cast on the entire group gathered around him.

every time that I reflected within through prayer – or, through an internal recollection that seems to me that always remains within me, ready whenever I like to deal with him” a goodness that has often made me marvel and confused at the same time with the thought of my own ingratitude. And He placed in me so many good desires, that I allowed, so to speak amount to nothing, as it did not seem to me to be possible that a wretched person, such as myself, full of weakness, that He could bestow so many graces.

He also placed in my heart in that moment the grace, which He had granted to me before, of loving so particularly the spiritual good of persons, who with their weakness caused displeasure in me. In brief, the graces that the Lord bestowed on me could not be well known, beyond that which on the day of judgment, because only He knows all that I really am, how much I have suffered, and that which I cannot say, as also the purity of intention, which were brought to situations, which ought to be excited against that which nature could have experienced: all graces which have been within my spirit because what pertains to the exterior, for reasons that I believed to be good, I often acted as though these had not been bestowed.

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August 31, 1805

It is only right to submit oneself to God and to be persuaded that in this world there is always suffering, and so to know how to suffer with joy, this is the genuine consolation of the just! And so, have courage and be joyful in the face of each and every tribulation, which you will then encounter because the saints love to suffer so much.

The repugnance with certain persons is not always evil, but derives from the difference of characters, which only with constancy in dealing with them can it be overcome. There have been saints who did not get along very well with each other, and were opposites in their character traits: in such a situation, it suffices to maintain charity and to excuse the defects of others, attributing this to the extreme delicacy of oneself.

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Extract from Letter and Personal Matters⁷⁹**May 10, 1806**

... In your previous letter, I read much about your spirit: it brings consolation to see how you overcome the battle with nature. The superior courage and the fortitude that you receive is a manifest proof of the readiness with which you ought to offer yourself to the Lord, in order to carry out His Holy Will.

Now, as I said to you, you will begin to know how much the Lord's works cost.

And you will also know the need to have a total trust in God, and to put it more clearly, a genuine need to be blindly abandoned into His hands, without which one cannot really work for His glory since He comes of Himself to receive it through the work that places us into His holy service. This is how creatures can glorify God: never of themselves, but in their handing themselves over unto death into His hands.

In these days we have seen for all practical purposes, that our projects were changed many times in a week, and why? In order to make us die to ourselves and at the same time

⁷⁹ There follow here a few passages from letters, which Leopoldina included in her personal papers which bear witness to the suffering and the hope with which she encountered these years of pilgrimage and expectancy.

to lead us to realize that He alone is the author of the endeavor and that each might come to know the need we have having recourse in everything to Him, and to strive to do nothing without Him, but that we need to be read and prepared in each moment to set out at the first hint, that we know to be His will.

It is true that for humanity it is a suffering, but for the spirit it is a comfort, keeping in mind the assurance the assurance that we have of His Divine will and the hope for his assistance in our needs, that His Providence will never be lacking to us.

Up to the present, we have needed such conduct, that the Lord has maintained with us, in order to form us into instruments suited for something in working in His Divine Service. Lacking this realization, we were incapable of serving Him. Now, that we cannot resist this truth, there is to be hoped that there will not be lacking the moment to begin something.

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2nd Extract from Letters

September 9th

... I firmly hope that the Lord's hour will arrive, in which we will be consoled, so let us keep ourselves constant in His holy service and to that which we have promised.

Let it not be us who put God on trial, but God tries us so that, whatever is done, we do solely in order to carry out His Holy Will and not for any other motive. While the flesh does not rejoice in this state, nor can the spirit be deceived by the spiritual sweetness and consolation, while His bread is daily tribulation. Remembered that God sorely tried Job.

And David, in his prayers, asked the Lord He might put him to the test in order to see how faithful he was: ***Test me, Lord, and try me.*** This kind of tribulation can only come from God, - and we ought to rejoice in Him, as He treats us as His true friends - who wants to provide us with the experience in order to know how much He may be able to provide us with for the future.

This is the authentic school in which all the saints have studied and where they made great strides in holiness. Let us allow ourselves to be instructed by the Divine Master and, with genuine humility of heart, let us submit ourselves to the blows which strike our backs, that we might thus learn to submit our judgment and to die to ourselves. We might be able to be afraid of nothing because the Grand Master, to Whom we have the great joy of serving, is most powerful, and His promises cannot be lacking to us. The paths of His Providence are unknown to human beings, because they come from an uncreated wisdom.

It is proper to His infinite wisdom to govern His servants minutely, in order to give them some idea of His immense greatness and infinite power. From all this, there redounds to Him that glory that human beings can offer Him on earth, by means of the virtues practiced by them along the path that they follow.

The birds live from day to day. The seasons come and go, the most critical being the winter, and yet, they praise their Creator in song.

The spring-time finally returns to them with the abundance of its fruit, so much so that they do not know where to attach themselves: so, it will happen to us, if we only knew how to keep ourselves faithful in the midst of the upheavals! Consolation will come after these and we will taste the fruits of the grace of the Holy Spirit in this world, and eternal life in the next...

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