

The shepherdess, the sheep and lambs (1867)

In the following passage, Don Bosco, founder of the Valdocco Oratory, recounts a dream he had between 29 and 30 May 1867 to his young people, which he narrated on the evening of Holy Trinity Sunday. In a boundless plain, flocks and lambs become an allegory for the world and the boys: lush meadows or arid deserts represent grace and sin; horns and wounds denounce scandal and dishonour; the number “3” foretells three famines – spiritual, moral, material – that threaten those who stray from God. From the account flows the saint’s urgent appeal: to preserve innocence, to return to grace through penance, so that every young person can be clothed in the flowers of purity and partake in the joy promised by the good Shepherd.

On Trinity Sunday, June 16 [1867]—the feast on which twenty-six years before Don Bosco had celebrated his first Mass – the Oratory boys eagerly awaited the narration of the dream he had promised them on the 13th. He took to heart the good of his spiritual flock and always abided by the exhortations of Holy Scripture: “Take good care of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.” [Prov. 27, 23] He constantly prayed for an intimate knowledge of his little lambs, for the grace of carefully watching over them and providing for their well-being after his death, and for their daily spiritual and bodily nourishment. On that Sunday, therefore, after night prayers, he thus addressed the Oratory community:

The night of the 29th or 30th of May, as I was lying in bed unable to fall asleep, I began thinking of my dear boys. I wish I could dream up something good for them, I said to myself. After mulling over this for a short while, I made up my mind to have a dream. Lo and behold, I fell asleep and found myself in an immense plain packed tight with huge sheep. Divided into flocks, they were grazing on meadows which

stretched as far as the eye could see. Wanting to get closer to them and marveling that anyone could own so many flocks, I looked for the shepherd. I soon spotted him leaning on a staff and went up to him.

"Whose flock is this?" I asked him.

He did not answer. I repeated my question.

"Is that any of your business?" he replied.

"That's no answer!" I countered.

"All right! They belong to their owner!"

"Thanks, but who is he?"

"Don't be so impatient. We'll come to that."

I then followed him for a close look at the flocks and the land. In places the meadows were luscious and dotted with shade trees. Here the sheep were healthy and gorgeous. In other places the plain was barren and forbidding, bristling with thorns and yellow thistles, and with not a blade of grass in sight. Here a large flock was grazing, but it looked miserable. I kept asking questions about the sheep, but my guide ignored them and simply told me, "You need not concern yourself with the sheep. I'll show you the flock you must shepherd."

"Who are you?"

"I am the owner. Follow me."

He took me to another area where I saw thousands of little lambs so weak that they could hardly move. The land was parched and grassless. Short, withered tufts and brush were the only vegetation because the countless lambs had devoured everything else. It was obvious that the soreplagued little things had suffered and were still suffering a great deal. Strangely, all sported thick, long horns like those of old rams, tipped with an appendage in the shape of an S.

Puzzled and perplexed at this sight, I could not believe that such little lambs could have so quickly consumed their feed and could already sport such thick, long horns.

"How is it," I asked the shepherd, "that these little lambs have such horns?"

"Take a close look," he replied.

I did and was surprised to see the figure 3 all over their bodies: back, neck, head, snout, ears, legs, hoofs.

"What's this?" I exclaimed. "I don't understand."

"I'll tell you! This great plain is the world. The lush meadows symbolize the Word of God and His grace. The parched and barren areas are the places where people don't listen to the Word of God and only aim at pleasing the world. The sheep are the adults; the lambs are the youngsters. For these God has sent Don Bosco. This area of the plain is the Oratory; the lambs are your boys. The parched soil represents the state of sin; horns symbolize dishonor; the letter S stands for scandal. Scandal-giving is the cause of these boys' perdition. Those with broken horns once gave scandal but do not do so now. The figure 3 stands for their triple punishment—spiritual, moral and material famine: spiritual famine by the lack of spiritual aid they will seek in vain; moral famine by being deprived of God's Word; material famine by the lack of food. Having devoured all their pasture, the lambs have nothing left but dishonor and the three famines. This scene also shows the present pitiful state of so many boys in the world; at the Oratory, at least, even the unworthy have something to eat."

While I listened and in bewilderment observed everything that was pointed out to me, a new wonder took place. All the lambs reared up on their hind legs, grew tall, and turned into boys. I got closer to see if I knew any of them. All were Oratory boys. Very many I had never before seen, but all claimed to be Oratory pupils. Among those I did not know were also a few who are now here. They never let themselves be seen by Don Bosco, never ask his advice, always dodge him. They are the boys Don Bosco does not know. But the greatest majority by far comprised boys who will come to the Oratory in the future.

As I sadly eyed that multitude, my guide took my hand and said, "Come, I'll show you something else." He led me to a far corner of the valley where hillocks and a thick hedge of dense foliage enclosed a vast, luxuriant meadow covered by patches of aromatic herbs of all kinds and dotted with wild flowers

and shady groves through which limpid streamlets made their way.

Here I found a multitude of very happy youngsters. Using the meadow's flowers, they had fashioned or were still making themselves very beautiful robes.

"At least you have these boys to console you," my guide remarked.

"Who are they?"

"Boys in the state of grace."

I can truthfully say that never had I seen anything or anyone so beautiful beyond compare! Never could I have imagined such splendor. I will not try to describe what I saw. It defies description. But a more wonderful sight was in store for me. As I was enjoying the vision of those happy boys and noting that many were yet unknown to me, my guide said, "Let's go. I want to show you something that will bring you greater pleasure and comfort."

He took me to another meadow carpeted with flowers prettier and sweeter-scented than those I had just seen. It looked like a royal garden. There were but few lads here, yet they were so extraordinarily handsome and brilliant as to outshine and eclipse those I had shortly before admired. Some of those boys are here now; others are still to come.

"These boys have preserved untainted the lily of purity," my guide explained. "They still wear the spotless robe of innocence."

I stood entranced. Nearly all wore floral wreaths of indescribable beauty. Each flower was a cluster of thousands of tiny, brightly-hued disk florets of unbelievable charm, each with more than a thousand colors. The boys wore an ankle-length garment of dazzling white, embroidered with flowers like those of the crowns. Sparkling light radiated from these flowers to swathe the boys' bodies and reflect its comeliness upon them. In turn, the flowers reflected each other's beauty, those in the crowns mirroring those of the garments, and each throwing back the rays emanating from the others. As the rays of one color hit others of a different color, new rays and new

colors were generated in an endless array of splendor. Never could I imagine such a fascinating, bewildering spectacle in heaven itself!

Yet that is not all. The sparkling flowers of the boys' crowns and dazzling garments were mirrored in the flowers and garments of their companions. Let me add that the brilliant countenance of each boy blended with those of his companions and, in reflection, increased its own intensity a hundredfold, so that those beautiful faces of innocence were clothed in blinding light, each boy mirroring the loveliness of his companions in unspeakable splendor. We call this the "external" glory of the saints. There is no way to describe even faintly each boy's beauty in that ocean of light! I recognized some boys who are now here at the Oratory. Could they see but one-tenth of their present beauty, I am sure that they would endure fire and torture or the cruelest martyrdom rather than lose it.

Once I could tear myself away from this heavenly vision, I asked my guide, "Are these the only ones who never lost God's grace?"

"Well," he replied, "don't you think that their number is quite large? Furthermore, lads who have lost their baptismal innocence can still follow their companions along the way of penance. Look at that meadow; it still boasts of many flowers. They too can be woven into most beautiful crowns and garments, and the boys can join their companions in the glory of heaven."

"What other suggestion can you give my boys?" I asked.

would make every sacrifice to preserve it. Tell them to be brave and to practice this fair virtue, which overrides all others in beauty and splendor. The chaste are lilies growing in God's sight.

I walked toward the boys to mingle among them, but I stumbled against something and awoke to find myself in bed.

My dear sons, are you all innocent? Perhaps a few of you are. To them I say: for heaven's sake, never lose such a priceless gem! It is a treasure worth God Himself. If you could only

have seen how beautiful those boys were with their crowns! I would have given anything in the world to prolong the enjoyment of that spectacle. If I were a painter, I would consider it a rare privilege to be able to paint what I saw. Could you but know how beautiful innocence is in a lad, you would undergo the most painful ordeal and death itself in order to safeguard that treasure. Though I was profoundly comforted by the number of those who had returned to the state of grace, I still wished that it might have been greater. I was also very much surprised to see that some boys who here appear to be good wore long, thick horns.

Don Bosco ended his narrative with a warm exhortation to those who had lost their innocence to strive earnestly to regain it by penance. Two days later, on June 18, after night prayers, Don Bosco gave more explanations of his dream:

There should be no further need of explaining, but I will repeat some things I have said. The great plain is the world, particularly the places and states of life from which you were called to come here. The area where the lambs grazed symbolizes the Oratory, and they are its past, present, and future pupils. The arid, the fertile, and the flowery meadows represent the state of sin, of grace, and of innocence. Horns stand for scandal; broken horns symbolize an end to scandal-giving. The figure 3 on every lamb stands for the three punishments that God will inflict upon those boys: famine of spiritual aid, famine of religious instruction and of God's Word, and famine of material food. The boys radiating light are those in the state of grace, particularly those still retaining their baptismal innocence. What glory awaits them!

Let us then, dear boys, bravely practice virtue. Those lads in the state of sin must do their utmost to start a new life and, with God's help, persevere till death. If we cannot all join the innocent ones around the Immaculate Lamb, let us at least follow along after them.

One boy asked me if he was among the innocent ones. I told him no, but that his horns were broken off. He also asked if he had any sores, and I said yes.

“What do you mean?” he insisted.

“Don’t worry,” I replied. “They are dried up and will disappear. They are no longer a dishonor. They are like the scars of a soldier who, regardless of his many wounds, was still able to overcome his enemy. They are marks of glory. But, yet, it is more glorious to come away from the combat unscathed. To achieve this is truly admirable!”

In the course of his explanation, Don Bosco also said that before long there would be an epidemic, a famine, and a lack of means to do good to ourselves. He predicted that within three months something would happen. This dream was as impressive and effective as others in the past.

(MB IT VIII 839-845 / MB EN VIII 360-364)

The Little Lambs and the Summer Storm (1878)

The dreamlike tale that follows, recounted by Don Bosco on the evening of 24 October 1878, is far more than just simple evening entertainment for the young people of the Oratory. Through the delicate image of lambs caught in a violent summer storm, the saintly educator paints a vivid allegory of school holidays: a seemingly carefree time, but one fraught with spiritual dangers. The inviting meadow represents the outside world, the hailstones symbolise temptations, while the protected garden alludes to the safety offered by a life of grace, the sacraments, and the educational community. In this dream, which becomes a catechism, Don Bosco reminds his boys – and us – of the urgency to be vigilant, to seek divine help, and to support each other in order to return to daily life unscathed.

No information has been left us about the boys' leaving for their fall vacation and their return, save for a dream which Don Bosco had concerning the effects of vacation. He narrated it after night prayers on October 24 to an audience which became excited the moment he mentioned it.

I am glad to see that my army of soldiers *contra diabolum* [against the devil] has returned-he began. This is Latin, but even Cottino 12 understands it! I have lots of things to tell you since this is the first chance I've had to talk to you after your vacation, but let me just tell you a dream. You know that dreams come in sleep and don't have to be believed. However, just as there is nothing wrong in disbelieving them, sometimes there is no harm in believing them, and they can teach things. So, too, this dream.

I was at Lanzo during the first spiritual retreat, when I dreamed one night that I was in some unknown region, but near a village which had a fine garden and an adjacent huge meadow. Some friend I was with told me to go into the garden. I did so and there I saw a numerous flock of lambs cavorting and prancing about. The sheepgate leading into the meadow was open, and the lambs scampered out to graze.

Many, however, remained inside browsing here and there, though the pasture was nowhere as abundant as in the meadow where most of the lambs had gone. "Let me see what those lambs are up to over there," I said. We went and saw that they were all quietly grazing. Suddenly the sky darkened, flashed with lightning and rolled with thunder.

"What will happen to all those poor little things if they are caught in the storm?" I asked. "Let's get them under a shelter." We all spread out and tried to herd them together toward the sheepgate, but they kept dodging us and their legs were a lot swifter than ours. Meanwhile, rain began to fall in heavy drops, and soon came a downpour. I could not herd the lambs

together. One or two did find their way into the garden, but the rest, the greater number, remained in the meadow. "Well," I said, "if they won't come back, all the worse for them! Let's go." And we returned to the garden.

There stood a fountain bearing an inscription in black capitals: FONS SIGNATUS [Sealed Fountain]. It was covered, but now it opened, and as the water shot high into the air, it sprayed out and formed a rainbow vault over us, something like this arch.

Meanwhile, the lightning and thunder grew worse, and hailstones began to pelt us. With the young lambs that had come into the garden, we took shelter beneath that arching vault which shielded us from rain and hail.

"What's this all about?" I kept asking my friends. "What will become of those poor little lambs out there?"

"You will see!" they answered. "Look at the foreheads of these lambs."

I did so and read on each the name of an Oratory boy.

"What does it mean?"

"You shall see!"

Too impatient to wait, I decided to dash out and find out what had happened to the lambs outside. I will gather those that were killed and send them back to the Oratory, I thought to myself. As soon as I left the rainbow shelter I was deluged with rain. There, on the ground, were those poor lambs struggling in vain to raise themselves and limp toward the garden. I opened the gate and shouted to them, but they were too weak. Rain and hail kept pelting them so hard that they were truly a pitiful sight, wounded in the head or eyes or legs and other parts of their bodies.

The storm gradually spent itself.

"Look at their foreheads," someone at my side told me.

I did. Again, each forehead bore the name of an Oratory boy. "Why," I

cried, "know these boys but they do not look like lambs."

"You will see," was the reply I got. Then he handed me a golden jar covered with a silver lid.

"Apply this ointment to the wounds of these lambs," he told me, "and they will instantly be healed."

I called out to them, but none of them stirred. Again and again I called, but they would not budge. I stepped toward one of them, but it dragged itself away. "Well, so much the worse for you," I exclaimed and turned to another, but that too dragged itself away. And so it was with every lamb I tried to reach. Finally, I managed to get close to one lamb whose badly battered eyes were protruding from their sockets. It was a pitiful sight. I touched it, and the lamb, instantly healed, skipped off into the garden.

On seeing that, many other lambs allowed me to heal them, and they too scampered back into the garden. Still, many stayed outside, the most battered of them all, but I could not get near them.

"If they do not want to be healed, they can only blame themselves," I said, "but how can I heard them back into the garden?"

"Leave them alone," a friend told me. "They will come back."

"Let's wait and see," I replied and, returning the gold jar, I went back to the garden. It was completely changed. Over the gate I read the word

"Oratory." As soon as I stepped in, the lambs that had formerly avoided me now inched forward and entered the garden stealthily, quickly squatting anywhere. But even then I couldn't get close to them. A few reluctantly let me rub the ointment on them, but it turned into poison on

them and reopened their wounds.

At this point one of my friends said, "Do you see that banner?"

I turned around to where he was pointing and saw a large banner in the air, blazoned with the word "VACATION" in tall letters.

"Yes," I answered.

"ll this happened during vacation," one of my friends told me, as I bewailed the destruction, beside myself with grief. "Your boys leave the Oratory honestly intent upon avoiding sin and being good, but no sooner come storm and rain-signs of the devil's temptations and assaults and the pelting hail than the poor little wretches fall into sin. Some recover through a good confession. Others receive the sacrament carelessly or avoid it altogether. Bear this in mind: never tire of reminding your boys that a vacation is a devastating tempest for their souls."

Gazing at those lambs again, I noticed that some were dying of their wounds. Just as I sought ways to heal them, Father Scappini, who was then getting out of bed next door, made some noise and I too awoke.

And this was my dream. Even though it is only a dream, it carries a message which will not harm those who accept it. I can also say that, as I matched the names of the lambs' foreheads with the boys being identified, I could agree that they were really behaving as did the lambs of my dream. Be that as it may, however, let us accept God's mercy and heal our wounds by a good confession during this novena in honour of All Saints. We are all to be determined to wage war against the devil. With God's help, we shall win and will one day receive the heavenly crown of victory.

Doubtless this dream effectively helped give the

new school year a good start. Everything was moving along so smoothly during the novena of the Immaculate Conception that Don Bosco remarked with warm satisfaction, "The boys have already reached a point which they would have barely attained in February in past years. "On the feast of the Immaculate Conception they once more witnessed the inspiring farewell ceremony of the fourth missionary expedition.

(MB XIII 761-764 / BM XIII 584-587)

Visiting Rome with Don Bosco. Chronicle of his first trip to Rome

The first time Don Bosco went to Rome was in 1858, from February 18 to April 16, accompanied by the twenty-one-year-old cleric Michele Rua. Four years earlier, the Church had celebrated an extraordinary six-month Jubilee, called on the occasion of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854). Don Bosco seized the opportunity of this great spiritual feast to publish the volume "The Jubilee and Devotional Practices for Visiting Churches".

During what would be his first of twenty visits to the Eternal City, Don Bosco behaved like a true Jubilee pilgrim, fervently dedicating himself to the visits and devotions planned, even participating in the solemn Easter rites officiated by the Pope. It was an intense experience that he did not keep to himself but shared with his young people with the enthusiasm and educational passion that characterised him.

In giving a detailed description of his journey, the stages,

and the sacred places, Don Bosco had a clear apostolic and educational intent: to make those who listened to or read him relive the same profound experience of faith, transmitting to them love for the Church and for the Christian tradition.

We now invite you, readers, to spiritually join Don Bosco, ideally retracing the paths of Christian Rome, to let yourselves be captivated by his zeal and enthusiasm and, together, renew your faith.

To Genoa by train

The departure for Rome was set for the 18th of February 1858. That night, almost a foot of snow fell on top of the two that already covered the ground. At half past eight, while it was still snowing, with the emotions of a father leaving his children, I said goodbye to the young people to begin my journey to Rome. Although we were somewhat in a hurry to arrive on time for the train, we lingered a bit longer to write up a will. I did not want to leave any pending matters at the Oratory in case Providence wanted to give us up to the fish of the Mediterranean [...] Then we hurried to the train station and, together with Fr. Mentasti [...], we left by train at ten in the morning.

An unpleasant incident occurred here: the carriages were almost full, so I had to leave Rua and Fr. Mentasti in one compartment and find a place in another [...]

The Jewish boy

I happened to be near a ten-year-old boy. Noticing his simple appearance and kind face, I started talking to him and [...] I realised he was Jewish. The father, who was sitting next to him, assured me that his son was in the fourth grade, but his education seemed to me to be second grade at the most. However, he was quick-witted. The father was pleased that I questioned him. Indeed, he invited me to have him talk about the Bible. So, I began to ask him about the creation of the world and man, about the Garden of Eden, about the fall of the ancestors. He answered quite well, but I was amazed when I

realised that he had no idea of original sin and the promise of a Redeemer.

– *Isn't there the promise of God to Adam when He cast him out of Paradise in your Bible?*

– *No, you tell me, he replied.*

– *Right away. God said to the serpent: since you have deceived the woman, you will be cursed among all animals, and One, who will be born of a woman, will crush your head.*

– *Who is this One being spoken of?*

– *He is the Saviour who would free mankind from the slavery of the devil.*

– *When will he come?*

– *He has already come, and He is the One we call... Here the father interrupted us, saying:*

– *We do not study these things because they do not concern our law.*

– *You would do well to study them, because they are in the books of Moses and the prophets whom you believe.*

– *Alright, said the other, I will think about it. Now ask him something about arithmetic.*

Seeing that he did not want me to talk to him about religion, we conversed about pleasant things, so that the father, the son, and even the other travellers began to enjoy themselves and laugh heartily. At the Asti station, the boy had to get off, but he couldn't bring himself to leave me. He had tears in his eyes, held my hand, and, moved, could only say to me:

– *My name is Priest Leone of Moncalvo; remember me. When I come to Turin, I hope to be able to visit you.* The father, to ease the emotion, said that he had searched for the "**History of Italy**" [written by me] in Turin. Not having found it, he asked me to send him a copy. I promised to send the one printed especially for the youth, then I also got off to look for my companions to see if there was room in their compartment. I found Rua, whose jaws were tired from yawning, as he had been very bored from Turin to Asti, not knowing with whom to strike up a conversation: his travel companions spoke only of dances, theatre, and other trivial matters [...]

Towards Genoa

We arrived at the Apennines. They rose before us, very high and steep. Since the train was travelling at high speed, we had the impression we were going to crash against the rocks, until suddenly it became dark in the train. We had entered the tunnels. These are "holes" that, passing under the mountains, save several tens of miles [...] Without tunnels, it would be impossible to cross them, and since there are many mountains, there are several tunnels. One of them is as long as the distance between Turin and Moncalieri. Here the train remained in the dark for eight minutes: the time necessary to travel the stretch of the tunnel.

We were surprised to find that the snow decreased as we approached the Riviera of Genoa. However, what truly amazed us was when we saw the countryside without a trace of white, the greenish shores, the gardens full of colours, the blooming almond trees, and the peach trees with buds ready to open to the sun! Then, comparing Turin and Genoa, we said that in this season, Genoa is spring and Turin the harshest winter.

The two mountaineers

I forgot to mention two mountaineers who got into our compartment at the Busalla station. One was pale and sickly to the point of pity, while the other had a healthy and lively appearance, and although he was nearly seventy, he showed the vigour of a twenty-five-year-old. He wore short trousers and his gaiters were almost unbuttoned, so much so that he showed his bare legs up to the knee, whipped by the cold. He was in a shirt with just a sweater and a coarse cloth jacket thrown over his shoulders. After getting him to talk about various topics, I said to him:

– *Why don't you adjust these clothes to protect yourselves from the cold?* He replied:

– *You see, dear sir, we are mountaineers, and we are used to the wind, rain, snow, and ice. We hardly even notice the winter season. Our boys walk barefoot in the snow. In fact,*

they have fun without minding the cold. From this, I understood that man lives by habits, and the body is capable of enduring either cold or heat depending on the circumstances, and those who want to shield themselves from every little discomfort, risk weakening their condition instead of strengthening it.

The Genoese stop

So, here is Genoa, here is the sea! Rua is restless to see it, stretching his neck. He notices a ship here, and there some boats, further down the lantern which is a very tall lighthouse. In the meantime, we arrive at the station and get off the train. Abbot Montebruno's brother-in-law was waiting for us with some young people, and as soon as we got on the ground, they welcomed us joyfully. Carrying our luggage, they took us to the work of the *Artigianelli*, which is a house similar to our Oratory. The conversation was brief since we were all very hungry. It was half-past three in the afternoon, and I had only had a cup of coffee. At the table, it seemed that nothing could satisfy us, yet by force of swallowing, the sack filled up.

Right after, we visited the house: schools, dormitories, workshops. It seemed to me like the Oratory of ten years ago. There were twenty boarders, while another twenty, although eating and working here, slept elsewhere. What was their food? For lunch, a good plate of soup, then... nothing else. For dinner, a small loaf that was eaten standing up, then off to bed!

At the end, we went out for a walk in the city which, to be honest, was not very attractive, although it had magnificent palaces and large shops. The streets were narrow, winding, and steep. But the most annoying thing was a bothersome wind that, blowing almost without interruption, took away the pleasure of admiring anything, even what was most beautiful [...]

In short, our expectations in Genoa were not met. As if that were not enough, the headwinds prevented the docking of the

ship on which we were to embark, so, much to our disappointment, we had to wait until the next day [...] In the morning, I said Mass in the church of the Dominican Fathers at the altar of **Blessed Sebastiano Maggi**, a friar who lived about three hundred years ago. His body is a continued miracle, as it remains whole, flexible, and with a colour that makes you think he died just a few days ago [...] Then we went to validate, that is, sign our passports. The papal consul welcomed us very courteously [...] He also tried to get us a discount on the boat, but it was not possible.

To Civitavecchia by sea. Boarding

At six-thirty in the evening, before heading to the steamboat called Aventino, we said goodbye to several clergy, who had come from the *Artigianelli* to wish us a good trip. Even the boys, attracted by the noble words, but above all by some extra courses at that day's lunch, had also become our friends and seemed to feel sorry to see us leave. Several of them accompanied us to the sea, then, nimbly jumping onto a small boat, wanted to escort us to the steamboat. The wind was very strong: unaccustomed to traveling by sea, with every movement of the boat, we feared capsizing and sinking, and our escorts laughed heartily. After twenty minutes, we finally arrived at the ship.

At first glance, it seemed to us like a palace surrounded by waves. We boarded, and after bringing our luggage to a rather spacious accommodation, we sat down to rest and think. Each of us felt particular sensations that we did not know how to express. Rua observed everything and everyone in silence. Then the first hitch occurred: having arrived at lunchtime, we did not go to eat right away. When we did request it, everything was finished. Rua had to have dinner with an apple, a small loaf, and a glass of Bordeaux wine, while I settled for a piece of bread and a bit of that excellent wine. It is worth noting that when traveling by ship, meals are included in the ticket, so whether you eat or not, you pay all the same.

Afterwards, we went up on deck to see what this "Aventino" was like. We learned that ships are named after the most famous places of the areas they head to. One is called Vatican, another Quirinal, another Aventino, like ours, to remember the famous seven hills of Rome. This ship of ours departs from Marseille, touches Genoa, Livorno, Civitavecchia, then continues to Naples, Messina, and Malta. On the way back, it repeats the same route back to Marseille. It is also called a *postal boat* because it carries letters, packages, etc. Regardless of whether the weather is good or bad, it departs anyway.

Seasickness

They had assigned us a bunk, which is a kind of shelf where passengers lie down on a mattress in each compartment. At ten o'clock, the anchors were raised, and the boat, propelled by steam and favourable winds, began to speed towards Livorno. When we were at sea, I was overcome by seasickness that tormented me for two days. This discomfort consists of frequent vomiting, and when there is nothing left to expel, the vomiting becomes more violent, so much so that the person becomes so exhausted that they refuse any food. The only thing that can provide some relief is to lie down and, when the vomiting allows it, to stay with the body fully stretched out.

Livorno

The night of February 20 was bad. We were not in danger from the rough sea, but seasickness had prostrated me so much that I could not lie down or stand. I threw myself down from the bunk and went to see if Rua was dead or alive. However, he only suffered a bit of fatigue, nothing else. He immediately got up and made himself available to alleviate my discomfort during the crossing. When God willed, we arrived at the port of Livorno. By port, we mean a bay of the sea sheltered from the fury of the winds by natural barriers or man-made bastions. Here ships are safe from all danger. Here they unload their goods and load others for different destinations.

Here they do their restocking. Passengers who wish can also go ashore for a stroll in the city as long as they return on time [...]

Although I wanted to go ashore to visit the city, say Mass, and greet some friends, I could not do so. In fact, I was forced to return to my bunk and stay there quietly, without food. A waiter named Charles looked at me with pity and every now and then came close to offer me his services. Seeing him so kind and courteous, I began to converse with him, and among other things, I asked him if he was not afraid of being ridiculed for assisting a priest under the gaze of so many people.

– *No*, he told me in French, *as you see, no one is amazed, on the contrary, everyone looks at you kindly, showing a desire to help you. Moreover, my mother taught me to have great respect for priests to earn the blessing of the Lord.* Charles then went to call a doctor: every ship has its doctor and the main remedies for any need. The doctor came, and his pleasant manners lifted my spirits somewhat.

– *Do you understand French?* He asked me. I replied:

– I understand all the languages of the world, even those that are not written, even the language of the deaf-mutes. I joked to wake myself from the drowsiness that had taken hold of me. He understood and began to laugh.

– *Peut être, perhaps!* he said while examining me. In the end, he announced that the seasickness had been associated by a fever and that a cup of tea would do me good. I thanked him and asked for his name.

– *My name, he said, is Jobert from Marseille, doctor of medicine and surgery.* Charles, attentive to the doctor's orders, quickly prepared a cup of tea for me, then shortly after another, then another again. And it did me good, so much so that I managed to fall asleep.

At five o'clock [in the afternoon], the boat raised its anchor. When we were back at sea, I had even more violent bouts of nausea, remaining agitated for about four hours, then

given my exhaustion – I had nothing left in my stomach – and assisted by the rolling of the ship, I fell asleep and rested peacefully until we arrived in Civitavecchia.

Paying, paying, paying

The night's rest restored my strength. Although exhausted from the long fast, I got up and prepared my luggage. We were about to disembark when we were informed of a debt we did not know we had incurred. Coffee was not included with the meals but had to be paid separately, and we, who had taken four cups, paid an extra two francs, that is, fifty cents per cup.

Once out passports had been stamped, the captain handed us the disembarkation permit. This is when the theory of tips kicked in: one franc each for the boatmen, half a franc for the luggage (which we carried), half a franc for customs, half a franc for whoever invited us into a carriage, half for the porter who arranged the luggage, two francs for the visa on the passport, one and a half francs for the papal consul. As soon as we opened our mouths, we had to pay. With the addition that, since the name and value of the coins varied, we had to trust those who exchanged them for us [...] At customs, they respected a package addressed to Cardinal Antonelli with the papal seal, in which we had placed the most important things [...]

After the procedures were completed, I went to the barber to shave off a ten-day beard. Everything went well, but in the shop, I could not take my eyes off two horns on a small table. They were about a meter long and adorned with shiny rings and ribbons. I thought they were destined for some special use, but they told me they were from a heifer, which we call ox, placed there only for decoration [...]

Towards Rome by carriage

Meanwhile, Don Mentasti was in a fury because he did not see us arrive, while the carriage was already waiting for us. We started to run to arrive on time. Once in the carriage, we set off for Rome. The distance to cover was 47 Italian miles,

which corresponds to 36 Piedmontese miles, and the road was very beautiful. We had taken a seat in the coupe from where we could contemplate the green meadows and flowering hedges. A curiosity amused us quite a bit. We noticed that everything was in threes: the horses of our carriage were harnessed in threes. We encountered patrols of soldiers going in threes. Even some farmers walked in threes, as did some cows and donkeys grazing in threes. We laughed at these strange coincidences [...]

A pause for the horses

At Palo, the coachman granted the travellers an hour of freedom to have the time to refresh the horses. We used it to run to the nearby inn to satisfy our hunger. The affairs had almost made us forget to eat. Since noon on Friday, I had only had a cup of coffee with milk. We gathered around the sandwiches and ate, or rather, devoured everything. Upon seeing the waiter all exhausted and pale, I asked him what was wrong.

– *I have a fever that has been afflicting me for many months*, he replied. I then played the good doctor:

– *Leave it to me, I will prescribe a remedy that will chase the fever away forever. Just have faith in God and Saint Louis*. Taking a piece of paper with a pencil, I wrote my prescription, recommending him to take it to a pharmacist. He was beside himself with joy, and not knowing how to better show his gratitude, he kept kissing my hand, and he also wanted to kiss Rua's, who, out of modesty, did not allow him to.

The encounter with a papal police officer was also pleasant. He thought he knew me, and I believed I knew him, so we both greeted each other with great joy. When we realised the misunderstanding, the friendship and expressions of goodwill and respect continued. To please him, I had to allow him to pay for a cup of coffee, and I offered him a small glass of rum. Then, having asked me to leave him some memento, I gave

him the medal of Saint Louis Gonzaga. The name of that good officer was Pedrocchi.

In the city of the popes

Back again in the carriage and moving faster due to desire rather than from the horses' legs, every moment it seemed to us that we were in Rome. As night fell, every time we spotted a bush or a plant in the distance, Rua would immediately exclaim:

– *There is the dome of St. Peter's*. However, to arrive we had to travel until ten-thirty in the evening, and being the middle of the night, we could no longer see any details. However, we got a certain thrill at the thought that we were entering the holy city. [...] Finally arriving at the stopping point, not having any knowledge of the place, we sought a guide, who for twelve *baiocchi*, accompanied us to De Maistre's house, on Via del Quirinale 49, at the Four Fountains. It was already eleven o'clock. We were kindly welcomed by the Count and Countess. The others were already in bed. After taking a bit of refreshment, we said goodnight and went to sleep.

Saint Carlino

The part of the Quirinal where we lived is called [Four Fountains](#) because four perennial fountains spring from four corners of four districts that meet here. In front of the house where we had taken residence there was the church of the Carmelites. Being all Spaniards, they belonged to the order called the *Redemption of Captives*. The church was built in 1640 and dedicated to [St. Carlino](#), but to distinguish it from others dedicated to the same saint, it was called St. Charles. Going to the sacristy, we showed the *Celebret* (the document to celebrate, *editor's note*) and thus we were able to say mass. [...] We spent the day almost entirely organising our papers, running errands, delivering letters [...]

The Pantheon

Taking advantage of an hour that remained before nightfall, we went to the [Pantheon](#), which is one of the oldest and most

famous monuments in Rome. It was commissioned by Marcus Agrippa, the son-in-law of Caesar Augustus, twenty-five years before the common era (from the birth of Christ, *editor's note*). It is believed that this building was called Pantheon, which means *all the gods*, because it was in fact dedicated to all the deities. The façade is truly superb. Eight large columns support an elegant cornice. Just after it, there is a portico formed by sixteen columns made from a single block of granite, then the pronaos, or entrance, consisting of four fluted pillars, within which are niches that were once occupied by the statues of Augustus and Agrippa.

Inside, there is a high dome with an opening in the centre, through which light enters, but also wind, rain, and snow when it falls in this area. Here, the most precious marble serve as flooring or as decoration all around. The diameter is one hundred thirty-three feet, corresponding to eighteen *trabucchi* (approximately 55 metres). This temple served the worship of the gods until 608 AD, when Pope Boniface IV, so as to prevent the disorder that occurred during sacrifices, dedicated it to the worship of the true God, that is, to all the saints.

This church was subject to many events. When Boniface IV obtained this place from Emperor Phocas and dedicated it to the worship of God and the Madonna, he had twenty-eight carts of relics transported from various cemeteries, which he placed under the main altar. From then on, it began to be called *Santa Maria ad Martyres*. Among the things we greatly appreciated there was the visit to the tomb of the great Raphael [...] Now this church is also called the *Rotunda*, from the shape of its construction. In front, there is a square whose centre is occupied by a large marble fountain, topped by four dolphins from which water continuously springs.

Saint Peter in Chains

On February 23rd [...] we were very pleased with the visit to [St. Peter in Chains](#), a church south of Rome on the city's

border. It was a memorable day because it coincided with one of the rare occasions when the [chains of St. Peter](#) were displayed, the keys of which are kept by the Holy Father himself.

Tradition holds that it was St. Peter himself who erected the first church here, dedicating it to the Saviour. Destroyed in the fire of Nero, it was rebuilt by St. Leo the Great in 442 and dedicated to the first Pope. It was called St. Peter in Chains because that is where the Pope placed the chain with which the Prince of the Apostles had been chained in Jerusalem by order of Herod. The Patriarch Juvenal had given it to the Empress Aelia Eudocia, who in turn sent it to Rome to her daughter Eudoxia, wife of Valentinian III. In Rome, the chain to which St. Peter was chained in the Mamertine prison was also kept. When St. Leo wanted to compare this chain with that of Jerusalem, the two chains miraculously joined together, so that today they form one single chain, which is kept in a special altar beside the sacristy. We had the consolation of touching those chains with our hands, kissing them, putting them around our necks, and bringing them to our foreheads. We also carefully checked to see if we could discern the point of union of the two, but it was not possible. We could only ascertain that the chain of Rome is smaller than that of Jerusalem.

At St. Peter in Chains there is the magnificent **tomb of Julius II** [...] It is one of the masterpieces of the famous Michelangelo Buonarroti, who is considered one of the greatest artists of marble, especially for the [statue of Moses](#) placed near the urn. The patriarch is depicted with the tablets of the law held under his right arm, in the act of speaking to the people whom he looks at fiercely, because they had rebelled. The church has three naves, separated by twenty columns of Parian marble, and two of well-preserved granite.

St. Louis of the French

Around nine o'clock we went to [Santa Maria sopra Minerva](#),

where we were received in a private audience by Cardinal Gaude for about an hour and a half. He spoke to us in the Piedmontese dialect, showing interest in our oratories [...] After noon we went to visit Marquis Giovanni Patrizi [...] In front of his palace is the [church of St. Louis of the French](#), which gives its name to the square and the nearby district. It is a well-kept church enriched with many precious marble objects. Its uniqueness lies in the tombs of illustrious Frenchmen who died in Rome. In fact, the floor and the walls are covered with epitaphs and plaques. [...]

St. Mary Major at the Esquiline Hill

From the Quirinal, a road leads to the Esquiline Hill, named for the many elms that once covered it. At the highest point stands [St. Mary Major](#), whose origin is narrated by all sacred historians. A certain Giovanni, a Roman patrician, having no children, wished to use his wealth for some work of piety [...] On the night of August 4, 352, the Madonna appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to raise a temple in the place where he would find fresh snow the next morning. The same vision was experienced by the Pope at that time, Liberius. The following day, word spread that abundant snow had fallen on the Esquiline Hill, so Liberius and Giovanni went there, and upon confirming the miracle, they set to work to carry out the command received in the vision. The Pope marked out the layout of the new temple, which was soon completed with Giovanni's funds. A few years later, Liberius was able to proceed with its consecration [...]

A vast square spreads out in front of the church, at the centre of which stands the ancient white marble column taken from the Temple of Peace. In 1614 Pope Paul V provided it with a base and a capital, on which he placed [the statue of the Madonna with Child](#). The architecture of the facade is majestic and is supported by large marble columns that form a spacious vestibule. At the back of it is the statue of Philip IV, King of Spain, who made many donations in favour of this church and

wished to be inscribed among the canons. The floor is made of precious mosaic worked with various types of marble, all of incalculable value.

The chapel to the right of the main altar houses the **tomb of St. Jerome**, the [cradle of the Saviour](#), and the **altar of Pope Liberius**. The papal altar is covered with precious porphyry marble and supported by four gilded bronze putti. Below it opens the **Confession**, which is a chapel dedicated to St. Matthias. We went to visit it on the day of the Lenten station, so we were fortunate to find the **head of St. Matthias** displayed above a rich altar. We observed it closely and noticed the skin attached to the head, in fact there is still some hair still attached to the venerated skull.

The Virgin and the Plague

In the chapel to the left of the altar it is possible to observe [a painting of the Virgin attributed to Saint Luke](#), highly venerated by the people. The image was highly esteemed by the popes. Saint Gregory the Great brought it in procession to the Vatican during the terrible plague of 590. It was April 25. When the procession reached the vicinity of Hadrian's mole, an angel was seen sheathing his sword, thus indicating the end of the plague. In memory of this miracle, Hadrian's mole was named [Castel Sant'Angelo](#), and since then the procession has been repeated every year on the feast day of Saint Mark the Evangelist. In Saint Mary Major everything is majestic and grand, however speaking or writing about it are not enough to describe it truthfully. Those who see it with their own eyes gaze in wonder in every corner.

Today, here in Rome every Ash Wednesday fasting is observed, which means that not only meat is prohibited, but also any soup or dish made with eggs, butter, or milk. Oil, water, and salt are the condiments used on these Wednesdays. The practice is strictly observed by all classes of people, so much so that in the markets and shops, one cannot find meat, eggs, or butter on that day.

The Legend of Saint Galgano

In the evening, Mrs. De Maistre told us a story worth remembering. She said:

Last year, the general vicar of Siena came to visit us. Among the many things he was accustomed to telling us, he narrated the story of Saint Galgano, the soldier. This saint died centuries ago, and his head remains intact. However, the greatest wonder is that every year his hair is cut, and it imperceptibly grows back to the same length the following year. A Protestant, after hearing this miracle, began to laugh, saying: let me seal the urn where the head is kept, and if the hair grows back, I will recognise the miracle and become Catholic. The matter was reported to the bishop, who replied: I will place the episcopal seals for the authenticity of the relic, and he can place his own to ensure this fact. So this was done. But that gentleman, impatient to see if the miracle began to take place, after a few months asked to open the urn. Imagine his astonishment when he saw that Saint Galgano's hair had already grown as it would have if he were alive! Then it is true! He exclaimed. I will become Catholic. Indeed, the following year on the feast day of the Saint, he and his family renounced Lutheranism and embraced the Catholic religion, which he now professes exemplarily.

St. Pudenziana at the Viminal Hill

From the Four Fountains, one ascends to the Viminal Hill, named so for the many reeds, that is, the rushes, that once covered it. At the foot of this hill, in the house of Pudens, a Roman senator, Saint Peter stayed when he came to Rome. The holy apostle converted his host to the faith and transformed his house into a church. Around 160, Saint Pius I, at the request of the virgins *Pudenziana* and *Prassede*, daughters of the senator Pudens' nephew, consecrated this church, which [...] was later dedicated to Saint Pudenziana because she had lived and died there. Many popes took part in restructuring this place, which contains precious Christian testimonies. The [well of Saint Pudenziana](#) deserves special attention. It is believed

that she buried the bodies of the martyrs in it. At the bottom, one can notice a large number of relics. History has it that it contains the relics of three thousand martyrs.

Next to the main altar, there is an oblong chapel whose altar features a marble group of Jesus handing the keys to Saint Peter. It is believed that this altar is the same one on which Saint Peter celebrated Mass, and on which I myself was able to celebrate with great consolation. Various pieces of sponge are preserved there, the same ones that Pudenziana used to collect the blood from the wounds of the martyrs, or from the earth that was soaked with it.

Continuing towards the left, one arrives at **a chapel where the testimony of a great miracle is preserved**. While celebrating Mass, a priest fell into doubt about the possibility of the true presence of Jesus in the holy host. After the consecration, the host slipped from his hands and fell to the floor, bouncing first on one step and then on another. Where it first struck the marble, it remained almost perforated, while even on the second step, a very deep cavity in the shape of a host was formed. These two marble steps are preserved in that same place, guarded by special gates.

Saint Prassede

From *Saint Pudenziana*, ascending towards the *Esquiline Hill*, not far from Saint Mary Major, there is the [Church of Saint Prassede](#). Around the year 162 AD, on the site where the baths of Novatus were, Saint Pius I erected a church in honour of this virgin, the sister of Novatus, Pudenziana, and Theophilus. The place served as a refuge for early Christians during times of persecution. The Saint, who worked to provide what was needed for the persecuted Christians, also took care to collect the bodies of the martyrs, which she then buried, pouring their blood into the well that stands in the middle of the church. It is richly adorned with precious marble and objects, as are almost all the churches in Rome.

There is also the **chapel of the martyrs Zenon and Valentine**, whose bodies, transported by Saint Paschal I in the year 899, rest beneath the altar. Here, there is also a column of jasper, about three palms high, which a cardinal named Colonna had transported from the Holy Land in the year 1223. It is believed to be the one to which the Saviour was tied during the flagellation.

The Caelian Hill

From the Esquiline Hill looking west, you can see the Caelian Hill. In ancient times, it was called *Querquetulanus* due to the oaks that covered it. Later, it was named Celio after Cele Vilenna, a captain of the Etruscans, who came to aid Rome, and whom Tarquinius Priscus had housed on that hill. The first thing that stands out *is the largest obelisk known to man*. Ramses, the Pharaoh of Egypt, had it erected in Thebes, dedicating it to the sun. Constantine the Great had it transported across the Nile to Alexandria, but, when struck by death, it fell to his son Constantius to bring it to Rome. A vessel with three hundred oars was used for the journey, and it was brought to the city via the Tiber and placed in a location called the Circus Maximus. Here it fell, breaking into three parts. Pope Sixtus V had it restored and raised in the Lateran square in the year 1588. The obelisk reaches a height of 153 Roman feet. It is entirely adorned with hieroglyphics and topped with a tall cross.

To the right of the square is the Baptistery of Constantine with the [Church of St. John in Font](#). It is said to have been built by Constantine on the occasion of the Baptism he received from Pope St. Sylvester in the year 324. From the two attached chapels, one dedicated to St. John the Baptist and the other to St. John the Evangelist, it took the name of the church of St. John in Font. The baptistery, which is a large basin lined with precious marble, is in the middle. The small chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist is believed to be a chamber of Constantine's, converted into an oratory and

dedicated to the holy Precursor by Pope St. Hilarius.

St. John Lateran

Exiting the baptistery and crossing the vast square, one encounters the [Basilica of St. John Lateran](#). This famous building is the first principal church of the Catholic world. On the façade is written: *Ecclesiarum Urbis et Orbis Mater et Caput* (mother and head of all the churches of Rome and the world). It is the seat of the Supreme Pontiff as Bishop of Rome. After his coronation, he solemnly takes possession of it. It was also called the *Constantinian Basilica* because it was founded by Constantine the Great. It was later called the *Lateran Basilica* because it was erected where the palace of a certain Plautius Lateranus stood, who was killed by Nero. It was also called the *Basilica of the Saviour*, following an apparition of the Saviour that occurred during its construction. It is still called the *Golden Basilica* for the precious gifts with which it has been enriched, and *Basilica of St. John* because it is dedicated to Saints John the Baptist and Evangelist.

It was Constantine the Great who had it built near his palace around the year 324. Later expanded with new structures, it was relinquished to the Holy Pontiff. Here the Popes lived until the time of Gregory XI. When he brought the Holy See back from Avignon to Rome, he moved his residence to the Vatican.

In the year 1308, a terrible fire broke out that destroyed it, but Clement V, who was then in Avignon, immediately sent his agents with large sums of money, and it was quickly rebuilt. The portico is supported by twenty-four large pillars. At the back is the statue of Constantine found in his baths at the Quirinal. The large bronze door is of extraordinary height. It was taken from the church of *St. Adrian in the Campo Vaccino* and transported here. It constitutes a rare example of ancient doors called *Quadrifores*, meaning constructed so that they could open in four parts, one at a time without any of

them endangering the stability of the other. On the right, there is a bricked-up door that is opened only in the year of the jubilee and is therefore called the **Holy Door**.

The interior has five naves. The length, height, exquisiteness of the floors, sculptures and paintings are enchanting to see. It would require large volumes to speak of them worthily. **The most significant relics of this church are the heads of the two princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul.** They are kept under the main altar and encased in another golden encasing. There is also a **significant relic of St. Pancras the martyr**, and a **table** is kept there that is thought to be the same one on which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his Apostles.

Exiting the church through the main door and crossing the square, one finds the [Holy Stairs](#), a building that Pope Sixtus V had erected to house the staircase, which was previously in pieces in the old papal palace of the Lateran. It consists of twenty-eight steps of white marble from the praetorium of Pilate in Jerusalem that Jesus ascended and descended several times during His Passion. St. Helena, mother of Constantine, sent them to Rome along with many other things sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. This famous staircase is held in great reverence and therefore it is ascended on one's knees, while descending via one of the four side stairs. These steps have been worn down by the great influx of Christians who have ascended them, so they have been covered with wooden planks. Sixtus V himself also had the famous private chapel of the popes placed at the top of the stairs, which is full of the most significant relics, and is therefore called the **Sancta Sanctorum**.

Vatican City. The construction

The [Vatican hill](#) contains the most excellent pieces in the arts, and most memorable objects in religion. Therefore, we will provide a somewhat more detailed account. It was called Vatican from *Vagitanus*, a deity thought to oversee the *cries* of infants. In fact, the first syllable *Uà* (*waah*,

editor's note) of which the word is composed is also the first cry of children. The hill became renowned when Caligula built the circus that was later named after Nero. Caligula built the Vatican bridge, also called the Triumphal, to cross from the left to the right bank of the Tiber, which no longer exists. Nero's circus began where the church of *St. Martha* is today and extended to the steps of the ancient Vatican basilica. In this circus, [the body of the Prince of the Apostles](#) was buried [...]

The bones of other popes were also buried there including Linus, Cletus, Anacletus, Evaristus, and others. The *Memory of St. Peter*, that is, the small temple built over his tomb, lasted until the time of Constantine, who, at the request of St. Sylvester, around 319, began the construction of a church in honour of the Apostle. It was erected right around that small temple, using material taken from public buildings. The construction was called the *Constantinian Basilica*, and at that time it was considered among the most famous in Christendom. In the middle of that church, shaped like a Latin cross, there was the altar dedicated to St. Peter, under which his body was buried, protected by gates. That space has been called the **Confession of St. Peter** since then. Once the temple was completed and endowed with rich furnishings, Pope Sylvester consecrated it on November 18, 324 [...] The popes that followed adorned and expanded it. For eleven centuries, it was the object of devotion and admiration of Christians who travelled to Rome.

In the 15th century, it began to fall into ruin, so Nicholas V thought to renew it, but he only had the merit of starting the work, as his death caused everything to be suspended. Julius II resumed the construction, changing its name from **Constantinian Basilica** to **St. Peter's in the Vatican**, and laid the first stone on April 18, 1506. The architects were Bramante, later Fra Giocondo Domenico and Raphael Sanzio. After them, the most famous architects and the most sublime

minds of the time worked on it.

The great square

[...] In front of the Basilica a vast square, whose length exceeds half a kilometre, opens up. It is formed by 284 columns and 64 pillars that, arranged in a semicircle on both sides in four rows, form three paths of which the widest, the central one, can allow the passage of two carriages. Above the colonnade there are 96 statues of saints, in marble, about 10 feet tall. In the centre, instead, stands an Egyptian obelisk. It is made from a single piece and is the only one that remains intact. It measures 126 feet in height, including the cross and the pedestal. It has no hieroglyphics. Nuncoreus, King of Egypt, had it erected in Heliopolis, from where it was taken and transported to Rome by Caligula in the 3rd year of his reign. It was placed in the circus built at the foot of the Vatican hill, as evidenced by the inscriptions that can be read there. This circus was called *Nero's* because he frequented it often. Here that cruel emperor slaughtered Christians, accusing them of being the authors of the fire of Rome that he himself had started.

In 1818, a sundial was built in the square. The twelve signs of the zodiac were drawn on the ground. The obelisk served as a gnomon (staff), and with its shadow indicated the stations of the sun. All around, the names of the winds were written in the direction in which each of them blows. On the sides, two identical fountains perpetually spout water from a group of jets that rise even up to sixty feet. The Queen of Scotland, welcomed pompously in this place, looked in wonder at the two fountains thinking they had been made especially for her reception. No, said a gentleman who was beside her, these jets are perennial.

A visit to St. Peter's

Walking towards the facade of the Basilica, one arrives at a magnificent staircase flanked by two statues, one of St. Peter and the other of St. Paul, placed there by the reigning Pius

IX. Having climbed the stairs, one stands before the facade which has this inscription: *In honour of the Prince of the Apostles Paul V Supreme Pontiff in the year 1612, the 7th of his pontificate.* Above the portico extends the great **Loggia of Blessings**. The facade is majestic and imposing. The portico is entirely adorned with marble, mosaic paintings, and other elegant works. At the back of the vestibule on the right, one can observe the beautiful equestrian statue of Constantine in the act of gazing at the miraculous cross that appeared to him in the sky before the final battle with Maxentius.

From the portico, one enters the Basilica through four doors, of which the last on the right is opened only for the Holy Year. The main door is made of bronze, very tall, and it takes many strong arms to open it. The interior presents five naves in addition to the transept that ends with the apse. Curiosity and surprise led us to the middle of the main nave. Here we stopped to admire and reflect without saying a word. It seemed to us to see the celestial Jerusalem. The length of the Basilica is 837 palms; its width is 607. It is the largest temple in all of Christendom. After St. Peter's, the largest is that of St. Paul in London. If we add the Church of St. Paul to that of our Oratory, it forms the exact length of St. Peter.

After being still for some time, we sought the basin of holy water. We spotted two putti, very small at first glance, holding a kind of shell in the first pillar of the Basilica. We were amazed that such a vast church had such a small holy water font. But the amazement turned into surprise when we saw the putti growing larger as we approached. The shell became a vase of about six feet in circumference, and the putti on the sides showed us their hands with fingers as large as our arms. This demonstrates that the proportions of this marvellous building are so well-regulated as to make its vastness less perceptible, which, however, becomes more noticeable when examining each detail. Around the pillars of the main nave,

one can see statues of the founders of religious orders carved in marble.

In the last pillar on the right is the bronze statue of St. Peter, held in great reverence. It was cast by St. Leo the Great from the bronze of that of Jupiter Capitolinus. It recalls the peace that that Pontiff obtained from Attila, who was raging against Italy. The right foot, which protrudes from the pedestal, is worn down by the lips of the faithful who never pass by without kissing it with respect. While we were admiring the statue, the Austrian ambassador in Rome passed by, bowed before the Prince of the Apostles, and kissed his foot.

Naves and chapels

Now let's say something about the minor naves and the chapels found there. In the right one, the first chapel encountered is the Chapel of the **Pietà**. In addition to magnificent mosaics and the statues that adorn it, one admires above the altar the celebrated group sculpted by Michelangelo Buonarroti in white marble when he was only twenty-four years old. It is perhaps the most beautiful sculpture in the world. The same Buonarroti was so pleased with it that he signed it on the belt of Mary's chest.

To the left of the Chapel of the Pietà is the inner chapel dedicated to the **Crucifix** and **St. Nicholas**. From here, one enters the so-called **Chapel of the Holy Column**, where one of the twisted columns that once stood in front of the altar of the **Confession of St. Peter** is preserved, protected by an iron gate. This is the column to which Jesus Christ leaned when he preached in the temple of Solomon. One is marvelled to note that the part touched by the sacred shoulders of the Saviour is never covered in dust, and therefore does not need to be dusted like the rest.

After the Chapel of the Pietà, one encounters the tomb monument of *Leo XII*, erected by Gregory XVI. The Pope is

depicted as he blesses the people from the Loggia above the porch. Around him are the heads of the cardinals assisting at the ceremony. Opposite this tomb is the cenotaph of *Christina Alexandra*, Queen of Sweden, who died in Rome on April 19, 1689. This woman, a Protestant, convinced of the little substance of her religion, had herself instructed in Catholicism and made a solemn abjuration in *Innsbruck* on November 3, 1655. Various bas-reliefs adorning the tomb represent the event.

Next is the **Chapel of St. Sebastian**, also rich in paintings and marble. Exiting to the right, one finds the burial point of *Innocent XII* of the Pignatelli family from Naples. Opposite is the tomb of the famous Countess *Matilda*, a distinguished benefactor of the Church and supporter of papal authority. Urban VIII had her ashes transferred here from the monastery of St. Benedict in Mantua. She was the first of the illustrious women who earned a tomb in the Vatican Basilica. The countess is depicted standing. The tomb is adorned with a bas-relief depicting the absolution granted by Gregory VII to Henry IV, Emperor of Germany, at the request of Matilda and other figures, on January 25, 1077, in the fortress of Canossa.

This brings us to the Chapel of the Sacrament, rich in marble and mosaics. Next to the altar, there is a staircase that leads to the papal palace. This altar is dedicated to *St. Maurice* and his fellow martyrs, the principal patrons of Piedmont. The two twisted columns made from a single piece that adorn the altar are two of the twelve believed to have been brought to Rome from the ancient temple of Solomon. On the floor in front of the altar, the bronze tomb of *Sixtus IV Della Rovere* can be admired. It was executed by order of his nephew Julius II and represents the virtues and knowledge of the deceased. It contains the ashes of the two popes.

When exiting the chapel, to the right is the tomb of *Gregory XIII Buoncompagni*. It is adorned with two

statues: *Religion* and *Fortitude*, while in the centre a large bas-relief represents the reform of the calendar, hence called Gregorian. Here are depicted a number of illustrious figures who played a part in that work, all in the act of venerating the Pope. Opposite, within a stucco urn, rest the bones of *Gregory XIV* of the Sfrondato family. This is where the minor nave ends, and one enters the Greek cross according to Buonarroto's design.

Exiting the nave, to the right is the **Gregorian Chapel**. Above the altar an ancient image of the Madonna from the time of Paschal II is venerated. Below rests the **body of St. Gregory Nazianzen**, transferred by order of Gregory XIII from the church of the nuns of Campo Marzio. Continuing along, one arrives at the tomb monument of *Benedict XIV* Lambertini, erected by the cardinals he created. On either side of the tomb rise two magnificent statues representing *Disinterest* and *Wisdom*, the two most luminous virtues of this pope. The statue of the Pontiff, standing, blesses the people with a majestic gesture. This work is so well executed that merely gazing at the Pope makes one recognise the greatness and elevation of his spirit. Opposite, one recognises the altar of *St. Basil the Great*, with a precious mosaic above it depicting Emperor Valens, who fainted in the presence of the Saint, while watching him celebrate Mass.

Then one reaches the tribune. The first altar on the right is dedicated to *St. Wenceslaus the Martyr*, King of Bohemia. The middle one is consecrated to *Saints Processus* and *Martinian*, guards of the Mamertine prison, converted to the faith by St. Peter when the Apostle was imprisoned there. The structure takes its name from these saints, and their bodies rest beneath the altar. Three precious bas-reliefs represent St. Peter in prison being freed by the Angel (the middle one), St. Paul preaching in the Areopagus (the one on the right), and the third depicts Saints Paul and Barnabas being mistaken for

gods by the inhabitants of Lystra.

Next is the tomb of *Clement XIII* Rezzonico, a sculpture by Antonio Canova. It is a masterpiece. The painting of the altar facing the monument depicts St. Peter in danger of drowning, supported by the Redeemer. Further on is the altar of *St. Michael*, then that of *St. Petronilla*, daughter of St. Peter. This saint is represented in a mosaic that narrates the exhumation of her corpse to show it to Flaccus, a noble Roman, who had asked for her hand in marriage. In the upper part, her soul is depicted praying to die a virgin and her being welcomed by Jesus Christ. Further on, one sees the sarcophagus of *Clement X*, Altieri: the bas-relief represents the opening of the holy door for the Jubilee of 1675. Above the altar is the painting of St. Peter, who at the prayers of a crowd of beggars, raises the widow Tabitha from the dead.

Crossing over two steps of porphyry that were part of the main altar of the ancient basilica, one ascends to the **Altar of the Chair**. A stunning group of four metal statues supports the papal seat. The two in front represent two Latin Fathers, Ambrose and Augustine. The two behind represent the Greek Fathers, Athanasius and John Chrysostom. The weight of these groups amounts to 219,161 pounds of metal. The bronze chair covers, as a precious relic, the wooden one inlaid with various ivory bas-reliefs. This chair belonged to the senator Pudens, who served the Apostle Peter and many other popes after him.

Above the *Altar of the Chair*, as a backdrop, the *Holy Spirit* is depicted on canvas in the middle of coloured and radiant glass, so that to the viewer, it seems there is a shining golden star. Instead, below, to the viewer's left is the magnificent tomb of *Paul III* Farnese, a highly valued monument for its sculptures. The statue of the Pope seated on the urn is made of bronze, while the other two statues, made of marble, represent *Prudence* and *Justice*. Opposite is the tomb of Pope Urban VIII, whose statue is made of

bronze. *Justice* and *Charity* are on either side of him, sculpted in white marble. On the urn, one can see the image of death in the act of writing the Pope's name in a book. Here we interrupted the visit. We were tired. The visit had lasted from eleven in the morning until five in the afternoon.

Rome. St. Mary of Victory

Towards noon looking from the Quirinal, one sees the road of [Porta Pia](#), so named after Pope Pius IV, who carried out several works to beautify it. Along this road, near the fountain of *Acqua Felice*, the [Church of St. Mary of Victory](#) rises to the left, built by Paul V in 1605, and named so for a miraculous image of the Madonna brought there by Father Domenico of the Discalced Carmelites. To this image, or rather to the protection of Mary, Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, owed the great victory achieved in a few days against the Protestants, who with a very large army had turned the Kingdom of Austria upside down. The miraculous image is preserved on the main altar. Banners taken from the enemies hang from the cornices: a glorious monument to the protection of Mary.

In memory of the liberation of Vienna, the feast of the *Name of Mary* was established and is celebrated by all of Christendom on the Sunday within the octave of the birth of Mary. This event occurred on September 12, 1683, during the pontificate of Innocent XI. In this same church, a special solemnity is celebrated on the second Sunday of November in remembrance of the famous victory achieved by Christians against the Turks at *Lepanto* on October 7, 1571, under Pius V. Some banners taken from the Turks are also hung as trophies on the cornice of this church.

In front of St. Mary of Victory is the [Termini fountain](#), called the Fountain of *Moses*, because in a recess there is a statue of Moses who, with a staff in hand, makes water spring from the stone. It is also called *Acqua Felice* after Fra Felice, which was the name of Sixtus V when he was in the convent.

The Tiber Island

In the afternoon, we decided to go with Count De Maistre to visit the great work of *St. Michael* across the Tiber. We therefore had to cross the river at the height of a small island called the Tiber Island or also Lycaonia, from a temple dedicated to Jupiter Lycaonio. This island originated as follows. When Tarquin was expelled from Rome, the Tiber was almost devoid of water, leaving some sandbanks exposed. The Romans, driven by hatred against this king, went into his fields, cut down the grain and spelt that were almost ripe, and threw everything into the Tiber. The straw came to rest on that sand, and as the muddy sand that the water carried flowed, it became consolidated to the point of being cultivable and habitable. On this island, the pagans erected a temple in honour of Asclepius, but in 973, the **body of St. Bartholomew** was transferred there, resting in the urn beneath the main altar.

Crossing the Tiber and continuing towards St. Michael, on the right you come upon the [Church of St. Cecilia](#), built on the site where her house once stood. Urban I consecrated it around the middle of the third century, and Saint Gregory the Great enriched it with many precious objects. Entering on the right is the chapel where Saint Cecilia's bath was, in which it is said she received the mortal blow. The main altar, protected by an iron gate, houses the **body of the saint**. Above the urn is a touching marble sculpture representing her lying down and dressed as she was found in the tomb.

Having arrived at the *St. Michael Hospice*, we had an audience with Cardinal Tosti, who narrated various episodes that happened to him during the republic. He too was forced to live away from the hospice for a while to avoid becoming a victim of some attack. Among the various items stolen in that sad circumstance from this pious cardinal were three very precious snuff boxes, especially for their antiquity and origin. Taken to the members of the triumvirate, Mazzini thought to keep one

for himself and give the other two to his companions. But they did not dare to take them. Mazzini sorted everything out and graciously put all three in his pocket!

The Capitol

Along the way back, halfway along rises the highest hill in Rome, the [Capitol](#), named so from *caput Toli*, the head of Tolo, which was discovered while Tarquin the Proud was levelling the top to build a fortress. We climbed a long staircase at the top of which stand two colossal statues representing Castor and Pollux. The flat area that forms the square was anciently called *inter duos lucos*, because it was situated between the groves that covered the two peaks. Here Romulus had created a refuge for neighbouring peoples who wished to take shelter. Today's Capitol no longer has a warlike grandeur, but it is a majestic square surrounded by buildings that house museums, and where municipal affairs are conducted. In one part of this square stood the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, so named from the weapons of the vanquished that the victors would hang at the altar of that temple.

In the middle of the square stands the **famous equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius** portraying a peacemaker. It is the most beautiful among the oldest bronze statues that have been preserved intact. Part of the large buildings surrounding the square constitutes the senatorial palace, founded by Boniface IX in 1390 on the same ground where the ancient Roman Senate stood. To the side is the Fountain of *Acqua Felice*, adorned by two reclining statues of the Nile and the Tiber. From here, through a small staircase, one reaches the tower of the Capitol, erected in the form of a bell tower on the same site where anciently observers would climb to admire Rome and monitor enemies attempting to approach the city [...]

At the highest part towards the east was the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which was called *Jupiter Optimus, Maximus*, and was erected by Tarquin the Proud on the foundations prepared by Tarquin the Elder, who had made a vow during the war

against the Sabines. Just as the excavation was being done, the *caput Toli* was discovered.

Santa Maria in Aracoeli

Where the **temple of Jupiter Capitolinus** was, now there stands the majestic [church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli](#), built in the 6th century of the common era. For a while it was called *Santa Maria in Campidoglio*, from the place where it stood. It was then called *Aracoeli* from the following fact. After lightning struck the Capitol, Octavian Augustus, fearing some misfortune, sent someone to consult the oracle of Delphi [...] For this event, and for some sayings of the Sibyls regarding the birth of the Saviour, Augustus had an altar erected entitled: *Ara primogeniti Dei*, altar of the firstborn of God. Hence this is where the name Santa Maria in Aracoeli comes from, after a church was erected on the site in honour of the Mother of God. The interior has three naves divided by 22 marble columns that once belonged to the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. The main altar is worthy of special observation, because above it is **an image of Mary** that is venerated, **believed to be by Saint Luke**. During the time of Saint Gregory the Great, it was taken around Rome in procession to obtain liberation from the plague. The event is depicted in a painting on the pillar beside the altar. In the middle of the crossing is the **chapel of Saint Helena**, where the *Ara Primogeniti* was erected. The altar's table is a large porphyry urn, within which the **bodies of Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, and Saints Abundius and Abundantius** are found.

In a room near the sacristy is preserved a **miraculous effigy of the Infant Jesus**. The swaddling clothes that cover him are adorned with precious stones. It is displayed for veneration during the Christmas festivities, in a beautiful nativity scene represented in the church inside a chapel. Along with the Child, the figures of Augustus and the Sibyl are also placed as a reminder of a tradition that states that the Cumaean Sibyl predicted the birth of the Saviour, and

therefore Augustus erected an altar there.

Exiting Aracoeli and heading towards the western part of the Capitol, one encounters the Tarpeian Rock, which occupied the side towards the Tiber, and was named after the Virgin Tarpeia, who was unexpectedly killed there during the war with the Sabines. From the top of this rock, traitors to the homeland were thrown down. Many Christians were martyred here, who, out of hatred for the faith, were thrown down. Nearby was the Curia, and the hut of Romulus, where, it is said, he awaited the response of the vultures [...]

Descending downwards, there is the [Temple of Concord](#), built by Camillus in the year 387 of Rome. [...] Near this temple on the left side of the descent there was that of *Jupiter Tonans*, of which three marble columns remain. It was erected by Augustus on the Capitoline slope and dedicated to Jupiter in gratitude for having escaped the lightning that killed the servant who preceded him.

The Mamertine Prison

On the morning of March 2, together with the De Maistre family, we went to visit the [Mamertine Prison](#), which is at the foot of the Capitol in the western part. This prison got its name from Mamertus, or Ancus Marcius, the 4th king of Rome who had it built to instil terror in the plebeians, thus preventing thefts and murders. Servius Tullius, the 6th king of Rome, added another prison beneath it, which was called Tullian. It has two underground chambers, which in the vault present an opening large enough for a man to pass through. Through it, the condemned were lowered with a rope [...]

Here there is a **water spring** that legend says Saint Peter miraculously caused to flow when he was imprisoned there with Saint Paul. The Prince of the Apostles used this water to baptise the Saints *Processus* and *Martinian*, the guardians of the prison, along with 47 other companions, all of whom died as martyrs. This water has miraculous properties. Its taste is

natural. It never increases or decreases in volume, regardless of how much is drawn from it. Two English gentlemen, almost to mock Catholics, wanted to try to empty the small pit of water that resembles a small vase. They and their friends grew tired, but the water always remained at the same level. Many miraculous healings are reported to have been obtained from its use. Next to the spring is a stone column to which the two princes of the Apostles were tied. Beside the column is a small and low altar where, with great consolation, I celebrated Mass, attended by the De Maistre family and other pious people. Above the altar, a bas-relief represents Paul preaching and Peter baptising the guards [...]

In a corner of the first floor of the prison, on the wall one can see the **imprint of a human face**. It is said that Saint Peter received a strong slap from a henchman, so that when his face struck against the wall, he left the imprint of his face that was miraculously preserved. Above this figure is carved this ancient inscription: *"On this stone Peter struck his head pushed by a henchman and the miracle remains."* A church was built above this prison, and above this another dedicated to Saint Joseph. The confraternity of carpenters is located here. The members gather on holidays, attend sacred functions, and provide for the maintenance of the church and for the cleaning of the prison. In ancient times, to reach the entrance of the prison, one descended through a staircase at the bottom of which was the opening from which the condemned were thrown. Those stairs were called *Gemonian*, from the moaning of the condemned [...]

Vatican City. Jubilee Devotions

March 3 was designated for the visit to Saint Peter's. Leaving home at six-thirty with a cool air that brightened life and quickened our steps, we headed towards the Vatican hill. Arriving at the Aelian Bridge, or Sant'Angelo Bridge, over which one crosses the Tiber, we recited the creed. The Popes grant fifty days of indulgence to those who recite the

Apostles' symbol while passing over this bridge. It is called Aelian from Aelius Hadrian who built it. However, it is also called Sant'Angelo Bridge from Castel Sant'Angelo, which is the first building encountered on the opposite bank.

Let us say something about this castle. Emperor Hadrian wanted to erect a great tomb on the right bank of the Tiber. For its width, length, and height, it was called *Mole Adrianorum*. When Emperor Theodosius had the columns taken from Hadrian's mausoleum to furnish the Basilica of Saint Paul, this construction was left without its upper half and without columns. In the year 537, Belisarius's troops assaulted the Goths to drive them away from Rome, and then almost all the remains of that mausoleum were reduced to pieces. In the 10th century, it was called *Castro and Torre di Crescenzio* from a certain Crescentius the Younger, who took possession of it and fortified it. Shortly after, history gave it the name *Castel Sant'Angelo*, derived perhaps from a church dedicated to the angel Michael [...] However, the most probable opinion remains that which tells of a procession of Saint Gregory the Great to obtain liberation from the plague from the Virgin. On that occasion, an angel appeared on the high summit of the Mole, sheathing his sword, a sign that the scourge was about to cease. Now Castel Sant'Angelo has been reduced to a fortress and is the only one in Rome.

Continuing along our journey, we arrived at the grand Saint Peter's square. Passing in front of the *obelisk*, we removed our hats, because the popes have granted fifty days of indulgence to those who show reverence or uncover their heads while passing near that obelisk, on which a cross has been placed. It holds a piece of the Holy Wood of the Cross of Jesus.

Here we are again in the Vatican Basilica. We had already visited the larger half plus the tribune, which forms a kind of choir to the papal altar, located in the middle of the crossing, opposite the chair of Peter. This choir was erected

by Clement VIII and consecrated by him in the year 1594: it encloses the altar already built by Saint Sylvester. Being the papal altar, only the Pope celebrates there, and when someone else wishes to use it, an apostolic "*Breve*" is required. On four sides rise four large spiral columns that support a baldachin adorned with friezes all in bronze. The height of this baldachin from the floor level equals that of the tallest buildings in Turin.

The tomb of Peter: curiosities of a saint

In front of the papal altar, a double marble staircase descends to the Confession level. At the end of the stairs, there are two columns of alabaster from Orte, a very rare material, transparent like a diamond. One hundred and twelve lamps burn continuously around the venerable site. At the back, a niche opens up, formed on the ancient oratory erected by Saint Sylvester, where Saint Anacletus "*erected a memorial to Saint Peter*". Here lies the **body of the Prince of the Apostles**. On the side walls, two doors equipped with an iron gate lead to the sacred grottos. On November 28, 1822, the marble statue of Pius VI, kneeling in fervent prayer, was placed directly in front of the niche. This is one of the most beautiful works of Antonio Canova. Pius VI used to go during the day and sometimes even at night to the tomb of Saint Peter to pray. In life, he showed a strong desire to be buried there, and upon his death, he wished to have it fulfilled. However, after a shallow excavation, a tomb was discovered with the inscription: *Linus episcopus*. Immediately, everything was put back in place, and the Pope was buried in another corner of the church. In the chosen place, instead of the body, the statue we mentioned was placed. We have seen and touched with our hands how precious everything is here, but we could not see the body of the first pope, because for centuries the tomb has not been opened for fear that someone might attempt to break off some relic.

Above this tomb, a rich altar has been raised: here I had the

consolation of celebrating the holy Mass. This altar, with an attached chapel, receives light from some portholes covered with metal grates. During the construction of the Basilica, a miraculous event occurred, reported by an eyewitness. Before the roof was finished, such heavy rains fell that the waters flooded the Basilica floor up to a foot high. Despite such abundance, the water did not dare to approach the altar of the *Confession*, nor did it descend into the lower oratory through the aforementioned three portholes, because, when coming close, it stopped, remaining suspended so that not even a drop reached that sanctuary to wet it. After observing every object, looking at every corner, the walls, the vaults, the floor, we asked if there was anything else to see.

– *Nothing more, we were told.*

– *But where is the tomb of the Holy Apostle?*

– *Right down below. It is located in the same place it occupied when the ancient basilica was standing [...]*

– *But we would like to see down there.*

– *It is not possible [...]*

– *But the pope said we could see everything. If he were to ask us when we return if we have seen everything, I would regret not being able to answer affirmatively.*

The monsignor [who was accompanying us] sent for some keys and opened a kind of cabinet. Here a cavity opened that descended underground. It was all dark.

– *Are you satisfied?* The monsignor asked me.

– *Not yet, I would like to see.*

– *And how do you want to do that?*

– *Send for a cane and a match.* They brought a cane and a match, which, applied to the tip of it, was lowered down, but it went out immediately in the air without oxygen. The cane did not reach the bottom. Then another cane was brought that had a metal hook at the end. Thus, it was possible to touch the lid of Saint Peter's tomb. It was seven/eight meters deep. Tapping lightly, the sound that came up indicated that the hook was hitting now iron, now marble. This confirmed what ancient historians had written.

It would take a volume to describe the things we saw. What existed in the Constantinian Basilica is preserved in side slabs, or on the floors or in the vaults of the undergrounds. I will highlight only one thing, the image of *Santa Maria della Bocciaata*, very ancient, placed in an underground altar. The name derives from the following circumstance. A young man, with disdain or perhaps inadvertently, hit the figure of Mary in the eye with a ball. A great miracle occurred. Blood flowed from the forehead, and the eye, which is still red, is seen above the cheeks of the image. Two drops splashed sideways onto the stone, which is scrupulously preserved behind two iron gates.

Altars, chapels, tombs

Above the papal altar and the tomb of Saint Peter rises the vast dome that leaves those who observe it enchanted. Four large pillars support it: each of them has one hundred and fifty steps, about twenty-five *trabucchi*, of circumference. All around that high dome, there are elegant mosaic works executed by the most famous authors. On the pillars, four niches called *Loggias of the Relics* are carved, which are the *Holy Face* of Veronica, the *Holy Cross*, the *Sacred Lance*, and *Saint Andrew*. Among them, the one of the Sacred Face is famous, believed to be the cloth that the Saviour used to wipe his face dripping with blood. He left his image imprinted on it, which he gave to Veronica, who, weeping, accompanied him to Calvary. Trustworthy people recount that this Sacred Face, in the year 1849, bled several times, even changing colour so much that it altered its features. These things were written down, and the canons of St. Peter testify to them.

Starting from the papal altar and proceeding southwards, one encounters the tomb of *Alexander VIII* of the Ottobuoni family. It was erected by his nephew Cardinal Pietro Ottobuoni. The statue of the Pope seated on the throne is made of metal. Two marble statues are on either side, representing *Religion* and *Prudence*. The urn is covered by the

bas-relief of the canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani, Giovanni da Capistrano, Giovanni da San Facondo, Giovanni di Dio, and Pasquale Baylon, made by Alexander VIII in 1690. Next to it stands the altar of *Saint Leo the Great*, on which the surprising bas-relief of the Pope going to meet the fierce Attila can be admired. Above are depicted Peter and Paul, next to the Pope is Attila, frightened by the appearance of the two and in the act of bowing to the Pontiff. In an urn under the altar rests the body of the holy pope and doctor of the Church. In front is the tomb of *Leo XII*, who died in 1829, who had so much such veneration for this glorious predecessor that he wished to be buried next to him. [...]

The following altar is dedicated to the **Virgin of the Column**, so called because it venerates the image of Mary painted on a column of the ancient Constantinian Basilica. It was placed there in 1607. The altar houses the bodies of Leo II, III, and IV. Continuing the tour along the southern line, we find on the right the tomb of Alexander VII Ghigi with four statues: *Justice*, *Prudence*, *Charity*, and *Truth*. Since this pope always had thoughts of death in mind, the sculptor laid a blanket in relief covering the figure of death that shows an hourglass, that is, a sand clock, which is about to finish its charge. The Pope is praying with hands joined on his knees. The altar on the left is dedicated to the apostles *Peter and Paul*. It depicts the fall of Simon Magus. In front is the altar of *Saints Simon and Jude*, who rest here. The altar on the right, however, is dedicated to *Saint Thomas* and houses the body of *Boniface IV*, while the one on the left preserves the remains of *Leo IX*. In front of the sacristy door, the altar of *Saints Peter and Andrew* represents in precious mosaic the death of Ananias and Sapphira.

Thus, we reach the Clementine chapel, whose altar, dedicated to *Saint Gregory the Great*, is topped by a beautiful mosaic of the saint in the act of convincing the unbelievers. Under the altar, his body is venerated. Above the door leading to the

organ is the tomb monument of *Pius VII*. The Pontiff, seated on a rich chair and dressed in papal garments, is in the act of blessing. The statues placed on the sides represent *Wisdom* and *Fortitude*. Before reaching the side nave, one encounters the altar of the *Transfiguration*, whose mosaic presents the Transfiguration of the Saviour on Mount Tabor.

The left minor nave

Entering the minor nave, one encounters on both sides two tombs, on the right there is that of *Leo XI* of the Medici. A bas-relief describes the Pontiff absolving Henry IV, King of France [...] Lower down are carved roses with the motto: *Sic floruit*, to indicate the transience of life and symbolise the brevity of the pontificate of *Leo XI*, which lasted only 21 days.

The sarcophagus on the left is of *Innocent XI* Odescalchi. The overlaid bas-relief depicts the liberation of Vienna from the Turks, which occurred during his pontificate. Proceeding along the nave, one arrives at the *Choir Chapel*, enriched with mosaics and paintings. Under the altar rests the body of *Saint John Chrysostom*. This chapel has an underground area where the ashes of *Clement XI* are preserved. It is called the *Sistine Chapel* by *Sixtus IV*, who erected another one in the same place as the ancient basilica. To the right, one accesses the choir loft and the *Cappella Giulia*, named so after *Julius II*, who was its founder. Above this door, there is a stucco urn that contains the ashes of *Gregory XVI*, who died in 1846. This urn is reserved to receive the corpse of the last pope until a burial is erected for him.

The tomb of *Innocent VIII* of the Cibo family is in front. There are two figures of this Pope: one seated with the iron of the lance in hand, alluding to the one with which Jesus was pierced, sent to him as a gift by *Bayazid II*, Emperor of the Turks, while the other is lying down, under the first [...] Facing the small door that leads to the dome staircase is the cenotaph of *James III*, King of England, of the Stuart family,

who died in Rome on January 1, 1766, and of his two sons Charles III and Henry IX, Cardinal, Duke of York. The three busts in bas-relief are by Antonio Canova.

The last chapel is that of the Baptistery. The baptismal font is made of porphyry and formed the lid of the urn of Otto II, Emperor, which was transported here when his ashes were placed in the Vatican grottos [...]

Rome. St. Andrew at the Quirinal

The visiting permit ended at half past noon, so Mr. Carlo, who was guiding us, and we, also guided by a strong appetite, postponed the ascent to the dome and the visit to the Vatican palace for another time. After lunch and a few hours of rest, we briefly visited the Quirinal and the most important things near our residence. The Quirinal is one of the seven hills of ancient Rome, so named by the Quirites, who came here to live, and from a temple dedicated to Romulus, venerated under the name of Quirinus. To our left, proceeding towards Piazza Monte Cavallo, there is the [Church of Saint Andrew](#), where today the novitiate of the Jesuits is located. The chapel dedicated to **Saint Stanislaus Kostka** houses the body of the saint inside a lapis lazuli urn adorned with precious marbles. Next to this church is the monastery of the Dominicans. It is believed that these two buildings were built on the ruins of the temple of Quirinus. To the right of the street rises the majestic Quirinal palace, begun by Paul III about 300 years ago and completed by his successors. It is adorned with architecture, sculptures, paintings, and mosaics of great value. The Pope resides there for part of the year. The palace has a spacious garden of about a mile in perimeter. Among other wonders, one can admire an organ that plays powered by the force of the water that flows here.

In front of the Quirinal opens the Piazza di Monte Cavallo, so named because of two colossal bronze horses representing *Castor* and *Pollux*. Pius VI had an obelisk erected in the middle of this square. It was carried out by order of

Smarre and Efre, princes of Egypt, and transported to Rome by Emperor Claudius. It has no hieroglyphics. To the south dominates the magnificent Rospigliosi Palace, built where the baths of Constantine once were. Lovers of the fine arts can visit many masterpieces of painting and sculpture here.

Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem

March 4 was dedicated to the [Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem](#). The weather was cloudy, and having travelled just a short distance, we got caught in the rain. Not having an umbrella, we arrived soaked like two rats, but the consolation felt during the visit compensated us for both the water and the discomfort endured. This is one of the seven basilicas that are visited to gain indulgences. Founded by Constantine the Great, where a palace called Sassorio stood, it was named the Sassorian Basilica and was erected in memory of the finding of the Holy Cross made by St. Helena, the emperor's mother, in Jerusalem. This princess had lots of soil from Calvary transported there, taken from the place where the Cross of Christ was found. The building took the name *Holy Cross* from the considerable part of the Holy Wood that is preserved there, and *in Jerusalem* was added because this holy relic, along with many others, were transported from that city. The church was consecrated by Pope St. Sylvester. Under the main altar rest the bodies of St. Cesarius and St. Anastasius, martyrs [...]

In front of the altar is the Gregorian chapel, privileged because one can gain the plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in purgatory, both for those who celebrate the mass and for those who listen to it. At this altar, with great consolation, I also celebrated. Next to the church stands the convent of the Cistercians. The Abbot is a certain Marchini, from Piedmont, who treated us with great courtesy. Among other things, he had us visit the library, rich in ancient parchments and other works [...]

A rainy day

March 5 was a rainy day, so we spent almost the entire day writing. There is something peculiar about Rome, that is that it rains and there is sunshine at the same time, so that at certain times of the year one must always be equipped with an umbrella to protect oneself from either the sun or the rain. At ten o'clock that day, Father Lolli, rector of the Jesuit novitiate, passed away in the church of *St. Andrew at Monte Cavallo*, a Piedmontese who had lived for a long time in Turin, where he became famous for his preaching and diligence in the confessional apostolate. The Queen of Sardinia, Maria Teresa, had chosen him as her confessor [...]

On this day, we learned that diseases in Rome had multiplied, and that the current mortality rate was four times higher than average. In the months of January and February alone, about 6,600 people died, a very large number, considering the population amounts to about 130,000 inhabitants. Towards evening, I went out to have my beard shaved. I went into a shop and was served quite well. However, I resolved never to go there again, because of how much the barber whacked and shook me with his big hands, which would have dislocated my teeth and jaw if they hadn't had strong roots.

St. Michael's Hospice

According to the invitation we received from Cardinal Tosti, on March 6 we went with the De Maistre family to visit *St. Michael's Hospice*. In addition to what I said last time, I can add the following. The first act of courtesy shown to us was a sumptuous breakfast, to which we could not participate because we had already eaten before leaving, and being a day of fasting, we could not eat again until lunch. So we limited ourselves to a small cup of chocolate, which His Eminence told us was compatible with fasting. We were also given a drink that tasted excellent made from mandarin, a sort of wine made with dried fruits infused with water and sugar. Only Rua, not being obliged to fast, ate something more solid.

Then we began the visit of that spacious hospice where over

eight hundred people were housed. Cardinal Tosti accompanied us everywhere. We stopped especially to consider the work of the young people. Here they learn the same trades that they learn from us. Most are engaged in drawing, painting, and sculpture, and many work in an internal printing house. The Holy Father, to help the Hospice, granted it the privilege of exclusively printing the school books used in the Papal States. Above the building, there is a terrace with a magnificent view: looking west, one can see the camp of the French who came to liberate Rome [...] At twelve-thirty, by which time the boys were at lunch, and seeing that the cardinal was also very tired, we took our leave [...]

St. Mary in Cosmedin and the Mouth of Truth

As usual, it was pouring down rain, and between Rua and me, having only one very small umbrella, we found a way to get both of us soaked. We crossed the Tiber over a bridge called *Ponte Rotto* because it had fallen apart and was replaced with an iron bridge very similar to the one we have over the Po in Turin. In ancient times, it was called the Coclite Bridge, because it was the same one where Horatius Cocles made a heroic stand against the army of Porsenna until the bridge was cut, and he jumped into the Tiber, swimming to the other bank amidst the arrows of the astonished enemies.

Here one encounters a street called the [Mouth of Truth](#), because at the end of it was the place where those who had to take an oath were led. Now there is a [church called St. Mary in Cosmedin](#), a word that means *ornament*, because it was magnificently adorned by Pope Adrian I. Inside, the chair used by St. Augustine when he taught Rhetoric is preserved. We retreated under the vestibule to wait for the downpour that was flooding all the streets to stop. While we were there, we took a look at the square also called the Mouth of Truth.

The herdsmen

There were many oxen yoked together, grazing, exposed to the rain, mud and wind. The herdsmen had taken shelter under the

same vestibule, sitting down to eat with enviable appetite. Instead of soup and a dish, they had a piece of raw cod, from which each one tore off a piece. Some small loaves of cornmeal and rye were their bread. Water was the drink. Seeing in them an air of simplicity and goodness, I approached and had this conversation.

– *You have a good appetite, don't you?*

– *Very much, one of them replied.*

– *Is that food enough to satisfy your hunger and sustain you?*

– *It is enough, thank God, when we can have it, since being poor, we cannot expect more.*

– *Why don't you take those oxen to the stables?*

– *Because we don't have any.*

– *Do you always leave them exposed to the wind, rain, and hail day and night?*

– *Always, always.*

– *Do you do the same in your villages?*

– *Yes, we do the same, because there too we have no stables, so whether it rains, or it's windy, or it snows, day and night they are always outside.*

– *And the cows and the calves are also exposed to such weather?*

– *Certainly. Among us, it is customary that the animals, those in the stable stay in the stable, and those that begin to stay outside always stay outside.*

– *Do you live very far from here?*

– *Forty miles.*

– *On holidays can you attend the sacred functions?*

– *Oh! Do you have any doubts? We have our chapel, the priest who says mass, gives the sermon and catechism, and everyone, however far away, makes an effort to attend.*

– *Do you also go to confess sometimes?*

– *Oh! Without a doubt. Are there perhaps Christians who do not fulfil these holy duties? **Now we have the jubilee and we all will make an effort to do it well.*** From this conversation, emerges the good nature of these peasants, who in their simplicity live content with their poverty and happy with

their state, as long as they can fulfil the duties of a good Christian and complete that which concerns their lowly trade.

St. Mary of the People

Sunday, March 7 was designated for the visit to [St. Mary of the People](#). Some pious and noble people wished that we go there to celebrate mass, so that they could receive communion. This was a pious devotion. At nine o'clock, Mr. Foccardi, a helpful and faithful person, came to pick us up with his own carriage to take us to the indicated place. This church was built on the site where Nero and the Domitian family had been buried. Tradition says that ghosts continuously appeared there, terrifying the citizens so much that no one wanted to live nearby. Pope Paschal II in the year 1099 had a church built there, and to drive away the diabolical infestation, he dedicated it to the Most Holy Mary. In 1227, the ancient church was threatening to collapse, and the Roman people generously contributed to the reconstruction expenses. For this reason, it was called St. Mary of the People. It is a grand church, rich in marble and paintings. In the main altar, a miraculous image of the Madonna is venerated, which was ordered to be taken from the chapel of the Saviour in Lateran by Gregory IX. Nearby is the convent of the Augustinian fathers.

The Porta del Popolo was formerly called Porta Flaminia, because it was at the beginning of the Flaminian way [...]. Outside this gate, turning right, one finds [Villa Borghese](#), a majestic building worthy of being visited by tourists because of the many art objects preserved there. The Porta del Popolo marks a large square called [Piazza del Popolo](#), adorned with abundant fountains and obelisks, which as everyone knows, are monuments of a remote antiquity erected by the kings of Egypt to immortalize the memory of their deeds. The superb obelisk that rises in the middle of the square was built in Heliopolis by order of Ramses, King of Egypt, who reigned in 522 B.C. Emperor Augustus had it transported to Rome. Unfortunately, it

fell over, breaking, and so it was covered with soil. Pope Sixtus V in 1589 had it unearthed, raising it in the square, after having topped it with a high metal cross. Its four sides are covered with hieroglyphics, that is, mysterious symbols used by the Egyptians to express sacred things and the mysteries of their theology.

At the bottom of the square rises the [Church of St. Mary of Miracles](#), built by Alexander VII, and called so because of a miraculous image of the Madonna that was previously painted under an arch near the Tiber. To the left is another church, [St. Mary of Monte Santo](#), because it was built over another church that belonged to the Carmelites of the province of Monte Santo. It was inaugurated in 1662. Having thus satisfied devotion and curiosity, we got back into the carriage that took us to the home of Princess Potosca, of the Sobieski counts and princes, ancient sovereigns of Poland. The breakfast prepared for us was sumptuous, but too elegant, therefore not very suitable for our appetite. We made do as best we could. However, we were very satisfied with the truly Christian conversation that those ladies held for the time we stayed at their home.

One thing aroused our wonder. After we finished eating, the hostess had a bunch of cigars brought to her and began to smoke. Despite a very animated conversation, she continued with great eagerness to smoke one cigar after another, and this made me uncomfortable, as I was forced to endure the smell of smoke that permeated the whole house. It made me nauseous, proving unbearable [...]

Vatican City. Going up to the Dome

We reserved March 8th to visit the famous Dome of St. Peter's. Canon Lantieri had procured the necessary ticket to satisfy this curiosity. The time allowed for the ascent is from 7 to 11:30 in the morning. The weather was clear and therefore favourable. After celebrating the Eucharist at the [Church of Jesus](#), where the Jesuits are, at the altar of St. Francis

Xavier, we arrived in Vatican City at 9 o'clock in the company of Mr. Carlo De Maistre. After handing over the ticket, a small door was opened for us, and we began to ascend a very comfortable staircase made like a steep terrace. **As we climbed, we encountered various inscriptions that recall the name and year of all the popes who opened and closed the jubilee years.** Near the terrace landing are written the names of the most famous figures, kings or princes, who ascended to the ball of the dome. We were pleased to also read the names of several of our sovereigns and the royal family.

We took a look at the terrace of the Basilica. It presents itself as a vast paved square where one can play ball, bocce, and similar games. Some people entrusted with the care of the upper part of the temple live here: carpenters, blacksmiths, asphalt workers. Almost in the middle of the terrace is a fountain that is always running, where Rua went to drink. From the square below, we had observed the statues of the Twelve Apostles that adorn the high cornice of the Basilica. From down there, they appeared small, but up close we realised that the big toe of the foot alone was as thick as a man's body. From this, one can understand how high we were. We also visited the largest bell, which has a diameter of over three meters, meaning three *trabucchi* in circumference (*about 9 meters, editor's note*).

A view that was very curious for us was the Vatican Gardens where the pope usually goes for a walk on foot. It is estimated they cover a distance as long as that from Porta Susa to the beginning of Via Po. To the south, vast fields could be seen. Our guide told us:

– *That whole plain was covered with French soldiers when they came to liberate our city from the rebels.* And he pointed out the [Basilica of St. Sebastian](#), [San Pietro in Montorio \(St. Peter on the Golden Mountain\)](#), *Villa Pamphili, Villa Corsini*, all buildings that suffered severe damage for having been made battlefields.

A spiral staircase on the sides of the dome led us up to the first railing. From this landing, it seemed we were flying high and distancing ourselves from the ground. The guide opened a small door that led to an internal railing that went around the dome. I wanted to measure it, and walking like a good traveller, I counted 230 steps before completing the circuit. A curiosity: at any point on the railing, even speaking softly with your face turned to the wall, the smallest sound is communicated clearly from one wall to the other. We also noticed that the mosaics of the church, which appeared very small from below, took on a gigantic form from there.

– *Get moving*, the guide urged us, *if we want to see other things*. So we took another spiral staircase and arrived at the second railing. Here it seemed we had risen towards Paradise, and when we entered the internal railing and let our gaze fall on the floor of the basilica, we realised the extraordinary height we had reached. The people who worked or walked down there looked like children. The papal altar, which is topped by a bronze baldachin that surpasses the tallest houses in Turin in height, looked like a simple armchair from there.

The last floor we ascended is the one that rests on the tip of the dome, from where one enjoys perhaps the most majestic view in the world. All around, one's gaze gets lost in a horizon formed by the limits of human sight. They say that looking east, one can see the Adriatic Sea, and to the west, the Mediterranean. However, we could only glimpse the fog that the rainy weather of the past days had spread everywhere.

There was still the ball, a globe that from the ground looks like one of the balls we use to pass the time. From there it appeared enormous. Those most brave, passing through a perpendicular ladder and walking as if inside a sack, climbed like cats to a height of two *trabucchi*, or six meters. Some did not have enough courage. We, who were a bit more daring, succeeded. From the ball, everything looks wonderful. I was

told it could hold sixteen people. However, it seemed to me that thirty could fit comfortably. Some holes, almost small windows, allow one to observe the city and the countryside. But the great height gives a certain sensation and does not make the view entirely pleasant. We thought it would be cold up there. Quite the opposite: the sun beating down on the bronze of the ball warmed it to such an extent that it felt like we were in the middle of summer. I believe this is one of the reasons why after lunch it is not allowed to go up there: due to the unbearable heat. Here, after discussing various matters concerning the youth of the oratory, satisfied with our venture, as if we had achieved a great victory, we began the descent with slow and grave steps, so as not to break our necks, and without stopping, we reached the ground.

To rest a bit, we went to listen to the sermon that had just begun in the Basilica. We liked the preacher. Good language, pleasant movement, but the theme did not interest us much because it dealt with the observance of civil laws. However, what did not serve to nourish the spirit served very well to give rest to the body. With a little time left, we used it to visit the sacristy, which is a true magnificence worthy of St. Peter. Meanwhile, it was eleven-thirty, and due to fasting and all the walking, we had a great appetite. Therefore, we went to have a small meal. Rua, not satisfied, thought it best to go to lunch, so I remained alone with Mr. Carlo De Maistre, an inseparable companion of that day. After refreshing ourselves a bit, we went to visit Monsignor Borromeo, the "majordomo" of His Holiness, who welcomed us very well. After talking about Piedmont and Milan, his homeland, he noted our names to include us in the catalogue of people who wish to receive the palm from the Holy Father during the Palm Sunday service.

To the famous Museums

Next to the loggia of this prelate, around the courtyard of the papal palace, are the [Vatican Museums](#). We entered and saw truly exceptional things. I will describe only a few. There is

a hall of extraordinary length adorned with marble and precious paintings. In the middle of the second arch stands a holy water font about one and a half metres high, made of malachite, one of the most precious marbles in the world. It was a gift from the Emperor of Russia to the Supreme Pontiff. There are various other objects of a similar kind. At the end of that large hall on the left opens a kind of long corridor that houses the Christian museum [...] Along the same corridor there is the [Vatican Library](#), where the most famous manuscripts of antiquity are preserved [...]

Going around Rome

From the Vatican heading towards the centre of Rome, we arrived at Scossacavalli square where the writers of the famous periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* work. We stopped to pay them a visit and felt a real pleasure in observing that the main supporters of this publication are from Piedmont. I was now feeling a strong desire to return home, overcoming any hesitation, and we were almost at the Quirinal when Mr. Foccardi saw us pass in front of his shop and called us inside. Given the numerous invitations and so much courtesy, he kept us for quite a while, and when we asked to leave, he said:

– *The carriage is here; I will accompany you home.* Although I reluctantly got into the carriage, I agreed to please him. But Foccardi, wanting to stay with us longer, made us take a long detour so that we arrived home late at night.

Here I was handed a letter. I opened it and read it. *Mr. Abbot Bosco is informed that His Holiness has deigned to admit him to the audience tomorrow, March 9th, from eleven forty-five to one o'clock.* This news, hoped for and much desired, caused an inner revolution in me, and for the whole evening, I could not talk about anything else but the Pope and the audience.

The papal audience. St. Mary above Minerva

March 9th had arrived, the great day of the papal audience. However, first I needed to speak with Cardinal Gaude.

Therefore, I went to say Mass in the church of St. Mary above Minerva, where the cardinal had his residence. It was formerly a temple that Pompey the Great had built for the goddess Minerva. It was called [St. Mary above Minerva](#) because it was built precisely above the ruins of this temple. In the year 750, Pope Zacharias donated it to a convent of Greek nuns. In 1370, it passed to the Preachers who still officiate it today. The area in front of this church opens up to a square where we admired an Egyptian obelisk with hieroglyphics, whose base rests on the back of a marble elephant. Upon entering, we were able to admire one of the most beautiful sacred buildings in Rome. Under the main altar rests the **body of St. Catherine of Siena**. After celebrating Mass and hastily going to Cardinal Gaude, I spoke to him, and then we set off for the Quirinal.

The young liar

Along the way, we met a boy who graciously asked us for alms, and to let us know his condition, he told us that his father was dead, his mother had five daughters, and that he knew how to speak Italian, French, and Latin. Surprised, I addressed him in French, to which he replied with a single *oui*, without either understanding what I was saying or articulating any other expressions. I then invited him to speak Latin, and he, without paying attention to my words, began to recite from memory the following words: *ego stabam bene, pater meus mortuus est l'annus passatus et ego sum rimastus poverus. Mater mea etc.* At this point, we could no longer hold back our laughter. However, we then warned him not to tell lies and gave him a baiocco.

The antechamber

Meanwhile, the time for the audience was approaching [...] Arriving at the Vatican, we climbed the stairs mechanically. Everywhere there were noble guards, dressed so they seemed like many princes. On the noble floor, they opened the door that led into the papal rooms. Guards and servants, dressed in great luxury, greeted us with deep bows. After handing over

the ticket for the audience, we were led from room to room until we reached the papal antechamber. Since there were several others waiting, we waited about an hour and a half before being received.

We spent this time observing the people and the place where we were. The Pope's servants were dressed almost like the bishops of our towns. A monsignor, who is given the title of *domestic prelate*, took turns introducing people for the audience as the previous one finished. We admired large halls, well-upholstered and majestic, yet without luxury. A simple green cloth carpet covered the floor. The tapestries were made of red silk but without embellishments. The chairs were made of hard wood. A large chair placed on a somewhat elegant platform indicated that this was the papal hall. All of this pleased us because with our own eyes we were able to realise the falsity of the rumours that some spread against the space and luxury of the papal court. While we were immersed in various thoughts, the bell rang, and the prelate signalled us to advance to present ourselves to Pius IX. At that moment, I was truly confused and had to force myself to remain calm.

Pius IX

Rua followed me carrying a copy of the *Catholic Readings*. Upon entering, we genuflected at the beginning, then halfway down the hall, and finally, the third time, at the feet of the Pope. All apprehension ceased when we saw in the Pontiff the appearance of a kind, venerable man, and at the same time the most beautiful that any painter could depict. We could not kiss his foot because he was seated at a small table; however, we kissed his hand, and Rua, remembering the promise made to the clerics, kissed it once for himself and once for his companions. Then the Holy Father signalled us to rise and stand before him. I, according to etiquette, would have liked to speak while remaining on my knees.

– *No*, he said, *you may rise*. It is worth noting here that when we announced ourselves to the Pope, our name was read

incorrectly. In fact, instead of writing Bosco, Bosser was written, so the Pope began to question me:

– *Are you from Piedmont?*

– *Yes, Your Holiness, I am from Piedmont, and at this moment I feel the greatest consolation of my life, being at the feet of the Vicar of Christ.*

– *What do you do?*

– *Your Holiness, I am involved in the education of youth and the Catholic Readings.*

– *The education of youth has been a useful apostolate in all times, but today it is much more so. There is also another in Turin who is concerned with young people.* Then I noticed that the Pope had a wrong name in front of him, but, without knowing how, he also realised that I was not Bosser, but Bosco. Thus he took on a much more cheerful demeanour and asked many things regarding the youth, the clerics, the oratories [...] Then with a smiling face he said to me:

– *I remember the offering sent to me in Gaeta and the tender feelings with which those young people accompanied it. I took the opportunity to express to him the attachment of our young people to his person and asked him to accept a copy of the Catholic Readings:*

– *Your Holiness, I said, I offer you a copy of the booklets printed until now in the name of the governance. The binding is the work of the young people of our school.*

– *How many are these young people?*

– *Your Holiness, the young people of the house are about two hundred, the binders are fifteen.*

– *Good, he replied, I want to send a medal to each one.* Then going into another room, after a few brief moments he returned carrying fifteen small medals of the Conception:

– *These will be for the young binders,* he said as he handed them to me. Turning then to Rua, he gave him a larger one saying:

– *This is for your companion.* Then turning again to me, he handed me a small box that contained a larger one:

– *And this is for you.* Having knelt to receive the gifts, the

Holy Father invited us to rise, and then believing that we wanted to leave, he was about to dismiss us when I began to speak to him like this:

– *Your Holiness, I have something particular to communicate to you.*

– *That's fine,* he replied [...].

The Holy Father is very quick to understand questions and very prompt in giving answers, so with him, it takes five minutes to discuss what would require over an hour with others. However, the Pope's kindness and my strong desire to stay with him extended the audience by over half an hour, a considerable time both regarding his person and regarding the hour of lunch which was delayed for our sake [...].

The Janiculum

At 1:30 p.m. on March 10, Father Giacinto of the Discalced Carmelites came to pick us up with a carriage to take us to the [Basilica of St. Pancras](#) and [San Pietro in Montorio](#). These are two churches located on the Janiculum, named so because of Janus, who is said to have lived there. At the top of this hill beyond the Tiber is the Basilica of St. Pancras, built by Pope Felix II in 485, about 100 years after the martyrdom of Pancras. General Narses, having defeated the Goths, made a solemn procession together with Pope Pelagius from St. Pancras to St. Peter. St. Gregory the Great, who had great veneration for this church, celebrated Mass there several times and held some homilies, finally donating it to the Benedictine monks. In 1673 it was entrusted to the Discalced Carmelites with the attached convent and a seminary for the missions to the Indies [...]

Under the main altar, there is another underground altar where the body of the Saint was once kept, protected by an iron railing. It was customary to bring those suspected of perjury before this railing, for if they were guilty, they would be seized by a noticeable trembling or some other accident.

The Catacombs

– *Come with me*, said Father Giacinto, *we will go to the catacombs*. He had prepared a lamp for each of us. We began to follow him. In the middle of the church, he pointed to a trapdoor on the floor. When he lifted the lid, a dark and deep cavity appeared: the catacombs began. At the entrance, it was written in Latin: *“In this place the martyr of Christ Pancras was beheaded.”* Here we are in the catacombs. Imagine long corridors now narrower and lower, now higher and more spacious, now cut by other corridors, now descending, now ascending, and you will get the first idea of these undergrounds. On the right and left, there are small graves dug parallel in the tuff. Here, Christians were buried in ancient times, especially martyrs. Those who had given their lives for the faith were designated with particular emblems. The palm was a sign of victory over tyrants; the ampoule indicated that they had shed blood for the faith; the “χ” meant that they had died in the peace of the Lord or had suffered for Christ. In others, the instruments with which they were martyred appeared. Sometimes these emblems were enclosed in the small tomb of the saint. When persecutions were not too severe, the name and surname of the martyr were written along with a few lines highlighting some important circumstance of their life. [...]

– *Here*, the guide said to us, *this is the place where St. Pancras was buried, next to him St. Dionysius, his uncle, and nearby another relative*. Then we visited some graves gathered in a small room whose walls bore ancient inscriptions that we could not read. In the middle of the vault, there was a painting of a young man who seemed to represent St. Pancras [...]

This time the guide pointed out a crypt to us. Crypt, a Greek word, that means depth. It is a space larger than usual where Christians used to gather during times of persecution to listen to the Word, attend Mass, and sacred functions. On one side, there is still an ancient altar where it is possible to celebrate. Generally, it was the tomb of some martyr that

served as an altar. After a bit of walking, we were shown the chapel where Pope St. Felix used to rest and celebrate the Eucharist. His tomb is not far away. Everywhere we saw human skeletons reduced to pieces by time. Our guide assured us that soon we would arrive at a place where slabs with intact inscriptions were preserved.

But we were very tired, also because the underground air and the difficulties of the path – everyone had to be careful not to bump their heads, not to hit their shoulders, and not to slip with their feet – had fatigued us quite a bit. The guide warned us that the undergrounds are numerous and some extend up to fifteen/twenty miles in length. If we had gone alone, we could have sung *requiescant in pace*, because it would have been very difficult to find the way back to the surface. However, our guide was very practical and soon led us back to the point from where we had started [...]

San Pietro in Montorio

Once again in the carriage with Father Giacinto, we headed down from the Janiculum to go to *San Pietro in Montorio*. The word is a corrupted version of “*mount of gold*”, because here the soil and gravel take on a yellow colour similar to gold. It was also called *Castro Aureo*, fortress of gold, for the remains of the fortress of Ancus Marcius that still exist on the top. It is one of the churches founded by Constantine the Great, rich in statues, paintings, and marble. Between the church and the attached convent stands a round-shaped building called the [Tempietto of Bramante](#). It is one of Bramante’s most significant works. It was built on the site where St. Peter was martyred. At the back, a staircase leads to a circular underground chapel, in the middle of which there is a hole where a lamp burns continuously. It is the place where the top of the cross on which St. Peter was nailed upside down was inserted. The church is located where the Janiculum ends and the Vatican begins.

Near San Pietro in Montorio is the magnificent [Paolina](#)

[Fountain](#), which Paul V had built in 1612. Water flows from three columns that resemble a river. It comes from Bramario, a place 35 miles from Rome. This water, cascading down, is used to turn millstones and other machines, and it branches out advantageously at various points in the city [...].

An unfortunate event

On March 11, we were busy writing and running errands. The episode of getting lost in Rome deserves mention. I went to visit Monsignor Pacca, the domestic prelate of His Holiness. On the way back, I was accompanied by Father Bresciani, having sent Rua to look for Father Botandi at Ponte Sisto. Good Bresciani took me to the Academy of the Sapienza and then pointed out where to go to reach the Quirinal:

– *Cross this area, then always keep to the right.* Instead of going right, I went left, so after an hour of walking, I found myself in Piazza del Popolo, almost a mile from home. Poor me! If only I had Rua with me, we could have consoled each other, but I was alone. The weather was cloudy, a strong wind was blowing, and it was starting to rain. What to do? I was reluctant to sleep in the middle of that square, so with all patience, I climbed up to the Pincian Hill, named after the palace of a gentleman called Pincio [...]. This hill is not very populated and is not one of the seven hills of Rome [...]

St. Andrew of the Valley

On Friday, the 12th, I went to celebrate Mass at [St. Andrew of the Valley](#) to distinguish it from other churches dedicated to the same Apostle. The word Valley was added because the basilica is located at the lowest point of Rome and also because of a palace belonging to the Valle family. In ancient times, the church was dedicated to St. Sebastian, who suffered martyrdom here. Nearby, another church dedicated to St. Louis, King of France, was built. But in the year 1591, a wealthy gentleman named Gesualdo had it renovated, completely renewing its design. It is one of the first churches in Rome. Its dome measures 64 palms in diameter, and therefore, after St.

Peter's in the Vatican, it is the widest dome of all the others in the city.

The first chapel on the left upon entering has an iron gate that indicates the point of the sewer where it is believed the body of the martyr *St. Sebastian* was thrown. Almost opposite this church is the Stoppani palace, which served as the residence of Emperor Charles V when he came to Rome, as indicated by an inscription on the wall at the foot of the stairs.

St. Gregory the Great

An hour and a half after noon, with Mr. Francesco De Maistre, our guide, we set off to visit the [Church of St. Gregory the Great](#). It is built on a part of the Caelian Hill, formerly known as *Clivus Scauri*, meaning the descent of Scaurus, and it was the house inhabited by St. Gregory and his followers. He was the one who converted it into a monastery, where he lived until the year 590, initially as a simple monk, then as Abbot. When he was elected pope (in 590), he dedicated that building to the apostle St. Andrew, transforming part of the premises for use as a church. After his death, it was dedicated to him.

It is certainly one of the most beautiful churches in Rome. The first chapel on the left as you enter is dedicated to St. Silvia, the mother of St. Gregory. The last chapel on the right is that of the Sacrament, on whose altar St. Gregory himself celebrated. [...]. This altar, venerable for the title and patronage of the holy Pope, became famous throughout the world due to the privileges granted by many popes. *It happened that a monk from the monastery, having been commanded by the saint, offered Mass for thirty consecutive days in suffrage for the soul of a deceased brother, and another monk saw him released from the pains of purgatory.*

Next to this chapel, there is another smaller one, where St. Gregory would retreat to rest. The exact spot where his bed was located is still shown. Nearby is the marble chair on

which he sat both when he wrote and when he announced the Word of God to the people.

After passing the main altar, one encounters the chapel that houses a very ancient and miraculous image of the Madonna. It is believed to be the one that the Saint kept in his house, and every time he passed by it, he greeted it saying "*Hail, Mary*". One day, however, the good Pope, in a hurry due to some urgent matters, did not address the usual greeting to the Virgin as he left. And she gave him this sweet reproach: "*Hail, Gregory*", with which words she invited him not to forget that greeting which was so pleasing to her.

In another chapel, the statue of St. Gregory stands out, a work designed and directed by Michelangelo Buonarroti. The Saint is seated on a throne with a dove near his ear, recalling what Peter the Deacon, a relative of the Saint, asserts, namely that whenever Gregory preached or wrote, a dove always spoke to him in his ear. In the centre of the chapel is a large marble table on which the Pope would offer food to twelve poor people every day, serving them with his own hands. One day, an angel in the form of a young man sat at the table with the others, and then suddenly disappeared. From then on, the Saint increased the number of the poor he fed to thirteen. Thus, this is how the custom of placing thirteen pilgrims at the table that the Pope serves by his own hand every Holy Thursday originated. Above the table is inscribed the following distich: "*Here Gregory fed twelve poor; an angel sat at the table and completed the number to thirteen.*"

Saints John and Paul

Exiting this church and turning right, one encounters that of [Saints John and Paul](#). Emperor Jovian allowed the monk St. Pammachius to build it in 400 in honour of these two martyr brothers. It was built over their dwelling, precisely where they suffered martyrdom. It was later restored by Pope St. Symmachus around 444 [...] Upon entering, a majestic building appears. In the middle, an iron gate marks the place where the

saints were killed. Their bodies, enclosed in a precious urn, rest under the main altar. In the adjacent chapel, under the altar, the body of Blessed Paul of the Cross, founder of the Passionists, is kept, to whom the church is entrusted. This servant of God is from Piedmont, born in Castellazzo in the diocese of Alexandria. He died in 1775 at the age of 82. The many miracles that occur in Rome and elsewhere through his intercession have led to the growth of the congregation of the Passionists, so named because of the fourth vow they take, namely to promote veneration for the passion of the Lord.

One of those religious, a Genoese, Brother Andrew, after accompanying us to see the most important things in the church, took us to the convent, a beautiful building that houses about eighty fathers, mostly from Piedmont.

– *This, Brother Andrew told us, is the room where our holy Founder died.* We entered and, in devout recollection, admired the place from which his soul departed to go to heaven.

– *There is the chair, the clothes, the books, and other objects that were used by the Blessed. Everything is kept under seal and is distributed as relics to the Christian faithful.*

That room is now a chapel where Mass is celebrated.

Arches of Constantine and Titus

After greeting the courteous Brother Andrew, we set off towards [St. Lawrence in Lucina](#). But after a little while, we found ourselves under the [Arch of Constantine](#). It has been preserved almost intact. An inscription from the Senate and the Roman people indicates that it was dedicated to Emperor Constantine on the occasion of the victory over the tyrant Maxentius. This Emperor, having become a Christian, had a statue placed on the arch with a cross in hand in memory of the cross that appeared to him before the army, to remind the whole world that he professed the religion of the Crucified Jesus.

After walking a bit further, there is another arch, the [Arch](#)

[of Titus](#). There are three arches in Rome, and that of Titus is the oldest and most elegant. It is adorned with bas-reliefs that commemorate the various victories achieved by that brave warrior: among them is carved the candelabrum of the Temple of Jerusalem in memory of the fall of that city and its temple. Under this arch passed the famous *Via Sacra*, one of the oldest in Rome, so named because sacred things were carried upon it every month to the Fortress, and the Augurs walked along it to receive their responses.

Upon arriving at *St. Lawrence in Lucina*, we could not enter due to the work being done there [...] This church is one of the largest parishes in Rome and was erected by Sixtus III with the consent of Emperor Valentinian in honour of St. Lawrence the martyr. To distinguish it from other churches erected to this deacon, it was named in Lucina either after the holy martyr of that name or perhaps from the place that was called as such. Attached to this church towards the street is the [Ottobuoni palace](#), built around the year 1300 over the ruins of a large ancient building called the *Palace of Domitian*. Being tired and with lunchtime approaching, we returned home [...].

St. Mary of the Angels

[...] On March 13, the Lenten station was at [St. Mary of the Angels](#), and we went there both to gain the plenary indulgence and to pray to God for our house. This church is distinguished from another with the same name with the addition of the [Baths of Diocletian](#) because it is built on the site where the famous baths of Emperor Diocletian once stood. The supreme pontiff Pius IV commissioned Michelangelo Buonarroti, who with his immense genius was able to transform part of those superb buildings into a church. In one of the halls of the baths, there was already a small church dedicated to St. Cyril the Martyr. This was enclosed in the new church, which the Pope dedicated to St. Mary of the Angels, to please the Duke and King of Sicily, a devoted servant of the Angels, who greatly

assisted in its construction.

On the day of the Lenten station, the church is adorned with special elegance, and the most significant relics are exposed for public veneration. In a chapel next to the main altar, there was a reliquary with many relics, among which we noted the bodies of St. Prosper, St. Fortunatus, St. Cyril, as well as the heads of St. Justin and St. Maximus, martyrs, and many others. Having thus satisfied our devotion, we arrived home around six, quite tired and with a good appetite.

St. Mary of the Oak

On Sunday, March 14, we celebrated at home, then we went to visit an oratory, according to the indications given by Marquis Patrizi. The church where the young people gather is called [St. Mary of the Oak](#). Here is its origin, which dates back to the time of Julius II. An image of Mary had been painted on a tile by a certain Battista Calvaro, who placed it above an oak tree in his vineyard in Viterbo. This image remained hidden for sixty years until, in 1467, it began to manifest with many graces and miracles, so that the faithful who went to visit it, with their offerings, raised a church and a monastery. Pope Julius II wished that there would also be a temple dedicated to Mary of the Oak in Rome, which is the one we are talking about.

Upon entering the church and arriving in the spacious sacristy, we were delighted by the sight of about forty young boys. Due to their lively behaviour, they resemble very much the mischievous boys from our oratory. Their sacred functions are all performed in the morning. Mass, confession, catechism, and a brief instruction are what is done for them [...]

After noon, the youth go to [St. John of the Florentines](#), another oratory where there is only recreation without church functions. We went there and saw about a hundred young people having a great time. Their games were *tombola* (a raffle) and *campana* (hopscotch), known to us as well. They also play a game called "*buco*," which consists of five fairly large holes

into which two chestnuts or something else are placed. From a distance of six paces, a ball is rolled. Whoever manages to get it into one of the holes wins what is inside. We were very sorry that they had nothing but recreation. If there were a priest among them, he could do good for their souls, as there is a great need for it. It saddened us even more because we found them well-disposed. Several were pleased to talk with us, kissing the hands of both me and Rua, who, against his will, was forced to agree [...]

Upon returning home, we received a visit from Monsignor *Merode*, the Chamberlain of His Holiness. After some pleasantries, he announced to me that the Holy Father was inviting me to preach the spiritual exercises to the female inmates in the prisons near *St. Mary of the Angels at the Baths of Diocletian*. Every desire of the Pope is a command for me, and so I accepted with true pleasure [...]

At the women's prison

At two in the afternoon, I went to see the superior of the prison to arrange the day and time to begin the preaching. She told me:

– *If it is good for you, you can start right away, as the women are in church and there is no one to preach.* So I started immediately, and the week was almost entirely dedicated to this ministry. The correctional facility is called “*At the Baths of Diocletian*” because it is located in the same place where the baths of that famous emperor were. There were 260 inmates housed there, guilty of serious crimes and sentenced to prison [...]. The exercises went satisfactorily. The simple and popular preaching that we use among ourselves proved fruitful in this prison. On Saturday, after the last sermon, the mother superior announced to me with great pleasure that none of the inmates had failed to approach the Sacraments.

Two episodes

A pleasant episode occurred to the Holy Father this week.

Count Spada went to visit him, and this conversation ensued:

– *Holiness, I would like to ask you for a memento of this visit.*

– *Ask for whatever you want, and I will try to satisfy you.*

– *I would like something extraordinary.*

– *Well, go ahead and ask.*

– *Holiness, I would like your snuffbox as a keepsake.*

– *But it is full of very poor quality tobacco.*

– *It doesn't matter. I will cherish it dearly.*

– *Take it, I gladly give it to you as a gift.* Count Spada left happier with that snuffbox than with a great treasure. It is simple, made of buffalo horn, joined with two brass rings, and is worth no more than four coins, but it is very precious because of its origin. The good count shows it to his friends as an object worthy of veneration [...]

Another anecdote was told to me about this venerable Pontiff. Last year, while the Holy Father was traveling through his states, he found himself near Viterbo. A girl with a bundle of wood, seeing that the papal carriage had stopped, thought that those gentlemen wanted to buy her bundle. She ran towards them:

– *Sir, she said to the Holy Father, buy it, the wood is very dry.*

– *We do not need it,* replied the Pope.

– *Buy it, I will give it to you for three baiocchi.*

– *Take the three baiocchi and keep your bundle.* The Holy Father gave her three *scudi*, then prepared to get back into the carriage. But the girl wanted the Holy Father to take her bundle.

– *Take it, you will be happy; there is plenty of room in your carriage.* While the Pope and his court laughed at such a deal, the girl's mother, who was working in a nearby field, rushed over shouting:

– *Holy Father, Holy Father, forgive her; this poor girl is my daughter. She does not know you. Have pity on us, for we are in great misery.* The Pope added another six *scudi* and

continued on his way [...]

St. Paul Outside the Walls

On Sunday, March 22, Don Bosco went to the Cardinal Vicar, the Most Eminent Costantino Patrizi [...] After leaving the Vicariate, he wandered to [St. Paul Outside the Walls](#) to venerate the tomb of the great Apostle of the Gentiles and admire the wonders of that immense temple. After a mile of walking, he arrived at the famous place called [Ad Aquas Salvias](#), where St. Paul shed his blood for Jesus Christ. Right at this point, where there are three miraculous springs of water, which gushed from the ground where the saint's severed head made three leaps, a church has been built. Don Bosco also prayed in the nearby church of [Sancta Maria Scala Coeli](#), octagonal in shape, built on the cemetery of St. Zenon, a tribune who suffered martyrdom under Diocletian, along with 10,203 of his comrades [...]

The Colosseum

On March 23, his astonished gaze contemplated the gigantic ruins of the Flavian amphitheatre or [Colosseum](#), oval in shape with a 527-meter external circumference, and still standing fifty meters high in some places. In its time of splendour, it was covered in marble, adorned with colonnades, hundreds of statues, obelisks, and bronze chariots. Inside it supported immense terraces all around, which could hold about 200,000 people, to witness the fights of wild beasts and gladiators, and the slaughter of thousands and thousands of martyrs. Don Bosco entered the arena of the shows, which measures 241 meters in circumference [...]

St. Clement

On the 24th, Don Bosco went to the [Basilica of St. Clement](#) to venerate the relics of the fourth pope after St. Peter, and those of St. Ignatius the martyr, Bishop of Antioch, as well as to admire the architecture of the ancient three-nave church. In the middle nave, in front of the Altar of the Confession, a white marble enclosure delineates the choir for

the minor clergy. It is equipped with two pulpits, one for the singing of the Gospel, near which rises the small column of the paschal candle, and the other for the reading of the epistle. Next to the latter was the lectern for the singers and readers of the prophecies and other books of scripture. Around the apse are the seats of the priests, and at the back in the centre on three steps, the episcopal chair [...].

Don Bosco proceeded from there to the [Church of the Four Crowned Martyrs](#) to visit the tombs of the martyrs Severus, Severinus, Carpophorus, and Victorinus, who were killed under Diocletian. He then passed to [St. John](#) in front of the Latin Gate, near which stands a chapel on the spot where St. John the Evangelist was immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil. From there he made his way to the little church of [Quo Vadis](#), so named because at that point the Lord appeared to St. Peter as he was leaving Rome to escape persecution:

– *Lord, where are you going?* exclaimed the astonished Apostle. And Jesus replied:

– *I come to be crucified again.* St. Peter understood, and returned to Rome where martyrdom awaited him. From this little temple, Don Bosco retraced his steps, after taking a look at the Appian Way, along which many mausoleums from pagan times can be counted, recalling the end of every human greatness.

Don Bosco... Salesian!

A charming scene occurred on the morning of March 25. Don Bosco, having crossed the Tiber, saw about thirty boys having fun in a small square. Without hesitation, he went among them, who, having suspended their games, looked at him in wonder. He then raised his hand holding a medal between his fingers, and exclaimed:

– *There are too many of you, and I regret not having enough medals to give one to each of you.* Gathering courage, they stretched out their hands and shouted loudly:

– *It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter... to me, to me!* Don Bosco added:

– *Well, since I don't have one for everyone, I want to give this medal to the best one. Who among you is the best?*

– *It's me, it's me!* they all shouted together. He continued:

– *How can I decide if you are all equally good? Then I will give it to the most mischievous! Who among you is the most mischievous?*

– *It's me, it's me!* they responded with deafening shouts.

The Marquis Patrizi and his friends, at a certain distance, smiled, moved and astonished to see Don Bosco treating those boys whom he had met for the first time, so familiarly, and exclaimed:

– *Here is another St. Philip Neri, a friend of youth.* Don Bosco indeed, as if he were an old friend of those children, continued to ask them if they had already attended Mass, which church they usually went to, and if they frequented the oratories that were in those areas [...] The dialogue was lively. Don Bosco, after encouraging them to always be good Christians, promised that he would pass through that square again and would give a medal to each one. Then, affectionately bidding them farewell, he returned to his companions showing the medal. He had given nothing to the boys, yet he had left them happy.

St. Stephen in the Round

On March 26, Don Bosco returned to the Caelian Hill in the spacious [church of St. Stephen in the Round](#), named for its shape. The circular cornice is supported by 56 columns. All around the walls are painted scenes of the atrocious tortures with which the martyrs were torn apart. It is adorned with mosaics from the 7th century, representing Jesus crucified, with some saints, and preserves the bodies of two confessors of the faith: St. Primus and St. Felician. From there, Don Bosco passed by [St. Mary in Domnica](#), or *alla Navicella*, for a marble boat that stands in the square in front. It has three naves divided by 18 columns and contains mosaics from the 9th century. Among these, the Virgin is in the place of honour among many angels, and at her feet kneels Pope Paschal [...]

Meanwhile, the Holy Father had expressed the desire for Don Bosco to attend the devout and magnificent spectacle of the Holy Week functions in the Vatican. He then entrusted Monsignor Borromeo with the task of inviting him in his name and procuring him a place from which he could comfortably attend the sacred rites. The monsignor searched for him all day without success. Finally, at a very late hour, the messenger found him at the De Maistre house where he had returned after a day of visits. Announcing that he came on the Pope's orders, he was introduced and then he presented Don Bosco with the invitation letter, with which he was permitted to receive the blessed palm from the very hands of the Pope. Don Bosco read it immediately and exclaimed that he would go with great pleasure.

Don Bosco's Roman Easter. Palm Sunday

On Sunday, March 28, with the cleric Rua, he entered the Basilica of St. Peter long before the functions began. Count Carlo De Maistre accompanied him to his place, in the diplomatic gallery. He was very attentive as he knew the importance of the Church's ceremonies. Next to him was a Protestant English *milord*, amazed at such solemnity. At a certain point, a singer from the Sistine Chapel performed a solo so well that Don Bosco was moved to tears, and that *milord* turning to him, exclaimed in Latin, as he did not know how to make himself understood in another language:

– *Post hoc paradisus!* That gentleman, after some time, converted to Catholicism and not only that, but he became a priest and bishop. After blessing the palms, the diplomatic corps took turns passing before the Pontiff, and each ambassador and minister received the palm from his hands. Don Bosco and the cleric Rua also knelt at the feet of the Pope and received the palm. This is what Pius IX wanted: was not Don Bosco an ambassador of God? The cleric Rua, having returned to the Rosminians, gave his to Father Pagani, who greatly appreciated it [...]

Don Bosco as a *caudatario*

Cardinal Marini, one of the two assistants to the throne, took Don Bosco on as a *caudatario* so that he could attend all the functions of Holy Week. Thus, in violet vestments, he stood almost beside the Pope the whole time, and was able to enjoy the Gregorian chants and the music of Allegri and Palestrina. On Holy Thursday, Cardinal Mario Mattei, being the oldest of the suburbicarian bishops, officiated instead of the dean cardinal who was impeded. Don Bosco followed the Pontiff, who was carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession to the Pauline chapel, to place it inside the specially prepared urn. He accompanied him to the Vatican loggia from which the Pope blesses Rome and the world. He attended the washing of the feet performed by the Pontiff on thirteen priests, and participated in their commemorative dinner, served by the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

The *Urbi et Orbi* blessing

[...] On April 4th, the artillery salutes from Castel S. Angelo announced Easter day. Pius IX descended into the Basilica around ten for the pontifical mass. Immediately after, preceded by a procession of bishops and cardinals, he went to the Loggia for the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing. Don Bosco, with Cardinal Marini and a bishop, remained for a moment near the windowsill covered by a magnificent drape, on which three golden Papal Tiaras had been placed. The cardinal said to Don Bosco:

– *Observe what a sight!* Don Bosco looked around the square with astonished eyes. A crowd of 200,000 people was packed with their faces turned towards the Loggia. The roofs, windows, and terraces of all the houses were occupied. The French army filled part of the space between the obelisk and the steps of St. Peter's. The battalions of the papal infantry were lined up to the right and left. Behind them were the cavalry and artillery. Thousands of carriages were stopped on both sides of the square, near Bernini's porticoes, and at the back near the houses. Especially on those for hire stood

groups of people who seemed to dominate the square. There was a loud chatter, the stomping of horses, an incredible confusion. No one can imagine such a spectacle.

Trapped

Don Bosco, who had left the Pope in the Basilica while he was venerating the significant relics, believed that he would take a while to appear. Absorbed in contemplating so many people from every nation, he did not notice the approach of the gestatorial chair on which the Pope was seated. He found himself in a difficult position. Squeezed between the chair and the balustrade, he could barely move. All around him cardinals, bishops, ceremonial attendants, and seat attendants were crowded, so he could see no way to get out. Turning his face to the Pope was inappropriate, turning his back to him was uncivil and remaining in the centre of the balcony was ridiculous. Unable to do better, he turned sideways. Then the tip of one of the Pope's feet came to rest on his shoulder.

At that moment, a solemn silence reigned over the great square so that one could hear even the buzz of a fly. The horses themselves stood still. Don Bosco, completely unperturbed, attentive to every little detail, observed that a single neigh, and the sound of a clock striking the hours, could be heard while the Pope recited the customary prayers. Meanwhile, seeing that the floor of the Loggia was strewn with leaves and flowers, he bent down, and picking up some flowers, he placed them between the pages of the book he was holding. Finally, Pius IX stood up to give his blessing. He opened his arms, raised his hands to heaven, stretched them over the multitude that bowed their heads, and his voice, singing the formula of the blessing, resonant, powerful, solemn, could be heard beyond Piazza Rusticucci and from the attic of the palace of the writers of the *Civiltà Cattolica*.

The crowd responded with an immense ovation. Then Cardinal Ugolini read the Brief of the plenary indulgence in Latin, and immediately after, Cardinal Marini repeated it in Italian. Don

Bosco had knelt, and when he got back up, the papal procession had already disappeared. All the bells were ringing in celebration, the cannon thundered from Castel Sant'Angelo, and the military bands sounded their trumpets. Cardinal Marini, accompanied by the attendant, descended and went towards his carriage. As soon as it moved, Don Bosco felt a wave of nausea from the motion that turned his stomach. Unable to resist any longer, he expressed his discomfort to the cardinal. By his advice, he got into the carriage with the coachman, but the malaise did not diminish, so he got down to walk on foot. Being in a violet robe, he would have been an object of wonder or mockery if he had crossed Rome like that. Therefore, the secretary kindly got down from the carriage and accompanied him to the palace [...].

The memory of the Pope

On April 6th, Don Bosco returned for a private audience with Pius IX along with the cleric Rua and the theologian Murialdo, admitted to the Vatican through the intercession of Don Bosco himself. They entered the antechamber at nine in the evening, and immediately Don Bosco was introduced. As soon as the Pope saw him, he said with a serious face:

– *Abbot Bosco, where did you go on Easter day during the papal blessing? There, in front of the Pope, with your shoulder under his foot as if the Pontiff needed to be supported by Don Bosco.*

– *Holy Father, he replied calmly and humbly, I was caught by surprise and I ask for forgiveness if I offended you in any way!*

– *And you also add the affront of asking me if you offended me? Don Bosco looked at the Pope and thought he was pretending: a smile seemed to appear on his lips. But what made you think of picking flowers at that moment? It took all of Pius IX's seriousness not to burst out laughing. [...]*

– *Now, Most Blessed Father, Don Bosco pleaded, please suggest a maxim that I can repeat to my young people as a reminder of the Vicar of Christ.*

– *The presence of God!* replied the Pope. *Tell your young people to always regulate themselves with this thought!... And you have nothing to ask me? Surely you desire something as well.*

– *Holy Father, Your Holiness has deigned to grant me what I asked for, now I have nothing left but to thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

– *Yet, yet, you still desire something.* Thereupon Don Bosco stood there as if suspended without saying a word. The Pontiff added:

– *How could that be? Do you not wish to make your young people happy when you return to them?*

– *Holiness, yes.*

– *Then wait.* A few moments earlier, the theologian Murialdo, the cleric Rua, and Don Cerutti from Varazze, Chancellor in the Archdiocesan Curia of Genoa, had entered that room. They were astonished by the familiarity with which the Pope treated Don Bosco and what they saw at that moment. The Pope had opened the chest, taken out a handful of gold coins, and without counting them, handed them to Don Bosco saying:

– *Take these and then give your boys a good snack.* Everyone can imagine the impression that this act of kindness from Pius IX made on Don Bosco, who, with great affection, also addressed the ecclesiastics who had arrived, and blessed the crowns, crucifixes, and other objects of devotion presented to him, and gave everyone a commemorative medal.

The educational challenge of Don Bosco

Among the cardinals who came to pay their respects there was His Eminence Tosti, at whose invitation he had spoken to the young people of the San Michele Hospice. Satisfied with Don Bosco's courtesy, since it was time for his walk, he wanted to have him as a companion, so both got into the carriage. They began to talk about the most suitable system for the education of young people. Don Bosco had come to believe that the students of that hospice did not have familiarity with their superiors, rather, they feared them. This was rather

unpleasant, since the educators were priests. Therefore, he said:

– *You see, Eminence, it is impossible to educate young people well if they do not have confidence in their superiors.*

– *But how, the cardinal replied, can this confidence be gained?*

– *By making sure they come close to us, removing any reason that drives them away.*

– *And how can we do to bring them closer to us?*

– *By approaching them ourselves, trying to adapt ourselves to their tastes, making ourselves similar to them. Do you want us to try? Tell me: where in Rome can we find a good number of boys?*

– *In Piazza Termini and in Piazza del Popolo,* replied the cardinal.

– *Well then, let's go to Piazza del Popolo.*

The cardinal gave the order to the coachman. As soon as they arrived, Don Bosco got out of the carriage, and the prelate stayed to observe him. Seeing a group of young boys playing, he approached them, but the mischievous ones ran away. Then he called them with good manners, and after some hesitation, they came closer. Don Bosco gave them some little gifts, asked about their families, inquired what game they were playing, and invited them to continue, first stopping to watch them, then starting to take part. Then others, who had been watching from afar, rushed in from all corners of the square around the priest, who welcomed everyone lovingly and had a kind word and a little gift for all. He asked if they were good, if they said their prayers and if they went to confession. When he wanted to leave, they followed him for quite a distance, only leaving him when he got back into the carriage. The cardinal was amazed.

– *Did you see?*

– *You were right!* exclaimed the cardinal [...]

The final visits

Don Bosco's final visits were reserved for the Confession of St. Peter and the Catacombs. After praying in the [Basilica of St. Sebastian](#), having seen two of the arrows that wounded the holy tribune and the column to which he was tied, he descended into the underground galleries that housed the bones of thousands and thousands of martyrs, and where for many nights St. Philip Neri kept vigil in prayer. He then went to the nearby [Catacombs of St. Callistus](#). There he was awaited by the Knight G. B. De Rossi, who had discovered them, to whom he had been introduced by Monsignor di San Marzano.

Anyone who enters those places feels such emotion that it stays with them for a lifetime. Don Bosco was absorbed in holy thoughts while walking through those undergrounds, where the first Christians, through Mass, communal prayers, the singing of psalms and prophecies, the Eucharistic Communion, and listening to bishops and popes had found the necessary strength to face martyrdom. It is impossible to contemplate with dry eyes those loculi that had enclosed the bloodied or burned bodies of so many heroes of faith, the tombs of fourteen popes who had given their lives to testify to what they taught, and the crypt of St. Cecilia.

Don Bosco observed the ancient frescoes depicting Jesus Christ and the Eucharist and the images representing the marriage of the Blessed Virgin Mary with St. Joseph, the Assumption of Mary into heaven, the Mother of God with the Child in her arms or on her knees. He was enchanted by the sense of modesty that shone in these images, in which primitive Christian art had managed to reproduce the incomparable beauty of the soul and the highest ideal of moral perfection that should be attributed to the Virgin. There were also other figures of saints and martyrs. Don Bosco exited the catacombs at 6 in the evening. He had entered at 8 in the morning [...]

Towards home

On April 14th, Don Bosco left Rome with the cleric Rua, happy that the foundations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales

had been laid [...] He then took a hired carriage, made a brief stop in the town of Palo where he found the innkeeper perfectly free from fever: his healing had been instantaneous. He would never forget the incident, and around 1875 or 76, having arrived in Genoa for business reasons, he wanted to continue his journey to Turin. He asked and learned by telegraph that Don Bosco was at the Oratory, so he went there. Yet, on that day he was having lunch at Mr. Carlo Occhetto. He then went there to find him, making endless festivities. Mr. Occhetto always remembered with great pleasure the story he heard about that healing. Arriving in Civitavecchia and having visited the papal delegate, Don Bosco went to the port to embark.

The waves this time were calm and the weather was beautiful, so he was able to disembark in Livorno, spend time with some friends, and visit some churches. Resuming the sea at dusk, Fr. Rua recalls how the ship arrived in the port of Genoa at the rising of a splendid dawn that illuminated the magnificent panorama of the superb city. As soon as Don Bosco set foot on land, he went to the college of the Artigianelli, where Don Montebruno and Mr. Giuseppe Canale were waiting for him. After noon, he boarded a train. While crossing the city, he experienced a pleasant surprise. When the bells rang for the *Angelus*, many people in the streets and squares uncovered their heads, and the porters had also risen from their benches to recite the prayer. He recounted this several times for the edification of his students. He arrived in Turin on April 16th, welcomed by the young people with such celebration and affection that no father could wish for more from his own children.

The cricket and the Coin

A wise man from India had a close friend who lived in Milan. They had met in India, where the Italian had gone with his family on a tourist trip. The Indian had acted as a guide for the Italian, taking them to explore the most characteristic corners of his homeland.

Grateful, the Milanese friend had invited the Indian to his home. He wanted to return the favour and introduce him to his city. The Indian was very reluctant to leave, but then gave in to his Italian friend's insistence and one fine day he disembarked from a plane at Malpensa.

The next day, the Milanese and the Indian were walking through the city centre. The Indian, with his chocolate-coloured face, black beard and yellow turban attracted the gaze of passers-by, and the Milanese man walked around proud to have such an exotic friend.

Suddenly, in Piazza San Babila, the Indian stopped and asked, "Do you hear what I hear?" The Milanese, a little bewildered, strained his ears as much as he could, but admitted that he heard nothing but the great noise of the city traffic.

"There is a cricket singing nearby," the Indian continued, confidently.

"You are wrong," replied the Milanese. "I only hear the noise of the city. Besides, there can't be crickets around here."

"I am not mistaken. I hear the song of a cricket," retorted the Indian and resolutely started searching among the leaves of some shrunken saplings. After a while he pointed out to his friend, who was watching him sceptically, a small insect, a splendid singing cricket, which was cowering and grumbling at those disturbing his concert.

"Did you see that there was a cricket there?" said the Indian.

"It's true," admitted the Milanese. "You Indians have much sharper hearing than us Whites..."

"This time it is you who are wrong," smiled the wise Indian.

“Be careful....” The Indian pulled a coin out of his pocket and pretending not to notice, dropped it on the pavement.

Immediately four or five people turned to look.

“Did you see that?” the Indian explained. “This coin’s jungle was more thinner and fainter than the cricket’s trill. Yet have you noticed how many Whites heard it?”

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Educating the Faculties of Our Spirit with Saint Francis de Sales

St. Francis de Sales presents the spirit as the highest part of the soul, governed by intellect, memory, and will. At the heart of his pedagogy is the authority of reason, a “divine torch” that truly makes a person human and must guide, illuminate, and discipline passions, imagination, and the senses. To educate the spirit therefore means cultivating the intellect through study, meditation, and contemplation, exercising memory as a repository of received graces, and strengthening the will so that it consistently chooses good. From this harmony flow the cardinal virtues – prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance – which shape free, balanced individuals capable of genuine charity.

Francis de Sales considers the spirit as the higher part of the soul. Its faculties are the intellect, memory, and will. Imagination could be part of it to the extent that reason and will intervene in its functioning. The will, for its part, is the master faculty to which particular treatment should be reserved. The spirit makes humans,

according to the classic definition, a “rational animal.” “We are human only through reason,” writes Francis de Sales. After “bodily graces,” there are “gifts of the spirit,” which should be the object of our reflections and our gratitude. Among these, the author of the *Philothea* distinguishes the gifts received from nature and those acquired through education:

Consider the gifts of the spirit; how many people in the world are foolish, furiously mad, mentally deficient. Why are you not among them? God has favoured you. How many have been educated rudely and in the most extreme ignorance; but you, divine Providence has had you raised in a civil and honourable way.

Reason, “Divine Torch”

In an Exercise of Sleep or Spiritual Rest, composed in Padua when he was twenty-three years old, Francis proposed to meditate on an astonishing topic:

I will stop to admire the beauty of the reason that God has given to man, so that, illuminated and instructed by its marvellous splendour, he may hate vice and love virtue. Oh! Let us follow the shining light of this divine torch, because it is given to us for use to see where we must put our feet! Ah! If we let ourselves be guided by its dictates, we will rarely stumble; it will be difficult to hurt ourselves.

“Natural reason is a good tree that God has planted in us; the fruits that come from it can only be good,” affirms the author of the *Treatise on the Love of God*. It is true that it is “gravely wounded and almost dead because of sin,” but its exercise is not fundamentally impeded.

In the inner kingdom of man, “reason must be the queen, to whom all the faculties of our spirit, all our senses, and the body itself must remain absolutely subject.” It is reason that distinguishes man from animal, so we must be careful not to imitate “the apes and monkeys that are always

sullen, sad, and lamenting when the moon is missing; then, on the contrary, at the new moon, they jump, dance, and make all possible grimaces." It is necessary to make "the authority of reason" reign, Francis de Sales reiterates.

Between the upper part of the spirit, which must reign, and the lower part of our being, sometimes designated by Francis de Sales with the biblical term "flesh," the struggle sometimes becomes bitter. Each front has its allies. The spirit, "fortress of the soul," is accompanied "by three soldiers: the intellect, memory, and will." Therefore, beware of the "flesh" that plots and seeks allies on the spot:

The flesh now uses the intellect, now the will, now the imagination, which, associating against reason, leave it free field, creating division and doing a bad service to reason. [...] The flesh allures the will sometimes with pleasures, sometimes with riches; now it urges the imagination to make claims; now it arouses in the intellect a great curiosity, all under the pretext of good.

In this struggle, even when all the passions of the soul seem upset, nothing is lost as long as the spirit resists: "If these soldiers were faithful, the spirit would have no fear and would not give any weight to its enemies: like soldiers who, having sufficient ammunition, resist in the bastion of an impregnable fortress, despite the fact that the enemies are in the suburbs or have even already taken the city. It happened to the citadel of Nizza, before which the force of three great princes did not prevail against the resistance of the defenders." The cause of all these inner lacerations is self-love. In fact, "our reasonings are ordinarily full of motivations, opinions, and considerations suggested by self-love, and this causes great conflicts in the soul."

In the educative field, it is important to make the superiority of the spirit felt. "Here lies the principle

of a human education," says Father Lejeune, "to show the child, as soon as his reason awakens, what is beautiful and good, and to turn him away from what is bad; in this way, to create in his heart the habit of controlling his instinctive reflexes, instead of following them slavishly. It is thus, in fact, that this process of sensualisation is formed which makes him a slave to his spontaneous desires. At the moment of decisive choices, this habit of always yielding, without controlling oneself, to instinctive impulses can prove catastrophic."

The Intellect, "Eye of the Soul"

The intellect, a typically human and rational faculty, which allows us to know and understand, is often compared to sight. For example, we say: "I see," to mean: "I understand." For Francis de Sales, the intellect is "the eye of the soul"; hence his expression "the eye of your intellect." The incredible activity of which it is capable makes it similar to "a worker, who, with hundreds of thousands of eyes and hands, like another Argus, performs more works than all the workers in the world, because there is nothing in the world that he is not able to represent."

How does the human intellect work? Francis de Sales has precisely analysed the four operations of which it is capable: simple thought, study, meditation, and contemplation. Simple thought is exercised on a great diversity of things, without any purpose, "as flies do that land on flowers without wanting to extract any juice, but only because they meet them." When the intellect passes from one thought to another, the thoughts that thus cram it are ordinarily "useless and harmful." Study, on the contrary, aims to consider things "to know them, to understand them, and to speak well of them," with the aim of "filling the memory," as beetles do that "land on roses for no other purpose than to satiate themselves and fill their bellies."

Francis de Sales could have stopped here, but he knew and recommended two other higher forms. While study aims

to increase knowledge, meditation aims to “move the affections and, in particular, love”: “Let us fix our intellect on the mystery from which we hope to draw good affections,” like the dove that “coos holding its breath and, by the grumbling that it produces in its throat without letting the breath out, produces its typical song.”

The supreme activity of the intellect is contemplation, which consists in rejoicing in the good known through meditation and loved through such knowledge; this time we resemble the little birds that frolic in the cage only to “please the master.” With contemplation, the human spirit reaches its peak; the author of the *Treatise on the Love of God* affirms that reason “finally vivifies the intellect with contemplation.”

Let us return to study, the intellectual activity that interests us more closely. “There is an old axiom of philosophers, according to which every man desires to know.” Taking up this affirmation of Aristotle on his part, as well as the example of Plato, Francis de Sales intends to demonstrate that this constitutes a great privilege. What man wants to know is the truth. The truth is more beautiful than that “famous Helen, for whose beauty so many Greeks and Trojans died.” The spirit is made for the search for truth: “Truth is the object of our intellect, which, consequently, discovering and knowing the truth of things, feels fully satisfied and content.” When the spirit finds something new, it experiences an intense joy, and when one begins to find something beautiful, one is driven to continue the search, “like those who have found a gold mine and push themselves further and further to find even more of this precious metal.” The amazement that the discovery produces is a powerful stimulus; “admiration, in fact, has given rise to philosophy and the careful search for natural things.” Since God is the supreme truth, the knowledge of God is the supreme science that fills our spirit. It is he who “has given us the intellect to know him”; outside of him there are only “vain thoughts and useless reflections!”

Cultivating One's Intelligence

What characterizes man is the great desire to know. It was this desire that "induced the great Plato to leave Athens and run so far," and "induced these ancient philosophers to renounce their bodily comforts." Some even go so far as to fast diligently "in order to study better." Study, in fact, produces an intellectual pleasure, superior to sensual pleasures and difficult to stop: "Intellectual love, finding unexpected contentment in union with its object, perfects its knowledge, continuing thus to unite with it, and uniting ever more, does not cease to continue to do so."

It is a matter of "illuminating the intellect well," striving to "purge" it from the darkness of "ignorance." He denounces "the dullness and indolence of spirit, which does not want to know what is necessary" and insists on the value of study and learning: "Study ever more, with diligence and humility," he wrote to a student. But it is not enough to "purge" the intellect of ignorance; it is also necessary to "embellish and adorn" it, to "wallpaper it with considerations." To know a thing perfectly, it is necessary to learn well, to dedicate time to "subjecting" the intellect, that is, to fixing it on one thing before moving on to another.

The young Francis de Sales applied his intelligence not only to studies and intellectual knowledge, but also to certain subjects essential to man's life on earth, and, in particular, to "consideration of the vanity of greatness, riches, honours, comforts, and voluptuous pleasures of this world"; to "consideration of the wickedness, abjection, and deplorable misery present in vice and sin," and to "knowledge of the excellence of virtue."

The human spirit is often distracted, forgets, and is content with vague or vain knowledge. Through meditation, not only on eternal truths, but also on the phenomena and events of the world, it is able to reach a more realistic and profound vision of reality. For this reason, in the *Meditations* proposed by the author to *Philothea*, there is

dedicated a first part entitled *Considerations*.

To consider means to apply the mind to a precise object, to examine its different aspects carefully. Francis de Sales invites *Philothea* to “think,” to “see,” to examine the different “points,” some of which deserve to be considered “separately.” He urges her to see things in general and then to descend to particular cases. He wants her to examine the principles, causes, and consequences of a given truth, of a given situation, as well as the circumstances that accompany it. It is also necessary to know how to “weigh” certain words or sentences, the importance of which risks escaping us, to consider them one by one, to compare them with each other.

As in everything, so in the desire to know there can be excesses and distortions. Beware of the vanity of false wise men: some, in fact, “for the little science they have, want to be honoured and respected by all, as if everyone should go to their school and have them as teachers: therefore, they are called pedants.” Now, “science dishonours us when it swells us up and degenerates into pedantry.” What ridiculousness to want to instruct Minerva, *Minervam docere*, the goddess of wisdom! “The plague of science is presumption, which swells spirits and makes them hydroponic, as are ordinarily the wise men of the world.”

When it comes to problems that surpass us and fall within the realm of the mysteries of faith, it is necessary to “purify them from all curiosity;” we must “keep them well closed and covered in the face of such vain and foolish questions and curiosities.” It is “intellectual purity,” the “second modesty” or “inner modesty.” Finally, one must know that the intellect can be mistaken and that there is the “sin of the intellect,” such as that which Francis de Sales reproaches to the lady of Chantal, who had made a mistake by placing an exaggerated esteem in her director.

Memory and its “warehouses”

Like the intellect, so memory is a faculty of the spirit that arouses admiration. Francis de Sales compares it

to a warehouse "that is worth more than those of Antwerp or Venice." Is it not said "*to store*" in memory? Memory is a soldier whose fidelity is very useful to us. It is a gift from God, declares the author of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*: God has given it to you "so that you may remember him," he says to *Philothea*, inviting her to flee "detestable and frivolous memories."

This faculty of the human spirit needs to be trained. When he was a student in Padua, the young Francis exercised his memory not only in his studies, but also in his spiritual life, in which the memory of benefits received is a fundamental element:

First of all, I will dedicate myself to refreshing my memory with all the good motions, desires, affections, purposes, projects, feelings, and sweetnesses that the divine Majesty has inspired and made me experience in the past, considering its holy mysteries, the beauty of virtue, the nobility of its service, and an infinity of benefits that it has freely bestowed upon me; I will also put order in my memories about the obligations I have towards her for the fact that, by her holy grace, she has sometimes weakened my senses by sending me certain illnesses and infirmities, from which I have drawn great profit.

In difficulties and fears, it is indispensable to use it "to remember the promises" and to "remain firm trusting that everything will perish rather than the promises will fail." However, the memory of the past is not always good, because it can engender sadness, as happened to a disciple of St. Bernard, who was assailed by a bad temptation when he began "to remember the friends of the world, the relatives, the goods he had left." In certain exceptional circumstances of the spiritual life "it is necessary to purify it from the memory of perishable things and from worldly affairs and to forget for a certain time material and temporal things, although good and useful." In the moral field, to exercise

virtue, the person who has felt offended will take a radical measure: "I remember too much the taunts and injuries, from now on I will lose the memory."

"We must have a just and reasonable spirit"

The capacities of the human spirit, in particular of the intellect and memory, are not destined only for glorious intellectual enterprises, but also and above all for the conduct of life. To seek to know man, to understand life, and to define the norms concerning behaviours conforming to reason, these should be the fundamental tasks of the human spirit and its education. The central part of *Philothea*, which deals with the "exercise of virtues," contains, towards the end, a chapter that summarizes in a certain way the teaching of Francis de Sales on virtues: "We must have a just and reasonable spirit."

With finesse and a pinch of humour, the author denounces numerous bizarre, foolish, or simply unjust behaviours: "We accuse our neighbour for little, and we excuse ourselves for much more"; "we want to sell at a high price and buy cheaply"; "what we do for others always seems a lot to us, and what others do for us is nothing"; "we have a sweet, gracious, and courteous heart towards ourselves, and a hard, severe, and rigorous heart towards our neighbour"; "we have two weights: one to weigh our comforts with the greatest possible advantage for us, the other to weigh those of our neighbour with the greatest disadvantage that can be." To judge well, he advises *Philothea*, it is always necessary to put oneself in the shoes of one's neighbour: "Make yourself a seller in buying and a buyer in selling." Nothing is lost by living as "generous, noble, courteous people, with a regal, constant, and reasonable heart."

Reason is at the base of the edifice of education. Certain parents do not have a right mental attitude; in fact, "there are virtuous children whom fathers and mothers can hardly bear because they have this or that defect in the body; there are instead vicious ones continuously pampered, because

they have this or that beautiful physical gift.” There are educators and leaders who indulge in preferences. “Keep the balance straight between your daughters,” he recommended to a superior of the Visitation nuns, so that “natural gifts do not make you distribute affections and Favors unjustly.” And he added: “Beauty, good grace, and gentle speech often confer a great force of attraction on people who live according to their natural inclinations; charity has as its object true virtue and the beauty of the heart, and extends to all without particularisms.”

But it is above all youth that runs the greatest risks, because if “self-love usually distances us from reason,” this perhaps happens even more in young people tempted by vanity and ambition. The reason of a young person risks being lost above all when he lets himself “be taken by infatuations.” Therefore, attention, writes the bishop to a young man, “not to allow your affections to prevent judgment and reason in the choice of subjects to love; since, once it has started running, affection drags judgment, as it would drag a slave, to very deplorable choices, of which he might repent very soon.” He also explained to the Visitation nuns that “our thoughts are usually full of reasons, opinions, and considerations suggested by self-love, which causes great conflicts in the soul.”

Reason, source of the four cardinal virtues

Reason resembles the river of paradise, “which God makes flow to irrigate the whole man in all his faculties and activities.” It is divided into four branches corresponding to the four virtues that philosophical tradition calls cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

Prudence “inclines our intellect to truly discern the evil to be avoided and the good to be done.” It consists in “discerning which are the most appropriate means to reach the good and virtue.” Beware of passions that risk deforming our judgment and causing the ruin of prudence! Prudence does not oppose simplicity: we will be, jointly, “prudent as

serpents so as not to be deceived; simple as doves so as not to deceive anyone."

Justice consists in "rendering to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves what is due." Francis de Sales begins with justice towards God, connected with the virtue of religion, "by which we render to God the respect, honour, homage, and submission due to him as our sovereign Lord and first principle." Justice towards parents entails the duty of piety, which "extends to all the offices that can legitimately be rendered to them, whether in honour or in service."

The virtue of fortitude helps to "overcome the difficulties that are encountered in doing good and in rejecting evil." It is very necessary, because the sensitive appetite is "truly a rebellious, seditious, turbulent subject." When reason dominates the passions, anger gives way to gentleness, a great ally of reason. Fortitude is often accompanied by magnanimity, "a virtue that pushes and inclines us to perform actions of great importance."

Finally, temperance is indispensable "to repress the disordered inclinations of sensuality," to "govern the appetite of greed," and to "curb the passions connected." In effect, if the soul becomes too passionate about a pleasure and a sensible joy, it degrades itself, rendering itself incapable of higher joys.

In conclusion, the four cardinal virtues are like the manifestations of this natural light that reason provides us. By practicing these virtues, reason exercises "its superiority and the authority it has to regulate sensual appetites."

Is Confession Still Necessary?

The Sacrament of Confession, often overlooked in today's hectic world, remains for the Catholic Church an irreplaceable source of grace and inner renewal. We invite you to rediscover its original meaning: not a mere formal ritual, but a personal encounter with God's mercy, established by Christ himself and entrusted to the ministry of the Church. In an age that downplays sin, Confession proves to be a compass for the conscience, medicine for the soul, and a wide-open door to peace of heart.

The Sacrament of Confession: A Necessity for the Soul

In the Catholic tradition, the Sacrament of Confession—also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance—holds a central place on the journey of faith. It is not merely a formal act or a practice reserved for a few particularly devout faithful, but a profound necessity involving every Christian called to live in God's grace. In an age that tends to relativize the concept of sin, rediscovering the beauty and liberating power of Confession is fundamental to fully responding to God's love.

Jesus Christ himself instituted the Sacrament of Confession. After His Resurrection, He appeared to the Apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). These words are not symbolic; they establish a real and concrete power entrusted to the Apostles and, through succession, to their successors, the bishops and priests.

The forgiveness of sins, therefore, does not happen only privately between man and God, but also passes through the ministry of the Church. God, in His plan of salvation, willed that personal confession before a priest be the ordinary means

of receiving His forgiveness.

The Reality of Sin

To understand the necessity of Confession, one must first become aware of the reality of sin.

Saint Paul states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). And, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8).

No one can claim immunity from sin, not even after Baptism, which purified us from original sin. Our human nature, wounded by concupiscence, continually leads us to fall, to betray God's love through actions, words, omissions, and thoughts.

Saint Augustine writes, "It is true; man's nature was originally created without fault and without any vice. conversely, the present nature of man, through which everyone is born from Adam, now needs the Physician, because it is not healthy. Certainly, all the goods it possesses in its structure, in its life, senses, and mind, it receives from the supreme God, its creator and maker. The vice, however, which obscures and weakens these natural goods, thus making human nature needy of illumination and care, was not derived from its irreproachable maker, but from original sin which was committed through free will." (Nature and Grace).

Denying the existence of sin is tantamount to denying the truth about ourselves. Only by recognizing our need for forgiveness can we open ourselves to the mercy of God, who never tires of calling us back to Himself.

Confession: Encounter with Divine Mercy

The Sacrament of Confession is, first and foremost, a personal encounter with Divine Mercy. It is not simply self-accusation or a session of self-analysis. It is an act of love from God who, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), runs to meet the repentant child, embraces him, and clothes him with new dignity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "*Those who*

approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer cooperates for their conversion." (CCC, 1422).

To confess is to allow oneself to be loved, healed, and renewed. It is to welcome the gift of a new heart.

Why Confess to a Priest?

One of the most common objections is, "Why must I confess to a priest? Can't I confess directly to God?" Certainly, every member of the faithful can – and should – turn directly to God with a prayer of repentance. However, Jesus established a concrete, visible, and sacramental means for forgiveness: confession to an ordained minister. And this applies to every Christian, meaning also priests, bishops, and popes.

The priest acts *in persona Christi*, that is, in the person of Christ Himself. He listens, judges, absolves, and offers spiritual counsel. This is not a human mediation that limits God's love, but rather a guarantee offered by Christ Himself; forgiveness is communicated visibly, and the faithful can have certainty of it.

Furthermore, confessing before a priest demands humility, an indispensable virtue for spiritual growth. Openly acknowledging one's faults frees us from the yoke of pride and opens us to the true freedom of the children of God.

It is not enough to confess only once a year, as required by the minimum of ecclesiastical law. The saints and spiritual masters have always recommended frequent confession – even bi-weekly or weekly – as a means of progress in the Christian life.

Saint John Paul II went to confession every week. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, despite being a Carmelite nun living in

enclosure, confessed regularly. Frequent confession allows one to refine the conscience, correct ingrained faults, and receive new graces.

Obstacles to Confession

Unfortunately, many faithful today neglect the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Among the main reasons are:

Shame: fearing the priest's judgment. But the priest is not there to condemn, but to be an instrument of mercy.

Fear that confessed sins will be made public: confessors cannot reveal to anyone, under any circumstances (including the highest ecclesiastical authorities), the sins heard in confession, even at the cost of their own lives. If they do, they immediately incur *latae sententiae* excommunication (Canon 1386, Code of Canon Law). The inviolability of the sacramental seal admits no exceptions or dispensations. And the conditions are the same even if the Confession did not end with sacramental absolution. Even after the penitent's death, the confessor is bound to observe the sacramental seal.

Lack of a sense of sin: in a culture that minimizes evil, one risks no longer recognizing the gravity of one's faults.

Spiritual laziness: postponing Confession is a common temptation that leads to a cooling of the relationship with God.

Erroneous theological convictions: some mistakenly believe that simply "repenting in one's heart" is sufficient without the need for sacramental Confession.

Despair of salvation: Some think that for them, there will be no more forgiveness anyway. Saint Augustine says: "Indeed, some, after having fallen into sin, lose themselves even more through despair and not only neglect the medicine of repentance but become slaves to lusts and wicked desires to satisfy dishonest and reprehensible cravings, as if by not

doing so they would lose even that to which lust incites them, convinced they are already on the brink of certain damnation. Against this extremely dangerous and harmful disease, the memory of the sins into which even the just and holy have fallen is beneficial." (ibid.)

To overcome these obstacles, one must seek advice from those who can give it, educate oneself, and pray.

Preparing Well for Confession

A good confession requires adequate preparation, which includes:

- 1. Examination of conscience:** sincerely reflecting on one's sins, perhaps aided by lists based on the Ten Commandments, the capital sins, or the Beatitudes.
- 2. Contrition:** sincere sorrow for having offended God, not just fear of punishment.
- 3. Purpose of amendment:** a real desire to change one's life, to avoid future sin.
- 4. Integral confession of sins:** confessing all mortal sins completely, specifying their nature and number (if possible).
- 5. Penance:** accepting and performing the act of reparation proposed by the confessor.

The Effects of Confession

Confession does not merely produce an external cancellation of sin. The internal effects are profound and transformative:

Reconciliation with God: Sin breaks communion with God; Confession re-establishes it, bringing us back into full divine friendship.

Inner peace and serenity: Receiving absolution brings profound peace. The conscience is freed from the burden of guilt, and a new joy is experienced.

Spiritual strength: Through sacramental grace, the penitent receives special strength to fight future temptations and grow in virtue.

Reconciliation with the Church: Since every sin also damages the Mystical Body of Christ, Confession also mends our bond with the ecclesial community.

The spiritual vitality of the Church also depends on the personal renewal of its members. Christians who rediscover the Sacrament of Confession become, almost without realizing it, more open to others, more missionary, more capable of radiating the light of the Gospel in the world. Only those who have experienced God's forgiveness can proclaim it convincingly to others.

The Sacrament of Confession is an immense and irreplaceable gift. It is the ordinary way through which Christians can return to God whenever they stray. It is not a burden, but a privilege; not a humiliation, but a liberation.

We are called, therefore, to rediscover this Sacrament in its truth and beauty, to practice it with an open and trusting heart, and to joyfully propose it also to those who have strayed. As the psalmist affirms, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps 32:1).

Today, more than ever, the world needs purified and reconciled souls, capable of testifying that God's mercy is stronger than sin. If we did not do so at Easter, let us take advantage of the Marian month of May and approach Confession without fear; there awaits us the smile of a Father who never stops loving us.

Young people's gifts to Mary (1865)

In a dream recounted by Don Bosco in the Chronicle of the Oratory, dated May 30th, Marian devotion transforms into a vivid, symbolic judgment of the Oratory's youth: a procession of boys comes forward, each bearing a gift, before an altar magnificently adorned for the Virgin. An angel, the community's guardian, accepts or rejects these offerings, unveiling their moral meaning—fragrant or withered flowers, thorns symbolizing disobedience, animals embodying grave vices such as impurity, theft, and scandal. At the heart of this vision resonates Don Bosco's educational message: humility, obedience, and chastity are the three pillars for earning Mary's crown of roses.

Don Bosco found consolation in acts of devotion to Mary, Help of Christians, whom the whole Oratory honored particularly in the month of May. Of his "Good Nights" the chronicle records but one—a most precious one—which he gave on the 30th:

30th May

I dreamed that you boys were heading in procession toward a lofty, richly decorated altar of Our Lady. You were all singing the same hymns to Her but not in the same way: many sang beautifully, others rather poorly and some totally out of tune. I saw too that some kept silent, strayed from the ranks, yawned or kept disturbing others.

Everyone carried gifts, mostly flowers, to Our Lady. The bouquets differed in size and kind. There were bouquets of roses, carnations, violets and so on. Some boys carried very odd presents, such as pigs' heads, cats, slimy toads, rabbits, lambs and so on. A handsome youth stood by the altar. A close look would show that he had wings. He may have been the Oratory's guardian angel. As you boys presented your gifts, he

took each and placed it on the altar.

The first to reach the altar offered gorgeous bouquets which the angel silently placed on it. From other bouquets, instead, he had to remove decayed or scentless flowers, such as dahlias, camelias and the like, because Mary is not satisfied with mere looks. Some bouquets even had thorns and nails which, of course, were promptly plucked out and thrown away.

When a boy carrying a pig's head came up, the angel said to him, "How dare you offer this to Our Lady? Don't you know that this animal symbolizes the ugly vice of impurity? Mary Most Pure cannot tolerate such a sin. Step aside. You are not worthy to stand in Her presence."

To those who offered a cat the angel said: "Don't you know better? A cat represents theft, and you dare present it to Mary? Those who take what does not belong to them, those who steal food from the house, tear their clothes out of spite or waste their parents' money by not studying as they ought, are nothing but thieves!" These too the angel ordered to withdraw. He was equally indignant with boys offering toads. "Toads symbolize the shameful sin of scandal, and dare you offer them to Our Lady? Step aside.

Join the unworthy ones." These boys too shamefully withdrew. Some lads came up with a knife stuck in their hearts, a symbol of sacrilege. "Don't you realize that there is death in your soul?" the angel asked them. "If it weren't for God's mercy, you would be lost forever. For heaven's sake, have that knife removed from your heart!"

Eventually the rest of the boys reached the altar and presented their gifts-lambs, rabbits, fish, nuts, grapes and so on. The angel took them and placed them before Our Lady. Then he lined up all the boys whose gifts had been accepted in front of the altar. I noticed to my deep regret that those who had been made to step aside were much more numerous than I had thought.

Two other angels now appeared at each side of the altar carrying ornate baskets filled with gorgeous, exceedingly beautiful crowns of roses. They were not earthly roses, but

heaven-grown, symbolizing immortality. With these the guardian angel crowned all the boys ranged before Our Lady's altar. I noticed among them many whom I had never seen before. Another remarkable thing is this: some of the most beautiful crowns went to boys who were so ugly as to be almost repulsive. Obviously, the virtue of holy purity which they eminently possessed amply made up for their unattractive appearance. Many other boys possessed this virtue too, though not to the same degree. Youngsters excelling in obedience, humility, or love of God were also crowned according to their deserts.

The angel then addressed all the boys as follows: "It was Our Lady's wish that you should be crowned today with these beautiful roses. See to it that they may never be taken from you. Humility, obedience and chastity will safeguard them for you. With these three virtues you will always find favor with Mary and one day receive a crown infinitely more beautiful than that you wear today."

All of you then sang the first stanza of the *Ave Maris Stella*. Afterward you turned around and filed away as you had come, singing the hymn *Lodate Maria* so full-heartedly that I was really amazed. I followed you for a while; then I went back to take a look at the boys whom the angel had pushed aside, but they were no longer there.

My dear children, I know who was crowned and who was turned down.

The latter I will warn privately so that they may strive to bring gifts pleasing to Our Lady.

Now let me make a few observations:

1. All you were carrying a variety of flowers, but unfailingly every bouquet had its share of thorns-some more, some less. After much thinking I came to the conclusion that these thorns symbolized acts of disobedience, such as keeping money instead of depositing it with Father Prefect, asking leave to go to one place and then going to another, being late to school, eating on the sly, going to other boys' dormitories although

knowing that this is always strictly forbidden, lingering in bed after rising time, neglecting prescribed practices of piety, talking during times of silence, buying books and not submitting them for approval, sending or receiving letters on the sneak, and buying and selling things among yourselves. This is what the thorns stand for.

“Is it a sin to break the house rules?” many will ask.

After seriously considering this question, my answer is a firm “yes.” I will not say whether it is mortal or venial. Circumstances will determine that, but it certainly is a sin. Some might counter that the Ten Commandments say nothing about obeying house rules. Well, the Fourth Commandment says: “*Honor thy father and thy mother.*” Do you know what “*father*” and “*mother*” stand for? Not only parents, but also those who take their place. Besides, doesn’t Holy Scripture say: “... *Obey your superiors*”? [Heb. 13, 17] If you must obey them, it follows that they have the power to command. This is why we have rules, and these must be obeyed.

2. Some bouquets had nails among the flowers, the nails which crucified Jesus. How could that be? As usual, one starts with little things and goes on to more serious ones ... He allows himself undue liberties and falls into mortal sin. This is how nails managed to find their way into those bouquets, how they again crucified Jesus, as St. Paul says: “... crucifying again ... the Son of God.” [Heb. 6, 6]

3. Many bouquets contained rotten or scentless flowers, symbols of good works done in the state of mortal sin – and therefore unmeritorious – or from human motives such as ambition, or solely to please teachers and superiors. That’s why the angel, after scolding those boys for daring to offer such things to Our Lady, sent them back to trim their bouquets. Only after they had done this did the angel accept them and place them on the altar. In returning to the altar, these boys did not follow any order, but went up to the angel as soon as they had trimmed their bouquets and then joined

those to be crowned.

In this dream I saw both your past and your future. I have already spoken of it to many of you. I shall likewise tell the rest. Meanwhile, my children, see to it that the Blessed Virgin may always receive gifts from you which She will not have to refuse.

(BM VIII, 73-76)

Opening photo: Carlo Acutis during a visit to the Marian Shrine of Fátima.

Election of the 266th Successor of Saint Peter

Every death or resignation of a Pontiff opens one of the most delicate phases in the life of the Catholic Church: the election of the Successor of Saint Peter. Although the last conclave dates back to March 2013, when Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, understanding how a Pope is elected remains essential to grasp the functioning of a millennia-old institution that influences over 1.3 billion faithful and – indirectly – global geopolitics.

1. The Vacant See

Everything begins with the **vacant see**, that is, the period between the death (or resignation) of the reigning Pontiff and the election of the new one. The apostolic constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*, promulgated by John Paul II on February 22, 1996, and updated by Benedict XVI in 2007 and 2013, establishes detailed procedures.

Verification of the vacancy

In case of death: the Cardinal Camerlengo – currently Cardinal Kevin Farrell – officially confirms the death, closes and seals the papal apartment, and notifies the Dean of the College of Cardinals.

In case of resignation: the vacant see begins at the time indicated in the resignation act, as happened at 8:00 PM on February 28, 2013, for Benedict XVI.

Ordinary administration

During the vacant see, the Camerlengo manages the material assets of the Holy See but cannot perform acts reserved exclusively for the Pontiff (such as episcopal appointments, doctrinal decisions, etc.).

General and particular congregations

All cardinals – electors and non-electors – present in Rome gather in the Synod Hall to discuss urgent matters. The “particular” congregations include the Camerlengo and three cardinals drawn by lot in rotation; the “general” congregations summon the entire College of Cardinals and are used, among other things, to set the start date of the conclave.

2. Who can elect and who can be elected

The electors

Since Paul VI’s motu proprio *Ingravescentem aetatem* (1970), **only cardinals who have not reached the age of 80 before the start of the vacant see have the right to vote.** The maximum number of electors is set at 120, but this can be temporarily exceeded due to closely spaced consistories.

Electors must:

- be present in Rome by the start of the conclave (except for serious reasons);
- take an oath of secrecy;
- stay at the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, the residence established by John Paul II to ensure dignity and discretion.

The enclosure is not a medieval whim: it aims to protect the cardinals’ freedom of conscience and shield the Church from

undue interference. Breaking the secrecy results in automatic excommunication.

Those eligible

In theory, **any baptized male** can be elected Pope, since the Petrine office is of divine right. However, from the Middle Ages to today, the Pope has always been chosen from among the cardinals. If a non-cardinal or even a layman were chosen, he would have to be immediately ordained a bishop.

3. The conclave: etymology, logistics, and symbolism

The term “conclave” comes from the Latin *cum clave*, “with key”: the cardinals are “locked in” until the election to avoid external pressures. The enclosure is guaranteed by several rules:

- Allowed places: Sistine Chapel (voting), *Domus Sanctae Marthae* (lodging), a reserved path between the two buildings.
- Communication ban: electronic devices are collected, signal jammers used, *anti-spy controls* in place.
- Secrecy is also ensured by an oath that includes spiritual sanctions (*automatic* excommunication) and canonical penalties.

4. Typical agenda of the conclave

1. “*Pro eligendo Pontifice*” Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on the morning of the entry into the conclave.
2. Procession in the Sistine Chapel reciting the *Veni Creator Spiritus*.
3. Individual oath of the cardinals, pronounced before the Gospel book.
4. *Extra omnes!* (“Everyone out!”): the Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations dismisses those not entitled to stay.
5. First (optional) vote on the afternoon of the entry day.
6. Two daily votes (morning and afternoon) followed by the scrutiny (counting).

5. Voting procedure

Each round follows four steps:

5.1. *Praescrutinium*. Distribution and filling out in Latin of the ballot "*Eligo in Summum Pontificem...*".

5.2. *Scrutinium*. Each cardinal, carrying the folded ballot, says: "*Testor Christum Dominum...*". He deposits the ballot in the urn.

5.3. *Post-scrutinium*. Three *scrutators* drawn by lot count the ballots, read aloud each name, record it, and perforate the ballot with needle and thread.

5.4. *Burning*. Ballots and notes are burned in a special stove; the colour of the smoke indicates the result.

To be elected, a qualified majority is required, that is, two-thirds of valid votes.

6. The smoke: black waiting, white joy

Since 2005, to make the signal unmistakable to the faithful in St. Peter's Square, a chemical reagent is added:

- Black smoke (*fumata nera*): no one elected.

- White smoke (*fumata bianca*): Pope elected; bells also ring.

After the white smoke, it takes another 30 minutes to an hour before the new Pope is announced by the Cardinal Deacon in St. Peter's Square. Shortly after (5 to 15 minutes), the new Pope appears to give the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing.

7. "*Acceptasne electionem?*" – Acceptance and pontifical name

When someone reaches the required threshold, the Dean of the College of Cardinals (or the oldest by order and legal seniority if the Dean is the elected) asks: "*Acceptasne electionem de te canonice factam in Summum Pontificem?*" (Do you accept the canonically made election as Supreme Pontiff?). If the elected consents – *Accepto!* – he is asked: "*Quo nomine vis vocari?*" (By what name do you wish to be called?). Taking the name is an act full of theological and pastoral meanings: it recalls models (Francis of Assisi) or reform intentions (John XXIII).

8. Immediately following rites

8.1 *Vesting*.

8.2 *Entry into the Chapel of Tears*, where the new Pope can

recollect himself.

8.3 *Obedientia*: the electing cardinals file past for the first act of obedience.

8.4 *Announcement to the world*: the Protodeacon appears on the central balcony with the famous "*Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum: habemus Papam!*"

8.5 *First "Urbi et Orbi" blessing* of the new Pontiff.

From that moment, he takes possession of the office and formally begins his pontificate, while the coronation with the pallium and the Fisherman's ring takes place at the inauguration Mass (usually the following Sunday).

9. Some historical aspects and development of the norms

1st–3rd centuries: Acclamation by clergy and Roman people. In the absence of stable norms, imperial influence was strong.

1059 – *In nomine Domini*. College of Cardinals. Nicholas II limits lay intervention; official birth of the conclave.

1274 – *Ubi Periculum*. Mandatory enclosure. Gregory X reduces political manoeuvres, introduces seclusion.

1621–1622 – Gregory XV. Systematic secret ballot. Improvement of ballots; two-thirds requirement.

1970 – Paul VI. Age limit of 80 years. Reduces electorate, favouring quicker decisions.

1996 – John Paul II. *Universi Dominici Gregis*. Modern codification of the process, introduces *Domus Sanctae Marthae*.

10. Some concrete data of this Conclave

Living cardinals: 252 (average age: 78.0 years).

Voting cardinals: 134 (135). Cardinal Antonio Cañizares Llovera, Archbishop Emeritus of Valencia, Spain, and Cardinal John Njue, Archbishop Emeritus of Nairobi, Kenya, have announced that they will not be able to participate in the conclave.

Of the 135 voting cardinals, 108 (80%) were appointed by Pope Francis. 22 (16%) were appointed by Pope Benedict XVI. The remaining 5 (4%) were appointed by Pope Saint John Paul II.

Of the 135 voting cardinals, 25 participated as electors in the 2013 Conclave.

Average age of the 134 participating cardinal electors: 70.3 years.

Average years of service as cardinal of the 134 participating cardinal electors: 7.1 years.

Average length of a papacy: about 7.5 years.

Start of the Conclave: May 7, Sistine Chapel.

Voting cardinals in the Conclave: 134. Number of votes required for election is two-thirds, i.e., 89 votes.

Voting schedule: 4 votes per day (2 in the morning, 2 in the afternoon).

After 3 full days (to be defined), voting is suspended for a full day ("to allow a prayer pause, informal discussion among electors, and a brief spiritual exhortation").

Then follow 7 more ballots and another pause up to a full day.

Then 7 more ballots and another pause up to a full day.

Then 7 more ballots and then a pause to evaluate how to proceed.

11. Unwritten "internal" dynamics

Despite the strict legal framework, the choice of the Pope is a spiritual but also a human process influenced by:

- Profiles of candidates ("papabili"): geographic origin, pastoral experience, doctrinal competence.
- Ecclesial currents: curial or pastoral, reformist or conservative, liturgical sensitivities.
- Global agenda : ecumenical relations, inter-religious dialogue, social crises (migrants, climate change).
- Languages and personal networks: cardinals tend to gather by region (the "Latin American" group, "African" group, etc.) and meet informally during meals or "walks" in the Vatican gardens.

A spiritual and institutional event together

The election of a Pope is not a technical step comparable to a

corporate assembly. Despite the human dimension, it is a **spiritual act essentially guided by the Holy Spirit.**

The care of minute rules – from sealing the Sistine doors to burning the ballots – shows how the Church has transformed its long historical experience into a system now perceived as stable and solemn.

Knowing how a Pope is chosen, therefore, is not just curiosity: it is understanding the dynamic between authority, collegiality, and tradition that supports the oldest religious institution still operating worldwide. And, in an age of dizzying changes, that “little smoke” rising from the roof of the Sistine Chapel continues to remind us that centuries-old decisions can still speak to the hearts of billions, inside and outside the Church.

May this knowledge of the data and procedures help us to pray more deeply, as one should pray before every important decision that affects our life.

When the Lord Knocks

A confrere told me, “Father, we only need your closeness, your listening, your prayer. This consoles us, encourages us, and gives us strength and hope so that we can continue to serve the young, the poor and wounded, the frightened and terrified!”

On March 25, 2025, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary. One of the most significant solemnities for the Christian faith. On this solemnity, we remember the initiative of God who becomes part of that human history that he himself created. On that day in the Holy Eucharist, we recite the Creed, and when we profess that the Son of God became man, we believers kneel as a sign

of amazement at this wonderful initiative of God before which we can only kneel.

In the experience of the Annunciation, Mary is afraid: "Do not be afraid, Mary," the Angel tells her. After she has expressed her questions, being assured that it is God's plan for her, Mary responds with a simple phrase that remains for us today a reminder and an invitation. Mary, the Blessed among women, simply says, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

Last March 25, the Lord knocked on the door of my heart through the call that my brothers at the 29th General Chapter addressed to me. They asked me to make myself available to take on the mission of being Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. I confess that at that moment I felt the weight of the invitation, moments that disorient because what the Lord was asking of me was not a light thing. The point is that when the call comes, we as believers enter that sacred space where we strongly feel the fact that it is He who takes the initiative. The only path before us is to simply abandon ourselves into the hands of God, without ifs, ands, or buts. And all this is naturally not easy.

"You will see how the Lord works"

In these first weeks, I am still asking myself like Mary, what is the meaning of all this? Then little by little I begin to arrive at that consolation that one of my Provincials once told me: "When the Lord calls, it is He who takes the initiative, what is done depends on Him. You just keep yourself ready and available. You will see how the Lord works."

In light of this personal but very broad experience, because it concerns the Salesian Congregation and the Salesian Family, I immediately turned to my dear Salesian brothers. From the first moment, I asked them to accompany me with their prayer, their closeness, their support.

I must confess that in these first weeks I already feel that

this mission must be inspired by Mary. After the Annunciation by the Angel, she set out to help her cousin Elizabeth. And thus, I set out to serve my brothers, listening to them, sharing with them, and reassuring them of the support of the entire Congregation, especially for those who live in situations of war, conflict, and extreme poverty.

I was struck by the comment of a Provincial who is experiencing an extremely difficult situation with his confreres. After a very fraternal conversation, he said to me, "Father, we only need your closeness, your listening, your prayer. This consoles us, encourages us, and gives us strength and hope so that we can continue to serve the young, the poor and wounded, the frightened and terrified!" After this comment, we remained silent, he and I, with some tears falling from his eyes and, I must say, also from mine.

After the meeting, I remained alone in my office. I asked myself if this mission that the Lord is asking me to accept is not perhaps that of making myself a brother alongside my brothers who suffer but hope? Who fight to do good for the poor and have no intention of stopping? I felt a voice inside me saying that it is worth saying 'yes' when the Lord knocks, whatever the cost!

The way to hell paved with feeble resolutions (1873)

San Giovanni Bosco recounts in a "good night" the result of a long plea to Mary Help of Christians: to understand the main cause of eternal damnation. The answer, received in repeated dreams, is shocking in its simplicity: the lack of a firm, concrete resolution at the end of Confession. Without a sincere decision to change one's life, even the sacrament

becomes ineffective and sins are repeated.

A solemn warning: Why do so many go to destruction? Because they do not make good resolutions when they go to confession.

At the "Good Night" on May 31, 1873, Don Bosco gave his pupils a serious warning, which, he said, was "the result of his humble prayers" and came from the Lord:

Throughout the whole month of May-he said-particularly during the novena of Mary, Help of Christians, I constantly offered Masses and prayers to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin imploring them to let me know what, most of all drags souls into hell. I do not say now that the Lord did or did not enlighten me. I only say that almost every night I dreamed that this is due to the lack of firm resolves in confessions. I seemed to see boys leaving church after confession, their heads sprouting two horns.

What causes this? I asked myself. *Ah, this is due to feeble resolutions.* That's why so many go frequently to confession but never mend their ways and keep confessing the same sins over and over again. There are some (I am only conjecturing. not going on anything heard in confession, because of the seal) who at the start of the school year were doing rather poorly in studies and are still doing no better: there are others who griped and are still griping. I thought it best to let you know this, because it is the result of my humble prayers and because it does come from the Lord.

Publicly he gave no other details, but undoubtedly he took advantage of this dream to encourage and admonish. What little he did say and the way he said it constituted a grave warning, such as should frequently be given to our boys.
(BM X, 48-49)