

La Voix du Père

Fr. Cyprien Casimir, our third Superior General from 1936 to 1946, was once called the *Fils du Coeur*, (Son of the Heart) of Dom Adrian Gréa, the Founder of the Canons Regular of the Immaculate Conception. In order to make the thoughts of his spiritual father better known, Fr. Casimir printed a collection of Dom Gréa's conferences in the CRIC Bulletin, *La Voix du Père*, The Voice of the Father, which ran from 1947 to 1949. In a note at the beginning of the first issue, Fr. Casimir explained why these conferences are such a great treasure to the Canons and to all those we serve: "his lectures reflect, as a whole, the science and the piety of the Father and Founder that God gave us, and the true spirit of the Canon Regular, destined, by vocation, to the Eucharistic Liturgy and, consequently, to the Sacramental Liturgy for the Service of Souls, and the Liturgy of the Divine Office for the praise of God." Although the subjects of his conferences are varied, Dom Gréa never fails to touch on those fundamental aspects of his spirituality, which he received from the Saints and passed on to his religious sons. One of his biographers, Msgr. Vernet, wrote: "All of Dom Gréa's spirituality is summed up in these words: prayer and sacrifice, through Mary, for the love of Christ and of the Church, His Mystical Body."

For this month's issue of *Nostra Laetitia*, we have chosen to include Dom Gréa's sermon for the Feast of All Saints, to help us better prepare for the coming Triduum of All Hallows' Tide – also, be sure to read Bro. Eric's article to learn more!

Dom Gréa, November 1, 1893
Abbey of St. Antoine

It is in his Sermon on the Mount that Our Lord gives mankind the new law. The old law had been given on Sinai in the midst of lightning and thunder, a threatening law which punished with death those who transgressed it. In the new, God attracted us with rewards, *Beati* etc. [Blessed are etc.]. He gives us the details of this law: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God" (cf. Mt 5:3-8). This is the law which is given to us: the reward promised to those who observe it, they will have beatitude, that is to say, the enjoyment of God Himself. *Ut gaudeatis et gaudium vestrum sit plenum* [that you may rejoice, and your joy may be full] (1 Jn 1:4). Let us raise our eyes to those who have kept this law. Heaven is filled with those who were pure in heart, who were humble and poor in spirit, who wept and groaned on earth, who were the object of the insults of the worldly.

Let us walk in the light of their examples. They are not only the witnesses of our struggles, they still excite us by their examples, and they send down on us the graces of God because they are the dispensers. Let us walk excited by the examples and strengthened by their

intercession, arriving at our end. *Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit* [He who perseveres to the end will be saved] (cf. Mt 24:13).

There is no point in living for a long time; a long life well lived saves, but if this time which is given to us must be for us a danger and a peril, it is better to die young. Let us not stop: time does not stop and as it goes we must progress. Let us not end our holiness. *Sancti estote* [Be holy] (Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:7; cf. 1 Pet 1:16). *Veni ut vitam habeant et abundantius habeant* [I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly] (Jn 10:10). Let us thank God for having called us to a state where we are in the necessity of always striving for perfection. This is how we are on the true path to salvation. Let us persevere. Perseverance is not earned, it is acquired. It is obtained through prayer. They persevere who pray, provided that their prayer contains the necessary conditions, that is to say, that it is done with humility, confidence, mortification and love.

What happiness is comparable to that of the saints? ...The universe offers us a beautiful spectacle of harmony and wealth, but the spectacle of the sanctification of the elect is incomparably more magnificent. There we see the blood of martyrs, the purity of virgins, the struggles and victories of holy confessors, the austerities of solitaries, the immolations of Saints crucifying nature to bring Jesus to life in their hearts. So many flowers! Violets, lilies, roses, the violets of humility, the lilies of purity and the splendor of innocence, the roses of love.

This is the magnificent garden that God inhabits and where we are invited to go one day to admire its splendors and breathe in its perfumes. Having this spectacle in front of our eyes, let us look at it unceasingly as the goal of our career and, supported by this hope, let us walk forward, let us run in the way of God. *Viam mandatorum cucurri etc.* [I have run in the way of thy commandments etc.] (Ps 118(119):32). May all our congregation leap forward with increasing ardor in this holy career.

Pergant igitur vocatione qua vocati sunt respondentes, orationi instantes, invicem diligentes et Deus erit merces eorum magna nimis. Amen

[Therefore, answering the call they have received, let them go ahead, instant in prayer, loving one another, and God will be their reward, exceeding great.]

The Voice of the Father
Article 2, November 2020

In this brief conference our beloved founder, Dom Adrien Gréa, discusses the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady and sheds some light on the nature of the Canonical Life. Indeed, it was Dom Gréa's desire, pursuant to the mind of the Church, that all parish clergy return to the Apostolic Life of religious poverty, chastity, and obedience, and thereby follow Our Lord most perfectly. It is my hope that you will be edified to hear more about this kind of life, which the Canons Regular of the Immaculate Conception are striving to live. Finally, you will see that I have appended a note at the end of the conference to explain his final statements.

Dom Gréa

November 21, 1894
Abbey of St. Antoine

Today we are celebrating the beautiful feast of the Presentation of Our Lady. It is on this day that the Blessed Virgin, still a very small child, is brought to the Temple by St. Joachim and St. Anne. Tradition reports that she was three years old. How beautiful and touching! St. Joachim and St. Anne present to God the flower of their home, the future Mother of God, the one who must anoint the world with the fragrance of Her virtues. See with what generosity these patriarchs make this offering to God. They are already advanced in age. This child is the only consolation and the joy of their old age. However, they offer Her up with joy and generosity; perhaps God gave them knowledge of the great destinies of the Blessed Virgin.

And the Blessed Virgin in the Temple, she is the model of the virtues that must be practiced in community: St. Ambrose shows Her to us in silence, in work and obedience, in the spirit of prayer, and already practicing from Her young years great mortifications, abstinence and fasting, spending the night in vigil, not even interrupting in sleep Her relations with the Holy Spirit. What a model of holiness! Let us honor this offering of our Queen and at the same time ask Her to accept and present to God the offering that we made to Her of ourselves on the day of our profession or on the day of our entry into the clerical state. It is an old custom of the Church of France to renew its clerical promises each year on the Feast of the Presentation.

While the Bishop cuts his hair, the cleric pronounces these words, which are a formula of religious profession: *Dominus pars hæreditatis meæ, et calicis mei: tu es qui restitues hæreditatem meam mihi* [The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: it is thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me] (Ps 15 (16):5). It is you, my God, who gives me the eternal inheritance for the temporal inheritance, which I renounce today out of love for you. What is this other than a religious profession? This formula expresses the perfect renunciation of the goods of the earth so well that St. Philip Neri chose it as a formula of profession for the Oratorian nuns he had founded. There is a very close relationship between the clergy and religious life; this is why

the Canon Regular is the perfect cleric, the cleric who best responds to the intention of the Church in the ordination of clerics. All clerics should be religious, so St. Gregory VII wanted everyone who received Sacred Orders to be religious. His work did not succeed and the Sovereign Pontiffs have always regarded this failure as a misfortune, because they saw in secularity a considerable weakening of the influence of the Church on the peoples.

So it is from this date that we see the appearance of religious orders: mendicants whom God sent to the aid of His Church, because the salt of the earth had been weakened by the ownership of temporal goods. God has saved us from this misfortune by calling us to the vocation of the clerics of the primitive Church, to the vocation of the clerics such as the Church desires and calls them. Here, documents abound. From St. Gregory VII to Pius IX, everyone agrees that secularity is tolerated in the Church, but that it is not an institution in the clergy.

Let us respond to this holy vocation with our fidelity and a great esteem. It gives us the means to save ourselves and to save others which the state of secularization does not provide. It is not activity that saves, it is not success, but holiness, humble and hidden holiness. To this esteem, let us add gratitude for a gift so precious that God has given us and that He has refused to so many others. But to keep this benefit which God has bestowed upon us, we need above all vigilance and prudence, and true prudence is to be found in humility: all vocations [i.e. those which are lost] have been lost by pride: they believed themselves capable of great things that obedience denied them; they thought they were a light placed under a bushel that needed to be revealed to the world. They thought that they should not leave in darkness talents that God had given them, but that they should make them bear fruit.

A final note from Bro. Derek: I would like to clarify, if necessary, that Dom Gréa is not implying here that religious, in order to be truly obedient and humble, ought to hide their light beneath a bushel (cf. Mt 5:15; Lk 11:33), nor that they ought to bury their talents (cf. Mt 25:14-30), nor that they should neglect to bear fruit (cf. Lk 13:9); indeed, if we did any of these, we would offend Our Lord. Rather, he is warning us against the temptations of pride, which would deceive us into disobedience under the pretext of these good deeds. As St. Augustine explains in his Rule: “As a matter of fact, every other vice produces evil deeds with a view to doing evil, but pride sets a trap for good deeds as well with a view to destroying them.” Even good deeds if done with prideful intentions offend the divine humility of our Blessed Lord, who knows our heart; “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8). Therefore, all of us must seek to humble ourselves through obedience to God, and for us religious, we must do this through obedience to the Rule and to our Superiors. Mindful of this, Dom Gréa warns his Canons, here and elsewhere, against the temptation to stray from their true vocation. If a Canon is tempted to neglect or abandon his life of contemplation, especially in favor of more external activity than the observances allow – either because he cannot see the fruits of his spiritual labor (cf. Jn 4:37) or because he fears that he shall not bear enough of it by observing the mandates of his vocation (cf. Jn 15:4) – he, in actuality, lacks faith in God, who calls him to this vocation. In light of this, Dom Gréa exhorts his religious sons and confreres, in his Spiritual Testament given to the entire Congregation in 1902: “You must

remember, that out of a hundred good things that are offered to us, there are ninety-nine that we must leave aside in order to apply to ourselves to that one alone to which we are called by God.”

The Voice of the Father
Article 3, December 2020

Just as Lent is a time of preparation for Easter, the greatest solemnity in the liturgical year, so too is Advent a season of preparation for the Church's great celebration of Christmas. Although not as austere as Lent, Advent is also a penitential season – hence the Church's use of the color violet in her Advent liturgies. It is a time to repent of our former ways and prepare for the coming of Our Lord, and to “make straight the way of the Lord” (Jn 1:23) in our lives. We do this, by the grace of God, through prayer, penance, and almsdeeds, and we do all of this in order to love God more. In this conference of our beloved Founder, Dom Gréa exhorts his religious to imitate Jesus. We hope that these brief reflections will also help you draw closer to Christ, especially during this blessed time of Christmas.

Note: The conferences which we have been sharing from *La Voix du Père* were not written by Dom Gréa himself, but are summaries quickly transcribed by a certain Brother Thomas as Dom Gréa gave his lectures. After they were compiled, the Reverend Abbot blessed these notes, attesting to their faithfulness to his thoughts despite their necessary brevity.

Dom Gréa

December 3, 1893
Abbey of St. Antoine

Each year at the start of Advent the Church calls for our meditations on the Last Judgment. At the same time as She urges us to prepare ourselves to celebrate with dignity the advent of Jesus in the stable of Bethlehem, full of gentleness; She invites us also to think of the other advent, where He will come to exercise on men all the rigor of His Justice. The entire life of humanity passes between these two mysteries: Jesus slain for the salvation of the world and Jesus exercising His justice over the world. What must we do? We must take advantage of the first advent of Our Lord so that we have nothing to fear from the second. The great Pope St. Leo tells us how to take advantage of this advent. Jesus is for the world, “*exemplum et sacramentum*” [example and sacrament]; He is “*the mystery that saves the world, and the rule that we must follow.*” What a mystery it is, that by which God, wanting to make His mercy burst forth, passing over the angelic world incapable of repentance, stoops down to man to raise him from the abyss into which he had fallen.

This is the great mystery that we are going to honor at Christmas; the blood of Jesus flowing in penance to purify souls; the Blood of Jesus flowing in the Sacred Chalice to nourish them. But if He is the mystery which gives salvation to men, He is also the example that we must follow: “*exemplum et sacramentum.*” Jesus called us to a religious state: to be configured to Him in His humility, in His obedience, in the innocence of His life, and in His immolation. All the mysteries that we celebrate, all the sacraments that we receive are due only to this. The Holy Eucharist comes to light in our hearts the fire of divine love and to make us live the very life of God. We must therefore imitate Jesus. As we were reading today in the refectory, it would be a

crime, a great sin to descend, instead of ascending, in the vocation that God has given us. You who are professed are bound on the altar, you who have not yet made your profession, you aspire to the same happiness.

Imitate Jesus in His humility; He has no need of you, He only wants your love. Love is what we must give to God; if we want to please Him, let us do everything out of love. When the Communards in 1870 were leading the monks, the Dominicans of Arcueil, to death, the Superior of these worthy monks turned to his brothers and said to them, "For the love of God," and they fell under the bullets, martyrs for the love of God. This kind of will, we do not need to seek it to know it; it is shown to us at every moment of the day. How cowardly we are, how we spare ourselves, while Jesus is on the Cross: are we ready to sacrifice for the love of God our country, our relations with our brothers (like those who went to Canada or who askmetogoto China), our health, our activity, our intelligence (if it pleases God to take it away from us), our works? "I would like to do this, I would like..." but do you love it, O Jesus? What you tell me to do, I will do it, the rest I will not, it would only be the attraction of my nature. If we did this, we would have nothing to fear from the Last Judgment.

During the 33 years that he spent on earth, He was constantly at work, immolating Himself, sacrificing Himself as soon as He entered this world. Let us model our life on His. Let us crucify ourselves, let us mortify ourselves, longing for the resurrection which will be given to us on the last day. The last day is the particular judgment, for the particular judgment is for each of us what the general judgment is for all men; this judgment is approaching, it has already been pronounced, because for each action we do, it is not long in coming. It is delayed so that we have time to repent and show God more love. Let us ask to die at the right time of grace, in the maturity of holiness. There is not a damned one in hell who does not regret having not died at some point in life; if they were dead by then, they would not have to bear the dreadful weight of the Eternity of God's righteousness. Our salvation is not yet done, we can still fall into these eternal regrets, we still have a long way to go. Long? I do not know, but the distance is great, since it is a mountain to climb. Jesus goes before us, we walk behind Him; let us follow in His footsteps, imitate His poverty, humility, obedience, then we will follow Him and we will be where He is, and after having shared with Him the pain of the cross, we will enjoy with Him the splendors of glory.

The Voice of the Father
Article 4, January 2021

This month we have chosen to share two shorter conferences of our beloved Founder rather than one. These allocutions bear a special significance for our six new novices as they were given by Dom Gréa to his own novices 126 years ago. For my brothers and I, these are the cherished words of our Father in religion, counseling us as we enter this blessed year of formation. He exhorts us, with St. Paul, to “Put on Jesus Christ” (Rm 13:14) and allow Him to more perfectly permeate us, letting go of all that does not lead us to a greater love of God, and then for us to do so without ceasing and without reservation. Although not all are called to the state of professed religious life, each and every person is called to sanctity. It is therefore our hope that these conferences will inspire you, our readers, to put on Jesus Christ all the more fervently. A brief note: you will notice that the first allocution begins by mentioning that the novices have already passed through the scholasticate; it seems that, until 1913, when our Congregation received official approbation by Pope Saint Pius X, this period of study preceded the Novitiate. For us now, this study will occur following the Novitiate during our time of temporary vows.

Dom Gréa

At the Entry into the Novitiate

7 September 1894

Abbey of St. Antoine

So here is finally a first step in your religious life. Faithful to the invitation of God, who from all eternity has marked you, called you, chosen you, you have moved forward. From the little brothers, you went up to the scholasticate and now you are going to begin this blessed year of the novitiate, a year of grace which only occurs once in a lifetime.

In this year you are going to learn what to keep your whole life. After your profession, it will not be finished, the work of your sanctification will not yet be completed; you will have to progress according to all the rules that you will learn. What are these rules? They can be summed up in just one: that which was revealed to St. Augustine when he heard a voice saying: “*Tolle, lege*” [take, read]. Having taken the book, he opened it and came across this word: “Put on Jesus Christ.” You already know what religious life is: you learned from childhood to love Jesus and to despise the world, this deceptive world which seduces by mirages. You are already clothed with Jesus Christ but now you are going to be permeated, and what you will acquire, you will spend it, and by spending it, your wealth will not decrease but on the contrary will always increase... On the day of accounts, you can say to God, “You gave me five talents, I made them fruitful: here are five others.” The talents that God gives you are the five wounds of His Son: the wound of the right hand which must keep you; the wound of the left hand which must support you; the wound of the right foot which must direct your affections towards Heaven; that of the left foot which must divert your affections from the earth.

You will offer five other ones, struck with the same effigy of the same value, corresponding to the wounds on His hands and feet and on His side. So enter into this joy promised to good servants. From here below, you are already entering it. We enter always and we exit always; we exit ourselves to enter God... This is why we ask Him to bless our entry and our exit. Launch yourself into this stage of the novitiate to receive the reward. The reward is the profession, it is Heaven. Enter it with humility, knowing that it is God, and not you, who has chosen you, with confidence and with love. May the Blessed Virgin, who will be your mistress, let Her lights descend on your heart. May your Father- Master, who will direct you, have the consolation of seeing that you respond humbly and generously to your holy vocation.

The Growth of the Soul

31 January 1894

St. Antoine

“Increase and Multiply.” I would like to speak to you tonight about a law that God imposes on souls. This law is *crescite*, increase. This law can first be understood as physical increase. A child grows up every day, it is obvious that we do not notice the progress he is making overnight. However, he is growing and if he did not grow every day, at the end of the year he would not have grown. It is the same with the spiritual. We must grow daily in the love of God by the decrease in the love of ourselves; “*oppertet ilium crescere, me autumn minui*” [He must increase, but I must decrease (Jn 3:30)].

In order that I may say that Jesus lives in me, I must be able to say that I no longer live. Ah, may God kill us – I am not saying the day we should offend Him, but the day we halt in His love, the day we would say, I am holy enough, I do not want to sanctify myself any more. Souls called to a higher holiness should not be content with a lower. You must grow faster and faster every day, as bodies are always falling faster and faster towards the center of the earth. We have no end or rather our end is: “*estote perfecti sicut Pater vester caelestis perfectus est*” [be perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect (Cf. Mt 5:48)].

Do not look back, forget everything behind you. We are amazed at the extraordinary falls; one is terrified at the sight of these souls who have already attained a high sanctity and who suddenly fall. These souls have halted. Saints have always grown in holiness. St. Antony at the age of 105, was holier than at 60, and at 60 more than at 40. Always grow. It is not necessary that you see the progresses you are making; it is enough for God to see them. He sees them and is consoled. Let us always grow up, in the midst of trials.

When we have reached full maturity, God will pick us; as long as we are not, God will leave us, as the gardener leaves an almost ripe fruit on the tree a few more days so that the sun will ripen it more and give it more sugar and sweetness.

What a pity if we had to live one day without progressing; it would be better to die, rather than incur this reproach from Our Lord: “I have against you that you left your first love” [(Cf. Apoc 2:4)]. In order to progress without ceasing, one must ceaselessly renounce oneself, no

longer live for oneself, surrender completely: *multiplicamini* [multiply]. By sanctifying yourself you sanctify souls. St. Thérèse saved as many souls as St. Francis Xavier. St. Vincent de Paul said to preachers: you believe that your words are what convert sinners. No, it is the lay brother who sweeps the corridor.

One thing is the external channel, another thing is the interior life through holiness. By sanctifying ourselves we sanctify souls by virtue of the dogma of the communion of saints. So, if you want to enrich yourself with a large number of souls that you have sanctified, sanctify yourself, otherwise we fall into the illusion of outer works. The saints never fell into this illusion. St. Francis Xavier, who was doing so much good in Japan, would have left everything on a word from St. Ignatius to return to Europe to take up any mundane job. Or do nothing at all except sanctify himself.

As our life gets simpler; one is only concerned with oneself and with one's sanctification. This is our work; we do the exterior work but we do not get attached to it. Our life is a life of renunciation, just that. We renounce ourselves to please Jesus. The more we withdraw, the more Jesus advances; the more we advance, the more Jesus withdraws. It is the spiritual life; it is reduced to these very simple maxims.

All the doctrines of the saints are but applications of this one principle. Let us respond to the grace of God. We are not allowed to halt, to be satisfied with a mediocre sanctity, we have vowed our conversion, that is to say to change ourselves every day, to advance every day.

The Voice of the Father
Article 5, February 2021

In our December issue we shared some of Dom Gréa's reflections on Advent. Therein, he describes Advent as a preparation – not only for the celebration of Our Lord's first coming at Christmas – but also as a preparation for that time when Christ Jesus shall come to each of us as the Just Judge, that is, at the point of our inevitable death and particular judgement. The season of Lent, all the more sobering and salutary, is a more perfect preparation for that most solemn feast and season in the Church's year, that of Easter. Lent is a reminder of the passion and death through which we must pass with Our Lord in order that we may share in His Easter: His glorious Resurrection. We now present to you two conferences from our Reverend Father in Religion, Dom Adrien Gréa, wherein he shall describe how the Church, the Bride of Christ, prepares for the new life given by God at Easter, and how we too must bear good fruit. In the little treasury of the transcripts of our Founder's conferences, the season of Lent is one of his most abundant and beloved topics because it brings us so close to Our Crucified King.

Dom Gréa

4 March, 1895
St. Antoine

What is Lent? Every year I repeat more or less the same things to you, but St. Paul tells us that there is no inconvenience but utility for our souls to use repetitions (Cf. Phil 3:1). Our Lord, Himself, asks of us only one and the same word, He wishes that we repeat it to Him often, it is the word of Love. He makes St. Peter repeat it three times: "Peter, do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. – Peter, do you love me? Yes ... – Peter, do you love me? etc." He likes to hear this word repeated. Let us repeat it often by the acts of our heart and by all the movements of our will. This year, therefore, I shall repeat to you what I have already told you so many times.

What is Lent? – Lent is a time when the Church, who is a fruitful wife and who each year gives birth to generations of the elect, is in the pains of labor. To give birth to souls, in order to resurrect them with Jesus on the feast of Easter, she makes them die with Him and in Him during Lent. You will tell me, there are people who convert, not only at Easter, but all year round. It is true, but it is in the mystery of Easter that the salvation and conversion of sinners and infidels is placed. Also, the feast of Easter is not a simple anniversary of the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord but each year it is something current, a mystery of resurrection which is accomplished in the mystical body of Jesus, that is to say, the Church.

What are the two Sacraments that save souls? Baptism and Penance, which are the two great fountains where souls are purified in the blood of Jesus. Now, it was at Easter that these two Sacraments were instituted; it was on the Cross, from the side of Jesus, that they came out. But you will say to me, here is a little child who has just been born in the course of the year, I do

not wait for Easter to have him baptized, do I? It is always in the mystery of Easter that we baptize. Also, it is at Easter that we bless the baptismal font, it is at Easter that we pray for infidels, for catechumens and for little children. The faithful go to confession at Easter and during the year, but it is always the same mystery, because Easter is placed as the central point of the reconciliation of sinners.

The Church enters into its view, and, to prepare for her childbirth at Easter, she celebrates Lent; to regenerate souls in the Resurrection of Our Lord, she unites herself to the Passion. How? By good works which are three in number: fasting, prayer, and alms. Through fasting, which is the principal penance of Lent, the Church unites herself with the Passion of Jesus, she imprints His wounds on her heart, and with penance, she inseparably unites prayer and alms.

Prayer; how the Church prays during Lent! Each day of this holy time has its own Mass, like Sunday, and, in the past, since fasting postponed the celebration of this Mass until the evening, all the people attended it at the end of the day's work. The office of Compline also had great solemnity. Alms during Lent were very abundant. Since we are poor by profession, the alms we give are all spiritual.

We ask God to accept these sighs and to pour out a grace of sanctification on these pains. Enter generously into this holy career. The faithful no longer know what it is. Later, when you are in charge of the ministry, you will have to teach them. The Fathers often spoke to the people of the great mystery of Lent, of the mystical number of these forty days, already marked in the Old Testament and consecrated by Our Lord Jesus Christ. The spirit of Lent is also a spirit of solitude and retreat. Let us imitate Our Lord who withdraws into the desert during the time of His fast. Let us move away from dissipation, let us better keep silent. Let us accomplish what the Church commands of us every day. *Utamur ergo parcius, verbis, cibis et potibus, somno, jocis,* etc... [(From a hymn attributed to St. Gregory the Great) Let us use therefore more sparingly, words, food and drink, sleep, mirth...]

How beautiful it is, a Lent spent entirely in prayer and recollection. What a beautiful spectacle, that of a community marching unanimously in these strict observances of penance and retreat, where each one crucifies his sensuality, his vanity, the ambitious revolts of his heart. This is what we have to do during Lent. Let us ask Mary, who followed Jesus in the dolorous way and who stood at the foot of the Cross, to assist us and to make us assist the Passion of her Son and to make us enter into the wound of her heart.

Gospel of Tuesday of the First Week of Lent; The Cursed Figtree

5 March, 1895

St. Antoine

I told you that each day of Lent has its own Mass, each Mass also has a particular Gospel. The Gospel of today recounts that Jesus, going towards Bethany, was hungry, and that He

approached a fig tree to find fruit there and, having not found any because it was not the season, He cursed it. There is a deep mystery hidden under this symbol.

Our Lord wanted to show us, by this rigor which He showed against this tree, how terrible would be the rigors of His justice against those who do not give Him fruit to satisfy His hunger. He comes to visit our heart to find fruit there. He goes down into His garden, as the Canticle of Canticles shares, to harvest myrrh there, to collect grapes and pomegranate fruit. Does He find what He desires when He encounters self-love in our hearts, the pursuits of its own satisfaction, confidence in its judgment?

The fruit He asks for is myrrh, a symbol of work and mortification; it is the grape, a symbol of the passions and intoxications of love; it is the pomegranate to quench His thirst; if He does not find any fruit He curses the tree. What then becomes of this beautiful tree, this vine which He had chosen, that He had transplanted into His garden?

It is desiccated. The next day, the Gospel tells us, the tree was dry. Beware of the aridity of the soul. Do not confuse this drought with aridity. Let us not confuse this drought with aridities, which are a test through which God wants to make us pass in order to purify us; but take care that these aridities are not caused by your infidelity and that they be not for you the beginning of the curse of the tree. The tree was desiccated to the root. As long as the roots still draw some life from the moisture of the soil, one can still have some hope, but when it is dried up to the root it is done; nothing more from the old memories, nothing more from the generous resolutions we had taken, it is dried up. We can water it and add fertilizer to the foot of the tree, it is dry, it is dead. Ah! Let us be vigilant so as not to draw upon us the curse of God. Let us reenter ourselves to see that we do not start to die, that the branches of the tree do not start to desiccate. The dry branches are the resolutions that bend, the old, good desires that drift away from the soul. Let us bring them back to life by going to Jesus, by bringing into our soul the will and the life of Jesus, by withdrawing ourselves from the ways which draw us to our own side, so that, though perhaps being on the verge of death, we may find life again and that Jesus may pluck within us the myrrh of a generous immolation and the two fruits, of the vine and of the pomegranate, that is to say an ardent love which will refresh His heart, quench His thirst and satisfy His hunger.

The Voice of the Father
Article 6, March 2021

On the 8th of December 1870 (the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception), Blessed Pope Pius IX declared St. Joseph to be the Patron of the Universal Church. To mark the 150th year anniversary of this declaration, Pope Francis has proclaimed this, the subsequent year, to be the Year of St. Joseph. Superadded to this great joy, shared by the whole Church, our own Congregation is celebrating this year the upcoming anniversary of its establishment – also 150 years ago. It was on the 8th of September 1871 (the Feast of the Nativity of Mary) that the Church received the Perpetual Vows of Dom Gréa and his first companions, officially founding our Congregation. In honor of this double anniversary, we have chosen to share with you this conference of our beloved Father in Religion, Dom Adrien Gréa, given on the Feast of St. Joseph. Dom Gréa recognized St. Joseph as a powerful intercessor for religious vocations, as well as an exemplar of the religious life, and our first Seminary, in Drôme, France, was dedicated to him. Even today, it remains our custom to pray for St. Joseph's strong support every night after Compline; as the patron of a holy death, it is fitting that we offer him our final thoughts and prayers before retiring for the night.

Dom Gréa

19 March, 1893
St. Antoine

It has pleased the Holy Spirit, who governs the Church, to choose in recent times St. Joseph to be the patron of the Universal Church. Our Lord submitted to him and the Blessed Virgin also. Do you see this apparent reversal of the works of God: the Blessed Virgin, queen of angels and men; Jesus, Creator God, Redeemer and Sovereign Lord, submit to St. Joseph.

These are the lessons that Jesus gives us in the mystery of the Incarnation: He who was Almighty submits to Joseph and Mary? How does St. Joseph exercise the power given to him? By being the minister of God's Providence. Over whom? Over Jesus and Mary. Jesus entrusts Himself to the Providence of His Father, of which St. Joseph is the minister. When Herod sought to put Him to death, He could have defended Himself. No, He lets Himself be led to Egypt by St. Joseph. In the midst of the weaknesses of humanity that He wanted to take, it is St. Joseph who nourishes and keeps Him. God placed our fathers and mothers near our childhood as the mouthpiece of His Providence.

For you, by bringing you here later, He made you find in your superiors a paternal authority which leads you. St. Joseph was that for Jesus. In Nazareth he provided for the necessities of His earthly life through his work. You can imagine that this authority that Jesus committed to St. Joseph over Himself, He extends to His mystical body, which is the Church. He surrendered Himself to the providence of St. Joseph. He entrusted His Mother to him, He also entrusted His Church to him. This is why, in these difficult times, the Holy Spirit has inspired the

Church to choose him as the universal patron, to help her pass through Egypt, that is, the darkness of infidelity. Nowadays the darkness obscures more and more of the world as a result of the doubts which pretend-science casts on the essential truths. We deny even the existence of God. The discoveries of science multiply, for God has left His work to the research of man, so that, discovering every day new proofs of His wisdom, His power, and His goodness, he may be penetrated by greater sentiments of adoration.

Instead of this, man takes pride in himself and rebels against God; this is the darkness that obscures. The Church therefore needs a protector who directs her and at the same time defends her against the persecution of the Herods. He protects her, he keeps her as he kept Jesus, because this flesh of Jesus – taken from the very pure source of Mary Immaculate, presented at the altar on the day of Purification, redeemed, for a time, by the exchange of two small doves, raised on the Cross and placed every day on the corporal of our altars – we know that this body of Jesus was nourished and sustained by St. Joseph.

It was St. Joseph who, through the sweat of his work, won the bread which made Jesus grow to the height of the Cross. Jesus wanted to eat the bread that He had given to Adam and that he had to win with his sweat. Whose is this forehead, whose sweats won the bread of Jesus? It is the forehead of St. Joseph. Thus, St. Joseph has a part in the preparation of the victim, because it is he who nourished Him and he who made Him grow, such that Jesus has obligations towards St. Joseph, and St. Joseph rights over Jesus.

Let us ask him to be for us what he is for the Church, for the mystery of the Church is found in every soul. We too will have to cross Egypt, the land of perils and temptations. You are young and the temptations you experience are still very little; later, if God allows it, you will have more violent ones. It is a mistake to believe that middle age and old age are free from temptation. If childhood has its levities, if adolescence has its dangers, middle age and old age also have their temptations. Temptations of independence, of self-confidence, temptations of egoism, temptations of rest. We no longer want to be a victim, we tire of being upon the altar. Let us ask St. Joseph to assist us, to support us in all the ages of human life, if it would please God to make us pass there. If it is beautiful to see young saints like St. Aloysius de Gonzaga, crowned with lilies and roses, the flowers of their spring, it is no less beautiful to see the old age of saints like St. Antony.

May St. Joseph keep us as he kept Jesus, or rather, may he keep Jesus within us. This is why in the communities we honor St. Joseph as the patron of vocations; it is he who gives us the lights at the beginning, who walks with us, watching over Jesus in us, giving us perseverance and finally ending our life with a holy death, because he is also the patron of a good death. What a beautiful death, that of St. Joseph, exhaling slowly, quietly, under the gaze and in the company of Jesus and Mary. Let us ask him that we have a death similar to his, and for that, that he obtains for us perseverance in our vocation, after having obtained for us the badge of favor of having been called there by God.

The Voice of the Father
Article 7, April 2021

Rather than causing us to forget our death, our Easter jubilation ought to remind us all the more that this life is passing away: the darkness of this world is giving way to the dawn of Christ's light, and we are called to live in that light, here and now, so that we may share in it forevermore. In order to share in His Resurrection as good and faithful servants, we must pass through His Passion: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt 16:24; Et al.) In this conference of our beloved Founder, Dom Gréa will show us the very essence of the religious life: the perfect renunciation of self, in favor of Christ. He, Christ Jesus, is the perfect religious, because He denies Himself absolutely to do the will of His Father. For our example, we need only look to the mystery of His Agony: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt 26:39; Et al.). Every day, Jesus asks His religious: "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" (Mt 20:22; Et al.)

Dom Gréa, 30 January 1895

I am going to tell you the same thing again and I will say it until you get it right, must I tire you out. "*Mihi non pigrum vobis autem necessarium*" [to me indeed it is not wearisome, but to you it is necessary (Cf. Phil 3:1)]. It is the renunciation of ourselves. This renunciation, we must do it. We made a commitment to this when we took our vows. The religious state is naught but the commitment to renounce the personality. On the day of our profession, God is committed with us and us with Him. We cannot fail in this commitment without making a deep wound in the heart of God.

I hear people say in the world (there is such a great ignorance of religious life in the world, even among those who should know it: thus, I have known poor religious left to the discretion of priests who had not the slightest notion of religious life). We hear people say: "Oh, religious life is not a grand thing. I am as religious as you; you get up early in the morning, too. You practice poverty; I am not rich." Religious life is [erroneously] made to consist in this. That which constitutes religious life is the vow, the commitment with Our Lord, a sacred and perpetual commitment, a pact that cannot be torn without flagrant infidelity, odious and offensive to the heart of Jesus. Commitment to what?

To renunciation. "Whoever wants to come after me, let him renounce himself" (Cf. Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23). Once you have embarked on this path, it is no longer permissible to look back, but always to advance, always renounce oneself. Be sure that any temptation against vocation is a temptation against renunciation, and every temptation against renunciation is a temptation against vocation. These two correlative truths are absolutely certain. Any temptation against a vocation is a temptation against renunciation, because one would like to follow one's tastes, have one's views, enjoy one's freedom. Any temptation against renunciation is a temptation against vocation, because our vocation is a vocation of renunciation and whenever we fail to renounce, we fail in our vocation. It is easy to let go of this side. This is why the prior of la Grande

Chartreuse [the head Monastery of the Carthusian Order] asked God, in a letter that he wrote to me and which I have read to you, to guard us from the tendency to the secular spirit. That is where one falls. We will want to give ourselves a little curiosity: reading a newspaper is not much, but doing it without permission is not renunciation. When we are traveling, the rule tells us to go “*recta via*” [the straight way]. We manage to be able to visit this or that curiosity which is a little out of our way; it is not renunciation. What constitutes the merit of religious life is renunciation. Without renunciation, obedience is only fictitious obedience, just as poverty where one lacks nothing is only fictitious poverty.

Also, the masters of the spiritual life tell us that a religious who, by skillful speech, succeeds in having Superiors legitimize his whims, his desires, his little will, would be a religious who would fail in his vocation. There would be no fault, theologically speaking, against obedience, but there would be a decrease in charity. There is a way to avoid faults without, however, avoiding a decrease in charity. It is very grave, a decrease in charity. “*Habeo adversum te quod primam caritatem tuam reliquisti*” [But I have against thee that thou hast left thy first charity (Apoc 2:4)]. Charity is the way that leads to heaven; to decrease in charity is to take the opposite direction and move towards hell. It is logic. “But I haven’t lost sanctifying grace yet; but I’m not in hell yet.” It is true, but you are on the way. Absolutely, like a traveler who suddenly stops and turns around. He is taking the wrong direction, he will not achieve the goal he had set for himself.

Ah, how difficult it is to always move forward in charity because the human soul is subject by itself to inconstancy. Also a fidelity which is based only on nature, is a fidelity which will not hold, because the human being is inconstant. This is why novelists advocate divorce so much, because the human, they say, whose nature is so inconstant, is incapable of making perpetual commitments. St. Francis de Sales said, when speaking of the state of marriage: it is a state where, if there was a novitiate, there would be no professed. This is true, and this is why the spouses have placed over their contract the Sacrament of Marriage. It is God’s intervention that gives them stability.

The Sacrament which gives us constancy in our vocation is the vow, just as the Sacrament of Marriage gives constancy to the spouses. But just as married people, who begin to have disgust, repugnance, resistance, a decrease in the mutual affection which is a duty for them, are on the path to infidelity, so too, when we allow the renouncement of ourselves, our charity to diminish, we are on the path to infidelity. What to do then? The Sacrament is not enough, the vow is not enough, we must pray. Decrease in prayer, relaxation, lack of devotion in prayer, (I am not saying the absence of sensitive consolations, because one can heroically stand in prayer without consolations and thereby acquire more merits, but) lukewarmness puts us on the path to infidelity. Just as spouses can make a bad household and not fulfill the duties of their state, nevertheless without divorce, so one can be a bad religious, without leaving the religious state. So, we need prayer to persevere. When a religious loses the spirit of prayer, be sure that the spirit of his state, that is to say his renunciation, has suffered a great decrease in him, to the extent that the spirit of prayer has diminished. May God give us this spirit of prayer and, to preserve it, may

He also add to it the spirit of penance. “*Spiritum fletus et precum*” [Spirit of weeping and of prayers (Cf. Zac 12:10)]. It will not be long, life is so short.

Today we are celebrating the anniversary of Fr. Bourgeois. How abruptly his life turned from time to eternity. Now he is happy to have been constantly improving in love, in renunciation, sustained by the spirit of prayer and penance. You will have the same happiness at any time that death comes for you, if you remember the teaching that I am giving you this evening. Life is not long; many of you will not reach the age that I have reached; death comes quickly. St. Francis de Sales said to the Bishop of Belley, who wanted to become a Carthusian: “The crossing is so short that it is not worth changing boats.” Come now, we have only to row and follow the wind of obedience, which will surely lead us to the port.