The Text of Martin Luther's Commentary on the Magnificat

English Translation in the Public Domain
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The text has been divided into sections to match the study booklet from Sola Publishing, entitled: "My Soul Magnifies the Lord" - A Biblical and Historical Study of Luther's Commentary on the Magnificat

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Section 1: Introduction

Luther's Letter to Prince John Frederick

To His Serene Highness, Prince John Frederick, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Meissen, My Gracious Lord and Patron, Serene and high-born Prince, gracious Lord! May your Grace accept my humble prayer and service.

Your Grace's kind letter has lately come into my hands and its cheering contents brought me much joy. By way of reply I send you this little exposition of the Magnificat, which I long since promised you, but which the troublesome quarrels of many adversaries have repeatedly interrupted.

If I put it off any longer, I shall have to blush for shame; nor is it meet that I make further excuses, lest your Grace's youthful spirit should be retarded, which inclines to love of Holy Writ, and which by further exercise in the same might be the more stirred up and strengthened. To which end I wish your Grace God's grace and help.

And of this there is sore need. For the welfare of many lies in the power of so mighty a prince, if he be taken out of himself and graciously ruled by God, just as, on the other hand, the ruin of many lies in his power, if he be left to himself and ruled by God's disfavor. For while the hearts of all men are in God's almighty hand, it is not without reason said of kings and princes alone, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Whereby God would instill His fear in the mighty lords and teach them that all their thoughts and intentions are naught without His special inspiration. Other men's acts bring gain or loss upon themselves alone or upon but few others; but rulers are appointed for the particular purpose of being either harmful or helpful to other men only, and to the more men, the wider their domains. Wherefore the Scripture also calls pious and God-fearing princes angels of God and even gods; but harmful princes it calls lions, dragons and wild beasts, which God includes amongst His four plagues — pestilence, famine, war, and noisome beasts.

The heart of man, then, being by nature but flesh and blood, is of itself prone to presumption; and when, besides this, power, riches and honor fall to his lot, these form so strong an incentive to presumption and overconfident security as to move him to forget God and despise his subjects.

Being able to do wrong with impunity, he lets himself go and becomes a beast, does whatever he pleases, and is a ruler in name, but a monster indeed. Wherefore the sage Bias has well said, *Magistratus virum ostendit*, — "the office of reveals what kind of man the ruler is." As for the subjects, they dare not let themselves go for fear of the authorities. Therefore, all rulers, since they need not fear men, should fear God more than others do, should learn to know Him and His works, and walk diligently, as St. Paul says in Romans 12:8, "He that ruleth, let him do it with diligence."

Now I do not know in all the Scriptures anything that so well serves such a purpose as this sacred hymn of the most blessed Mother of God, which ought indeed to be learned and kept in mind by all who would rule well and be helpful lords. Truly she sings in it most sweetly of the fear of God, what manner of lord He is, and especially what His dealings are with those of high and of low degree. Let another listen to his love singing a worldly ditty; this pure Virgin well deserves to be heard by a prince and lord, as she sings him her sacred, chaste and salutary song. It is a fine custom, too, that this canticle is sung in all the churches daily at vespers, and to a particular and appropriate setting that distinguishes it from the other chants.

May the tender Mother of God herself procure for me the spirit of wisdom, profitably and thoroughly to expound this song of hers, so that your Grace as well as we all may draw therefrom wholesome knowledge and a praiseworthy life, and thus, come to chant and sing this Magnificat eternally in heaven. To this may God help us. Amen.

Herewith I commend myself to your Grace, humbly praying your Grace in all kindness to receive my poor effort.

Your Grace's obedient chaplain.
Wittenberg, 10 March, 1521.

Section 2

The Magnificat

1. *My soul doth magnify the Lord: And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.*
2. *For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*
3. *For He that is mighty hath done to me great things: And holy is His Name.*
4. *And His mercy is on them that fear Him: From generation to generation.*
5. *He hath showed strength with His arm: He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*
6. *He hath put down the mighty from their seats: And exalted them of low degree.*
7. *He hath filled the hungry with good things: And the rich He hath sent empty away.*
8. *He hath holpen His servant Israel: In remembrance of His mercy.*
9. *As He spoke to our fathers: To Abraham and to his seed forever.*

Section 3

Luther's Introduction

In order properly to understand this sacred hymn of praise, we need to bear in mind that the most blessed Virgin Mary is speaking out of her own experience, in which she was enlightened and instructed by the Holy Spirit.

For no one can rightly understand God or His Word who has not received such understanding directly from the Holy Spirit. But no one can receive it from the Holy Spirit without experiencing, proving and feeling it. In such experience the Holy Spirit instructs us as in His own school, outside of which naught is learned save empty words and idle fables. When the Holy Virgin, then, experienced what great things God wrought in her, notwithstanding she was so poor, meek, despised, and of low degree, the Holy Spirit taught her this precious knowledge and wisdom, that God is a Lord whose work consists but in this — to exalt them of low degree, to put down the mighty from their seats, in short, to break whatever is whole and make whole whatever is broken.

For even as God in the beginning of creation made the world out of nothing, whence He is called the Creator and the Almighty, so His manner of working continues still the same. Even now and unto the end of the world, all His works are such that out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched and dead, He makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed and living.

Again, whatever is something, precious, honorable, blessed and living, He makes to be nothing, worthless, despised, wretched and dying. After this manner no creature can work; none can produce anything out of nothing.

Therefore, His eyes look only into the depths, not unto the heights; as it is said in Daniel 3:55, "Thou sittest upon the cherubim, and beholdest the depths"; in Psalm 138:6, "The Lord is the most high, and looketh down on the low: and the high he knoweth afar off"; and in Psalm 113:5, "Who is as the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, and looketh down on the low things in heaven and earth?" For since He is the Most High, and there is naught above Him, He cannot look above Him; nor yet to either side, for there is none like unto Him. He needs to therefore look within Him and beneath Him; and the farther one is beneath Him, the better doth He see him.

The eyes of the world and of men, on the contrary, look only above them and are lifted up with pride, as it is said in the book of Proverbs, "There is a generation, whose eyes are lofty, and their eyelids lifted up on high." This we experience every day. Everyone strives after that which is above him, after honor, power, wealth, knowledge, a life of ease, and whatever is lofty and great. And where such folk are, there are many hangers-on, all the world gathers round them, gladly yields them service, and would be by their side and share in their high estate. Wherefore the Scriptures not vainly describe but few kings and rulers who were godly men. On the other hand, no one is willing to look into the depths with their poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery and anguish. From these all turn away their eyes. Where there are such folk, everyone takes to his heels, forsakes and shuns and leaves them to themselves; no one dreams of

helping them nor of making something out of them. And so, they need to remain in the depths and in their low and despised estate. There is among men no creator who would make something out of nothing, although that is what St. Paul teaches in Romans 12:6, when he says, "Dear brethren, set not your mind on high things, but go along with the lowly."

Therefore, to God alone belongs that sort of seeing that looks into the depths with their need and misery, and is nigh unto all that are in the depths; as St. Peter says, "God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace." And this is the source of men's love and praise of God. For no one can praise God without first loving Him. No one can love Him unless He makes Himself known to him in the most lovable and intimate fashion. And He can make Himself known only through those works of His which He reveals in us, and which we feel and experience within ourselves. But where there is this experience, namely, that He is a God who looks into the depths and helps only the poor, despised, afflicted, miserable, forsaken, and those who are naught, there a hearty love for Him is born, the heart overflows with gladness, and goes leaping and dancing for the great pleasure it has found in God. There the Holy Spirit is present and has taught us in a trice such exceeding great knowledge and gladness through this experience.

For this reason. God hath also imposed death upon us all, and laid the cross of Christ together with countless sufferings and afflictions on His beloved children and Christians; nay, He even suffers us sometimes to fall into sin; in order that He may look much into the depths, bring help to many, perform manifold works, show Himself a true Creator, and thereby make Himself known, and worthy of love and praise. Herein, alas! the world with its proud eyes constantly thwarts Him, hinders His seeing, working and helping, and our knowledge, love and praise of Him, and deprives Him of all His glory, itself of its pleasure, joy and salvation.

He also cast His only and well-beloved Son Christ into the depths of all woe and showed in Him most plainly to what end His seeing, work, help, method, counsel and will are directed. Wherefore Christ, having most fully experienced all these things, abounds through all eternity in the knowledge, love and praise of God; as it is said in Psalm 21:6, "Thou hast made him exceedingly glad with thy countenance" — namely, in that He sees Thee and knows Thee. Here, too, belongs Psalm 45:17, where it is said that all the saints shall do naught else in heaven but praise God because He looked upon them when they were in the depths, and there made Himself known to them and loved and praised by them.

The tender Mother of Christ does the same here, and teaches us, with her words and by the example of her experience, how to know, love and praise God. For since she boasts, with heart leaping for joy and praising God, that He regarded her despite her low estate and nothingness, we need to believe that she came of poor, despised and lowly parents. Let us make it very plain for the sake of the simple. Doubtless there were in Jerusalem daughters of the chief priests and counselors, who were rich, comely, youthful, cultured, and held in high renown by all the people; even as it is to-day with the daughters of kings, princes and men of wealth. The same was also true of many another city. Even in her own town of Nazareth, she was not the daughter of one of the chief rulers, but a poor and plain citizen's daughter, whom none looked up to nor esteemed. To her neighbors and their daughters, she was but a simple maiden, tending the cattle and doing the house-work, and doubtless esteemed no more than any poor maidservant today, who does as she is bidden about the house.

For Thus, Isaiah announced, in his eleventh chapter: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root, and the Holy Spirit shall rest upon him." The stem and root is the generation of Jesse or David, in particular the Virgin Mary; the rod and flower is Christ.

Now, just as unlikely, nay incredible, a thing it is that a fair branch and flower should spring from a dry and withered stem and root, just so unlikely was it that Mary the Virgin should become the mother of such a child. For, I take it, she is called a stem and root, not only because she became a mother in a supernatural manner and without violation of her virginity, even as it is above nature to make a branch grow out of a dead tree-stump, — but also for the following reason: in the days of David and Solomon,

the royal stem and line of David had been green and flourishing, fortunate in its great glory, might and riches, and famous in the eyes of the world. But in the latter days, when Christ was to come, the priests had usurped this honor and were the sole rulers, while the royal line of David had become so impoverished and despised it was like unto a dead stem, so that there was no hope nor likelihood that a king descended therefrom would ever attain to any great glory. But when all seemed most unlikely-comes Christ, and is born of the despised stem, of the poor and lowly maiden! The rod and flower springs from her whom Sir Annas' or Caiaphas' daughter would not have deigned to have for her humblest lady's maid. Thus, God's work and His eyes are in the depths, but man's only in the height.

So much for the occasion of Mary's canticle, which let us now consider in detail.

Section 4

Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord" - *Luke 1:46*

These words express the strong ardor and exuberant joy whereby all her mind and life are inwardly exalted in the Spirit. Wherefore she does not say, "I exalt the Lord," but, "My soul doth exalt Him." It is as though she said, "My life and all my senses float in the love and praise of God and in lofty pleasures, so that I am no longer mistress of myself; I am exalted, more than I exalt myself, to praise the Lord." That is the experience of all those through whom the divine sweetness and Spirit are poured; they cannot find words to utter what they feel. For to praise the Lord with gladness is not a work of man; it is rather a joyful suffering, and the work of God alone. It cannot be taught in words but must be learned in one's own experience. Even as David says, in Psalm 34:8, "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him." He puts tasting before seeing, because this sweetness cannot be known unless one has experienced and felt it for oneself; and no one can attain to such experience unless he trusts in God with his whole heart, when he is in the depths and in sore straits. Therefore, David makes haste to add, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in God." Such a one will experience the work of God within himself, and will Thus, come to feel His sweetness, and thereby attain to all knowledge and understanding

Let us take up the words in their order. The first is "my soul." The Scriptures assign three parts to man, as St. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "The God of peace sanctify you wholly, that your whole spirit, and soul, and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (There is yet another division of each of these three, and the whole of man, into two parts, which are called spirit and flesh. This is a division not of the nature of man, but of his qualities. The nature of man consists of the three parts — spirit, soul and body; and all of these may be good or evil, that is, they may be spirit or flesh. But we are not now dealing with this division.)

The first part, the spirit, is the highest, deepest and noblest part of man. By it he is enabled to lay hold on things incomprehensible, invisible, and eternal. It is, in brief, the dwelling-place of faith and the Word of God. Of it, David speaks in Psalm 51:10, "Lord, create in my inward parts a right spirit" — that is, a straight and upright faith. But of the unbelieving he says, in Psalm 78:37, "Their heart was not right with God, nor was their spirit faithful to him."

The second part, or the soul, is this same spirit, so far as its nature is concerned, but viewed as performing a different function, namely, giving life to the body and working through the body. In the Scriptures it is frequently put for the life; for the soul may live without the body, but the body has no life apart from the soul. Even in sleep the soul lives and works without ceasing. It is its nature to comprehend not incomprehensible things, but such things as the reason can know and understand. Indeed, reason is the light in this dwelling, and unless the spirit, which is lighted with the brighter light of faith, controls this light of reason, it cannot but be in error. For it is too feeble to deal with things divine. To these two parts of man the Scriptures ascribe many things, such as wisdom and knowledge — wisdom to the spirit, knowledge to the soul; likewise hatred and love, delight and horror, and the like.

The third part is the body with its members. Its work is but to carry out and apply that which the soul knows and the spirit believes.

Let us take an illustration of this from Holy Scripture. In the tabernacle fashioned by Moses there were

three separate compartments. The first was called the holy of holies: here was God's dwelling- place, and in it there was no light The second was called the holy place: here stood a candlestick with seven arms and seven lamps. The third was called the outer court: this lay under the open sky and in the full light of the sun. In this tabernacle we have a figure of the Christian man. His spirit is the holy of holies, where God dwells in the darkness of faith, where no light is; for he believes that which he neither sees nor feels nor comprehends. His soul is the holy place, with its seven lamps, that is, all manner of reason, discrimination, knowledge and understanding of visible and bodily things. His body is the forecourt, open to all, so that men may see his works and manner of life.

Now Paul prays God, who is a God of peace, to sanctify us not in one part only, but wholly, through and through, so that spirit, soul, body, and all, may be holy. We might mention many reasons why he prays in this manner, but let the following suffice. When the spirit is no longer holy, then naught is holy. This holiness of the spirit is the scene of the sorest conflict and the source of the greatest danger. It consists in naught else than in faith pure and simple. for the spirit has nothing to do with things comprehensible, as we have seen. But now there come false teachers and lure the spirit out of doors; one puts forth this work, another that mode of attaining to godliness. And unless the spirit is preserved and is wise, it will come forth and follow these men. It will fall upon the external works and rules, and imagine it can attain to godliness by means of them. And before we know it, faith is lost, and the spirit is dead in the sight of God.

Then commence the manifold sects and orders. This one becomes a Carthusian, that one a Franciscan; this one seeks salvation by fasting, that one by praying; one by one work, another by another. Yet these are all self-chosen works and orders, never commanded by God, but invented by men.

Engrossed in them, they have no eye for faith, but only go on teaching men to put their trust in works, until they are so sunk in works that they fall out among themselves. Everyone would be the greatest and despises the others, as our bragging and blustering *Observantines* [Franciscan monks] do today. Over against such work-saints and teachers of pious appearance, Paul prays, calling God a God of peace and unity. Such a God these divided, unpeaceable saints cannot have nor keep, unless they give up "their own things," agree together in the same spirit and faith, and learn that works breed nothing but distinctions, sin and discord, while faith alone makes men pious, united and peaceable. As it is said in Psalm 68:6, "God maketh us to dwell in unity in the house"; and in Psalm 133:1, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

There is no peace except where men teach that we are made pious, righteous and blessed by no work nor outward thing, but solely by faith, that is, a firm confidence in the unseen grace of God that is promised us, as I showed at greater length in the Good Works. But where there is no faith, there need be many works, and where these are, peace and unity depart, and God cannot remain.

Therefore, Paul is not content with saying here simply, "your spirit, your soul," etc., but he says, "your whole spirit," for on this all depends. He employs a fine Greek expression,

— "your spirit that possesses the whole inheritance." It is as though he said: "Let no doctrine of works lead you astray. The believing spirit alone possesses all things. Everything depends upon the faith of the spirit. And this same 'spirit that possesses the whole inheritance' I pray God to preserve in you against the false doctrines which would make works the basis of our trust in God, and which are but false tidings, because they do not base such trust upon God's grace alone."

When this spirit that possesses the whole inheritance is preserved, both soul and body are able to remain without error and evil works. On the other hand, when the spirit is without faith, the soul together with the whole life cannot but fall into wickedness and error, however good an intention and opinion it may profess, and find its own devotion and satisfaction therein. As a consequence of this error and false opinion of the soul, all the works of the body become likewise evil and damnable, even though a man killed himself with fasting and performed the works of all the saints. In order, therefore, that our works and our life may not be in vain, but that we may become truly holy, it is necessary that God preserve, first, our

spirit, and then our soul and body, not only from open sins, but much more from false and seeming good works.

Let this suffice in explanation of these two words, soul and spirit; they occur very frequently in the Scriptures. We come to the word Magnificat, which means to magnify, to exalt, to esteem one highly, as having the power, the knowledge and the desire to perform many great and good things, such as those that follow in this canticle. Even as a book-title indicates what is the contents of the book, so this word Magnificat is used by Mary to indicate what her hymn of praise is to be about, namely, the great works and deeds of God, for the strength-erring of our faith, for the comforting of all who are of low degree, and for the terrifying of all the mighty ones of earth. We are to let the hymn serve this threefold purpose; for she sang it not for herself alone, but for us all, that we should sing it after her.

Now these great works of God will neither terrify nor comfort anyone unless he believes that God has not only the power and the knowledge, but also the willingness and hearty desire to do such great things. Nay, it is not even enough to believe that He is willing to do them for others, but not for you. That would be to put yourself beyond the pale of these works of God, as is done by those who, because of their strength, do not fear Him, and by those of little faith who, because of their tribulations, fall into despair. That sort of faith is naught; it is dead; it is like an idea got from a tale.

You must rather, without any wavering or doubt, realize His will toward you, and firmly believe that He both will and is willing to do great things also to you. Such a faith has life and being; it pervades and changes the whole man; it constrains you to fear if you are mighty, and to take comfort if you are of low degree. And the mightier you are, the more must you fear; the lowlier you are, the more must you take comfort. This neither of the other two kinds of faith is able to affect. How will it be with you in the hour of death? There you need to believe that He has not only the power and the knowledge, but also the desire to help you. For it is indeed an unspeakably great work that must be wrought in order to deliver you from eternal death, to save you and make you God's heir. To this faith all things are possible, as Christ saith; it alone abides; it also comes to experience the works of God, and Thus, attains to the love of God, and thence to songs and praise of God, so that man esteems him highly and truly magnifies Him.

For God is not magnified by us so far as His nature is concerned — He is unchangeable — but He is magnified in our knowledge and experience, when we greatly esteem Him and highly regard Him, especially as to his grace and goodness. Therefore, the holy Mother does not say, "My voice or my mouth, my hand or my thoughts, my reason or my will, doth magnify the Lord." For there be many who praise God with a loud voice, preach about Him with high sounding words, speak much of Him, dispute and write about Him and paint His image; whose thoughts dwell often upon Him, and who reach out after Him and speculate about Him with their reason; there are also many who exalt Him with false devotion and a false will. But Mary says, "My soul doth magnify Him" — that is, my whole life and being, mind and strength, esteem Him highly. She is caught up, as it were, unto Him, and feels herself lifted up into His good and gracious will, as the following verse shows. It is the same when anyone shows us a signal favor; our whole life seems to incline to him, and we say, "Ah, I esteem him highly," that is to say, "My soul doth magnify him." How much more will such a lively inclination be awakened in us when we experience the favor of God, which is exceeding great in His works. All words and thoughts fad us, and our whole life and soul need to be set in motion, as though all that lived within us would fain break forth into praise and singing.

But here we find two kinds of false spirits that cannot sing the Magnificat aright. First, there are those who will not praise Him unless He does well to them; as David says, "He will praise thee when thou shalt do well to him." These seem indeed to be greatly praising God; but because they are unwilling to suffer oppression and to be in the depths, they can never experience the proper works of God, and therefore, can never truly love nor praise Him. The whole world is nowadays filled with praise and service to God, with singing and preaching, with organs and trumpets, and the Magnificat is magnificently sung; but alackaday! that this precious canticle should be rendered by us so utterly without salt or savor. For

we sing only when it fares well with us; as soon as it fares ill, we have done with singing and no longer esteem God highly, but suppose He can or will do nothing for us. Then the Magnificat also must languish.

The other sort are more dangerous still. They err on the opposite side. They magnify themselves by reason of the good gifts of God, and do not ascribe them to His goodness alone. They themselves desire to bear a part in them; they would be honored and set above other men on account of them. When they behold the good things that God has wrought for them, they fall upon them and appropriate them as their own; they regard themselves as better than others who have no such things. Verily, this is a smooth and slippery position. The good gifts of God will naturally produce proud and self-complacent hearts. Therefore, we must here give heed to Mary's last word, which is "the Lord." She does not say, "My soul doth magnify itself," or "exalt me." She does not desire herself to be esteemed; she magnifies God alone and gives all glory to Him. She leaves herself out, and ascribes everything to God alone, from Whom she received it. For though she experienced such an exceeding great work of God within herself, yet was she ever minded not to exalt herself above the humblest mortal living. Had she done so, she would have sunk, like Lucifer, into the lowest hell.

She had no thought but this: if any other maiden had got such good things from God, she would be just as glad and would not grudge them to her; yea, she counted herself alone unworthy of such honor and all others worthy of it. She would have been well content had God withdrawn these blessings from her and bestowed them upon another before her very eyes.

So little did she lay claim to anything, but left all God's gifts freely in His hands, being herself no more than a cheerful guest-chamber and willing hostess to so great a Guest. Therefore, she also kept all these things for ever. That is to magnify God alone, to count only Him great and lay claim to nothing. We see here how strong an incentive she had to fall into sin, so that it is no less a miracle that she refrained from pride and arrogance than that she received the gifts she did. Tell me, was not hers a wondrous soul?

She finds herself the Mother of God, exalted above all mortals, and remains withal so simple and so calm and counts not any poor serving maid beneath her. O we poor mortals! if we come into a little wealth or might or honor, yea if we are a whit fairer than other men, we cannot abide being made equal to anyone beneath us, but are puffed up beyond all measure. What should we do if we possessed such great and lofty blessings?

Therefore, God lets us remain poor and hapless, because we cannot leave His tender gifts undefiled, nor keep an even mind, but let our spirits rise or fall according as He gives or takes away His gifts. But Mary's heart remains at all times the same; she lets God have His will with her, and draws from it all only a good comfort, joy and trust in God. Thus, we too should do; that would be to sing a right Magnificat.

Section 5

"And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" - *Luke 1:47*

We have seen what is meant by "spirit"; it is that which lays hold by faith on things incomprehensible. Mary, therefore, calls God her Savior, or her Salvation, even though she neither saw nor felt that this was so, but trusted in sure confidence that He was her Savior and her Salvation. Which faith came to her through the work God had wrought within her. And, truly, she sets things in their proper order when she calls God her Lord before calling Him her Savior, and when she calls Him her Savior before recounting His works. Whereby she teaches us to love and praise God for Himself alone, and in the right order, and not selfishly to seek anything at His hands. This is done when one praises God because He is good, regards only His bare goodness, and finds one's joy and pleasure in that alone. That is a lofty, pure and tender mode of loving and praising God, and well becomes this Virgin's high and tender spirit.

But the impure and perverted lovers, who are nothing else than parasites and who seek their own advantage in God, neither love nor praise His bare goodness, but have an eye to themselves and consider only how good God is to them, that is, how deeply He makes them feel His goodness and how many good things He does to them. They esteem Him highly, are filled with joy and sing His praises, so

long as this feeling continues. But as soon as ever He hides His face and withdraws the rays of His goodness, leaving them bare and in misery, their love and praise are at an end. They are unable to love and praise the bare, unfelt goodness that is hidden in God.

Whereby they prove that their spirit did not rejoice in God their Savior, and that they had no true love and praise for His bare goodness. They delighted in their salvation much more than in their Savior, in the gift more than in the Giver, in the creature rather than in the Creator. For they are not able to preserve an even mind in plenty and in want, in wealth and in poverty; as St. Paul says, "I know how to abound and how to suffer want." Here apply the words in Psalm 49, "They will prime thee when thou shalt do well with them." That is to say, they love not Thee, but themselves; if they have but Thy good and pleasant things, they care naught for Thee. As Christ also said to them that sought Him, "Verily I say unto you, you seek me not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves and were filled."

Such impure and false spirits defile all God's gifts, and prevent His giving them many gifts, especially the gift of salvation Whereof the following is a good illustration: Once on a time a certain godly woman saw in a vision three virgins seated near an altar. During the mass a beautiful boy leapt from the altar, and approaching the first virgin in a most friendly manner, lavished caresses upon her and smiled lovingly in her face. Thereupon he approached the second virgin, but was not so friendly with her, neither did he caress her, howbeit he lifted her veil and vouchsafed her a pleasant smile. But for the third virgin he had not a friendly sign, struck her in the face and tore her hair, thrust her from him and dealt most ungallantly with her. Then he ran swiftly back upon the altar and disappeared.

Afterwards the vision was interpreted for the woman on this wise: The first of the three virgins was a figure of the impure and self-seeking spirits, on whom God need to lavish many good things, and whose will He must do rather than they His; they are unwilling to suffer want, but must always find joy and comfort in God and are not content with His goodness. The second virgin was a figure of the spirits that make a beginning of serving God, and are willing to do without some things, but not without all, nor to be free from all self-seeking and enjoyment. God must now and then smile upon them and let them feel His good things, in order that they may learn thereby to love and praise His bare goodness. But the third virgin, that poor Cinderella — for her there is naught but want and misery; she seeks to enjoy nothing, and is content to know that God is good, even though she should never once experience it, though that is impossible. She keeps an even mind in both estates; she loves and praises God's goodness just as much when she does not feel it as when she does. She neither falls upon the good things when they are given, nor falls away when they are removed.

That is the true bride of Christ, who says to Him: "I seek not Thine, but Thee; Thou art to me no dearer when it goes well with me, nor any less dear when it goes ill."

Such spirits fulfill the words of Scripture, "Go not aside from the even and right way of God, neither to the left hand nor to the right." That is to say, they are to love and praise God evenly and rightly, and not seek their own advantage or enjoyment. Such a spirit was David's, who, when he was driven from Jerusalem by his son Absalom and was like to be cast out for ever and to lose his kingdom and the favor of God, said: "Go to; if I shall find favor in the sight of the Lord, he will bring me back again."

But if he shall say to me, "Thou pleasest me not; I am ready." O how pure a spirit was that, not to leave off loving, praising and following the goodness of God even in the direst distress! Such a spirit is manifested here by Mary the Mother of God. Standing in the midst of such exceeding great good things, she does not fall upon them nor seek her own enjoyment therein, but keeps her spirit pure in loving and praising the bare goodness of God, ready and willing to have God withdraw them from her and leave her spirit poor and naked and in want.

Now it is much more difficult to practice moderation in the midst of riches, honor and power than amid poverty, dishonor and weakness, since the former are mighty incentives to evildoing. Even so the wondrous pure spirit of Mary is worthy of the greater praise, because, having such overwhelming honors heaped upon her head, she does not suffer that to make her stumble, but acts as though she did not see it,

remains "even and fight in the way," clings only to God's goodness which she neither sees nor feels, overlooks the good things she does feel, and neither takes pleasure nor seeks her own enjoyment therein. Thus, she can truly sing, "My spirit rejoiceth in God my Savior." It is indeed a spirit that exults only in faith and rejoices not in the good things of God that she felt, but only in God, Whom she did not feel, and Who is her Salvation, known by her in faith alone. Such are the truly lowly, naked, hungry and God-fearing spirits, as we shall see below.

From all this we may know and judge how full the world is nowadays of false preachers and false saints, who fill the ears of the people with preaching good works. There are indeed a few who teach them how to do good works, but the greater part preach human doctrines and works that they themselves have devised and set up. Even the best of them, alas! are yet so far from this "even and straight road" that they constantly drive the people to "the right hand" by teaching good works and a godly life, not for the sake of the bare goodness of God, but for the sake of one's own enjoyment. For if there were no heaven nor hell, and if they could not enjoy the good gifts of God, they would let His good things go unloved and unpraised. These men are mere parasites and hirelings; slaves, not sons; aliens, not heirs. They turn themselves into idols, whom God is to love and praise, and for whom He is to do the very things they ought to do for Him.

They have no spirit, nor is God their Salvation. His good gifts are their Savior, and with them God needs to serve them as their menial. They are the children of Israel, who were not content in the desert with eating bread from heaven, but fell lusting after meat, onions and garlic.

Alas! all the world, all monasteries, and all churches are now filled with such folk. They all walk in that false, perverted and uneven spirit, and urge and drive others to do the same. They exalt good works to such a height that they imagine they can merit heaven thereby. But the bare goodness of God is what ought rather to be preached and known above all else, and we ought to learn that, even as God saves us out of pure goodness, without any merit of works, so we in our turn should do the works without reward or self-seeking, for the sake of the bare goodness of God. We should desire nothing in them but His good pleasure, and not be anxious about a reward.

That will come of itself, without our seeking. For though it is impossible that the reward should not follow, if we do well in a pure and right spirit, without thought of reward or enjoyment; nevertheless. God will not have such a self-seeking and impure spirit, nor will it ever obtain a reward. A son serves his father willingly and without reward, as his heir solely for the father's sake. But a son who served his father merely for the sake of the inheritance would indeed be an unnatural child and deserve to be cast off by his father.

Section 6

"He has regarded the humble estate of his servant. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name."- Luke 1:48-49

The word *humilitas* has been translated "humility" by some, as though the Virgin Mary referred to her humility and boasted of it; hence certain prelates also call themselves *humiles*. But that is very wide of the mark, for no one can boast of any good thing in the sight of God without sin and perdition. In His sight we ought to boast only of His pure grace and goodness, which He bestows upon us unworthy ones; so that not our love and praise, but His alone, may dwell in us and may preserve us. Thus, Solomon teaches us to do, in Proverbs 25:6 "Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not (that is, pretend not to be something) in the place of great men. For better it is that it be said unto thee, come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince."

How should such pride and vainglory be imputed to this pure and righteous Virgin, as though she boasted of her humility in the presence of God? For humility is the highest of all the virtues, and no one could boast of possessing it save the very proudest of mortals. It is God alone who knows humility; He alone judges it and brings it to light; so that no one knows less about humility than he who is truly humble.

The scriptural meaning of *humiliare* is to humble and

bring to naught. Hence Christians are frequently called in the Scriptures, *pauperes, afflicti, humiliati* — poor, afflicted, despised. Thus, in Psalm 116:10, "I was greatly afflicted" — that is, humbled. Humility is, therefore, nothing else than a disregarded, despised and lowly estate, such as that of men who are poor, sick, and hungered, thirsty, in prison, suffering, and dying. Such was Job in his afflictions, David when he was thrust out of his kingdom, and Christ as well as all Christians, in their distresses. Those are the depths of which we said above that God's eyes look only into them, but men's only unto the heights, namely, to that which is splendid and glorious and makes a brave show. Wherefore Jerusalem is called in the Scriptures a city upon which God's eyes are open (Zechariah 12:4) — that is to say, the Christian Church lies in the depths and is despised by the world; therefore, God regards her and His eyes are always fixed upon her, as He says in Psalm 32:8, "I will fix my eyes upon thee."

St. Paul also says, in 1 Corinthians 1:27, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are." Whereby He turns the world with all its wisdom and power into foolishness and gives us another wisdom and power. Since, then, it is His manner to regard things that are in the depths and disregarded, I have rendered the word *humilitas* by nothingness or low estate. This, therefore, is what Mary means: "God hath regarded me, a poor, despised and lowly maiden, though He might have found a rich, renowned, noble and mighty queen, the daughter of princes and great lords. He might have found the daughter of Annas or of Caiaphas, who were the first folk in the land. But He let His pure and gracious eyes light on me, and used so poor and despised a maiden, in order that no one might glory in His presence, as though he were worthy of this, and that I need to acknowledge all to be pure grace and goodness and no whit my merit or worthiness."

Now, we described above at length, how lowly was the estate of this tender Virgin, and how unexpectedly this honor came to her, that God should regard her in such abundant grace. Hence she does not glory in her worthiness nor yet in her unworthiness, but solely in the divine regard, which is so exceeding good and gracious that He deigned to look upon such a lowly maiden, and to look upon her in so glorious and honorable a fashion. They, therefore, do her an injustice who hold that she gloried, not indeed in her virginity, but in her humility. She gloried neither in the one nor in the other, but only in the gracious regard of God. Hence the stress lies not on the word *humilitatem*, but on the word *repexit*. For not her humility, but God's regard, is to be praised. When a prince takes a poor beggar by the hand, it is not the beggar's lowliness, but the prince's grace and goodness, that is to be commended.

In order to dispel that false opinion, and to distinguish true from false humility, we shall have to digress a little and treat of the subject of humility, in respect to which many are far astray. Humility we call that which St. Paul calls in the Greek, v *(tapeinophosune),* and in the Latin, *affectus vilitatis seu sensus humilium rerum* — that is, a love and leaning to lowly and despised things. Now we find many here who carry water to the well; that is to say, who affect humble clothing, faces, gestures, places and words, but with the intention of being regarded by the mighty and rich, by scholars and saints, yea, by God Himself, as men who take pleasure in lowly things. For, if they knew that no one regarded what they did, they would soon give over. That is an artificial humility. For the evil eye is fixed only on the reward and result of their humility and not on lowly things apart from a reward; hence, when the reward and result no longer allures, their humility stops. Such folk one cannot call *affecti vilitatis* — having their heart and will set on things of low degree; for they have only their thoughts, lips, hands, garb and demeanor therein, while their heart looks above to great and lofty things, to which it hopes to attain by that semblance of humility. Yet these men deem themselves humble saints.

But the truly humble look not to the result of humility, but with a simple heart regard things of low degree, and gladly hold converse with them. It never once enters their mind that they are humble. Here the water flows from the well; here it follows naturally and as a matter of course, that they will cultivate a humble demeanor, humble words, places, faces and clothing, and shun so far as possible great and lofty

things. Thus, David says in Psalm 131:1, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty." And Job 22:29, "He that hath been humbled, shall be in glory: and he that shall bow down his eyes, he shall be saved." Hence honors always come unexpectedly upon them, and they are exalted all at unawares; for they have been simply content with their lowly station and never aspired to the heights. But the falsely humble wonder why their glory and honor are so long in coming; their secret false pride is not content with their low estate, but aspires in secret ever higher and higher.

True humility, therefore, never knows that it is humble, as I have said; for if it knew this, it would turn proud from contemplation of so fine a virtue. But it clings with all its heart and mind and senses to lowly things, sets them continually before its eyes, and ponders them in its thoughts. And because it sets them before its eyes, it cannot see itself nor become aware of itself, much less of lofty things. And therefore, when honor and elevation come, they need to take it unawares and find it immersed in thoughts of other things. Thus, Luke tells us, in his first chapter (Luke 1:29), that Mary was troubled at the angel's saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation that could be, seeing she had never expected the like. Had it come to Caiaphas' daughter, she would not have cast in her mind what manner of salutation it was, but would straightway have hugged it to herself, and thought, "Heigh-ho! how fine a thing is this, and well bestowed."

False humility, on the other hand, never knows that it is proud; for if it knew this, it would soon grow humble from contemplation of that ugly vice. But it clings with heart and mind and senses to lofty things, sets them continually before its eyes, and ponders them in its thoughts. And because it does this, it cannot see itself nor become aware of itself. Hence honors come to it not unawares nor unexpectedly, but find it immersed in thoughts of them. But dishonor and humiliation take it unawares and when it is thinking of something far different.

It is in vain, therefore, to teach men to be humble by teaching them to set their eyes on lowly things, nor does become proud by setting his eyes on lofty things. Not the things, but our eyes, must be changed; for we need to spend our life here in the midst of things both lowly and lofty.

It is our eye that must be plucked out, as Christ says (Matthew 5:29, Matthew 18:9). Moses does not tell us, in Genesis 3:7, that Adam and Eve saw different things after the fall, but he says their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked, though they had been naked before and were not aware of it. Queen Esther wore a precious crown upon her head, yet she said it seemed but a filthy rag in her eyes (Esther 14:16, Douay). The lofty things were not removed out of her sight, but being a mighty queen she had them before her in great abundance, and not a lowly thing within sight; but her eyes were humble, her heart and mind looked not on the lofty things, and Thus, God wrought wondrous things through her. It is Thus, not the things, but we, that must be changed in heart and mind. Then we shall know of ourselves how to despise and shun lofty things, and how to esteem and seek after lowly things. Then humility is truly good, and steadfast in every way, and yet is never aware that it is humble. All things are done gladly, and the heart is undisturbed, however things may shift and turn, from high to low, from great to small.

Ah, how much pride lurks behind that humble garb, speech and conduct, of which the world i s today so full. Men despise themselves, yet so as to be despised by no one else; they fly from honors, yet so as to be pursued by honors; they shun lofty things, but in order to be esteemed and praised, and not to have their lowly things accounted all too low.

But this holy Virgin points to naught save her low estate. In it she was content to spend the remainder of her days, never seeking to be honored or exalted, not ever becoming aware of her own humility. For humility is so tender and precious a thing it cannot abide beholding its own face; that belongs to God's eyes alone, as it is said in Psalm 113:6, "Who looketh down on the low things in heaven and earth." For if anyone could see his own humility, he could judge himself worthy of salvation, and Thus, anticipate God's judgment; for we know that God of a truth saves the humble. Therefore, God needs to reserve to Himself the right to know and look on humility, and must hide it from us by setting before our eyes things of low degree and exercising us in the same, so that we may forget to look upon ourselves. This is the

purpose of the many sufferings of death and all manner of afflictions we have to bear on earth; by means of the trouble and pain they cause us we are to pluck out the evil eye.

Thus, the little word *humilitas* shows us plainly that the Virgin Mary was a poor, despised and lowly maiden, who served God in her low estate, nor knew it was so highly esteemed by Him. This should comfort us and teach us that, even though we should willingly be humbled and despised, we ought not to despair and deem God angry with us, but rather set our hope on His grace, and be concerned only lest we be not cheerful and contented enough in our low estate, and lest perchance our evil eye be too wide open and deceive us by secretly lusting after lofty things and satisfaction with self, which is the death of humility. What profit is it to the damned that they are humbled to the lowest degree, since they are not willing and content to be where they are? Again, what harm is it to all angels that they are exalted to the highest degree, so long as they do not cling to their station with false desire?

In short, this verse teaches us to know God aright, because it shows us that He regards the lowly and despised. For he knows God aright, who knows that He regardeth the lowly, as we have said above. From such knowledge flows love and trust in God, whereby we yield ourselves to Him and gladly obey Him. As Jeremiah says, Jeremiah 9:23f, "Let none glow in his wisdom, might, nor riches, but let him that glorieth glow in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me." And St. Paul teaches us in 2 Corinthians 10:17, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Now, after landing her God and Savior with pure and single spirit, and after truly singing the praises of His goodness by not boasting of His gifts, the Mother of God addresses herself in the next place to the praise also of His works and gifts. For, as we have seen, we must not fall upon the good gifts of God nor boast of them, but make our way through them and ascend to Him, cling to Him alone and highly esteem His goodness.

Thereupon we should praise Him also in His works, in which He showed forth that goodness of His for our love, trust and praise; so that His works are but so many incentives to love and praise His bare goodness that rules over us.

Mary begins with herself and sings what He has done for her. Thus, she teaches us a twofold lesson. First, that everyone of us should give heed to what God does for him rather than to all the works He does for others. For no one will be saved by what God does to another, but only by what He does to thee. When Peter asked, in John 21:21f, concerning John, "What shall this man do?" Christ answered and said unto him, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." That is to say, "John's works will not avail for thee; thou must set out, thyself, and await what I will do to thee."

But now the world is in thrall to a dreadful abuse, — the sale and distribution of good works, —by which certain audacious spirits would assist others, especially such as live or die without good works of their own, just as if these spirits had an overplus of good works. But St. Paul plainly says in 1 Corinthians 3:8, "Each man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" — certainly not according to anyone else.

It would not be so bad if they prayed for others or brought their works before God by way of intercession. But since they deal with their works as though they were something they had to give away, it becomes a scandalous piece of business. And what is worst of all, they give away works of

theirs of whose value in God's sight they themselves are ignorant; for God looketh not on the works, but on the heart, and on the faith by which He Himself works with us. To this they pay not the least attention, but trust only in the external works, deceiving themselves and all others beside. They have even gone so far as to persuade men to don the monk's cowl on their deathbeds, pretending that whoever dies in that sacred habit receives indulgence for all his sins and is saved. Thus, they have begun to save men not only with the works but with the clothes of others. Unless we see to it, I fear the evil spirit will drive them on to bring people to heaven by means of monastic diet, cells and burial. Great God, what gross darkness is this! A monk's cap make a man pious and save him! Where then is the need of faith? Let us all turn monk or all die in cowls. What quantities of cloth would in this way alone go to the making of monks' cowls! Beware, beware of the wolves in such sheep's clothing; they will deceive you and rend you limb from limb (Matthew 7:15).

Remember that God also has His work in you and base your salvation on no other works than those God works in you alone, as you see the Virgin Mary do here. To let the intercessions of others assist you in this, is right and proper; we ought all to pray and work for one another. But none should depend on the works of others, without the works of God in himself. Everyone should with all diligence so regard himself and his God as though God and he were the only persons in heaven and on earth, and as though God were dealing with no one else than with him. Thereupon he may also glance at the works of others.

In the second place, she teaches us that everyone should strive to be foremost in praising God by showing forth the works He has done to him, and then by praising Him for the works He has done to others. Thus, we read that Paul and Barnabas declared to the apostles the works God had wrought by them, and that the apostles in turn rehearsed those He had wrought by them (Acts 15:12). The same was done by the apostles, in Luke 24:34, with respect to the appearances of Christ after His resurrection. Thus, there arose a common rejoicing and praising of God, each one praising the grace bestowed on another, yet most of all that bestowed on himself, however much more modest it was than that of the other. So simple-hearted were they that all desired to be foremost not in possessing the gifts, but in praising and loving God, for God Himself and His bare goodness were sufficient for them, however small His gifts. But the hirelings and mercenaries grow green with envy when they observe that they are not first and foremost in possessing the good things of God; instead of praising, they murmur because they are made equal to or lower than others, like the husbandmen in the Gospel, Matthew 20:11, who murmured against the goodman of the house, not that he did them any wrong, but because he made them equal unto the other laborers by giving to all the same penny.

Even so we find men to-day who do not praise the goodness of God, because they cannot see that they have received the same things as St.

Peter or any other of the saints, or as this or that man living on earth. They imagine they also would praise and love God if they possessed as much as these, and they despise the good gifts of God which are showered so abundantly upon them, and which they altogether overlook — such as life, body, reason, goods, honor, friends, the ministration of the sun and all created things. And even if they had all the good things of Mary, they yet would not recognize God in them nor praise Him because of them. For, as Christ says in Luke 16:10, "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much: and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much." Therefore, because they despise the little, and the few things, they are not worthy of the much, and the great things. But if they praised God in the little, the much would also be added unto them. They act as they do because they look above them and not beneath them; if they looked beneath them they would find many that have not the half of what they have, and yet are content in God and sing His praise. A bird pipes its lay and is happy in the gifts it has; nor does it murmur because it has not the gift of speech. A dog frisks gayly about and is content, even though he is without the gift of reason. All animals live in contentment and serve God, loving and praising Him. Only the evil, grudging eye of man is never satisfied, nor can it ever be really satisfied, because of its ingratitude and pride. It would always have the best place at the feast and be the chief guest; it is not willing to honor God, but would rather be honored by God (Matthew 20:15). This previous reference does not appear to have any significance with the context — to me, anyway! (Luke 14:7ff).

There is a tale, dating back to the days of the Council of Constance, of two cardinals who, riding abroad, beheld a shepherd standing in a field and weeping. One of the two cardinals, being a good soul and unwilling to pass by without offering the man some comfort, rode up to him and enquired why he wept. The shepherd, who was weeping sore, was a long time replying to the cardinal's question. At last, pointing his finger at a toad, he said: "I weep because God has made me so well favored a creature, and not hideous like this reptile, and I have never yet acknowledged it nor thanked and praised Him therefor." The cardinal smote upon his breast and trembled so violently he fell from his mount. He had to be carried to his lodging, and cried out: "Ah, St. Augustine, how truly hast thou said, 'The unlearned start up and take heaven by violence, and we with all our learning, see how we wallow us in flesh and blood!'" Now I trust this shepherd was neither rich

nor comely nor powerful; nevertheless, he had so clear an insight into God's good gifts and pondered them so deeply that he found therein more than he could comprehend.

Mary confesses that the foremost work God wrought for her was that He regarded her, which is indeed the greatest of His works, on which all the rest depend and from which they all derive. For where it comes to pass that God turns His face toward one to regard him, there is naught but grace and salvation, and all gifts and works need to follow. Thus, we read in Genesis 4:4, that He had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. Here is the origin of the many prayers in the Psalter, — that God would lift up His countenance upon us, that He would not hide His countenance from us, that He would make His face shine upon us, and the like. And that Mary herself regards this as the chief thing, she indicates by saying, "Behold, since He hath regarded me, all generations shall call me blessed."

Note that she does not say men shall speak all manner of good of her, praise her virtues, exalt her virginity or her humility, or sing of what she has done. But for this one thing alone, that God regarded her, will men call her blessed. That is to give all the glory to God as completely as it can be done.

Therefore, she points to God's regard and says, *Ecce enim*, ("looked upon"), "For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." That is, beginning with the time when God regarded my low estate, I shall be called blessed. Not she is praised thereby, but God's grace toward her. Nay, she is despised, and despises herself in that she says her low estate was regarded by God. Therefore, she also mentions her blessedness before enumerating the works that God did unto her and ascribes all to the fact that God regarded her low estate.

From this we may learn how to show her the honor and devotion that are her due. How ought one to address her? Keep these words in mind and they will teach you to say: "O blessed Virgin, Mother of God, thou wast naught and all despised; yet God in His grace regarded thee and wrought such great things in thee. Thou was worthy of none of them, but the rich and abundant grace of God was upon thee, far above any merit of thine. Hail to thee: blessed art thou, from thenceforth and forever, in finding such a God." Nor need you fear that she will take it amiss if we call her unworthy of such grace. For, of a truth, she did not lie when she herself acknowledged her unworthiness and nothingness, which God regarded, not because of any merit in her, but solely by reason of His grace.

But she does take it amiss that the vain chatterers preach and write so many things about her merits. They are set on proving their own skill, and fail to see how they spoil the Magnificat, make the Mother of God a liar, and diminish the grace of God. For, in proportion as we ascribe merit and worthiness to her, we lower the grace of Cod and diminish the truth of the Magnificat. The angel salutes her but as highly favored of God, and because the Lord is with her, wherefore she is blessed among women (Luke 1:28). Hence all those who heap so great praise and honor upon her head are not far from making an idol of her, as though she were concerned that men should honor her and look to her for good things, when in truth she thrusts this from her, and would have us honor God in her and come through her to a good confidence in His grace.

Whoever, therefore, would show her the proper honor must not regard her alone and by herself, but set her in the presence of God and far beneath Him, must there strip her of all honor, and regard her low estate, as she says; he should then marvel at the exceeding abundant grace of God who regards, embraces, and blesses so poor and despised a mortal. Thus, regarding her, you will be moved to love and praise God for His grace, and drawn to look for all good things to Him, Who does not reject but graciously regards poor and despised and lowly mortals. Thus, your heart will be strengthened in faith and love and hope. What, think you, would please her more than to have you Thus, come through her to God, and learn from her to put your hope and trust in Him, notwithstanding your despised and lowly estate, in life as well as in death? She does not want you to come to her, but through her to God. Again, nothing would please her better than to have you turn in fear from all lofty things on which men set their hearts, seeing that even in His mother God neither found nor desired aught of high degree.

But the masters who so depict and portray the

blessed Virgin that there is found in her naught to be despised, but only great and lofty things — what is it they do but contrast us with her instead of her with God? Whereby they make us timid and afraid, and hide the Virgin's comfortable picture, as the images are covered over in Lent. For they deprive us of her example, from which we might take comfort; they make an exception of her and set her above all examples. But she should be, and herself gladly would be, the foremost example of the grace of God, to incite all the world to trust in this grace and to love and praise it, so that the hearts of all men should through her be filled with such knowledge of God that they might confidently say, "O thou blessed Virgin, Mother of God, what great comfort hath God shown us in thee, by so graciously regarding thy unworthiness and low estate. Hereby we are encouraged to believe that He will henceforth not despise us poor and lowly ones, but graciously regard us also, according to thy example."

Pray tell; if David, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalene, and the like, are examples to strengthen our trust in God and our faith, by reason of the great grace bestowed on them without their worthiness, for the comforting of all men, will not also the blessed Mother of God gladly be such an example to all the world? But now she cannot be this because of the fulsome eulogists and empty chatterers, who do not show the people, from this verse, how the exceeding riches of God joined in her with her utter poverty, the divine honor with her low estate, the divine glory with her shame, the divine greatness with her smallness, the divine goodness with her lack of merit, the divine grace with her unworthiness.

Hereby our love and affection toward God would grow and increase with all confidence, to which end indeed her life and works, as well as the lives and works of all the saints, have been recorded. But now we find those who come to her for help and comfort, as though she were a divine being, so that I fear there is now more idolatry in the world than ever before. But enough of this for the present.

The Latin phrase, *omnes generationes*, I have rendered "children's children," although literally it means "all generations." But that is an obscure expression, and many have been hard put to it by this passage to know how it can be that all generations shall bless her, since the Jews, the heathens, and many wicked Christians blaspheme her or scorn to call her blessed. They understand the word "generations" of the totality of mankind, whereas its meaning here is rather the line of natural descent, as father, son, grandson, and so on, each member being called a generation.

The Virgin Mary means to say simply that her praise will be sung from one generation to another, so that there will never be a time when she shall not be praised. This she indicates by saying, "Behold, from henceforth all generations, etc." — that is, it begins now and will continue throughout all generations, unto children's children.

The [Greek] word *makarios* means more than simply to *call* blessed; its meaning is rather to bless, or to *make* blessed. This consists not merely in saying the words, bending the knee, bowing the head, doffing the hat, making images or building churches; for this even the wicked can do. But it is done with all one's strength and with downright sincerity, when the heart, moved by her low estate and God's gracious regard of her, as we have seen, rejoices in God and says or thinks with all its heart, "O thou blessed Virgin Mary!" So to bless her is to accord her the honor that is her due, as we have seen.

Section 7

"For He That is Mighty hath Done to me Great Things: and Holy is His Name" (Luke 1:49).

Here she sings in one breath of all the works that God hath done to her and observes the proper order. In the preceding verse she sang of God's regard and gracious goodwill toward her, which is indeed the greatest and chief work of grace, as we have said. Now she comes to the works and gifts. For God indeed gives to some many good things and richly adorns them, as He did Lucifer in heaven. He scatters His gifts broadcast among the multitude; but He does not therefore, regard them. His good things are merely gifts, that last but for a season; but His grace and regard are the inheritance, which lasts forever, as St. Paul says in Romans 6:23, "The grace of God is eternal life." In giving us the gifts, He gives but what is His, but in His grace and His regard of us He gives His very self. In the gifts we touch His hand, but in

His gracious regard we receive His heart, spirit, mind and will. Hence the blessed Virgin puts His regard in the first and highest place, and does not begin by saying, "All generations shall call me blessed, because He hath done to me great things," as this verse says; but she begins, "He hath regarded my low estate," as the preceding verse shows. Where God's gracious will is, there are also His gifts; but, on the other hand, where His gifts are, there is not also His gracious will. This verse, therefore, logically follows the preceding verse. We read in Genesis 25:17 that Abraham gave gifts unto the sons of his concubines, but to Isaac, his natural son by his true helpmate Sarah, he gave the whole inheritance. Thus, God would not have His true children put their trust in His goods and gifts, spiritual or temporal, however great they be, but in His grace and in Himself, yet without despising the gifts.

Nor does Mary enumerate any good things in particular, but gathers them all together in one word and says, "He hath done to me great things," that is, "All that He hath done to me is great." She teaches us hereby that the greater devotion there is in the heart, the fewer words are uttered. For she feels that however she may strive and try, she cannot express it in words. Therefore, these few words of the Spirit are so great and profound that no one can comprehend them without having, at least in part, the same Spirit.

But for the unspiritual, who deal in many words and much loud noise, such words seem utterly inadequate and wholly without salt or savor. Christ also teaches us, in Matthew 6:7, not to speak much when we pray, as the Gentiles do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Even so there is to-day in the churches a great ringing of bells, blowing of trumpets, singing, shouting, and intoning, yet I fear precious little worship of God, who would be "worshiped in spirit and in truth," as He says in John 4:24.

Solomon says, in Proverbs 27:14, "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him." For such a one awakens the suspicion that he is endeavoring to adorn an evil cause; he protests too much and only defeats his own end. On the other hand, he that curses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising up early in the morning (that is, not indifferently, but with great zeal and urgency), is to be regarded as a praiser of him. For men do not believe him but deem him impelled by hatred and a wicked heart; he hurts his own cause and helps his neighbor's. In the same way, to think to worship God with many words and a great noise, is to count Him either deaf or ignorant, and to suppose we must waken or instruct Him. Such an opinion of God tends to His shame and dishonor rather than to His worship. But when one ponders well His divine works in the depths of one's heart, and regards them with wonder and gratitude, so that one breaks out from very ardor into sighs and groanings rather than into speech; when the words, not nicely chosen nor prescribed, flow forth in such wise that the spirit comes seething with them, and the words live and have hands and feet, yea, that the whole body and life with all its members strives and strains for utterance — that is indeed a worship of God in spirit and in truth, and such words are all fire, light and life. As David says, in Psalm 119:140, 171, "Lord, Thy word is exceeding refined;" and again, "My lips shall utter a hymn" even as boiling water overflows and seethes, unable to contain itself for the great heat within the pot. Of this sort are the words of the blessed Virgin in this hymn of hers, few, but profound and mighty. Such souls St. Paul calls, in Romans 12:11, *spiritu ferventes*, "fervent and seething in spirit," and teaches us to be even so.

The "great things" are nothing less than that she became the Mother of God, in which work so many and such great good things are bestowed on her as pass man's understanding. For on this there follows all honor, all blessedness, and her unique place in the whole of mankind, among which she has no equal, namely, that she had a child by the Father in heaven, and such a Child. She herself is unable to find a name for this work, it is too exceeding great; all she can do is break out in the fervent cry, are great things," impossible to describe or define. Hence men have crowded all her glory into a single word, calling her the Mother of God. No one can say anything greater of her or to her, though he had as many tongues as there are leaves on the trees, or grass in the fields, or stars in the sky, or sand by the sea. It needs to be pondered in the heart, what it means to be the Mother of God.

Mary also freely ascribes all to God's grace, not to

her merit. For though she was without sin, yet that grace was too surpassing great for her to deserve it in any way. How should a creature deserve to become the Mother of God! Though certain scribblers make much ado about her worthiness for such motherhood, I will yet believe her rather than them.

She says her low estate was regarded by God, nor was that a reward for anything she had done, but, hath done to me great things"; He hath done this of His own accord without any doing of mine. For never in all her life did she think to become the Mother of God, still less did she prepare or make herself meet for it. The tidings took her all unawares, as Luke reports (Luke 1:29). But merit is not unprepared for its reward, but deliberately seeks and awaits it.

It is no valid argument against this to cite the words of the hymn, *Regina Coeli Laetare* [i.e. 'Queen of Heaven, Rejoice'], "Whom thou didst merit to bear," and again, "Whom thou was worthy to bear." For the selfsame things are sung of the holy Cross, which was a thing of wood and incapable of merit. The words are to be understood in this sense: In order to become the Mother of God, she needs to be a woman, a virgin, of the tribe of Judah, and must believe the angelic message in order to become fit therefor, as the Scriptures foretold.

As the wood had no other merit or worthiness than that it was suited to be made into a cross and was appointed by God for that purpose, even so her sole worthiness to become the Mother of God lay in her being fit and appointed for it; so that it might be pure grace and not a reward, that we might not take away from God's grace, worship and honor by ascribing too great things to her. For it is better to take away too much from her than from the grace of God. Indeed, we cannot take away too much from her, since she was created out of nothing, like all other creatures. But we can easily take away too much from grace, which is a perilous thing to do and not well pleasing to her. It is necessary also to keep within bounds and not make too much of calling her "Queen of heaven," which is a true enough name and yet does not make her a goddess, who could grant gifts or render aid, as some suppose, that pray and flee to her rather than to God. She gives nothing, God gives all, as we see in the words that follow: "He that is mighty..." Verily, in these words she takes away all might and power from every creature and bestows them on God alone. What great boldness and robbery on the part of so young and tender a maiden!

She dares, by this one word, to make all the strong feeble, all the mighty weak, all the wise foolish, all the famous despised, and God alone the possessor of all strength, wisdom and glory. For this is the meaning of the phrase, "He that is mighty." There is none that does anything, but as St. Paul says in Ephesians 1:11, "God worketh all in all," and all creatures' works are God's works. Even as we confess in the Creed, "I believe in God the Father, the Almighty." He is almighty because it is His power alone that works in all and through all and over all.

Thus, St. Anna, the mother of Samuel, sings in 1 Samuel 2:9, "By strength shall no man prevail." And St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God." This is a most important article of faith, including many things; it utterly puts down all pride, arrogance, blasphemy, fame, and false trust, and exalts God alone. It points out the reason why God alone is to be exalted, — because He does all things. That is easily said, but hard to believe and to translate into life. For they who carry it out in their lives are most peaceable, composed and simple-hearted folk, who lay no claim to anything, well knowing it is not theirs but God's.

This, then, is the meaning of these words of the Mother of God: "In all those great and good things there is naught of mine, but He Who alone doeth all things, and Whose power worketh in all, hath done to me such great things." For the word "mighty" does not denote a quiescent power, as one says of a temporal king that he is mighty, even though he be sitting still and doing nothing. But it denotes an energetic power, a continuous activity, that works and operates without ceasing. For God does not rest, but works without ceasing, as Christ says in John 5:17, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." In the same sense St. Paul says in Ephesians 3:20, "He is able to do above all that we ask" — that is, He always does more than we ask; that is His way and Thus, His power works.

That is why I said Mary does not desire to be an idol; she does nothing, God does all. We ought to call upon her, that for her sake God may grant and do what we request. Thus, also all other saints are to be

invoked, so that the work may be every way God's alone. Therefore, she adds, "And holy is His name." That is to say, "As I lay no claim to the work, neither do I to the name and fame. For the name and fame belong to Him alone Who does the work. It is not meet that one should do the work, and another have the fame and take the glory. I am but the workshop wherein He performs His work; I had nothing to do with the work itself. None, therefore, should praise me or give me the glory for becoming the Mother of God, but God alone and His work are to be honored and praised in me. It is enough to congratulate me and call me blessed, because God used me and wrought in me His works."

Behold, how completely she traces all to God, lays claim to no works, no honor, no fame. She conducts herself as before, when as yet she had naught of all this; she demands no higher honors than before. She is not puffed up, does not vaunt herself, nor proclaim with a loud voice that she is become the Mother of God. She seeks not any glory, but goes about her wonted household duties, milking the cows, cooking the meals, washing pots and kettles, sweeping out the rooms, and performing the work of maidservant or housemother in lowly and despised tasks, as though she cared naught for such exceeding great gifts and graces. She was esteemed among other women and her neighbors no more highly than before, nor desired to be, but remained a poor townswoman, one of the great multitude.

O how simple and pure a heart was hers, how strange a soul was this! What great things are hidden here under this lowly exterior! How many will have come in contact with her, have talked, eaten and drunk with her, who perchance despised her and counted her but a common, poor and simple village maiden, and who, had they known, would have fled from her in terror.

That is the meaning of the clause, "Holy is His name." For "holy" means separated, and dedicated to God, that none should touch or defile it, but all should hold it in honor. And "name" means a good report, fame, praise and honor. Thus, everyone should let God's name alone, not lay hands on it nor appropriate it to himself. It is a figure hereof when we read, in Exodus 30:25, that Moses made an oil of holy ointment, at God's command, and straightly forbade that it be poured on any man's flesh.

That is, no man should ascribe to himself the name of God. For we desecrate God's name when we suffer ourselves to be praised or honored, or when we take pleasure in ourselves and boast of our works or our possessions, as is the way of the world, that constantly dishonors and desecrates the name of God. But as the works are alone, so too the name should be His. And all that Thus, hallow His name and deny themselves all honor and glory, rightly honor His name, and therefore, are hallowed by it. Thus, we read, in Exodus 30:25, that the precious ointment was so holy it hallowed whatever it touched. That when God's name is hallowed by us, so that we lay claim to no work, fame or self-satisfaction therein, it is rightly honored, and in turn touches and hallows us.

We must, therefore, be on our guard, because we cannot do without God's good things whi le we live on earth, and therefore, cannot be without name and honor. When men accord us praise and honor, we ought to profit by the example of the Mother of God and at all times arm ourselves with this verse to make the proper reply and to use such honor and praise aright. We should openly say, or at least think in our heart: "O Lord God, Thine is this work that is being praised and celebrated. Thine be also the name. Not I have done it, but Thou, who art able to do all things, and holy is Thy name."

We ought neither to reject this praise and honor as though they were wrong, nor to despise them as though they were naught; but refuse to accept them as too precious or noble, and ascribe them to Him in heaven, to Whom they belong. This is one lesson from this precious verse. It also furnishes us an answer to the question that some may ask, — whether no man ought to honor another. St. Paul indeed says, in Romans 12:10, that we ought to strive to prefer one another in honor. But no one should accept the honor as accorded to him nor take it to himself, but should hallow it and ascribe it to God, to Whom it belongs, by performing all manner of good works, from which honor comes. For no one should lead a dishonorable life. But if he is to live honorably, there needs to be honor shown him. Yet, as an honorable life is the gift and work of God, so too the name should be His alone, holy and undefiled by

self-complacency. For this we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be Thy name."

Section 8

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. - *Luke 1:50*

We must accustom ourselves to the scriptural usage according to which generations are, as we have said above, the succession of those born in the course of nature, one human being descending from another. Hence the German word *Gechlechter* is not an adequate translation, though I do not know a better. For by *Gechlechter* we understand families or blood relations.

But the word here means the natural succession from father to son and son's son, each several member being called a generation; so that the following would not be an ill translation: "His mercy endureth to children's children of them that fear Him."

This is a very common expression in Holy Writ, and has its origin in the words of God under the First Commandment, spoken on Mount Sinai to Moses and all the people "I am thy God, strong and jealous,: visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto many thousand generations of them that love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:5f.).

Having done singing of herself and the good things she had from God, and having sung His praises, Mary now rehearses all the works of God that He works in general in all men, and sings His praises also for them, teaching us to understand aright the work, method, nature and will of God. Many philosophers and men of great acumen have also engaged in the endeavor to find out the nature of God; they have written much about Him, one in this way, another in that, yet all have gone blind over their task and failed of the proper insight. And, indeed, it is the greatest thing in heaven and on earth, to know God aright, if that may be granted to one. This the Mother of God teaches us here in a masterly fashion, if one will but take her meaning, even as she taught the same above, in and by her own experience.

How can one know God better than in the works in which He is most Himself? Whoever understands His works aright cannot fall to know His nature and will, His heart and mind. Hence, to understand His works are an art that need to be learned. And in order that we may learn it, Mary enumerates, in the following four verses, six divine works among as many classes of persons. She divides all the world into two parts, and assigns to each side three works and three classes of men, so that either side has its exact counterpart in the other. She describes the works of God in each of these two parts, portraying Him so well that it could not be done better.

This division is well conceived and is borne out by other passages of Scripture. For instance, God says in Jeremiah 9:23: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord who exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." This is a noble text and well agrees with this hymn of the Mother of God. Here we see that He, too, divides all that is in the world into three parts — wisdom, might and riches — and puts them all down by saying none should glory in these things, for none will find Him in them nor does He delight therein. Over against them He sets three others — loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness. In these things, says He, I am to be found; yea, I exercise them, so nigh am I to them; nor do I exercise them in heaven, but in the earth, where men may find me. And whoever Thus, understandeth Me may well glory and trust therein.

For, if he be not wise, but poor in spirit, My lovingkindness is with him; if he be not mighty, but brought low, My judgment is by his side to save him; if he be not rich, but poor and needy, the more hath he of My righteousness.

Under wisdom He includes all spiritual possessions and gifts, by which a man may gain popularity, fame and a good report, as the following verse will show. Such gifts are intellect, reason, wit, knowledge, piety, virtue, a godly life, in short, whatever is in the soul that men call divine and spiritual, all great and high gifts, yet none of them God. Under might He includes all authority, nobility, friends, high station and honor,

whether pertaining to temporal or to spiritual goods or persons (though there is in Scripture no spiritual authority or power, but only servants and subjects, together with all the rights, liberties and privileges pertaining to the same. Under riches are included good health, beauty, pleasure, strength, and every external good that may befall the body. Opposed to these three are the poor in spirit, the oppressed, and they that lack the necessaries of life. Let us now consider these six works in order.

Of this our verse treats: "His mercy is on them that fear Him: from generation to generation." She begins with the highest and greatest things, with the spiritual and inward goods, which produce the most vain, proud and stiff-necked folk on earth. No rich or mighty man is so puffed up and bold as one such wiseacre who feels and knows that he is in the right, understands all about a matter, and is wiser than other folk. Especially when he finds he ought to give way or confess himself in the wrong, he waxes so insolent and is so utterly devoid of the fear of God that he dares to boast of being infallible, declares God is on his side and the others on the devil's side, and has the effrontery to appeal to the judgment of God. If such a one possesses the necessary power, he rushes on headlong, persecuting, condemning, slandering, slaying, banishing, and destroying all who differ with him, saying afterward he did it all to the honor and glory of God. He is as certain and sure as hardly an angel in heaven, of earning much thanks and merit before God. O how big a bubble have we here!

How much God's Word has to say about such men, and how many grievous things it threatens them with! But they feel them less than the anvil feels the smith's hammer. This is a great and widespread evil.

Christ says of such men in John 16:2, "The time cometh that whoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." And. Psalm 10:5 has this to say of them: "As for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said, I shall never be in adversity,"— as who should say, "I am in the right, I do well, God will richly reward me," etc. Such were the people of Moab, of whom we read in Isaiah 16:6 and Jeremiah 48:29, "We have heard of Moab (he is exceeding proud), his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart, and his indignation is more than his strength." Thus, we see that such men would gladly do more in their great arrogance than they are able. Such were the people of the Jews in their dealings with Christ and the Apostles. Such were the friends of St. Job, who argued against him with extraordinary wisdom and praised and preached God in the loftiest terms. Such folk will not give you a hearing; it is impossible that they should be in the wrong or give way. They must have their way, though all the world perish.

The Scripture cannot find reproaches enough for such a lost crew. Now it calls them an adder stopping its ears lest it hear; now a unicorn that cannot be tamed; again, a raging lion, a mighty immovable rock, a dragon, etc. (e.g. Psalm 58:4, Psalm 22:21, Psalm 7:2, Jeremiah 5:3, Psalm 74:13). But nowhere are they more aptly portrayed than in Job 40:15 and Job 41:1, where He calls them *behemoth*. *Behema* is a single beast, *behemoth* a drove of beasts, that is, a people having a bestial mind and unwilling to be ruled by the Spirit of God. In those chapters God describes it as having eyes "like the dawn of the morning," for their prudence is unbounded. "His hide is so hard that he laugheth to scorn the archer and them that shake the spear"; that is, when they are preached to, they laugh it to scorn, for their right must not be questioned. Again, "his scales are joined one to another, that no air can come between them;" that is, they hold so closely together that no spirit of God can come into them. "His heart," says the Lord, as firm as a smith's anvil." It is the body of the devil. Wherefore He also ascribes the same things to the devil, in this passage.

Such, above all others, are the pope and his herd to-day and these many days. They do all of these things, and worse than were ever done; there is no hearing nor giving way, it profits naught to speak, to counsel, beg, or threaten. It is simply, "We are in the right," and there is an end of it, in despite of everyone else, though it be the whole world.

But someone might say: "How is that? Are we not bound to defend the right? Should we let the truth go? Are we not commanded to die for the sake of the right and the truth? Did not the holy martyrs suffer for the sake of the Gospel? And Christ Himself, did not He desire to be in the right? It happens indeed that such men are now and then in the right publicly

(and as they prate, before God) and that they do wisely and well."

I reply: Here it is high time and most necessary that we open our eyes, for here lies the crux of the whole matter. Everything depends on our proper understanding of "being in the right." It is true, we are to suffer all things for the sake of the truth and the right, and not to deny it, however unimportant the matter be. It may also be that those men are now and then in the right; but they spoil all by not rightly asserting their right, by not going about it in fear, nor setting God before their eye. They deem it sufficient that it is right, and then desire to continue and carry it out by their own power. Thus, they turn their right into a wrong, even if it was, in itself, right. But it is much more dangerous when they only think they are in the right, yet are not certain; as they do in the important matters that pertain to God and His right. Let us, however, deal first with the more tangible human right, and use a simple illustration that all may grasp.

Is it not true that money, property, body, wife, child, friends, and the like, are good things created and given by God Himself? Since, then, they are God's gifts and not your own, suppose He were to try you, to learn whether you were willing to let them go for His sake and to cleave to Him rather than to such gifts of His.

Suppose He raised up an enemy, who deprived you of them in whole or in part, or you lost them by death or some other mischance. Do you think you would have just cause to rage and storm, and to take them again by force, or to sulk impatiently until they were restored to you? And if you said that they were good things and God's creatures, made with His own hands, and that, since all the Scriptures called such things good, you were resolved to fulfill God's Word and defend or get back such goods at cost of life and limb, or not willingly to suffer their loss nor let them go with patience — what a farce would that be!

To do right in this case, you should not rush in pell-mell, but fear God and say, "Dear Lord, they are good things and gifts of Thine, as Thine own Word and Scripture saith; nevertheless I know not whether Thou wilt permit me to keep them. Did I know I was not to have them, I would not move a finger to get them back. Did I know that Thou wouldst rather have them remain in my possession than in that of others, I would serve Thy will by taking them back at risk of life and property. But now, since I know neither, and see that for the present Thou sufferest them to be taken from me, I commit the case to Thee. I will await what I am to do and be ready to have them or to do without them."

That, mark you, is a right soul, and one that fears God. There is God's mercy, as the Mother of God sings. Hence we can see why in times past, Abraham, David, and the people of Israel waged war and slew many. They went into battle by the will of God, they stood in fear, and fought not for the sake of the goods, but because God commanded them to fight; as the narratives show, in which this command of God is usually set forth at the beginning. In this way the truth is not denied, for the truth declares they are good things and God's creatures. But the same truth declares also and teaches that you should let such good things go, be ready at all times to do without them, if God so wills it, and ever cleave to God alone. The truth, by saying they are good, does not compel you to take the good things back again, nor to say they are not good, but it does compel you to regard them with equanimity, and to confess that they are good and not evil.

In the same manner we must treat the right and the manifold good things of reason or wisdom. Who can doubt that right is a good thing and a gift of God? God's Word itself says right is good, and no one should admit that his good and righteous cause is unrighteous or evil, but should sooner die for it and let go everything that is not God. To do otherwise would be to deny God and His Word, for He says right is good and not evil.

But if such right is wrested from you or suppressed, would you, therefore, cry out, storm and rage, and slay the whole world? Some do this; they cry to heaven, work all manner of mischief, ruin land and people, and fill the world with war and bloodshed. How do you know whether or not it is God's will that you keep such a gift and right? It belongs to Him, and He can take it from you to-day or to-morrow, outwardly or inwardly, by friend or foe, just as He will. He tries you to see whether you will dispense with your right for His will's sake, be in the wrong and suffer wrong, endure shame for Him and cleave

to Him alone. If you fear God and think, "Lord, it is Thine; I will not keep it unless I know Thou willest me to have it. Let go what will: only be Thou my God" — then this verse is fulfilled: "His mercy is on them that fear Him," who will do naught apart from His will.

Then both sides of God's Word are observed: in the first place, you confess that the right, your reason, knowledge, wisdom and all your thoughts, are right and good, as God's Word teaches. In the second place, you are willing to dispense with such good things for God's sake, to be wrongfully despoiled, and put to shame before the world, as God's Word also teaches. To confess the right and good is one thing, to obtain it is another. It is enough for you to confess that you are in the right; if you cannot obtain it, commit that to God.

To you is committed the confession, the obtaining God has reserved to Himself. If He desires you also to obtain, He will perform it Himself or put it in your way, without any thought of yours, so that you must come into possession of it and win the victory, above all that you asked or thought. If He does not desire you to obtain it, let His mercy be sufficient for you. Though they deprive you of the victory of the right, they cannot deprive you of the confession. Thus, we must refrain not from the good things of God, but from wickedly and falsely cleaving to them; so that we may use them or suffer the lack of them with equanimity, and cling, whatever befall, to God alone.

O this is a thing that ought to be known to all princes and rulers who, not content with confessing the right, would straightway obtain it and win the victory, without the fear of God; who fill the world with bloodshed and misery, and think what they do is right and well done because they have or think they have a just cause. What else is that but proud and haughty Moab, that deems and makes itself worthy to possess the right, that fine and noble good and gift of God; while if it regard itself aright in the sight of God, it is not worthy to live on earth or eat a crust of bread, because of its sins. O blindness, blindness! Who is worthy of the least creature of God? Yet we desire not only to possess the highest creatures, right, wisdom and honor, but to keep them or regain possession of them with furious shedding of blood and every disaster. Thereupon we go and pray, fast, hear mass, and found churches, with such bloody, furious, raving hearts, it is a wonder the stones do not burst asunder in our face.

Here arises a question. If a ruler did not defend his land and subjects against injustice, but followed my advice, made no resistance, and let all be taken from him, what would the world come to?

I will briefly set down my view of the matter. Temporal power is in duty bound to defend its subjects, as I have frequently said; for it bears the sword in order to keep in fear those who do not heed such divine teaching, and to compel them to leave others in peace. And in this the temporal power seeks not its own but its neighbor's profit and God's honor; it would gladly remain quiet and let its sword rust, if God had not ordained it to be a hindrance to evildoers. Yet this defense of its subjects should not be accompanied by still greater harm; that would be but to leap from the frying- pan into the fire. It is a poor defense to expose a whole city to danger for the sake of one person, or to risk the entire country for a single village or castle, unless God should have enjoined this by a special command, as He did of old time. If a robber knight robs a citizen of his property and you, my lord, lead your army against him to punish this injustice, and in so doing lay waste the whole land, who will have wrought the greater harm, the knight or the lord?

David winked at many things when he was unable to punish without bringing harm upon others. All rulers must do the same. On the other hand, a citizen must endure a certain measure of suffering for the sake of the community, and not demand that all other men undergo for his sake the greater injury.

Christ did not desire the tares to be gathered up, lest the wheat also be rooted up with them (Matthew 13:29f.). If men went to war on every provocation and passed by no insult, we should never be at peace and have naught but destruction besides. Therefore, right or wrong is never a sufficient cause indiscriminately to punish or make war. It is a sufficient cause to punish within bounds and without destroying another. The lord or ruler must ever look to what will profit the whole mass of his subjects rather than anyone portion. That householder will never grow rich, who, because one has plucked a feather from his goose, flings the whole goose after him. There is not

now time to go into the subject of war.

We must do the same in things divine, such as faith and the Gospel, which are the highest goods and which no one should let go. But the right, favor, honor, and acceptance of them we must cast in the balance and commit them to God. We should be concerned not to obtain, but to confess, and willingly endure being reviled before all the world, being persecuted, banished, burned at the stake, or otherwise slain, as unrighteous, deceivers, heretics, apostates, blasphemers, and what not; for then God's mercy is upon us. They cannot take the faith and the truth from us, even though they take our life.

There are but few, however, who rage and fret to obtain and to win the victory in this matter, as men do in temporal goods and rights. There are also few who confess it aright and on principle. But we should grieve and lament for the others who through the defeat of the Gospel are hindered in their soul's salvation. Nay, we should much rather lament and labor (yet as in the sight of God) because of the injury to souls inflicted by the Moabites for the sake of their own temporal goods and rights, as we said above. For it is a lamentable thing when God's Word does not win the victory, lamentable not so far as the confessor is concerned, but so far as they are concerned who should have been saved by it.

Hence we find in the prophets, in Christ, and in the Apostles, such sorrow and sore lamentation for the suppression of the Word of God, who yet were glad to bear any injustice and injury. For far more depends on the obtaining of this good than of any other. Yet no one should employ force nor keep or regain such right of the Gospel by rage and unreason; he should rather humble himself before God as being perchance not worthy that such a great and good thing be done through him and commit all to His mercy with prayer and lamentation.

This, then, is the first work of God — that He is merciful to all who are ready to do without their own opinion, right, wisdom, and all spiritual goods, and willing to be poor in spirit. These are they who truly fear God, who count themselves not worthy of anything, be it never so small, and are glad to be naked and bare before God and man; who ascribe whatever they have to His pure grace, bestowed on the unworthy; who use it with praise and fear and thanksgiving, as though it belonged to another, and who seek not their own will, desire or honor, but His alone to Whom it belongs.

Mary also indicates how much more gladly God shows such mercy, which is His noblest work, than its counterpart, His strength; for she says this work of God endures without ceasing from generation to generation of them that fear Him, while His strength endures but unto the third and fourth generation and has in the verse that follows no time nor limit set to it.

Section 9

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. - *Luke 1:50-51*

I trust no one will be confused by my translation. Above I rendered this verse, "He showeth strength," and here, "He hath showed strength." I have done this in order that we may the better understand these words, which are not bound to anyone time, but are intended to set forth in general the works of God which He always has done, always does, and always will do. Hence the following would be a fair translation: "God is a Lord Whose works are of such a nature that He mightily scatters the proud and is merciful to them that fear Him."

The "arm" of God means in the Scriptures God's own power, by which He works without the medium of any creature. This work is done quietly and in secret, and none becomes aware of it until all is accomplished; so that this power, or arm, can be known and understood only by faith. Wherefore Isaiah complains that so few have faith in this arm, saying, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1-2 ff.). These things are so because, as he goes on to say, all is done in secret and without the semblance of power. We also read in Habakkuk 3:4 that there are horns coming out of God's hands, to indicate His mighty power; and yet it is said, "there was the hiding of his power." What is the meaning of this?

It means that, when God works by means of His creatures, it is plainly seen where the strength is and where the weakness. Hence the proverb, "God helps them that help themselves." For example, whichever

prince wins a battle, it is seen that God defeated the other by him. When a man is devoured by a wolf or otherwise injured, it is evident that it took place by means of the creature. Thus, God makes or breaks one creature by means of another. Whoever falls, falls; whoever stands, stands.

But it is otherwise when God Himself works, with His own arm. Then a thing is destroyed or raised up before one knows it, and no one sees it done. Such works as these He does only among the two divisions of mankind, the godly and the wicked. He suffers the godly to become powerless and to be brought low, until everyone supposes their end is nigh, when in these very things He is present to them with all His power, yet so hidden and in secret that even they that suffer the oppression feel it not, but only believe.

There is the fullness of God's power and His outstretched arm. For where man's strength ends, God's strength begins, provided faith be present and wait on Him. And when the oppression comes to an end, it becomes manifest what great strength was hidden underneath the weakness. Even so, Christ was powerless on the cross, and yet He there performed His mightiest work and vanquished sin, death, world, hell, devil, and all evil. Thus, all the martyrs were strong and overcame. Thus, too, all who suffer and are oppressed overcome. Therefore, it is said in Joel 3:10 "Let the weak say, I am strong" — yet in faith, and without feeling it until it is accomplished.

Again, God suffers the other half of mankind to become great and mightily to exalt themselves. He withdraws His power from them and lets them puff themselves up in their own power alone. For where man's strength begins, God's strength ends. When their bubble is full-blown, and everyone supposes them to have won and overcome, and they themselves feel safe and secure and have achieved, then God pricks the bubble and all is over.

The poor dupes do not know that even while they are puffing themselves up and growing strong they are forsaken of God, and God's arm is not with them. Therefore, their prosperity has its day, disappears like a bubble, and is as if it had never been. To this the psalmist refers in Psalm 73:16 (Vulgate). He was troubled when he saw the riches, pride and prosperity of the wicked in the world. At last he said, "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I looked into the hidden things of God; then understood I their last end. For I saw that for their own deceit they are exalted; when they were lifted up thou hast cast them down.

How are they brought into destruction as in a moment! they are as though they had never been, as a dream when one awaketh." And Psalm 37, (Psalm 37:55 f. (Vulgate)) "I have seen the wicked highly exalted and lifted up like the cedars of Lebanon. And I passed by, and lo, he was not: and I sought him, and his place was not found."

It is because of our lack of faith that we cannot tarry a little, until the time comes when we too shall see how the mercy of God together with all His might is with them that fear Him, and the arm of God with all severity and power against the proud. O faithless! we grope with our hands after the mercy and the arm of God, and, unable to feel them, suppose our cause lost and that of our enemies won, as though God's grace and mercy had forsaken us and His arm turned against us. This we do because we do not know His proper works, and therefore, do not know Him, neither His mercy nor His arm. For He must and will be known by faith; hence our sense and our reason must close their eyes. (Matthew 5:29) This is the eye that offends us; therefore, it must be plucked out and cast from us.

These, then, are the two contrary works of God, from which we learn that He is minded to be far from the wise and prudent, and nigh unto the foolish and those compelled to be in the wrong. This makes God worthy of love and praise, and comforts soul and body and all our powers.

We come to the words, "He scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts." This scattering comes to pass, as we have said, when their prudence is at its height, and when they are filled with their own wisdom; then, verily, God's wisdom is no longer with them. And in what better way could He scatter them than by depriving them of His eternal wisdom and suffering them to be filled with their own temporal, short-lived and perishing wisdom? For Mary says, "the proud in the imagination of their hearts" — that is, those who delight in their own opinions, thoughts and reason, which not God but

their heart inspires, and who deem them alone right and good and wise above all others. Wherefore they exalt themselves above them that fear God, put down and pour shame upon the opinion and right of others, and persecute them to the utmost, so that their own cause may by all means be right and be maintained. When they have accomplished this, they boast and loudly brag; even as the Jews did with Christ, who saw not that their cause was destroyed and brought to naught, but Christ exalted to glory.

We observe, then, that our verse treats of spiritual goods, and how one can know God's twofold work therein. It shows us that we ought gladly to be poor in spirit, and in the wrong, and let our adversaries be in the right.

They will not long continue; the promise is too strong for them. They cannot escape God's arm, but must succumb and be brought as low as they once were high, if we will but believe it. But where there is no faith, God does not perform such works; He withdraws His arm and works openly by means of the creatures, as we said above. But these are not His proper works, whereby He may be known, for in them the creatures' strength is mingled with His own. They are not God's own pure works, as they must be when no one works with Him and He alone does the work, which He does when we become powerless and oppressed in our right or our opinion and suffer God's power to work in us. What precious works are these!

With what mastery does Mary here hit the perverse hypocrites! She looks not on their hands nor in their eyes, but in their hearts, when she says, "the proud in the imagination of their hearts." She refers, in particular, to the enemies of divine truth, such as the Jews in their opposition to Christ, and the men of today. For these scholars and saints are not proud in their dress or conduct; they pray much, fast much, preach and study much; they also say mass, go meekly with bowed head, and shun costly clothes. They think there are no greater foes to pride, error and hypocrisy, nor any better friends of truth and of God, than they themselves. How else could they bring so great harm upon the truth if they were not such holy, pious and learned folk? Their doings make a brave outward show and impress the common people. O they have good hearts and mean well, they call upon the good God, and pity the poor Jesus, who was so unrighteous and proud, and not so pious as they. He says of them, in Matthew 11.19, "Divine wisdom is justified by her children" — that is, "They are more righteous and wise than I, Who am divine Wisdom Itself; whatever I do is wrong, and I am School-mastered by them."

These men are the most venomous and pernicious folk on earth, their hearts abysses of satanic pride. There is no helping them; they will not heed our counsel. It does not concern them; they leave that to poor sinners, for whom such teaching is necessary, but not for them. John calls them, "a generation of vipers," in Luke 3:7 and so does Christ.

These are the right guilty ones, who do not fear God, and are fit only that God should scatter them with their pride, because none persecute the right and wisdom more than they, — yet for the sake of God and of righteousness, as we have said (Matthew 23:23). Hence they need to be first and foremost among the three enemies of God on this side. For the rich are the least His enemies; the mighty are much more hostile; but these wiseacres are the worst of all, because of their influence on others. The rich destroy the truth among themselves; the mighty drive it away from others; but these wise ones utterly extinguish the truth itself, and replace it with other things, the imagination of their own heart, so that the truth cannot come again into its own. As much as the truth itself is better than the men among whom it dwells, so much worse are the wise than the mighty and the rich. O God is their special enemy, as they well deserve.

Section 10

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. - Luke 1:52

This work and those that follow are easily understood from the two foregoing works. For, just as God scatters the wise and prudent in their own thoughts and imaginations on which they depend, venting their pride on them that fear God -- they need to be in the wrong and see their right and opinion rejected (which happens chiefly for the sake of God's Word). Even so, He destroys and puts down the mighty and the great with their strength and authority, on which

they depend, venting their pride on their inferiors, the godly and weak, who need to suffer injury, pain, death and all manner of evil at their hands. And just as He comforts those who must suffer wrong and shame for the right, truth and word, even so He comforts those who must suffer injury and evil. And as much as He comforts the latter, so much does He terrify the former.

But this, too, must all be known and waited for in faith. For He does not destroy the mighty as suddenly as they deserve, but lets them go for a season, until their might has reached its highest point. When it has done this, God does not support it, neither can it support itself; it breaks down of its own weight without any crash or sound, and the oppressed are raised up, also without any sound, for God's strength is in them, and it alone remains when the strength of the mighty has fallen.

Observe, however, that Mary does not say He breaks the seats, but He casts the mighty from their seats. Nor does she say He leaves those of low degree in their low degree, but He exalts them. For while the earth remaineth, authority, rule, power and seats need to remain. But God will not long suffer men to abuse them and turn them against Him, inflict injustice and violence on the godly, and take pleasure therein, boast of them and fail to use them in the fear of God, to His praise and in defense of righteousness. We see in all histories and in experience that He puts down one kingdom and exalts another, lifts up one principality and casts down another, increases one people and destroys another; as He did with Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, though they thought they should sit in their seats forever. Nor does He destroy reason, wisdom and right; for if the world is to go on, these things must remain. But He does destroy pride and the proud, who use these things for selfish ends, take pleasure therein, do not fear God, but persecute the godly and the divine right by means of them, and thus, abuse the fair gifts of God and turn them against Him.

Now, in things divine, the wiseacres and proud sages are wont to make common cause with the mighty and to persuade them to take sides against the truth; as it is written in (Psalm 2:2) "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed." For truth and right must ever be assailed by the wise, the mighty, and the rich, that is, by the world with its greatest and best ability. Hence the Holy Spirit comforts truth and right by the mouth of this Mother and bids them not to be deceived nor afraid. Let them be wise, mighty, rich: it will not be for long. For if the saints and scholars, together with the mighty lords and the rich, were not against but for the right and the truth, what would become of the wrong? Who would there be to suffer evil?

But this must never come to pass. The learned, saintly, mighty, great and rich, and the best that the world has, must fight against God and the right, and be the devil's own. As it is said in Habakkuk 1:16: "His meat is dainty and choice" — that is to say, the evil spirit has a most delicate palate and is fond of feasting on the very best, daintiest and choicest morsels, as a bear on honey. Hence the learned and saintly hypocrites, the great lords and the rich, are the devil's own titbits. On the other hand, those whom the world rejects, the poor, lowly, simplehearted and despised, God hath chosen, as Paul says in (1 Corinthians 1:28) and causes the best part of mankind to bring suffering upon the lowest part, in order that men may know that our salvation consists not in man's power and works, but in God's alone, as St. Paul also says. (1 Corinthians 3:7) Hence there is much truth in these sayings, "The more men know, the worse they grow", "A prince, a rare bird in heaven"; "Rich here, poor yonder." For the learned will not put by the pride of their hearts, nor the mighty their oppression, nor the rich their pleasures. (Luke 16:19 ff.) Thus, wags the world.

Those of low degree are here not the humble, but as such are contemptible and altogether nothing in the eyes of the world. It is the same expression Mary applied to herself above — "He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden." Nevertheless, those who are willing to be nothing and lowly of heart, and do not strive to be great, are truly humble.

Now, when He exalts them, it does not mean that He will put them in the seats of those He has cast out; any more than when He shows mercy to them that fear Him, He puts them in the place of the learned, that is, the proud. He grants them rather to be exalted spiritually and in God, and to be judges over seats and power and all might, both here and in

heaven; for they have more knowledge than all the learned and mighty. How this is done was said above under the first work and need not be repeated. All this is said for the comfort of the suffering and for the terror of the tyrants, if we but had faith enough to

Section 11

He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty - Luke 1:53

We said above that by those of low degree are meant not those who are despised and nothing in appearance, but those who are willing to be in such a state, especially if they have been forced into it for the sake of God's Word or the right. Even so, by the hungry are not meant those who have little or nothing to eat, but those who gladly suffer want, especially if they are forcibly compelled by others to do so for God's sake or the truth. Who is lowlier, more despised and needier than the devil and the damned, or than men who are tortured, starved, or slain on account of their evil deeds, or all who are lowly and in want against their will? Yet that does not help them, but only adds to their misery. Of them the Mother of God does not speak, but of those who are one with God and God with them, and who believe and trust in Him.

On the other hand, what hindrance was their riches to the holy fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? What hindrance was his royal throne to David, or his authority in Babylon to Daniel? or their high station or great riches to those who had them or who have them today, provided they do not set their hearts on them nor seek their own in them? Solomon says, in Proverbs 16:2, "The Lord weigheth the spirits" — that is, He judgeth not according to the outward appearance, whether one be rich or poor, high or low, but according to the spirit, and how it behaves itself within.

There need to be such differences and distinctions of persons and stations in our life here on earth, yet the heart should neither cling to them nor fly from them — not cling to the high and rich, nor fly from the poor and lowly. Thus, it is also said in Psalm 7:9,11, "God trieth the hearts and reins" — therefore, He is a "just judge." But men judge according to the outward appearance; therefore, they often err.

These works are done in secret, like those mentioned above, so that no one is aware of them until they have come to an end. A rich man is not aware how really empty and wretched he is until he comes to die or otherwise suffers loss. Then only does he see how all his goods were altogether nothing, as it is said in Psalm 76:5 (Vulgate), "they have slept their sleep (that is, died); and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hand." On the other hand, the hungry and thirsty know not how filled with good things they are until they come to the end. Then they find the words of Christ true, in Luke 6:21, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst; for they shall be filled," and the comfortable promise of the Mother of God here, "He hath filled the hungry with good things." It is utterly impossible for God to let anyone who trusts in Him die of starvation; all angels must sooner come and feed him. Elijah was fed by ravens and lived for many days on a handful of meal, he and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:6,15). God cannot forsake those who trust in Him. Hence David says, in Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Now, he is righteous that trusts in God. Again, in Psalm 34:10 (Vulgate), "The rich have wanted and have suffered hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good." And St. Anna, the mother of Samuel, says in 1 Samuel 2:5, "They that were full before have hired out themselves for bread: and the hungry are filled."

But our wretched unbelief always hinders God from working such works in us, and ourselves from experiencing and knowing them. We desire to be filled and have all things aplenty before hunger and want arrive. We lay up provision against future hunger and need, so that we no longer have need of

God and His works. What sort of faith is that which trusts in God, when all the while you feel and know that you have goods laid up whereby you are able to help yourself? It is because of our unbelief that we see God's Word, the truth, and the right defeated, and wrong triumph, and yet remain silent, do not rebuke, speak out, nor prevent it, but let things go as they will. Why? We are afraid that we too might be attacked and made poor and might then perish of hunger and be forever laid low. That is to esteem temporal goods more than God, and to put them in God's place as an idol.

If we do this, we do not deserve to hear nor to understand this comfortable promise of God, — that He exalts the lowly, puts down the mighty, fills the poor, and empties the rich. We do not deserve ever to come to the knowledge of His works, without which there is no salvation. We need to, therefore, be damned forever, as Psalm 28:5 says, "Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up." And that justly; because they do not believe His promises, but count Him a fickle, lying God. They dare not make a venture nor launch out on the strength of His words, so little do they esteem His truth. It is indeed necessary that we make a trial and venture out on His words; for Mary does not say that He hath filled the full, and exalted them of high degree, but, "He hath filled the hungry, and exalted them of low degree."

You need to feel the pinch of poverty in the midst of your hunger, and learn by experience what hunger and poverty are, with no provision on hand and no help in yourself or any other man, but in God only; so that the work may be God's alone, and impossible to be done by any other. You must not only think and speak of a low estate, but actually come to be in a low estate, and caught in it, without any human aid, so that God alone may do the work. Or, if it should not come to such a pass, you must at least desire it and not shrink from it. We are Christians and have the Gospel, which neither the devil nor men can abide, in order that we may come into poverty and lowliness, and God may thereby have His work in us.

Think but for yourself and you will see that if God were to fill you before you were hungry or to exalt you before you were brought low, He need to sink to the level of a wizard or conjuror; He would be unable to do what He promises, and all His works would be a mere jest, whereas it is written in Psalm 111:7, "His works are verity and truth." And even if He were to perform His works as soon as you felt the first pinch of want or lowliness, or to help you in some slight need, such works would be altogether unworthy of His divine power and majesty; for Psalm 111 says of them, "Great are the works of the Lord: sought out according to all his wills."

Let us assume the reverse case. If He were to put down the rich and them of high degree before they became either rich or high, how would He go about it? They must first have risen to so high a place and come into such great riches that they themselves and everyone else supposed — nay, that it was actually the case none could put them down, none could stop them, and that they were sure of themselves and said what Isaiah writes of them and of Babylon (Isaiah 47:8 f.), "Hear now this, thou that art delicate, and dwellest confidently, and sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children (that is, of power and assistance). But these two things shall come to thee in one day." Then only is God able to work His works in them.

Thus, He suffered Pharaoh to lift himself up against the children of Israel and to oppress them, as He Himself says of him in (Exodus 9:16) "For this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." Of such instances the Bible is full, whereby it teaches naught but God's work and word, and rejects the work and word of men.

Behold, how strong a comfort it is, that not man but God gives to the hungry, and that He not only gives them this or that but fills and fully satisfies them. Mary says, moreover, "with good things." That is to say, this fullness is to be harmless, wholesome and saving, benefiting both body, soul, and all their powers. But it also shows that, before being filled, the hungry are lacking in all good things and filled with all want. For, as we said above, riches here include all manner of temporal goods for the supply of bodily needs, whereby the soul also is rejoiced.

Even so, "hunger" here signifies the want not only of food but of all temporal goods. For a man can do without everything else but food, so that almost all goods exist for the sake of furnishing him with food, without which no man can live, even though he might be able to live without clothing, house, money, property, and fellow men. The Scripture, therefore, here designates temporal goods according to that part of them whose need and use are most essential, and which we can least of all do without. Thus, it also calls misers and men covetous of temporal goods, "servants of their own belly" (Romans 16:18), and Paul calls their belly their god (Philippians 3:19). How could one be more strongly and comfortably moved

to willing endurance of hunger and poverty, than by these fine words of the Mother of God, — that God will fill all the hungry with good things? Whoever is not moved by these words and such glory and praise of poverty, is of a certainty without faith and trust, a very heathen. On the other hand, how could one bring a more damning accusation against riches or more grievously terrify the rich, than by saying that God sends them empty away? O how great and overflowing are both God's filling and God's sending away! How utterly vain is here the help or counsel of any creature!

A man is frightened when he hears that his father has disowned him or that he has fallen into disfavor with his lord. Yet we rich men and of high degree are not frightened when we hear that God disowns us, nay, not only disowns us, but threatens to break, humble, and send us empty away! It is a joy, on the other hand, when one's father is good and one's lord gracious, and many a one sets such great store by these things as to give up life and property for them. We have here such a promise of God and such strong comfort — yet we can neither use nor enjoy them, neither thank Him for them nor rejoice therein! O wretched unbelief! hard and firm as stock and stone, not to feel such great things. Let this suffice concerning the six works of God.

Section 12

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors - *Luke 1:54-55*

After enumerating the works of God in her and in all men, Mary returns to the beginning and to the chief thing. She concludes the Magnificat by mentioning the very greatest of all God's works: the Incarnation of the Son of God. She freely acknowledges herself handmaiden and servant to all the world, by confessing that this work which was performed in her was not done for her sake alone, but for the sake of all Israel. But she divides Israel into two parts and refers only to that part that is God's servant.

Now no one is God's servant save he that lets Him be his God and perform His works in him, of which we spoke above, Alas! the word "service of God" has nowadays taken on so strange a meaning and usage that whoever hears it thinks not of these works of God, but rather of the ringing of bells, the wood and stone of churches, the incense-pot, the flicker of candles, the mumbling in the churches, the gold, silver and precious stones in the vestments of choir boys and celebrants, of chalices and monstrances, of organs and images, processions and churchgoing, and, most of all, the babbling of lips and the rattling of rosaries. This, alas! is what the service of God means now. Of such service God knows nothing at all, while we know nothing but this. We chant the Magnificat daily, to a special tone and with gorgeous pomp, and yet the oftener we sing it the more we silence its true music and meaning. Yet the text stands firm. Unless we learn and experience these works of God, there will be no service of God, no Israel, no grace, no mercy, no God; though we kill ourselves with singing and ringing in the churches and drag into them all the goods in all the world. God has not commanded any of these things; hence there can be no doubt that He takes no pleasure therein.

Now the Israel that is God's servant, him the Incarnation of Christ benefits. That is His own beloved people, for whose sake He also became man, to redeem them from the power of the devil, of sin, death and hell, and to lead them to righteousness, eternal life and salvation. That is the help of which Mary sings. As Paul says, in Titus 2:14, "Christ gave himself for us, that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people"; and St. Peter, in 1 Peter 2:9, "Ye are a holy nation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood," etc.

These are the riches of the boundless mercy of God, which we have received by no merit, but by pure grace. Therefore, she sings, "He hath remembered His mercy." She does not say, He hath remembered our merit and worthiness. We were in need, to be sure, but altogether unworthy.

Herein consists His praise and glory, while our boasting and presumption must hold their peace. There was nothing for Him to regard that could move Him save His mercy, and this name He desired to make known.

But why does she say, "He remembered" rather than "He regarded"? Because He had promised this mercy, as the following verse shows. He had waited a

long time before showing it, until it seemed as though He had forgotten — even as all His works seem as though He was forgetting us — but when He came, it was seen that He had not forgotten, but had continually had in mind to fulfill His promise.

It is true that the word Israel means the Jews alone, and not us Gentiles. But because they would not have Him, He yet chose certain out of their number, and thereby satisfied the name Israel and made of it henceforth a spiritual Israel. This was shown in Genesis 32:24, when the holy patriarch Jacob wrestled with the angel, who strained the hollow of his thigh out of joint, to show that his children should henceforth not boast of their fleshly birth, as the Jews do. Wherefore he also received a new name, that he should henceforth be called Israel, as a patriarch who was not only Jacob, the father of fleshly children, but Israel, the father of spiritual children. With this the word Israel agrees, for it means a prince with God.

That is a most high and holy name and contains in itself the great miracle that, by the grace of God, a man prevailed as it were with God, so that God does what man desires. We see the same thing in the case of the Christian Church. Through Christ she is joined to God as a bride to her bridegroom, so that the bride has a right to and power over her Bridegroom's body and all His possessions; all of which comes to pass through faith. By faith man does what God wills; God in turn does what man wills. Thus, Israel means a godlike, God-conquering man, who is a lord in God, with God, and through God, able to do all things.

That is the meaning of Israel. For *Saar* means a lord, a prince; *El* means God. Put them together, and they become Israel, after the Hebrew fashion. Such an Israel God would have. Therefore, when Jacob had wrestled with the angel and prevailed, He said to him, "Thy name shall be called Israel; for since thou hast power with God, thou shalt also have power with men" (Genesis 32:28). There would be much more to say on this subject, for Israel is a strange and profound mystery.

Just as he promised our ancestors (Luke 1:55).

Here all merit and presumption are brought low, and God's grace and mercy alone exalted. For God hath not holpen Israel on account of their merits, but on account of His own promise. In pure grace He made the promise, in pure grace He also fulfilled it. Wherefore St. Paul says in Galatians 3 that God gave the promise to Abraham four hundred years before He gave the law to Moses, that no one might glory, saying he had merited and obtained such grace and promise through the law or the works of the law (Galatians 3:17 f.). This same promise the Mother of God here lauds and exalts above all else, ascribing this work of the Incarnation Of God solely to the undeserved promise of divine grace, made to Abraham.

The promise of God to Abraham is recorded especially in Genesis 12 and 22, and is referred to, besides, in many other places (e.g. Genesis 12:3; Genesis 22:18). It runs thus: "By myself have I sworn: in thy seed shall all families or nations of the earth be blessed." These words are highly esteemed by St. Paul and by all the prophets, and well might they be. For in these words Abraham and all his descendants were preserved and saved, and in them we too must all be saved; for Christ is contained and promised therein as the Savior of the whole world. This is Abraham's bosom, wherein were kept all who were saved before Christ's birth; without these words no one was saved, even though he had performed all good works (Luke 16:22). Let us examine them more fully.

In the first place, it follows from these words of God that without Christ all the world is in sin and under condemnation and is accursed with all its doing and knowing. For if He says that not some but all nations shall be blessed in Abraham's seed, then without Abraham's seed no nation shall be blessed. What need was there for God to promise, so solemnly and with so mighty an oath, that He would bless them, if they were already blessed and not rather cursed? From this saying the prophets drew many inferences; namely, that all men are evil, liars all, false and blind, in short, without God, so that in the scriptural usage to be called a man is no great honor, since in God's sight the name of man is no better than the name of liar or faithless in the eyes of the world. So completely is man corrupted through Adam's fall that the curse is innate with him and become, as it were, his nature and being.

It follows, in the second place, that this Seed of Abraham could not be born in the common course of

nature, of a man and a woman; for such a birth is cursed and results in naught but accursed seed, as we have just said.

Now, if all the world was to be redeemed from the curse by this Seed of Abraham and thereby blessed, as the word and oath of God declare, the Seed itself must first be blessed and neither touched nor tainted by that curse, but be pure blessing, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Again, if God, who cannot lie, declared with an oath that it should be Abraham's natural seed, that is, a natural and genuine child, born of his flesh and blood, then this Seed need to be a true, natural man, of the flesh and blood of Abraham. Here then we have a contradiction — the natural flesh and blood of Abraham, and yet not born in the course of nature, of man and wife. Therefore, He uses the word "thy seed," not "thy child," to make it very clear and certain that it should be his natural flesh and blood, such as seed is. For a child need not be one's natural child, as everyone knows. Now who will find the means to establish God's word and oath, wherein such contradictory things lie side by side?

God Himself has done this thing. He is able to keep what He has promised, even though no one may understand it before it come to pass; for His word and work do not demand the proof of reason, but a free and pure faith.

Behold, how He combined the two. He raises up seed unto Abraham, the natural son of one of his daughters, a pure virgin, Mary, through the Holy Spirit, and without her knowing a man. Here there was no natural conception with its curse, nor could it touch this seed; and yet it is the natural seed of Abraham, as truly as any of the other children of Abraham.

That is the blessed Seed of Abraham, in Whom all the world is set free from its curse. For whoever believes in this Seed, calls upon Him, confesses Him, and abides in Him, to him all his curse is forgiven, and all blessing given, as the word and oath of God declare "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." That is to say, whatever is to be blessed must and shall be blessed through this Seed, and in no other way.

This is Abraham's Seed, begotten by none of his sons, as the Jews always confidently expected, but born of this one daughter of his, Mary, alone.

That is what the tender Mother of this Seed means here by saying, "He hath holpen His servant Israel, as He promised to Abraham and to all his seed." She found the promise fulfilled in herself; hence she says, "It is now fulfilled; He hath brought help, and kept His word, solely in remembrance of His mercy." Here we have the foundation of the Gospel and see why all its teaching and preaching drive men to faith in Christ and into Abraham's bosom. For where there is not this faith no other way can be devised nor help given whereby to lay hold on this blessed Seed. And, indeed, the whole Bible hangs on this oath of God, for in the Bible everything has to do with Christ.

Furthermore, we see that all the fathers in the Old Testament, together with all the holy prophets, had the same faith and Gospel as we have, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:1; for they all remained with a strong faith in this oath of God and in Abraham's bosom and were preserved therein.

The sole difference is, they believed in the coming and promised Seed; we believe in the Seed that is come and has been given. But it is all the one truth of the promise, and hence also one faith, one Spirit, one Christ, one Lord (Ephesians 4:5) now as then, and forever, as Paul says in Hebrews 13:8.

But the subsequent giving of the law to the Jews is not on a par with this promise. The law was given in order that by its light they might the better come to know their cursed state and the more fervently and heartily desire the promised Seed; wherein they had an advantage over all the heathen world. But they turned this advantage into a disadvantage; they undertook to keep the law by their own strength and failed to learn from it their needy and cursed state. They Thus, shut the door upon themselves, so that the Seed was compelled to pass them by. They still continue in this state, but God grant not for long. Amen.

This was the cause of the quarrel all the prophets had with them. For the prophets well understood the purpose of the law, namely, that men should thereby know their accursed nature and learn to call upon Christ. Hence. they condemned all the good works and everything in the life of the Jews that did not agree with this purpose. Wherefore the Jews waxed wroth with them and put them to death, as men who condemned the service of God, good works, and

godly living; even as the hypocrites and graceless saints ever do, of which we might say a great deal.

When Mary says, "His seed forever," we are to understand "forever" to mean that such grace is to continue to Abraham's seed (that is, the Jews) from that time forth, throughout all time, down to the last day. Although the vast majority of them are hardened, yet there are always some, however few, that are converted to Christ and believe in Him. For this promise of God does not lie that the promise was made to Abraham and to his seed, not for one year or for a thousand years, but *in secula*, that is, from one generation to another, "without end." We ought, therefore, not to treat the Jews in so unkindly a spirit, for there are future Christians among them, and they are turning every day.

Moreover, they alone, and not we Gentiles, have this promise, that there shall always be Christians among Abraham's seed, who acknowledge the blessed Seed, who knows how or when? As for our cause, it rests upon pure grace, without a promise of God. If we lived Christian lives, and led them with kindness to Christ, there would be the proper response. Who would desire to become a Christian, when he sees Christians dealing with men in so unchristian a spirit? Not so, my dear Christians. Tell them the truth in all kindness; if they will not receive it, let them go. How many Christians are there who despise Christ, do not hear His word, and are worse than Jews or heathen! Yet we leave them in peace, and even fall down at their feet and wellnigh adore them as gods.

Let this suffice for the present. We pray God to give us a right understanding of this Magnificat, an understanding that consists not merely in brilliant words, but in a glowing life in body and soul. May Christ grant us this through the intercession and for the sake of His dear Mother Mary. Amen.

Epilogue

In conclusion I come once more to your Grace, craving pardon for my temerity. I know full well that your Grace's youth is amply supplied, each day, with wholesome instruction and admonition. Yet I cannot neglect my duty as a loyal subject, nor keep my conscience from dwelling on and being concerned for your Grace. It is the hope of us all that God may by His salutary grace so direct the future that the rule of Saxony shall come into your Grace's hands, which will be a great and precious thing if it turn out well, but a perilous and wretched if it turn out ill. We must in all things hope and pray for the best, but none the less fear and be prepared for the worst.

Your Grace should reflect that in all the Scriptures God suffered not any heathen king or prince throughout the length and breadth of the world to be praised, but, contrariwise, to be punished, which is a mighty and terrible example to all rulers. Moreover, even in Israel, His chosen people, He found never a king worthy of praise and not rather of punishment. Above all, in the kingdom of Judah, the chief portion of the whole race of mankind, exalted by God and beloved of Him above all others, there were few, not above six, kings found worthy of praise. And the very best of kings, His own beloved David, who had no peer among temporal rulers, before, beside or after him, filled as he was with the fear and the wisdom of God, and directing his whole rule not after his own reason but according to God's command alone, nevertheless stumbled more than once. Wherefore the Scripture, unable to blame his reign, and yet finding it necessary to narrate the calamity that befell the people on his account, put the blame not on David but on the people, saying God's anger was kindled against them so that He suffered the saintly David to be moved by the devil to number the people, on account of which seventy thousand of them were destroyed by pestilence (2 Samuel 24:1).

All these things were appointed by God in order to terrify those in authority, to keep them in fear, and to admonish them of their peril. For great possessions, glory, power and favor, as well as the flatterers no lord may be without, surround and lay siege to the heart of a prince, moving it to pride, to forgetfulness of God and neglect of the people and the common weal, to sensuality, blasphemy, arrogance and idleness, in short, to every sort of vice and evil. Indeed, there is no castle or city that is so heavily besieged and assaulted. Unless, therefore, one fortify oneself by means of such example s, and take the fear of God for his portcullis and rampart, how should he endure? For, unless a lord and ruler loves his subjects, and has for his chief concern not how to live at ease, but how to uplift and improve his people, his case is hopeless; he rules but to his soul's perdition.

Nor will it avail him to make amends by the foundation of great anniversaries, monasteries, altars, and what not. God will require of him an account of his office and station and will not be satisfied with aught else.

Therefore, my gracious Lord and Prince, I commend the Magnificat to your Grace, particularly the fifth and sixth verses, in which its chief content is gathered up. I beseech and exhort your Grace in all your life to fear nothing on earth, nay, not even hell itself, so much as that which the Mother of God there calls, *mens cordis sui* [mind and heart]. That is the greatest, closest, mightiest, and most destructive foe of all mankind, and especially of rulers.

Its name is reason, good sense or opinion, and from it all counsels and all rule must be derived. Your Grace will never be secure from it unless you continually keep it under suspicion and follow it only in the fear of God. I do not mean your Grace's counsels only, but those of all your counselors as well. None should be despised, none trusted.

How is this to be done? Why, your Grace should not leave prayer to the cowls or to the chalices, as it is now the wretched custom to put one's trust in other men's prayers, without praying oneself; but your Grace should pluck up courage and be of good cheer, put by your timidity, and yourself converse with God in your heart or in secret, boldly casting down the keys at His feet, and pleading His own institution with Him. After this fashion: "Behold, O God my Father, it is Thy doing and appointment that I was born and created in this estate, to be a ruler. This none can deny, and Thou Thyself knowest it to be true. Whether worthy or unworthy, I yet am what Thou and everyone sees. Grant, therefore, my Lord and Father, that I may rule over Thy people to Thy praise and their profit. Let me not follow my own reason, but be Thou my reason," and so on. In this spirit, then, let things go as they will, in God's name.

How well such a prayer and such a spirit please God, He Himself shows in the case of Solomon, who also prayed such a prayer (1 Kings 3:5-14), which I have translated and hereunto appended. May it serve your Grace as a pattern at the close of this preachment and awaken in you a comfortable confidence in God's grace; so that both the fear and the mercy of God may be together, as the fifth verse sings.

Herewith I commend myself to your Grace, and your Grace to God. May He grant you a blessed reign. Amen.