### Conference to the community in Rome

First Sunday of Advent 1913

Today we begin the time of preparation for the feast of Christmas, the time of Advent, which reminds us of a double event: a great disgrace and a still greater grace. The great disgrace was the original sin of man with its consequences: the separation from God and the abandonment to sin and that is to Satan, who became, so to speak, prince of this world to lead men to eternal perdition. The greater grace, however, was the coming of the Savior who decided to redeem the fallen human race. This, in fact, was the expectation of the just in the Old Testament, the hope which at the end was accomplished when the Incarnate Lord appeared.

On this double reminder is based the practices and the preparation of Advent according to the desire of the Church. This preparation should be triple. That is, we must exercise ourselves: 1) in penance, 2) in recollection and 3) in joyous expectation.

1. Penance is not sought as a preference in corporal mortification, because that could rather be an obstacle to the practice of the preferred, that is the mortification of the spirit: meekness, humility and especially obedience. Simply mortifying our own will and judgment, we must exercise ourselves in the spirit of penance, observing with great perfection the Constitutions, the prescriptions and the directions of the Superiors. Besides, we must stimulate ourselves to this through contemplation of the incomprehensible mystery of dependence in which the Divine Savior was before His birth. He, in spite of His being full of every wisdom, wanted to depend in everything from the Most Holy Virgin.

Therefore, the Church has mitigated the prescriptions regarding the fast. We do not live any more in the times in which the body had to be subdued by the fast in order to be subordinate to the spirit. Rather, there is the danger that the body by reason of weakness is not in a condition to serve the spirit as it should. When, for example, we are overcome by sleep during prayer, or we can’t get up in the morning at the appointed time, the weakened body becomes a true obstacle in the spiritual exercises.

1. The time of Advent must be a time of holy recollection. That doesn’t say that in our work we must force ourselves to think about Advent, though we must construct in our hearts a little house of Nazareth where we can retire after our work and ask the Divine Savior, in union with the most Holy Virgin, to descend.
2. The time of preparation for Christmas should also be a time of joyous and confident expectation. But why must we desire the Lord so much while we already receive Him every day in our hearts? We must desire Him and rejoice as Christmas approaches in view of the graces which the Lord reserves for us. We must rejoice for three reasons: first, because Jesus Himself desires it and is happy to bring us His gifts, especially in the Holy Night, during Holy Communion. Second, we rejoice also by reason of ourselves, obtaining from the Lord a great grace which, perhaps we have been asking Him for a longer time, and once received, it brings us in great strides on the way of perfection. We rejoice also by reason of our parents in the world who, through our prayers, will receive many graces, gifts much more precious than the earthly gifts, which as religious, we cannot offer to them. Third, we rejoice for the Negroes. For many of them the holy feast of Christmas is also the great day of grace and of joy in which they receive the Sacrament of Baptism, or, for the first time they receive the Lord in their heart. All the more since, through our work, we have contributed to their happiness.

We must also be grateful to the Lord, because through our vocation, we are in a position to exercise ourselves in such a triple preparation, contrary to the people of the world who, in this time, think almost exclusively of the temporal joys which they expect from the feast of Christmas. Even in pious Catholic families, the spirit of earthly joys is entertained, while the true motive of joy, that of the coming of the Savior and of our Redemption, pass into the shadow. For the children, a big Christmas tree is lighted up with lots of lights and adorned with sweets, but no one explains to them that this luminous tree symbolizes our Divine Savior Who comes into this world, as the true Light, to illuminate our darkness. Instead, they speak about the gifts, and sometimes someone is dissatisfied and deluded because he/she didn’t receive that which she desired and expected.

Not without a particular reason, I have had the blue starry sky placed in the chapel; and not because the chapel should be for us, in a certain manner, our heaven here on earth, but also that we would often think of heaven. Our life is already, so to speak, heaven on earth, at least it could be, and if it isn’t, we ourselves are to blame, because everything is disposed for our happiness. Now, the meditations on Heaven are most appropriate for the time of Advent. At the sight of the azure, starry sky in the chapel, we can think of the just of the Old Testament who invoked the Savior from Heaven: “Rorate coeli desuper” and unite our prayer to that of the Holy Church for the descent of the Redeemer.

Contemplating the starry Heaven, we can arouse in us still another thought. It is the thought of the Divine Judge on the clouds of Heaven to judge the world. However, not the sentiments of fear nor of fright should fill our hearts, but rather, those of joy and of jubilee; because, what should we fear if we have faithfully fulfilled our duties of state in union with Jesus and Mary? At the same time, we will see coming towards us, with Our Lord, many souls of Negroes, whom we have helped, with our prayers and with our work, to reach eternal happiness. We will then enter with them eternal joy, to the eternal Feast of Christmas in Heaven. Amen.