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06. The longest text of Libermann on devotion to the Virgin Mary

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The longest text of Libermann on devotion to the Virgin Mary

To M. Dupont¹

While he was in the seminary at Strasbourg, preparing for his ordination, François Libermann sent a long letter to a co-disciple at Saint-Sulpice, Marie Eugène Dupont,² which is largely a commentary on the prayer, "O Jesu vivens in Maria".³ Libermann explains the role of Mary in leading us to become like Jesus through the grace of the Holy Spirit. This passage tells us more than any other about Libermann's devotion to Mary.

As this letter is very long, we give two extracts in this text.

Strasbourg, April 1st, 1841

My dear brother,

You have asked me again about the background to the prayer, "O Jesu, vivens in Maria". All I know is that it was written by Fr. De Condren, but I know nothing of its history. I have always felt that he composed it to honour the sacred mystery of the Incarnation and its effects on Mary, so that we might benefit from the same wonderful effects ourselves. We have to remember that when God gives us his gifts, he never takes them away again. As St. Paul says, his gifts are unconditional. If we do lose them, it is through our own fault, our own

¹ N.D., II, pp. 456-467

² See index

³ "O Jesu vivens in Maria, veni et vive in famulis tuis, in spiritu sanctitatis tuae, in plenitudine virtutis tuae, in perfectione viarum tuarum, in communionemysteriorum tuorum; dominare omni adversitae potestati, in Spiritu tuo, ad gloriam Patris. Amen"

"O Jesus, come and live in your servants as you live in Mary, with the perfection of your ways and the fullness of your virtues and in communion with your mysteries; overcome everything which is opposed to this, in your Spirit, to the glory of the Father. Amen."

weaknesses and imperfections and our lack of cooperation.

But our Mother was never exposed to the risk of losing what she had received; on the contrary, her purity and holiness were growing all the time. Being always more and more possessed by love, her faithfulness was beyond doubt. All the graces and gifts she received bore fruit in her that poor people like us can barely imagine. So the gifts she received from God remained with her always, growing and developing wherever possible. Although Our Lord did not continue to live in Mary physically, her amazing union with the divinity, which happened at the Incarnation, remained throughout her life and will continue to do so for all eternity. All the gifts and graces which came from this union will always be ornaments of the soul of Mary, along with all the divine perfections which were given to her by the three Persons in their respective relations with her.

This great mystery, which contains all the graces, the gifts and the mysteries of God made man, was received by Mary at the wonderful moment of the Incarnation, the principle and seed of all graces, gifts and mysteries, which grew within her when the time came, and to a degree of perfection that was peculiar to herself. In the same way, we ask Our Lord to come and live in us to establish that same life in ourselves, - if not to the same degree of perfection, then at least in the same manner as expressed in this prayer. In this way, we will also receive these same graces, these same gifts that are contained in all these mysteries. We can think of the moment when we receive Holy Communion, when Jesus makes us sharers (as far as is possible) in the mystery of the Incarnation, and ask him to live his life in us as he did in Mary, in the manner expressed in the Prayer, *O Jesu vivens in Maria*.

This prayer comes from a soul who is contemplating Jesus living in Mary. The soul, in its own small way, sees Jesus living in Mary; it sees him operating in a way that is both living and

life-giving. This poor soul is prostrate, overwhelmed with respect; it remains in a state of silence and nothingness. It admires the great things it is seeing a little – and even those things that it is incapable of seeing. It rejoices, praises, blesses and glorifies Jesus...

The soul, even though it overwhelmed by these things, begins to desire them for itself; and these same desires, far from being something bad or imperfect, are the necessary, or at least the natural result of all graces and all gifts. So being raised up, strongly but gently, the soul opens before Jesus to attract him into itself so that He will live the same life there as he does in Mary.

O Jesus, living in Mary...! This sigh from the soul is accompanied by a glance that is full of love. The person feels a violent need; it is love that causes this need and makes it so ardent, but it cannot satisfy this need, It feels too weak and powerless, so it approaches this furnace of love, which is both attracting and consuming it, and tries to get it to enter itself. This is why the soul turns to Jesus with this sigh so full of love, weakness and trust – *O Jesu, vivens in Maria...*

Dominare omni adversae potestati.

The person is convinced that the one he loves is living within him, but he is also painfully aware that this life is not the same as it was in Mary; so by this prayer, he begs for this perfect life. He feels that there are many powers within him which are opposed to this life; they have been a barrier in the past and they could do the same harm in the future. He feels powerless to resist, so he asks Our Lord to overcome both himself and the forces which are working against his happiness. He knows that they will never be completely eliminated as long as he is on this earth, but he begs Jesus to subjugate and master them and keep them under control. These enemies are the devils, the flesh and its concupiscence, our appetites, our faults, our

nature and our natural and human life. As long as this person is under their influence, he will never have this perfect life of Jesus within him. If Jesus overcomes them, they will still be able to attach him in the flesh, but they will no longer have any power over his soul, because Jesus alone will be living there. They will be cast out of his soul, which will remain closed to them; henceforth, he will live only in Jesus and by the life of Jesus.

"In Spiritu tuo, ad gloriam Patris." This will all be brought about by the Holy Spirit, who is always fighting against the flesh which he abhors. Jesus, living in our soul, deploys his spirit and his overwhelming power against these mortal enemies. So the soul, which is animated and strengthened by the life of Jesus and his Spirit, is able to oppose and repel all these hostile forces. But it is not the soul which overcomes them, but the divine Spirit of Jesus, *ad gloriam Patris*. This is the only reason why Jesus lives in Mary and in our souls. The soul does not want to have all these graces for its own delectation but for the greater glory of the Father, and this is a pure and holy desire that is inspired by the vision of Jesus living in Mary. Amen.

François Liberman