

Adoration

with Saint Raphaela Mary

A Guide for Study and Prayer,
based on the *Spiritual Notes*
and on her *Letters*

***Proclamation on the occasion
of the erection of her statue***

Because she contemplated the world
with the gaze of her pure heart,
and always found God;
because she faithfully adored his Presence
in the Eucharist and in all things,
and especially in persons, seeing the divine image,
now the world sees in her
the precious image of the Heart of God.

Because she was held in low esteem
in spite of her good judgment,
and was able to forgive from her heart,
loving everyone unconditionally --
including those who misunderstood her --
today Raphaela Mary is
honored in the Kingdom of heaven
and loved by people on earth.

Because, with the radiance of her smile
and the constancy of her self-surrender,
she was able to open paths and expand horizons...
because she always trusted,
because she believed blindly in love --
in Love which is stronger than death --
Raphaela is today raised up
as a sign of hope.

In the Church which she loved passionately,
by the Vicar of Christ,
whom she always venerated in life,
she was proclaimed a SAINT
On the twenty third day of January of 1977.

Today we contemplate her image,
raised up as a symbol
in the center of Christianity.
From her modest pedestal,
Raphaela continues to look lovingly
on all the children of God
convened here from all parts of the world.
May her words resonate in us,
words which speak to us of borders breached,
of open hearts
of universal brotherhood:
“How many children God has!
Seeing the world stirs up one’s zeal.”

We, remembering her today,
are united in the praise, adoration
and thanksgiving -- EUCHARIST --,
that was her whole reason for being,
and may we make our own
the sentiments of her heart
consumed by zeal for the salvation
of all people.

Let's pray with St. Raphaela Mary

I come into your Presence, Lord of my Life.
I adore You.
I contemplate You and linger with You.
As You did to so many people in the Gospel,
You ask me: “What is it you want from Me?”

In silence, I show you my life:
my projects, my worries,
the people I interact with,
those that I love most...and also those that are distant,
those who, in my limitation, I do not understand or know.

You look at me, Lord;
Your eyes bless my whole being,
my surroundings,
the hidden places in my heart,
which even I do not fully understand.

Your gaze caresses my life.
It heals me, fills me with light;
Your presence transforms, comforts, energizes.

I gaze at You, Lord, and I adore You;
You gaze at me, Lord, and You love me.

References to this theme in other texts

Spiritual Notes

Numbers 5, 10, 21, 34

Letters

Number 98 (49)

Scripture texts

Jn 12: 44-46; Eph 1: 15-21

On January 23, 1977, after the canonization of Raphaela Mary, Pope Paul VI appeared at his window to pray the Angelus with all the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square. He seemed truly impressed by the human and spiritual qualities of the woman who had just been proclaimed a saint. He spoke these beautiful words:

A very humble, gentle, refined, silent saint, spiritually rich and edifying by her example.... We can almost hear her voice, inviting us to follow, in a way suited to ourselves, her way to sanctity... "Come," she seems to say to us in her gentle, persuasive voice... "Come, try it, you go through these paths: first, that of prayer, absorbed in silent adoration... As Christ himself has said, He reveals himself to the little ones, to the humble, to the simple, to the pure of heart, to the disciples who believe, hope and love... Then you will hear Jesus' voice, go and serve your brothers and sisters..."

Thirty two years have gone by – the number is quite symbolic in the life of our Foundress – and Raphaela Mary, like Pope Paul VI, appears in the Square and tells us again: "Come, try it..." Perhaps she wants to encourage us to renew our Eucharistic experience, rediscovering the profundity of the apostolic meaning and life-giving plentitude that it had for her.

We would have to reread her *Spiritual Notes* and her *Letters* in the light of the circumstances in which they were written, in conjunction with her spirituality and history.

The annotations which follow can be simple guides for reflection, for personal consideration; a passive reading of them will be of little value. They can also be material for a communal re-reading of the life of Raphaela Mary.

Following the primary sources and their historical references, there are also references to her *Spiritual Notes* and *Letters* in order to facilitate personal and communal study. In addition, there are references to biblical texts for prayer.

written on one occasion (*Spiritual Notes, 34, 1904*) To one of her companions from the early days of the Institute she used to say that she saw her as more contemplative than anything else; truly this affirmation and the advice which it seemed to include could be applied to herself. "Concentrate on one word. And the soul is satisfied." (*Spiritual Notes, 5, 1887*) "... Stupefied gazing at the face of God..." (*Spiritual Notes, 10, 1890*) Prayer, the Mass or the adoration, were filled much more than with words or reasoning, with an illuminating presence. "I felt Jesus in my soul, and I was illuminated by it the whole time..." (*Spiritual Notes, 10*) In 1892, in a complicated year in which circumstances were hardly conducive to contemplation, she speaks of "a contemplative light" which continued to gently illuminate her, and which taught her more than all the reflections could have done. (*Spiritual Notes, 13*) The testimony of one of the religious shows this clearly: "I don't remember ever having seen her with a book at Mass or during her adorations; her prayer consisted solely in opening her heart." (*Summary of the Cause for beatification and canonization*) "In those times when I knew her, she was always before the Blessed Sacrament with her gaze fixed on the Sacred Host," testified another religious during the Process (*M. Transfiguracion Valdedomar*).

This was not a case of sterile silence, or a trancelike passivity. The gaze of the heart, illuminated by that contemplative light, led her always to absolute and trusting self-surrender: "I can do no more than to put myself into the hands of God the Father, and say at all times: may Your will be done in me." (*Spiritual Notes, 16, 1892*)

"I gaze at Him and He gazes at me:" it was not necessary for her to reach an old age to realize that this exchange of glances was truly important. In the case of *Raphaella Mary* these brief words were the sum of an entire life of prayer. With them she expressed in her last years a very deep experience of love which she had enjoyed from her youth and which now, as always, inundated her with unlimited peace.

In the high choir of the church of XX Settembre there are two “sacred” places, those which Raphaela Mary used to occupy for adoration when she could no longer get to the church. She had the steps counted from her bedroom to the places of her appointment with the Lord; the better one was very close to the altar, but far from her room. While she was able walk there, this was her favorite spot. Every day, with quite a bit of effort, she would go slowly leaning on her cane. Those who saw her, at times would admire her, but sometimes would admonish her, “But Mother Sacred Heart, why are you walking such a long way? Why not go to the place that’s a little closer to your room?” For Raphaela Mary the response was obvious: “Because from here I see the Lord better.” However, she herself finally had to accept that it was necessary to take the shorter path. Days, weeks, months passed by... Her illness overcame her and left her bedridden. They moved her then to a bedroom in the infirmary, right in front of the chapel. Once again, a question, -- surely from the Sister infirmarian – “Mother Sacred Heart, do you want me to open the two doors so that you see the tabernacle and can make your adoration?” The invalid hesitated a moment – perhaps she was hearing the beating of her own heart – and said “Thank you, Sister, but don’t bother about me; it’s not necessary. He is here with me.” She knew that, now as always in her life, a marvelous Presence had been dwelling within her.

As happens frequently in any infirmary, the Handmaids of XX Settembre would affectionately ask the older sisters as if they were children, “Mother Sacred Heart, what do you say to the Lord in those many hours that you spend in the tribune?” This time the invalid seemed surprised at the question, “Say? I don’t say anything. He gazes at me and I gaze at Him.” There was no need for words.

In reality, in the prayers of Raphaela Mary silence had always been predominant, her silent acceptance. “My way is not to say many prayers, but to pray very much,” she had

To adore

**is to feel that God is very great
and we are very small,
but immensely loved
by Him;
it is to feel the joy
of being in the hands of God:
the absolute OTHER,
who is incomprehensibly close
to us.**

Raphaela Mary sought and found God in all things: in nature, in persons, in joy and in sorrow. Her entire existence was a continual adoration of the Lord of life, the Lord of her life. She adored Him in a special way in the Eucharist. During her long hours before the Blessed Sacrament, her gaze became more and more discerning, more and more able to perceive the intimate and loving presence of God.

In 1890, while in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, Raphaela Mary contemplated as in a “flash” the film of her life. Let us recall the circumstances of this experience. It was the sixth day of her retreat, which she was making in private without any guidance from her spiritual director. The community of Madrid, where she found herself, was going about their ordinary life; in the church, as always, there was Exposition, and the sisters took turns adoring the Lord. The retreatant probably participated from the high choir, or perhaps she had entered the low choir to substitute for one of the sisters. She was preparing to make the examen of the meditation she had just finished, according to the Ignatian method. As on many other occasions, God changed her plan. As was becoming usual for her, it happened suddenly. We repeat now the actual words of the narration of the episode. Raphaela Mary writes that she “saw God very great” and herself “very small,” but happy. She recorded with admiration and gratitude the work of God in her life; she was adoring. “I saw who God is and who I am.” There was no place for timidity or false modesty; that extraordinary insight “opened wide” her whole being. “Seeing myself small, I am in my center, because I see what God has done in me and in my things, which is what I desire.” (*Spiritual Notes, 10*)

(Certainly, the circumstances within the Institute hardly favored that feeling of fulfillment. Almost her entire council, as well as the bishop of Madrid, was opposed to her; she felt that the lack of confidence toward her had even begun to affect her communication with Fr. Hidalgo. She was facing economic difficulties, and suddenly she had to deal with the illness and

To adore

**Is to look at the Lord,
to feel Him very close within,**

to let Him look at me,

**to know that within me dwells
a wondrous Presence.**

stamped as a seal on the face
of all Your children, of all human beings.
I praise You and give You thanks
for the joy of children,
for the dreams of the young,
for the joy of united families,
for the faith and hope of those
who continue to discover You
in spite of the contradictions of life.

*To me the world is a temple,
and my whole life praises the Lord.*

I praise You and I give You thanks, Lord,
because You love us as the apple of Your eye,
for Your love, which surpasses all understanding,
for the nearness of Your Presence in the Eucharist
-- the boundless sea into which we may always dive.
In the marvelous temple of this world,
kissing the ground, giving thanks,
I offer You, Lord, my life
in continual and joyous praise.

premature deaths of young and promising sisters. But undoubtedly the security of God enveloping her – His small creature – helped her to withstand so many troubles and urged her on to new ventures such as the foundations of Cadiz and Rome.)

This experience of God is complemented by others, no less profound, recorded in the *Spiritual Notes*. Let us look at some of these.

By temperament, but even more so by grace, Raphaela Mary was an eminently contemplative person, one who effortlessly went beyond the surface straight to the heart of the matter. Her wonder at the marvels of nature is reflected in many of her expressions. We have on record her joy on contemplating different scenes: the sea, the starry night, the changing colors of the landscapes, the snow, the clouds which fly across the sky and at intervals cover or reveal the sun...and always the gaze of the heart, which goes beyond appearances and perceives Him who, “pouring out a thousand graces, passed quickly through these groves” Raphaela Mary is always adoring her Lord. It was the sea – to our limited eyes an infinite expanse – which offered her some of the best moments of profound comprehension of the love of God: “How great is our God! How fortunate we are to have such a great God! And to think that we are to possess this immense God in His fullness for all eternity, and we do possess Him now in the Blessed Sacrament, and He comes every day into our heart. This indeed, is a boundless sea!” (*Letter to M. Maria de la Paz, 1890*)

Raphaela Mary felt the greatness of God even to the point of trembling with awe. As His creature she adored Him, and as a “small creature” she admired the nearness of this “immense God” who even comes down to us and remains in the Eucharist. She felt that even her long life would not be sufficient time for adoration, for humble and grateful love. She

needed all of eternity – time without limit with God – to dive into the “boundless sea” of God’s love.

References to this theme in other texts:

Spiritual Notes

Number 10 (Spiritual Exercises of 1890)
Number 13 (Communication to Fr. Hidalgo regarding the Spiritual Exercises of 1891)

*Letters**

Numbers 64, 70 (34), 268 (119), 276 (126), 304 (136)

Scriptural texts

Mt. 18: 1-5
Acts 17: 24-28
Eph 1: 3-11; 15-22; 2: 4-10

*Numbers in parentheses refer to numeration of these documents in the English translation of the *Letters of Saint Raphaela Mary*. For some of the letters there is no translation available.

whole life.” (*Constitutions, 5*) The space and time of God found room within the “short time,” and the limited space of humanity.

References to this theme in other texts

Spiritual notes

Numbers 36, 43

Scripture texts

Ps 8, 84, 99, 103; Jn 8:25-32; Col 1: 9-18

Let’s pray with St. Raphaela Mary

*To me the world is a temple,
and my whole life praises the Lord.*

I praise You, Lord, and I give You thanks,
for the wonders of nature:
for the expanse and the depth of the sea,
the image of the unfathomable depths of Your love,
for the stars which delight our eyes
on dark nights,
for the sun and the clouds,
precursors of rain and snow,
which You bestow indiscriminately on the good and the bad.

*To me the world is a temple,
and my whole life praises the Lord.*

I praise You, Lord, and I give You thanks
for Your divine image

praise.” She had caught a glimpse of this many years before, but now she was experiencing in an extraordinary way that it is always the hour of Eucharist, because it is always the time for offering one’s life, for creating bonds of communion, for serving, for adoring.

The great light projected on her life did not distance her from reality, but made her see it in a new form. The acceptance of the will of God which frees one from all slavery would in the end win her the holy freedom of the children of God. Other things which at times might worry her would become unimportant.

Very soon she would live all this during one unique occasion. A few months after this retreat those who by right would participate in the General Congregation gathered in Rome. (Among these she was included, but not M. Pilar.) Predictably, as the natural consequence of those circumstances in which the assembly had been prepared, M. Purisima was elected General of the Institute. In the meetings during those days, Raphaela Mary showed that it is possible to combine humility and freedom; for her, truly, these were inseparable. “Never enslaved by any creature which would interfere with the holy freedom of the true children of God,” she had written in September. With true freedom she expressed herself before all those assembled, explaining her points of view and refusing to support with her vote the election of M. Purisima as General “ad vitem.” With true humility, which included showing joy, she accepted other decisions which did not constitute a step backwards.

“I am in this world as in a great temple.” It is as though she were entering a large space, in God’s time. This type of “cosmovision” of the spiritual life undoubtedly enriched her daily time with the Lord in adoration. Nothing would have persuaded Raphaela Mary to give up her adorations, privileged moments of absolute gratitude “to express thanksgiving of her

Let’s pray with St. Raphaela Mary

I come before You, my Lord,
You, my immense God. I, your small creature.
You are not like the lords of the earth,
who with their “greatness” intimidate
the lowly and the poor.

I come to be present to Your Presence,
and I feel my soul open wide,
inundated with the breadth of Your love.
You, my immense God. I, Your small creature.

Before You, my insignificant person
feels itself in the center of the universe
and in communion with all creation.
With wonder I contemplate Your concern,
Your constant providential care for me.
The memory of Your mercies
expands my heart and enlightens my soul.

You lavishly pour out Your love upon the humble.
You love to avail Yourself of the “nobodies”
-- those who do not shrink from their littleness,
but experience it with a heart full of joy –
and “cling to Him who is”...
because You alone are the One who does marvelous things.

I come before You, my Lord,
You, my immense God. I, Your small creature.

trials would end, and her sorrow would be permanently taken away

That was only the beginning. The best part came during the second meditation:

“I must live in this world depending only on the will of God, and never enslaved by any creature that would interfere with this holy freedom of the true children of God... In all my actions I must keep in mind that I am in this world as in a great temple, and that I, as its priest, should offer Him continual sacrifice in things that go against my grain, whatever they be, and continual praise in those which gratify me, and always for the greater glory of God, which is the purpose for which He has put us into this world.” (*Spiritual Notes, 36*)

It was on the first day of the retreat, in which, according to St. Ignatius, one should consider the “Principle and Foundation,” that is, the meaning of life. Raphaela Mary, inundated by the light of God, went far beyond the limits of her mere powers of reason. With utmost clarity she contemplated her simple everyday life transformed into a continual act of praise.

Without doubt these were the Spiritual Exercises of freedom. However, a careful reading of her notes from these days will prevent us from trivializing the special sense of freedom which Raphaela Mary experiences. In her this freedom was something deep, comprehensive and unifying, which permitted her to interpret all events “as means” in relation to the overriding goal of the glory of God. On that day in September, 1905, she understood as never before that in life everything can have a marvelous simplicity, everything can be an occasion of an act of gratitude, of “Eucharist” -- happy events as well as bitter trials for which one needs great doses of faith and hope. “I am in this world as in a great temple, and I, as its priest, must offer continual sacrifice and continual

In the Spiritual Exercises of September, 1905, Raphaela Mary had one of her most important spiritual experiences -- at least, one of those most recalled by the Handmaids. The point of departure, as on other occasions, was the most absolute desolation; in the light of her circumstances, it could not have been otherwise.

The term of M. Purisima as Vicar of the Institute was nearing its end, a three-year period rife with irregularities, a situation which could have ended with the Third General Congregation. However, it seemed that this was not going to happen, rather that any change would be impossible; the sidelining of the two Foundresses would be complete and irreversible.

In spite of everything, with all the generosity of which she was capable, on September 20 Raphaela Mary began her retreat. "I don't believe that I will be getting any fruit or strength out of this, and I anticipate that our Lord will ask great sacrifices from me." She prayed for an hour. She attended Mass. Not even at the moment of communion did she experience the joy she had felt on other occasions, she who used to say that she had never gotten used to the wonder of this encounter -- today, nothing, "without any light of consolation." However, as on so many other occasions, God was going to surprise her when she least expected it, in an ordinary, almost prosaic moment. "While I was tidying up my room, the cloud disappeared." When she opened the window of her room, the light of day streamed in, reaching even the corners, and she saw the sun break through a cloud. Raphaela Mary felt in that moment the presence of God: "He is with me." The certainty of this presence brought back to her other important moments from years before. "He is with me," her whole being repeated wordlessly. "I felt in my soul a great strength in order not to hold back anything from Him, and an extraordinary confidence that Our Lord is with me, and that in His time He will deliver me from the tribulation which surrounds me." She understood that there would come a day in which her

To adore

is to praise and give thanks.

It is to trust,

to believe blindly

in the incomprehensible love

which God has for us.

A few years after the Institute was established, Raphaela Mary had defined its essence as “the true love of Our Lord in the Eucharist, and the concern of His Divine Heart for the salvation of souls.” (*Letter to Cardinal Benavides, 1881*) In 1884, writing a letter to the community of Cordoba, she urged the sisters to give their “whole heart completely to God.” From the beginning, the life of the Handmaids had been a loving experience, something “all-consuming” and at the same time tender, a matter of the heart. Of course, the personal self-surrender of each one of the sisters was based on the absolute conviction that God is always first.

For Raphaela Mary, this affirmation was something more than a tenet of faith. In 1887 she had had an extraordinary light concerning the all-powerful force of divine love, which she glimpsed as a growing torrent capable of sweeping away all of her possible imperfections. As well as she could, she explained her experience to Fr. Hidalgo, employing imaginative terms that are rarely found in her spiritual notes. She mixed her metaphors – love, was it water or fire? – but the essential meaning is clear: in the matter of love, the important thing is to accept, to open wide the doors, or to take away the “biggest obstacles,” leaving to the force of the water the “carrying off of the smaller ones.” Raphaela Mary continued, explaining her experience to Fr. Hidalgo, “...and love came with such force, that it demolished everything, and on coming to its destination, which was the soul or the heart, only by the strength of the love I received, my heart was not converted into cinders.” (*Spiritual Notes, #3*). In the end, the torrent was converted into fire, into a kind of volcano.

As Raphaela Mary writes in the conclusion of this passage, two days later she trembled on reliving the experience, especially each time that she pondered it in prayer, during her adoration and whenever she was able to take a moment for reflection.

To adore

**is to live the joy
of true freedom,
the offering of one’s being
in the temple of the universe.**

**It is to enter into the space
and time of God,
to give Him my time.**

Let's pray with St. Raphaela Mary

I have contemplated, Lord, the world, Your work,
the men and women
who bear Your own image --
and I begin my prayer before Your Presence,
Your Eucharistic, risen Presence.

"This is My Body," You said in the Last Supper,
to proclaim Your love unto death.
"This is My Body" You say now,
and You direct me toward Your human images,
toward all Your children,
marked forever with Your divine seal.
Although many times I forget,
they, too, are Your Body!

I want to adore You, Lord,
and I want to love You in your children
spread out over the whole world.
I will speak to You about them;
perhaps this is how the conviction grows
that they are a part of You,
a part also of me.

I place before You, Lord, my brothers and sisters.
May I always be mindful of them with their worries,
their joys and sorrows,
with their progress and their setbacks.
Be present to them, so that they may draw near to You,
so that they may contemplate You
and realize that they are images of You.

Lord, expand my heart
so that all may fit inside it,
-- in Your Heart there is breadth, depth, height...
I want them to come with me to You!

Believing blindly in the incomprehensible love that God has for us gave Raphaela Mary and the first Handmaids the strength to live through those first stages of the foundation, at first with the ingenuous enthusiasm of beginning, afterwards and always with the constancy and humble certainty of faith.

"Love is strong as death and as hard as hell." Raphaela refers to the *Song of Songs* in a passage in which she expressed her determination to continue responding to love in spite of the difficulties surrounding her. It was the year 1893. She was faced with the prospect of a life of obscurity, difficult, isolated from everything that until then had occupied her interest and her efforts. "Love is as strong as death and hard as hell, and that is as it should be, but the creature is so weak that she feels herself helpless to correspond to it. What to do, then, my Lord and my God? Love and keep on loving, love will overcome everything; pray without ceasing for this love." This paragraph is inserted into a text titled "Reform of life made during retreat, 1893." In a little more than a year of residence in Rome – from June of 1892 to November, 1893 -- Raphaela Mary had made the Ignatian Exercises no fewer than three times. She renewed in this document the ongoing option in her life: to open herself to the love of God, to respond to Love with all her love.

It goes without saying that "to pray without ceasing for love" was the principal motif in the pattern of her prayer and concretely in her Eucharistic adoration, above all during the most difficult years. The petition, in some of her writings, has overtones of agony. (*Reform of life, Retreat, 1893, point 3*) However, the supplication is generally trusting, and as always is based on an unshakable foundation, that of feeling herself very especially loved by God. "I am sure of His very great love for me, more than that of a tender mother, and his desires that I may find my refuge always in Him, trusting completely in the healing power of His love."

When she prays insistently for love, she refers specifically to a “humble love,” that is, the love of adoration, which is far superior to any exterior signs of devotion. According to Raphaela Mary, the “heart burning with humble love” is worth more than many candles, more than any efforts in adorning the altar.

The painful circumstances of her life are always present in her writings: “...to receive everything that He may send me, no matter how hard and bitter it may be, as proofs of His love for me, and not to attribute them to any other cause. This is to give Him my whole heart, as He asks of me, and the best proof that I can give Him of love and of absolute confidence.” Although in many moments her notes highlight the agony of struggle, there is always the experience of light which dazzles and simultaneously reassures and comforts. “When I enumerated the Lord’s mercies toward me, my soul was illuminated,” she writes on one occasion.

There is always blind faith in love: “May He love me, even though it means losing my skin...” “The Lord loves me as the apple of his eye...He will see what to do with me; I trust in Him.”

Security in the love of God, present during her entire life, is a joy and a hope during her final years. In 1922 Raphaela Mary writes a beautiful letter to one of her companions from the early years. Thinking of the heavenly reward, she imagines it as a delicious conversation about love: “How we will chat then about the loving kindness that God has showered upon us, and we’ll urge one another on to show Our Lord our immense gratitude. Let us go on serving Him, my dear sister, with all the generosity in our power, for He deserves it all; and let us ever pray with our whole hearts for this work of His to be more pleasing to Him every day, for each and every one of His members, who are our members too, for we are all His, in the love of His Sacred Heart, blessed be God.” (*Letter to M. Maria de Jesus Gracia*)

“Let us ever pray with our whole hearts for this work of His to be more pleasing to Him every day, and for each and every one of its members, who are our members too, for we are all His, in the love of His Sacred Heart. Blessed be God.” (*Letters, 683, 1922*)

References to this theme in other texts

Spiritual Notes

Numbers 6, 10, 14, 18, 25, 26, 28, 32, 36

Letters

Numbers 80 (41), 121 (56) 267 (118), 287 (135), 661 (279), 666

Scripture Texts

Jn. 17: 1-26; Rom. 1: 8-12; Philip. 1: 3

rejoices with her nieces and nephews and their children with the addition of each generation. Her principal interest is that they become close to God and that they live as true Christians, but she rejoices with their joys and accompanies them in their sorrows. They fill an important chapter in her prayer of supplication.

In the processes of beatification and canonization we find testimonies of her constant intercession; there is the detail, for instance, of her concern for the soldiers sent to fight in the World War. We know also another moving detail; in her final years she used to pray for a young priest who came to celebrate the daily Eucharist in the church in Via Piave -- and who later became instrumental in her process of canonization. (This was Fr. Ramon Bidagor, SJ)

For various reasons, Raphaela Mary prayed for all the Handmaids: for the young, who she said "suffered very much from their inexperience;" for the "old," friends from the early days; for the sick, so that they would not weaken in their struggle....and for those to come, without doubt, ourselves.

The concern for all the Handmaids and the fear of possible deviations disquieted her heart, which sought peace and rest in her time with the Lord. She explains this in a letter to Fr. Muruzabal:

"Greatly afflicted, I was explaining to Our Lord in adoration certain fears I had about the Congregation... He filled me with the great confidence He knows how to give at times, and showed Himself to me, making me understand that He was sheltering it beneath His mantle. I saw the whole congregation, as it were, dependent upon His gaze, and He seemed to say to me: "This is your duty, to pray without ceasing, and without taking your eyes off Me; all its good depends on that." (*Letters, 395, 1893*)

References to this theme in other texts

Spiritual Notes

Numbers 3, 5 (pg. 1027), 6 (pg. 1031), 10 (pg. 1041), 3 (pg. 1118), 36 (pg. 1128), 43

Letters

Numbers 80 (41), 121 (56), 386 (171), 406, 683 (295)

Scripture Texts

Jn 15; Rom 8, 18-39

Let's pray with St. Raphaela Mary

I come into Your Presence, Lord,
with the absolute confidence that You are waiting for me,
I know that You are there to continue with me
a dialogue of friendship that is never interrupted.

I experience the strength of Your love for me,
and I fear that I will not be able to return it.
I am so weak, Lord!
Your mercy is an overflowing torrent
which inundates my soul.
Break down all the obstacles within me, great or small,
which at times, like a dike, I erect in Your path.
When I count Your mercies
my soul is filled with light.
I am in wonder at Your love – is it water or fire?
It alone is able to make me clean,
transparent in Your eyes, happy.

I come into Your Presence,
to delight in the torrent of Your love.
Like the small, flickering light of the candle,
I want to burn simply with humble love,
the only kind of love which truly pleases You, Lord.

In the sincerity of my prayer,
I listen to Your word
clothed in the words with which You inspired Raphaela Mary:
“Love, and keep on loving, love overcomes everything.
Pray without ceasing for this love.”
Day after day I want to repeat my trusting prayer
in order to open myself to Your torrent, Lord.

to work had even presented itself as a temptation which threatened to deprive her of peace; therefore she spoke of “praying and doing gently what is in my part, as my Lord teaches me.”

In the years of leadership – her active life in the Institute – as in the years when she was completely marginalized in Rome, the only important thing for Raphaela Mary was “the concern which consumed the Divine Heart for the salvation” of “souls” or of “men.” “Let us grow in our zeal for souls, but not for eight or for ten, but for millions and millions...,” she had written to the community of Cordoba long before in 1884. (*Letters, 121*) Years later, in spite of painful circumstances which could have made her withdraw into herself, she continued to be convinced that the heart of a Handmaid cannot limit itself, but must be open to the whole world. Still very much alive in her was the true “interest which consumed the Divine Heart” for the salvation of all:

“Be less concerned about myself, and much, much more concerned about the interests of Jesus in all their extension. He is kind enough to hear me. If I don't practice this apostolate, I will not fulfill His plan for me...One request from a humble and simple heart conquers His Heart, and He will deny it nothing....” (*Spiritual Notes, 26, Spiritual Exercises of 1896*)

“I will pray with great insistence for the salvation of souls. I will not rest from this determination.” (*Spiritual Notes, 28, Spiritual Exercises of 1898*)

“We must do what Christ did: suffer even to the point of death for our brothers.” (*Spiritual Notes, 25, 1895*)

The sisters of the Institute, girls in the schools, retreatants, family and friends, members of the Church, “poor sinners,” the sick, those in danger -- all were objects of the “pleas of her humble and simple heart,” especially during the hours of adoration. During the years she spent in Rome, her communication with her family is more frequent. She is concerned about their illnesses; she

very great desires to do what I could so that they should know and love Him, and if I could do nothing else, by prayer. Certainly from this meditation St. Francis Xavier drew the fortitude to work so much to make the glory of God known.”

“The Kingdom of Christ...Not only did I offer myself unconditionally to the glory of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but I proposed and promised to give Him as much glory as possible, although it might cost me my reputation and my life, with His holy grace. I finished that meditation very encouraged and happy to be able to do something for my Captain Jesus, above all to place Him for the adoration of the peoples....” (*Spiritual Notes 10, Spiritual Exercises of 1890*)

“I must work with wise and constant zeal in order to draw all people to love Christ and to serve Him. Even more, with prayer.” (*Spiritual Notes, 10*)

“To work very much for Him now, for afterwards there will be plenty time to enjoy Him,” she wrote in 1890 (*Spiritual Notes, 10*). Until 1892 her apostolic interest had impelled her to action, to organize and work directly in the various apostolates of the Institute. This was the “wise and constant zeal” to which she alludes in the notes of the Spiritual Exercises of 1892. Even then, as she was beginning her Roman stage – which probably at first she never envisioned as definitive – she made the resolution of “working” and “praying.” She never thought of any personal work not linked with prayer. The years of apparent inaction convinced her more and more of the value of prayer, without diminishing her appreciation for or awareness of apostolic action. On the contrary, the desire to work in the activities of the mission of the Institute never left her. “To feel in myself the desire to work for the glory of God, it is not in my power to erase this from my soul, because God our Lord is the one who chose me for this kind of life.” (*Letters, 482, 1900*) The desire

To adore

is to dive into the boundless sea
of the love of Christ
which is offered in the Eucharist.

It is to become Eucharist:
to love, to serve...

To love to the extreme,
even to give one’s life
as Christ did.

The Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist was for Raphaela Mary the axis around which her being revolved. One could say that her entire life was one of diving into the “boundless sea” of the love of Christ – the true “God-with-us.”

In this theme, certain words and expressions contained in the spiritual notes of the saint demonstrate the inevitable influence of the spirituality of her time, centered preferentially on the permanent Presence in the sacramental species. However, the context of these writings demonstrates a profound experience of the Eucharistic mystery in all its fullness.

Reexamining her biographical information, one comes to the conclusion that for Raphaela Mary, the Eucharist was the natural setting of her relationship with God. During one of her retreats she wrote, as a resolution, an entire personal project: “to model my life on His earthly one – that of Christ, naturally – or on that which He has in the Blessed Sacrament... to be less concerned about myself, and much, much more concerned about the interests of Jesus in all their extension....Only in Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus, my whole life and my whole heart, forever...” Truly the Eucharist completely filled her life, orienting her glance and giving her the strength to be constantly faithful. The Presence of Christ, loved and contemplated, illumined the eyes of her heart, and her enlightened eyes found His Presence in all the realities of this world.

From her early youth she united the joy of intimate relationship with God to the demands of serving others. Even before the foundation of the Institute, when she was living in Pedro Abad with her sister -- a stage which could be called the “time of service”-- every day, after attending the parish Mass, she would make the rounds of the “outskirts,” visiting and helping the poor and the sick of the town. The Eucharist, memorial of “love to the extreme,” predisposed her to an attitude of awareness and kept her eyes and heart open to those for whom Christ had preferential love. She also came

She was passionate about the “salvation of souls.” This expression, which we would refer to as the “terminology” of her age – and even of a much later time – is repeated often in the writings of Raphaela Mary to refer to the apostolic vocation. However, she does not always speak of “souls;” she also frequently refers to “men” and to the “peoples,” whom she wishes to accompany to an encounter with Christ. The fact is that she felt very profoundly the extraordinary dignity of the human person, with whom she felt solidarity. On one occasion she had had an extraordinary experience which filled her with admiration and thanksgiving: “I felt such gratitude toward God for the dignity which He has given to man, that it transported my soul.” (*Spiritual Notes, 6*) That day in 1888 would decisively influence her spiritual journey; it would definitively mark her way of looking at persons: in them is the indelible image of God, an image which can never be erased -- not even by sin.

“To see the image of God in every person I meet.”
(*Spiritual Notes, 14, Retreat of 1891*).

“To respect all as images of God, because in reality that is what they are.” (*Spiritual Notes, 32*)

Her passion for humanity is always the desire of collaborating in the rebuilding of the image of God, blurred -- but never definitively lost – by sin:

“...and since what God makes remains, because it is immutable, and man was made in His image and likeness, and for the same reason so perfect, and the offences were committed against the Eternal Father, the love of the Second Person, the Son, had to repair this creature of God, and He realized that He could not do this without making Himself like the offender, and for this reason He came down in order to take on our nature. I felt a great deal of compassion for infidels and heretics who are blind to the benefits from God, and felt

The “authentic love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament” and the concern of His Heart for the “salvation of souls,” concerned the heart of Raphaela Mary from her early youth. Within the Institute, consonant with its mission, Raphaela Mary had in her life only one passion: to adore Christ and to love Christ and all that He has loved, to love to the extreme, occupying herself and concerning herself with the salvation of the children of God.

The expressions with which she alludes to this theme are abundant and sensitive, in the *Spiritual Notes* as well as in the *Letters*.

Raphaela Mary was a kind, affectionate person, attentive to the welfare of all. We can say that she was concerned not only with eternal salvation, but also with the well-being of others. On one occasion she recommended to a religious to do everything possible to “make those around you happy,” because she considered happiness a foretaste of beatitude, even in the short span of a human lifetime. She trusted in the love of God, and knew that He wants us to live joyfully. This conviction accompanied her always; in her hours of adoration of the Eucharist she found a privileged moment to renew it.

The passion for Christ and for those whom He has loved even to the extent of giving His life inspired her to a constant prayer of intercession; everything fit into her apostolic interests. As superior of the Institute she tried to meet the needs of the people who shared her vocation, of families, of acquaintances. She reminded one very young religious, who was beginning to work in the school, that she should look at the children “as one looks at something of great worth,” that she be very concerned for them and, of course, pray for them. She would have them very much in mind when she herself would approach the Lord in her daily adoration time. It was the expression of her eminently apostolic interest and prayer.

prepared for the Eucharistic celebration by the continual assimilation of the Word of God. Participation in “the table of the Bread and the Word” guided her from the beginning toward communion with and commitment to the most needy. Years later, as superior general of the Handmaids, she would initiate works and establish communities in different places, always with the interior flame of a charism which inserted her daily into the “mystery of faith” and urged her to spare no effort in the proclamation of the gospel and the service of all. She never separated the sacramental celebration from the vital demands of the Eucharist.

“This is My Body which is given...” “I am among you as one who serves...” “Do this in memory of Me...” The narratives of the Last Supper, some passages especially, always reverberated in the heart of Raphaela Mary. Many passages from her *Spiritual Notes* show the importance that the Eucharistic words and gestures of Jesus had in her life. In 1895, she writes during her retreat: “The Lord said in the sermon at the Last Supper that we should love one another as He has loved us. In the law of Moses it had said that we should love our neighbor as our very selves; but this love is more perfect, to the extent of giving one’s life for another, as He has given His...and we have to do what Christ did, suffer and agonize for the sake of our brothers...” To love to the extent of giving one’s life, to love to the extreme -- for Raphaela Mary, these were not mere words.

“The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation.” stated Pope John Paul II (*Mane Nobiscum*, 27) “I am willing to give my life for peace,” Raphaela would say in the most troubled moments in the history of the Institute. “Where there is no union, God is not present,” she would emphatically affirm at that time. “May we all be of one heart and one soul” was her ardent desire, her passionate plea. Her struggle to reconcile and pacify troubled spirits was the assumption of responsibility by one who tried above all to

contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church, the Institute, the community

Coherent with her profound understanding of the Eucharistic mystery, Raphaela Mary would become a true expert in the mission of reconciliation, although she seldom made use of this term. Instead, she used many other terms to refer to this topic: conciliate, understand, trust. Forget offenses and forgive. Always forgive. Believe that the impossible is still possible. Be always willing to begin anew. She could use all these verbs fluently, but above all, she specialized in the task of putting them into practice.

“This is My Body which is given...This is the chalice of My Blood poured out for you and for all...” “Do this in memory of Me.” Raphaela Mary literally lived by these mysteriously efficacious words. She lived by the Eucharist, which makes efficacious in us the death of the Lord Jesus and empowers us to love unto the end, in order to become persons of “tender mercy.” In the daily Eucharistic celebration -- above all in communion – and in the hours of silent adoration, the “Body which is given” and the “Blood poured out” communicated to her the strength and constancy necessary to live her commitment.

A paragraph in the current legislation of the Handmaids takes up another demand of the Eucharist – the evangelical witness of the resurrection – lived intensely by Raphaela Mary. “Because we have recognized the Lord in the Breaking of the Bread, we know we are sent by Him to all people, and we work to bring the good news of the resurrection to every human situation.” (*Application of the Constitutions, 2*) Raphaela Mary was not literally acquainted with this passage, but without doubt she lived it better than any of us. She would have wished to proclaim Christ to the ends of the earth, to be a missionary in the strictest sense of the word – “ready to cross distant seas.” However, she was a missionary in the most profound sense. Although circumstances did not permit her to “cross the seas,” she found a way of not remaining inactive:

To adore

is to let one’s own heart beat
in rhythm with the Heart of Christ.

It is to feel oneself, with Christ,
the Heart of the world:
to beat for all, to intercede for all.

“When I see myself with no physical way to exercise my zeal, as I desire so intensely, I must be satisfied with praying and doing gently whatever is in my power to do, as my Lord teaches me. “ “In whatever way possible, and if there is no other way, with prayer.” Her quiet words and the silence of her life were always a witness to the resurrection. In all places and circumstances she tried to “place Christ for the adoration of the peoples,” “to make everyone know and love Him” and feel and believe in the salvation that comes through Him alone.

A basic religious experience – that of the “immense God” “incomprehensibly close to us” – offered to Raphaela Mary the good fortune of living the joy of limitless trust and peace. The passionate quest for and encounter with God in all things brought her, day after day, to the source of it all, to her true center, Christ, mysteriously palpable in the Eucharist. In the midst of any of the communities born in the warmth of her ecclesial charism, the Lord was “He who brings us joy, although He is concealed, in the Blessed Host, in the Holy Mass” (*Letters*, 427). These words of Raphaela Mary point to an eschatological future in which without any veils or “coverings,” the joy of adoration will be consummated in definitive blessedness. Thinking of this, the saint would say that it “made her want to sing.” (*Letters*, 563)

References to this theme in other texts:

Spiritual Notes

Numbers 10 (“Kingdom of Christ,” “Of the Love of God”), 18 (pp. 1072-73), 21, 25 (p. 1096), 26 (pp. 1100-1101)

Letters

Numbers 90 (45), 121 (56), 226, 386 (171), 683 (295)

Biblical Texts

Mt 26: 26-29; Mk 14: 22-25; Lk 22: 14, 27; Jn 6, 35-40; 1 Cor. 11: 23-34

Let's Pray with St. Raphaela Mary

"This is My Body...do this in memory of Me."
Like so many times in my life,
I have listened to these words in the Eucharist,
words which speak to me of Your love even unto death,
and which at times I listen to as a matter of routine.
Today I want to open myself to them as Raphaela Mary did.

Give me, Lord, new eyes
to see You and look at You "as one who serves,"
kneeling at the feet of all, washing them and healing wounds.
Make me valiant in order to imitate your actions:
to wash, to cure, to touch gently,
to cede the first place, to renounce ambitions,
to make community life pleasant, to facilitate joy,
just as Raphaela Mary did.

"This is my Body... do this in memory of Me."
Give me, Lord, constancy and humility
to foster in my surroundings the unity of Your body,
to rebuild again and again
the dream of brotherhood open and committed,
encouraging hope, inspiring utopias.
I remember Your precious Blood, poured out for many.
I am encouraged also by the memory of Raphaela Mary,
who was always ready to give her life for unity and peace.

Model my life, Lord, on Your life
-- Your life in time, our limited span of time,
Your life given in the Eucharist --
open my heart to new dimensions,
the interests of Your Heart, which embraces all people.

Like Raphaela Mary, in spirit and in truth,
I want to adore Your Presence:
Presence as servant and Lord, as God and friend.

Let's pray with St. Raphaela Mary

Before You, Lord, I renew my conviction
that I am Yours, completely Yours.
From my mother's womb,
Your love and Your goodness have led me,
they carry me gently along the path traced by Your Will.

Before You, Lord, I bow my head.
I, your small Handmaid, say to you,
"You are truly my Lord;
may Your will be done in me,
even though it cost me my life.

You ask of me a filial and absolute trust,
the certainty that Your ways are mercy,
although at times they may seem like precipices.
I abandon myself entirely to love,
Your love which has always gone before me:
bringing me into existence, showering me with blessings,
waiting for my response, again and again, without giving up,
entrusting me with a mission far beyond my capacity,
which You make possible with Your grace.

May I fulfill Your will for the sake of all my brothers and sisters;
may I do it, in imitation of You, lavishly giving
mercy and patience, joy and trust.

Free me, Lord, from enslavement
to any other will which could separate me from Yours.
I trust in Your Word, and I feel that I am free and blessed
with the joyous freedom of Your children,
like the Virgin Mary, like Raphaela Mary.

never enslaved by any creature that interferes with this holy freedom of the true children of God.” (*Spiritual Notes, 35*).

The memory of the “Fiat” of the Virgin Mary is, of course, a constant reference.

The theme of the will of God is also present in her letters. One of these, most expressive, is the one in which, on leaving Madrid on the way to her Roman exile, she writes to M. Maria del Carmen Aranda, “ I am not going of my own will, I have been sent, and I am very happy to be fulfilling the most holy will of God.” (*Letters, 364*)

References to this theme in other texts:

Spiritual Notes

Numbers 2, 5, 7, 18, 19, 20, 30, 32, 35

Letters

Numbers 10 (8), 16, 64, 70 (34), 118, 364 (155), 369 (158), 376 (163), 380 (166), 385 (170)

Scripture Texts

Lk 1: 26-38; Mt 12: 31-35; Rom 12: 1-2; Philip: 1: 3-6; 2: 5-11;
Heb 10: 4-10

To adore

**is to embrace the plan of God,
to place oneself into His hands
without reservation.**

**It is to receive the life that God
gives us,
with its ups and downs,
sorrows and joys,**

and to respond to life with love.

One day in 1892, writing a letter to Fr. Muruzabal, Raphaela Mary offers a detail of her style of prayer, concretely, of her way of being in the presence of the Lord in adoration. Those were painful times, the first that she spent in Rome in a kind of exile. In the generosity of her heart, and after trying every possible means to resolve the conflicts, she had arrived at the conclusion that humanly there was no way out. It was time to accept. She told Fr. Muruzabal that frequently, and especially in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, she would physically bow her head. It was her way of involving her entire being in an attitude of humble acceptance of the plan of God.

The will of God had always been the lodestar of all her journeys: to search for it, to find it, to accept it, to follow it. Since her youth she had had no other desire. During those first years the project of the Lord had thrust her into the work necessitated by the foundation and expansion of the Institute; now, on the other hand, it required her to “bow her head,” to accept.

The will of God is, surely, the most recurrent theme in writings of Raphaela Mary; it is present from the beginning to the end. Certainly one can distinguish shades of meaning according to the different stages, but the central thesis is the same. In the *Spiritual Notes*, the search for and acceptance of the plan of God are absolutely related with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. The first of these which we conserve situates us in 1885. Raphaela Mary begins by writing, “God created me for some purpose,” as though questioning herself about her mission in the Institute. In this moment she is, for all the Handmaids, the indisputable superior. Nevertheless, she is very conscious of her difficulties in government – those of that very moment, and those which could come in the future – and she asks herself what, in reality, is the will of God in this matter. In the *Spiritual Notes* from the years 1887 and 1888, this preoccupation is repeated, “...in many things I resist the will of God...” she writes in 1887. In the following year, in the

form of a resolution – “Oblation” at the end of the third week of the Spiritual Exercises – she writes, “Not to resist again, not even in thought, Your divine will with regard to my charge... the principal barrier which keeps Your grace from my soul.” She is now the superior general of an Institute approved by the Pope; the will of God is absolutely clear.

In notes written after the Spiritual Exercises, the theme of the will of God is always related with that of trust and abandonment to Providence, which arose from a reading of her own life from the perspective of faith: “Complete abandonment into the hands of God with filial confidence in Him. I am His because He created me, and afterwards not only showered me with blessings but also freed me from many evils, finding always in me great resistance...and He never got tired of me! Docility to holy inspirations. May God insist with so much tenderness in making me see this necessity, after my lack of cooperation thus far.” (*Spiritual Notes*, 20) “I must put all my efforts into abandoning myself without reserve into the hands of Our Lord... This is to give Him my whole heart, as He asks of me, and the best proof of love which I can give Him and of absolute trust... The greatest work that I can do for my God is this: to surrender myself completely to His most holy will without putting even the smallest hindrance in His way.” (*Spiritual Notes*, 20)

Raphaela Mary relates also very expressly the attitude of acceptance of the will of God with “humble love.” “Humility and love drew Jesus to the virginal womb...Jesus was formed in the virginal womb, and immediately He was given the mission for which He had been brought to earth. And He accepted it wholeheartedly, and He offered Himself irrevocably to the Eternal Father.” (*Spiritual Notes*, 32). At the apex of her spiritual ascent, the quest for and the encounter with the will of God lead her definitively to a profound sense of freedom. “I must live in this world depending only on the will of God, and