

monks, *unoccupied with any exterior ministry and having nothing to do with it*, should fix their thoughts exclusively on the things of heaven - wonderful was the benefit that accrued from it to Christian society. ... It was highly important for the Church that this most holy form of life ... should be restored to its pristine vigor, so that there should never be lacking *men of prayer*, who, unimpeded by any other care, would be perpetually besieging the Divine Mercy and thus draw down from Heaven benefits of every sort upon men too neglectful of their salvation. ... We wish that so valuable an institution should spread and increase. For if ever it was needful that there should be anchorites of this sort in the Church of God, it is especially expedient nowadays when we see so many Christians ... giving rein to their desire for earthly riches and pleasures of the flesh ... *But it is easy to understand how those who assiduously fulfill the duty of prayer and penance contribute much more to the increase of the Church and the welfare of mankind than those who labor in tilling the Master's field.*"

Our Lord Himself defends this life of pure contemplation, in the person of Mary, against those busy Martha's who look down about their sister, calling her lazy, selfish, or useless. To live for God alone is certainly not to live for oneself. Far from being selfish, this gift of oneself to God, this "laying down of one's life for his friends," is the greatest act of charity. No one has the real welfare of the world at heart more than a true contemplative. Anyone who thinks that the contemplative life is selfish should try it for a few years. If it were selfish, monasteries and convents should be full, since men are naturally selfish creatures. But instead we see empty cloisters, and candidates not persevering, precisely because it is so self-less. It is a sublime sacrifice of practically every natural satisfaction. It is Calvary re-lived. Perhaps by "selfish" some refer to the fact that here are souls who obtain many graces and lights from God but without apparently sharing them with others. This is a fallacy, somewhat understandable for those who believe that the only way to "share" or "help" others is by preaching or teaching. Have they never heard of the Mystical Body of Christ or the Communion of Saints? Do they not believe in the power of prayer and penance, and the Omnipotence and Omnipresence of God? A soul living for God alone is like a vessel placed near the fountain of all holiness, God Himself. The greater the union of the soul with God, the greater the channel through which He will pour forth His grace upon souls, wherever they are.

By fixing his gaze on Christ and living for Him alone in the monastery, the monk is acquiring abundant graces for others and is radiating a spiritual influence upon the world that is incalculable. The contemplative religious, an apostle of the cloister, must walk by faith