On the first Sunday of Lent, the Church shows us the temptation of Christ (Matt 4:1-11); on the second, the Transfiguration and glory of the heavenly Jerusalem (Matt 17:1-9); and on the third, the providence of God toward those who, having learned from Our Lord to battle valiantly, have done it so faithfully that they have merited the reward he shows to them after the battle (Luke 11:14-28). Today let us offer some brief considerations by which we will demonstrate that there are four degrees of prayer; but before all that let us say three words.

The soul of Our Lord was blessed from the instant of his conception; it resembled the star of Jacob, which with one of its points could touch heaven and with one of the others earth (Gen 28:12). It was entirely the same with the holy soul of our Master, for his superior part was supported in the womb of his Father, and his inferior part touched the earth by the choice which he had made of our miseries, pains, and sufferings. That being the case, we see clearly that the mystery of the Transfiguration was not so much a miracle as the cessation of a miracle, since the portion of glory which enriched the superior part of this blessed soul was so bound to the inferior part which did not enjoy any of it at all. Thus it was abandoned and left completely to the mercy of our misery and calamities, just as a great spring bubbling up at the summit of a high mountain retains its waters without flowing away in the small valleys. At the hour of the Transfiguration, this miracle ceases for a time, Our Lord letting his inferior part delight in the glory and consolation of his superior part.
Many devout souls will ask how it can be that we know we are advancing in prayer and, by means of prayer, to perfection. It is truly by means of prayer that one approaches perfection, and St. Bernard, after having indicated it to others, says what surpasses all of them. The four considerations that I wish to deduce will readily show whether you are making some advancement, since they are excellent degrees of perfection.

The first consideration is this: **Jesus having ascended on the mountain, begins to pray, and being in prayer he was transfigured, and his face became more dazzling than the sun and his clothing white as snow** (Matt 17:1-2; Luke 9:28-29). Now, we know that our prayer is good and that we are advancing in it if, when we leave it, we have, in imitation of Our Lord, a face dazzling as the sun and our habits white like the snow. I mean to say, if our face dazzles with charity and our body with chastity. Charity is the purity of the soul, for it cannot support in our hearts any impure affection or one which would be contrary to Him whom it loves (charity and love being only one and the same thing). And chastity is the charity of the body, since it rejects all sorts of impurities. If, on leaving prayer, you have a scowling and chagrined countenance, one readily sees that you have not meditated as you wished.

The second consideration has to do with the Apostles seeing Moses and Elijah who were speaking to Our Lord about the departure which he was to make to Jerusalem. See how in the midst of the Transfiguration one speaks of the Passion, for this departure is nothing other than the Passion. Our divine Master would make his departure in a fashion other than ours; for us, let us cast ourselves from below to above. Departure [in French "exces"] means ecstasy; he speaks there about the departure. What departure? That by which God descends from his supreme glory. And why does he do this? In order to take up our humanity and render himself subject to men, to see himself in all human miseries, as far as being immortal he is rendered subject to death and to death on the cross (Phil 2:6-8). Love is not fed as we think! Our Lord speaks therefore of his Passion and his Death because it is the sovereign act of his love; thus the Blessed, in eternal glory, no longer speak of, nor rejoice in, anything except death (cf. Rev 5:9, 12). Consequently, in the midst of consolation one must be reminded of the Passion. No, indeed, it is not necessary to say as St. Peter does, It is good that we be here (Matt 17:4), but it is good that we pass by here in order to go to the mountain of Calvary.

It is necessary to ascend the mountain of Tabor in order to be consoled there, we would say, for that could and does advance weak souls who do not have the courage to do good without feeling satisfaction. For sure, pardon me, true perfection is not acquired amid consolation. Ah, do you not see this in our mystery today? These three Apostles, having seen the glory of Our Lord, would be left afterward to quit him in his Passion; and St. Peter, who had often spoken more hardly, nevertheless commits a very great sin by renouncing his Master. One descends from the mountain of Tabor a sinner, but on the contrary one descends that of Calvary justified (cf. Luke 18:14). This is understood when one holds firm there at the foot of the Cross, as Our Lady, who is the paragon of all that is beautiful and excellent in heaven and on earth. St. John dwells there firm at the feet of his Master, and never more does one find that he commits any sin. One is quite right to be afraid in the midst of consolation, for one does not know if one loves the consolation of God, or better the God of consolations (2 Cor 1:3). But in affliction there is nothing to fear, provided that one be faithful, since there is nothing delectable. Behold, therefore, as much as concerns the second consideration.
I make the third on what is intended by the voice of the eternal Father who says: this is my beloved Son, listen to him (Matt 17:5; 2 Peter 1:17). It is necessary, therefore, to obey the eternal Father by following Our Lord in order to hear his word. And behold how we are taught that all persons, whatever their condition may be, must pray and meditate, for it is there, principally, where this divine Master speaks to us. I do not say that we must all meditate an equal amount, for it would not be appropriate that those who have many affairs [in the world] remain as long in prayer as do religious. I say, nevertheless, that if you wish to fulfill your duty well, it is necessary that you pray to God, and it is in prayer that we learn to do well that which we must do. When Our Lord wanted to accomplish some great thing, he placed himself in prayer, but not in a simple prayer made without preparation; thus does he withdraw to the mountain and enter into solitude. Before beginning his preaching and the conversion of souls, he withdraws forty days (Matt 4:1-2). Today he wishes to be transfigured and to make visible to his three Apostles a scintilla of his glory, so he places himself in prayer and in ecstasy. And being there, he makes visible the face more dazzling than the sun and his clothing more white than snow; and this is our first consideration. Afterward, he is seen between Moses and Elijah, speaking of the departure which he must make to Jerusalem; and that is the second. Then one hears the voice of the eternal Father who says: this is my beloved Son, listen to him; the third degree of prayer, to see perfection itself, is therefore to obey the Father and listen to the Son.

But it will not do us any good to listen if we do not do what he says to us, observing faithfully his commandments and his wishes. Now to listen willingly there will be found several; many also who would wish to follow on the mountain of Tabor, but quite few on that of Calvary. The one is nevertheless more profitable than the other, in the same way that there is more profit in accomplishing the will of God, or to love even that which is contrary to us, than not to listen to Our Lord speak amid the consolation that one receives anytime in prayer.

I pass on to the fourth consideration. The Apostles, having stood up (for they fell on their face hearing the voice of the eternal Father), saw only Jesus alone (Matt 17:6,8). That is the sovereign degree of perfection, seeing only Our Lord in whatever we do. Many refrain from looking upon others and the things of this world, but there are extremely few who no longer regard themselves. Thus do the more spiritual search among the exercises of devotion and choose those which are more to their taste and more conformed to their inclinations. However, the only thing necessary is to see God, to search only for him, and then we will be blessed. Souls which have attained this degree of perfection have an entirely particular care to look upon and to be held by Our Lord crucified on Calvary, because they find him there more alone than in any other place. Amen.