

“There are so many holy heroes waiting for us to stumble upon them, waiting with words that will resonate in our souls and lead us to a closer spiritual union with God. Saint Rafael Arnaiz is a wonderful example of this and through her translation of his collected works, Catherine Addington has made it so for both us and Saint Rafael the wait is over. I have been blessed to get to know this wonderful saint and I smile knowing that countless others will now as well.”

—Tommy Tighe, author of *Saint Dymphna’s Playbook*

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“St. Rafael is a brother to St. Therese of Lisieux, living a small, hidden life that was burning with love for God. I will turn to his writings for strength in my own spiritual life, and I’ll read excerpts to my children, so that they can see what it means to turn every crumb and corner of our lives over to God, all for love.”

—Leah Libresco Sargeant, author of *Building the Benedict Option*



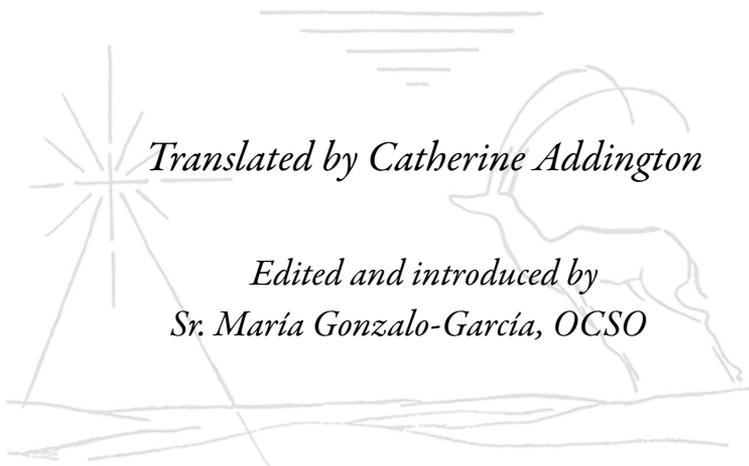
MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES: NUMBER SIXTY-ONE

# The Collected Works

Saint Rafael Arnaiz

*Translated by Catherine Addington*

*Edited and introduced by  
Sr. María Gonzalo-García, OCSO*



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## *Drawings and Paintings*

Numbers below preceded by a hashmark identify the numbered item in the work below, so, e.g., #207 is Rafael's letter to his brother Leopoldo on page 694.

Cover: *Incola ego in terra*, a holy card painted by Rafael (see #207). Source: LPM 225.

Title page: A deer and the cross (see #137). Source: LPM 234.

### **Illustrations**

#30 (p. 86): A drawing of a monk sitting at a desk and writing. Source: LPM 231.

#83 (p. 305): A holy card featuring a quotation from Saint John of the Cross: "I will not gather flowers, / nor fear wild beasts; / I will go beyond strong men and frontiers." Source: LPM 213.

#87 (p. 328: above text): Two Christmas sketches. Source: LPM 183.

#87 (p. 332): "Knowing how to wait" ("*Saber esperar*"), a holy card for Leopoldo Barón. Source: LPM 215.

#94 (p. 366): Saint Francis of Assisi. Source: LPM 203.

#103 (p. 389): Landscape of the monastery. Source: LPM 199.

#103 (p. 395): Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Source: LPM 197.

#108 (p. 413): Cover drawing for Meditations of a Trappist. Source: LPM 239.

#117 (p. 435): "Why would God create flies?" Source: LPM 231.

#119 (p. 439): A meadow outside the monastery. Source: LPM 229.

#120 (p. 441): A ship in fair weather. Source: LPM 229.

- #121 (p. 443): A bird singing "*Laus Deo*," "praise be to God." Source: LPM 235.
- #122 (p. 445): The tower bell. Source: LPM 230.
- #123 (p. 447): A rifle and a discipline, or penitential rope. Source: LPM 232.
- #125 (p. 452): Stalks of wheat. Source: LPM 236.
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- #129 (p. 460): A smiling sun. Source: LPM 236.
- #130 (p. 463): A scroll reading "*Sólo Dios basta*," "God alone suffices." Source: LPM 238.
- #130 (p. 463): A monk from behind. Source: LPM 232.
- #132 (p. 469): A cowl and a gun. Source: LPM 232.
- #137 (p. 483): A deer and the cross. Source: LPM 234.
- #138 (p. 489): A landscape. Source: LPM 229.
- #139 (p. 493): A crowned turnip. Source: LPM 236.
- #140 (p. 495): A shining cross atop a mountain. Source: LPM 238.
- #141 (p. 501): *Ego sum resurrectio*, "I am the Resurrection." Source: LPM 233.
- #142 (p. 506): Text: "Emmanuel" (see Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23). Source: LPM 233.
- #144 (p. 509): "*No había lugar para ellos en el mesón*," "There was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). Source: LPM 237.
- #146 (p. 515): A clock being pulled toward midnight. Source: LPM 230.
- #147 (p. 517): A singing bird. Source: LPM 235.
- #148 (p. 520): The star over Bethlehem. Source: LPM 233.
- #149 (p. 522): Olive branches. Source: LPM 233.
- #150 (p. 527): A shining chair. Source: LPM 236.
- #151 (p. 529): A window. Source: LPM 236.
- #151 (p. 530): The view from Rafael's window in the infirmary. Source: LPM 229.

- #152 (p. 531): Stalks of wheat flowing in the wind. Source: LPM 229.
- #153 (p. 533): A notebook open to the words “*Laus Deo*,” “praise be to God.” Source: LPM 231.
- #154 (p. 539): A portrait of “*Jesús Nazareno*,” Jesus of Nazareth. Source: LPM 234.
- #155 (p. 541): A painter’s palette. Source: LPM 230.

### *Color Images*

#### **Samples of Rafael’s art before he entered the monastery**

An exaggerated portrait of a man in watercolor. Source: LPM 41.

A playful line drawing of children playing music. Source: LPM 63.

One of a series of sketches in pen and watercolor commissioned by his mother, portraying costume designs for a theater performance she directed. Source: LPM 44.

#### **Covers Rafael painted for his uncle’s books**

A cover for *Él* (Madrid: Editorial Voluntad, 1930). Source: LPM 224.

A cover for *Del campo de batalla a la Trapa: El hermano Gabriel* (Madrid: Librería Religiosa Hernández, 1931). Source: LPM 224.

#### **Holy cards painted by Rafael**

*Incola ego sum in terra*, “I am a stranger and pilgrim on earth” (see #207). Source: LPM 225.

*Omnis terra adoret te*, “All the earth worships you” (see #207). Source: LPM 225.

“I have chosen the way of truth” (see #207). Source: LPM 219.

“I will not gather flowers, / nor fear wild beasts; / I will go beyond strong men and frontiers” (see #83). Source: LPM 213.

“The tranquil night / at the time of the rising dawn, / silent music, / sounding solitude, / the supper that refreshes, and deepens love” (SJC 474). Source: LPM 211.

The Holy Face of Jesus, painted as a mural above the staircase at his parents’ residence in Villasandino. Source: LPM 175.

## *Abbreviations*

- LPM *La pintura mensaje del Hermano Rafael*  
Antonio Cobos Soto. *La pintura mensaje del hermano Rafael: estudio crítico de la obra pictórica del venerable Rafael Arnáiz Barón, monje trapense*. Burgos: Monte Carmelo y Monasterio Cisterciense de San Isidro de Dueñas, 1989.
- OC *Obras completas*  
Saint Rafael Arnáiz Barón. *Hermano San Rafael: Obras completas*. Edited by Alberico Feliz Carbajal, OCSO. 6th ed. Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2011.
- RB *Rule of Saint Benedict*  
Saint Benedict. *RB 1980: The Rule of Saint Benedict in English*. Ed. Timothy Fry. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019.
- SJC *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*  
Saint John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991.
- STA *The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Ávila*  
Saint Teresa of Ávila. *The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Ávila*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976.
- Summ *Summarium*  
Giulio Dante. *Summarium*. In *Palentina Canonizationis servi Dei Raphaëlis Arnáiz Barón, Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum Oblati, Positio super virtutibus* by Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Rome: Tip. Guerra, 1987. 1–265.

VE *Vida y escritos*

Saint Rafael Arnáiz Barón. *Vida y escritos de Fray María Rafael Arnáiz Barón: monje trapense*. Edited by Mercedes Barón y Torres. Madrid: P. S. Editorial, 1974.



# “Upheld by Him”

## A Saint in the Making

God alone . . . How difficult it is to understand and live these words, but once you do, even if just for a moment . . . once your soul has realized that it belongs to God, that it is His possession . . . that Jesus dwells within it, despite its wretchedness and weakness . . . once your eyes are opened to the light of faith and hope . . . Once you understand the purpose of life, which is to live for God and for Him alone, there is nothing in the world that can trouble your soul. . . . God alone! How sweet it is to live like this!<sup>1</sup>

These words capture the inner current within Saint Rafael Arnaiz’s life. “God alone,” *sólo Dios*, was his battle cry. It is also a door he left open behind him, an access to that which we often can’t name but for which our hearts ache. Even though Rafael’s main intention in writing was to expand his soul in prayer and praise to God, he also desired that those who happened to read any of his words would come closer to God. He had himself received abundant guidance from the writings of great spiritual masters such as Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Ávila, Saint Benedict, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, and some of the main proponents of the *Devotio Moderna* movement.

1. Rafael Arnaiz, *The Collected Works* (CW), trans. Catherine Addington, MW 61 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2022); Rafael Arnáiz Barón, *Obras Completas* (OC), 6th ed. (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2011), 795. Rafael’s works cited in the introduction and in the translation below are identified by item number in the English, here CW 201.

As a rich young man of the twentieth century, Rafael weighed all the possibilities that life offered him against a single offer: “Follow me” (Matt 4:19). He sold everything and followed the Master who was calling him. Most of us would like to have what he found as he advanced on the path of discipleship: love, peace, and joy. However, we carefully try to avoid the struggle involved in the process. That is why, even though Rafael is not a complicated writer, there is something counterintuitive in his writings. If we are aware and honest, as we read through his letters and meditations we may realize we are experiencing a similar interior resistance to what we feel when we hear the Beatitudes, something like, “are you sure there is not an easier way to happiness?” From the many valuable lessons that can be learned from the writings of this saint, I believe the main one is the secret of the cross:<sup>2</sup> only by our walking the way of the cross is love set in order in us,<sup>3</sup> and our desire for lasting happiness fulfilled.

Rafael didn’t write like a theologian. His brief life didn’t allow him to elaborate a synthesis of his own experience. He himself was aware of the effect that rapid changes and the constant need to adapt to new situations had on him as he wrote, “The Lord has given me so many ups and downs in so few years that at times I am utterly perplexed. But when I serenely contemplate all the wonders He has done in me, despite my resistance . . . then my perplexity is transformed into a marvelous light that speaks to me of God’s greatness and infinite mercy.”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Rafael’s mission, what he describes as the occupation of the Trappist, to “love God and let ourselves be loved by Him,”<sup>5</sup> remained the same. Love is the key to his life and writings, as he wrote to his aunt María in one of his letters: “Love God and *nothing* else . . . That’s what I’m saying in my letters, in all of them . . . Don’t read anything else into them . . .”<sup>6</sup>

In his pages, we find the unfolding of his spiritual path he himself walked through the stages of his interior pilgrimage. And his spiritual

2. CW 140.

3. Saint Rafael’s life embodies to perfection the Cistercian ideal that authors like Saint Bernard of Clairvaux proposed, as it is expressed in the Vulgate translation of these words of the Song of Songs, “He set love in order in me” (Song 2:4).

4. CW 168.

5. CW 51.

6. CW 85.

landscapes changed fast—his initial sunny descriptions of the life in the monastery during his “monastic honeymoon” contrast vividly with the darkness of confusion and pain when he was struck by illness. Each of his statements needs to be judged not so much in itself but as a part, a stepping stone, preparing for the next grace to be received and embraced. Out of context, some of Rafael’s expressions are shocking and could be misleading. As parts of the whole, however, as colors or lines on a great and luminous canvas, they are simply perfect. Therefore we need to follow his journey to the end if we want to be able to understand what our brother meant and, ultimately, what we can learn from him. In some way, the life of each true Christian can only be understood if we read it like Christ’s, in the light of the resurrection.

Rafael took the straight path to holiness, that is, the cross, without making excuses. His message, being so contrary to that of the prevalent culture, is desperately needed.<sup>7</sup> For this reason we are glad that Rafael’s voice may now reach the people of the English-speaking world with the good news of hope.

### **All the World Can Give: Early Years and Vocational Discernment<sup>8</sup>**

#### *Saint Rafael Arnaiz in His Historical Context*

The interaction between God’s grace and the personal traits and historical context of the life of each saint—a mixture of failures and victories—is always surprising. Seeing Saint Rafael framed in his concrete circumstances gives a better understanding of the power that led him and his free response to it.

Rafael Arnaiz Barón<sup>9</sup> was born in the city of Burgos, Spain, on April 9, 1911, and died at the Trappist-Cistercian monastery of San Isidro de Dueñas on April 26, 1938. The twenty-seven years of his life comprise

7. CW 53: “I sincerely believe, abuela, that the world has lost its mind . . . and is on its way to losing its heart, which would be even worse.”

8. CW 1–24.

9. Traditionally Spaniards have two last names: the first one is the father’s and the second the mother’s—women don’t change their maiden name when they marry. Rafael’s full name is Rafael Arnaiz Barón.

some of the most difficult years of Spanish contemporary history and its bloodiest war: the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).

The socio-cultural context into which Rafael was born was complex and rich. The loss in 1898 of the last Spanish colonies—the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico—had initiated the search for a new national identity that nurtured a cultural revival. At the same time, a new social balance was needed that would incorporate the growing working class, which was concentrated in the main cities, and the new business bourgeoisie. The lack of dialogue and understanding among different groups and factions—those in favor of the monarchy and the defenders of the Republic as a form of government, traditionalists and socialists, proletariat and the bourgeois—led to constant and unresolved tensions among the different social forces. The situation of the Roman Catholic Church was not separate from these conflicts, which erupted in the religious persecution that began during the years of the Republic (1931–1936) and continued during the Civil War. During this period, over 4,000 members of the Catholic clergy, about 2,500 men and women religious, and more than 3,000 lay people were killed because they refused to deny their Christian faith.

### *Saint Rafael Arnaiz's Family Environment*

Rafael was blessed with a loving family who helped him grow humanly and spiritually. Cherished by his parents and three younger siblings, he remained deeply attached to them during his whole life. Because of his affectionate nature, separation from them was always a struggle. But while this attachment was an important source of emotional pain for Rafael, his parents' courageous example in accepting the religious vocation of their firstborn son gave him strength to persevere not only for his own sanctification but also for theirs.

Rafael's parents, Rafael Arnaiz and Mercedes Barón, belonged to the Spanish upper class, connected with the nobility and the wealthy families who owned large estates. The code of impeccable dressing and refinement at table, as well as other expressions of their social status, was however not at odds with the sincere practice of the Christian faith that permeated the ordinary life of the family.

Rafael's father had degrees in law and forestry engineering. A lover of both nature and literature, he maintained a personal library of some six thousand books. Because of his work as a forestry engineer, the family

moved from Burgos to Oviedo in 1922. Mercedes Barón was highly esteemed in aristocratic society because of her elegance and sensitivity, and her talents for literature and music. While the father was clearly the head of the family, she was in charge of the spiritual education of the children. The religious vocations of three of their four children speak of the spirit prevalent in their home. After Rafael's death, Luis Fernando (1913–1999) would join the Carthusians, and the younger Mercedes (1917–1946) the Ursulines, but only for a short period, as tuberculosis forced her to leave and took her life when she was twenty-eight years old. Only Leopoldo (1915–1999) married; he had a family of twelve children.

Among the members of Rafael's extended family, Leopoldo Barón (Rafael's mother's youngest brother, affectionately called “Polín”) and his wife, María del Socorro Osorio de Moscoso, the duke and duchess of Maqueda, deserve special mention because of their great influence in the development of Rafael's vocation. As Rafael writes in a letter to his aunt, “The Lord used you and Uncle Polín to plant a seed in me, and it has taken a long time to grow . . . and I don't know whether it'll produce flowers or thorns, but either way, it comes from God.”<sup>10</sup> The largest amount of Rafael's correspondence was addressed to them. These letters are a privileged witness not only of Rafael's spiritual evolution but also of his desire to share the graces he was receiving, to foster in others the love he himself had for God and the Virgin Mary.

Rafael visited his aunt and uncle many times. His stay with them during the summer of 1929 at their country estate in Pedrosillo, close to the city of Ávila, influenced him deeply as he assumed the numerous religious practices of their pseudo-monastic life. After an adult conversion, Leopoldo Barón had seriously considered becoming a Trappist, and after his death in 1952, his wife entered the Discalced Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation in Ávila.

During Rafael's first visits, his uncle and aunt introduced him to the writings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Ávila, writers who would have great influence in the development of Rafael's spirituality. Leopoldo's attraction to the monastic way of life was the source of Rafael's early glimmers of the Trappist vocation. His uncle also organized the first

10. CW 72.

quick visit that Rafael would make to the Trappist monastery of San Isidro de Dueñas, popularly known as “La Trapa.”

Because of his frequent stays with his aunt and uncle, Rafael was for them one more of their five children. However, as the nephew advanced so quickly on the way of the Spirit, they started addressing each other as *brother* and *sister*. Ultimately, much to Rafael’s distress and amusement, the aunt and uncle became his spiritual disciples.

Rafael’s family household also included a number of servants. It is noteworthy that their family didn’t pay attention to the differences in social classes, unlike the general custom in Spanish society of the time. A simple example of this fact is Rafael’s great affection for Rosa Calvo, a poor lottery administrator. In two of his letters, we find Rafael entrusting himself to her prayers while remembering their conversations about God at her workplace, where there were “very few *pesetas* inside . . . but a whole lot of love for God.”<sup>11</sup>

This particular aspect of Rafael’s education was a good preparation for him to accept community life at the monastery, where a common law of work and mutual respect applies to all. According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, no differences are to be made in the reception of brothers or their rank in community, no matter their previous social status, and “Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Saint Rafael Arnaiz’s Personality and Education*

Rafael’s early writings, along with the numerous testimonies of those who knew him well, provide valuable material for understanding his luminous personality, a personality that is partly shown in his later writings, where his suffering comes to the fore. Balancing the two realities is necessary for understanding the multifaceted aspects of this rich young soul.

Rafael was unusually talented. Testimonies from his years as a student in Jesuit schools, initially in Burgos and later in Oviedo, speak about his good academic results and religious piety—he belonged to the Sodality

11. CW 8 and 49.

12. *RB 1980: The Rule of Saint Benedict 1980*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 259, 271–73, on the offering of sons by nobles and the poor, and 279–81 on community rank (RB 53.15; 59:1-7; 63:1-9).

of Mary Immaculate of his school and, later, to the Nocturnal Adoration society and other religious organizations. The fact that he easily passed the difficult entrance exams for the prestigious School of Architecture in Madrid is also proof of his quick intelligence and self-confidence.<sup>13</sup> He also excelled in other areas, like playing various musical instruments without formal training, and being an excellent dancer. His artistic interest and capacity for drawing and painting were much more than a lifelong hobby for him. At the age of fifteen, he had already begun private lessons with the well-known artist Eugenio Tamayo.

Rafael's personality was magnetic. He intentionally brought joy wherever he went. He easily became the center of conversations and games thanks to his natural elegance and irresistible sense of humor. Along these lines, he tended to exaggerate his own imperfections as a way of laughing at himself. Awareness of this tendency is necessary to arrive at an accurate picture of some of the situations he describes.

Rafael's capacity for taking himself lightly was the counterpart of what he himself called his "excessive sensitivity."<sup>14</sup> His affectionate nature would bring him both great joys and great sorrows. When he pondered God's love for him, he described his soul as "a burning volcano about to erupt."<sup>15</sup> Often, his gratitude and the desire to love in return overwhelmed him: "My soul is full and running over. You've put so much love into such a miserable little soul, Lord!"<sup>16</sup>

Given the particular circumstances of his monastic journey, Rafael had to say goodbye to his family on four occasions. Each separation was an agonizing struggle. Joining a Trappist monastery at the time required a radical rupture from family and friends. Given the remarkably affectionate relationships in his family circle, and the pampered life he had lived so far, his impending separation from his family felt even starker. He so feared breaking the news to his family before his first departure to the monastery that he had initially decided to enter directly and only tell his parents when he had already been admitted as a novice. Fortunately, his uncle Polín, with the help of the papal nuncio to Spain, Monsignor

13. Rafael's own words on June 23, 1930, after he took one of his exams are eloquent in this respect. See CW 2.

14. CW 51.

15. CW 75.

16. CW 211.

Federico Tedeschini, was able to dissuade him from that approach. While they supported him in his resolution, they encouraged him to receive his parents' blessing before departing.

As a young man, Rafael was full of lofty ideals. When he entered the monastery, the monks looked like angels to him, living only for God. Coming to terms with the reality of human weakness still present in those who had dedicated their lives to God cost him many tears. His natural sensitivity and affectionate personality needed to be purified through the process of learning to love in and with God's love; only then would he discover a new peace, which he called "serenity."<sup>17</sup>

### **A Heart Filled with Joy and Love: Joining the Monastery<sup>18</sup>**

Rafael visited the Trappist-Cistercian monastery of San Isidro de Dueñas, in the Spanish region of Palencia, for the first time on September 23, 1930. He was nineteen years old. This first quick visit, when he stayed only overnight, left what was already an indelible mark on his soul, captivating his spiritual and aesthetic sensitivity.

After that short visit he did not go back to the monastery until September 1931, for an eight-day stay. His first written impressions of the life at La Trapa come from that time. But it was not till the summer of 1932, during an eight-day retreat at the monastery, preached by one of the monks, Father Armando Regolf, that Rafael seems to have come to a decision about his vocation. It was then a well-pondered decision when in November 1933 he finally wrote to the abbot of San Isidro, Dom Félix Alonso García, requesting to be admitted as a novice. He clearly stated his reasons for this request in this short but eloquent letter: "I am not motivated to change my life in this way because of sadness or suffering or disappointment or disillusionment with the world . . . I have all that it can give me. God, in His infinite goodness, has given me such gifts in this life, many more than I deserve . . . As such, my reverend Father, if you receive me into your community alongside your sons, be assured that you will be receiving only a heart filled with joy and much love for God."<sup>19</sup>

17. CW 159.

18. CW 25–34.

19. CW 12.

*II. A Heart Filled with Joy  
and Love*



Joining the Monastery

## 26. *To Mercedes Barón Torres*

the guesthouse at La Trapa,  
January 16, 1934

My dearest mother,

Just a quick note to let you know that soon, at two in the afternoon, I will be entering the community and will go to the choir at Vespers; of course if I am happy, I hope that you are too.

Yesterday my father left me here. He spent a long time with Rev. Fr. Abbot. Afterwards I went to the *Salve*, then I had dinner and went to bed. Today I got up late and spent a good while with Father Master. He told me that he'd come look for me at two.

I suppose you will all be together in Oviedo now, giving thanks to God at all times for the great blessing He has given us; I, at least, do not cease giving Him thanks for everything.

I wanted to tell you so many things but I don't have the words for any of them. All of you are in my heart, especially you, my dear mother. Did you like the dedications I wrote for you?<sup>1</sup>

Keep praising God for everything, and asking the Blessed Virgin to pray for my perseverance, for if we receive anything from God it is always through Her intercession.

Now they are distributing food to the poor; Father told me that yesterday there were more than a hundred of them.<sup>2</sup>

It is splendidly sunny out today, not like yesterday, which was rather gloomy.

Right now I am impatiently awaiting the Novice Master and wanting it to be time for me to take my place in choir already. How happy I will be, dear Mother. Look, my first prayers will be a hymn of thanksgiving for God

1. The dedications I wrote for you: See #24 and #25.

2. See #7, n. 14.

that will burst forth from my heart, but afterwards, for whom will I pray if not for my parents? That is the one thing that I think can console you.

I will write you more slowly when the Novice Master gives me permission to do so. For today, be content with knowing that your son is content, that he is praying a lot for you all, and that he is in the hands of the Virgin, who is the protectress of the Order.

Without further ado, know of all your son's love as he asks for your blessing,

*Rafael*

I really want a smoke, but I don't know what's going on with me. Somehow I end up forgetting that I want to.

*27. To Rafael Arnaiz Sánchez de la Campa  
and Mercedes Barón Torres*

La Trapa, January 23, 1934<sup>1</sup>

It is six-thirty in the morning, and I am overcome with drowsiness. Brother *Damián*<sup>2</sup> noticed, and he signed to me that I won't fall asleep if I write, and I'll be able to keep my eyes open more easily that way . . . So without further ado beyond a Hail Mary, I have taken up pen and paper and begun to write.

I have been in the monastery for exactly eight days, in which I have tried to submit everything in my power to the Rule,<sup>3</sup> and for now all I can say is that I am very sleepy . . . I go to bed at seven in the evening, and with the grace of God, I fall asleep immediately. At one, the pain in my lower back wakes me up, since it's not exactly a feather mattress that I'm sleeping on. I change position at one, as I was saying, and just when I think I've fallen asleep again . . . Bong! The bell tells me that it's two and that I have to go down to Matins . . . I don't doubt it for a minute, not even a second. I just put on my slippers and coat, since I sleep in my clothes, and then wash my face a little. And then, thinking of God, with a joyful heart, I go down the novitiate stairs at full speed and enter the church, where my God is in the tabernacle waiting for His monks to start singing His praises . . . And once there, in the choir of a Cistercian abbey, fifty men begin to live the monastic day, gazing down and singing the words the angel spoke to Mary: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you."<sup>4</sup>

1. Although this was originally intended as an exercise to keep him awake, Rafael did end up attaching this sheet of paper (#27) and the following one (#28) to a letter to his parents dated January 29, 1934 (#29). See OC 185.

2. Brother *María Damián Yáñez Neira* (see #20, n. 4).

3. The Rule: The Rule of Saint Benedict (see #7, n. 2).

4. Luke 1:28.

I think that at that moment, the Queen of Heaven must look upon her sons with tenderness, and God Himself must delight in Mary . . . And so it is well worth the effort to get up at two and be a little sleepy.

Well, Brother Damián was right, I'm not sleepy anymore. Blasted nature, what a pain you are!! But I hope that with God's help I will conquer and master you, and for that, I need only one thing, persistence and prayer . . . and surely, without even realizing it, after a certain amount of time I won't be as sleepy as I am now, but nothing to be done about that . . . even the apostles fell asleep in the garden,<sup>5</sup> and left Jesus all alone . . . and they're apostles, so what am I, a poor sinner, to do?

5. Matt 26:40-46; Mark 14:37-42; Luke 22:45-46.

## *28. To Rafael Arnaiz Sánchez de la Campa and Mercedes Barón Torres<sup>1</sup>*

La Trapa, January 24, 1934

How beautiful silence is! Especially here in La Trapa, where we all understand one another with a simple look; but above all, God understands us, and I think that is enough . . . The Rule of Saint Benedict is admirable, but silence is what gives it the quality of holiness.<sup>2</sup> That joyful silence of the cloister and the gardens, where everything falls silent, except the birds who sing to God.

I live together with three novices<sup>3</sup> who, since I have been here, have not spoken to me except through signing.<sup>4</sup> I already know how to make a few signs, but . . . how I'd like to say a paragraph or two to my beloved brothers! I'm convinced that silence helps one hold onto God's presence . . . but it is also a great penance, especially at certain moments and certain times. For example, when it's a splendid day out, and you're going to work in the fields, and working in the fields is cheerful; well, the cheerfulness that you'd like to express by jumping around and singing, you have to quiet it down instead, and offer it to God in silence . . . And that is rather beautiful, but you have to get used to it. I told Father Master that sometimes I feel like crying out, and he told me to channel that energy into singing in choir, and so that's what I do.

1. A loose sheet of paper included with a letter to his parents. See #27, n. 1.

2. On the Rule and on monastic silence, see #7, nn. 2, 6.

3. The three other novices were Brother María Isidro David (Felipe) Ortega, who left the monastery upon being drafted during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and eventually became a doctor; Brother María Bernardo Michelena Castañeda, who spent most of his monastic life as a chaplain to Trappist nuns in Japan; and Brother María Damián Yáñez Neira, who moved to the Trappist monastery of Oseira in Galicia, Spain. Brothers Bernardo and Damián both attended Rafael's beatification in Rome on September 27, 1992.

4. On monastic sign language see #5, n. 8.

As you can see, life at La Trapa boils down to singing in choir and singing out of choir; sometimes shouting out, other times in silence, but the song is the same. And although my own is rather poor, and sometimes I sing it quite sleepily, I think God will accept it, and I pray to the Blessed Virgin that it may be so.

This morning, January 24, it was snowy, so after high Mass, we'll go to the chocolate factory to wrap chocolates.<sup>5</sup> I'm really slow, but lucky for me, I don't get paid by the piece. We have two hours of work, that is, two hours of absolute silence, and I promise I don't get tired or bored, because what I do is think. When I say it like that, it sounds absurd, because everybody thinks, but it's not like that—thinking is a difficult thing. Of course I mean thinking well, thinking in an orderly fashion, so as to benefit from it; thinking calmly, getting hold of your imagination and taking it where you will . . . I devote myself to all that while I wrap up chocolates, and if I pray a Hail Mary from time to time, I get even more out of the work, and the chocolate is wrapped better. Here in La Trapa you may be asked to do anything except waste time.

5. Until 1960, the monks at San Isidro de Dueñas made part of their income by making chocolate. As Rafael implies, novices generally worked in the fields unless the ground was too frozen, and then they might be assigned to the chocolate factory or the kitchen for the day.

*IV. Shaped in His Hands*



A Path of Oblation

## 64. *To Dom Félix Alonso García*

Ávila, October 9, 1935

J-H-S

Reverend and dear Father Abbot,

I have offered many prayers to the Most Blessed Virgin before beginning this letter, and spent a lot of time consulting Jesus by the tabernacle . . . The time has come for me to decide to open my heart to my superiors at once, in order to tell them my decision and the journey my soul has made.

Reverend Father, I want you to understand my words, which, though clumsy, are sincere; and for you to be merciful toward me. And so, I have asked God for this.

Reverend Father, I've been away from my beloved Trapa for nearly a year and a half now, and if only you knew, Reverend Father, how great a work the Lord has done in me! . . . And how grateful I am to Him for the trial that He is making me endure . . . I've often thought about how unworthy I am, that Jesus should care for me, but how could He not? . . . Do I not care for Him? God is so good, and He knows what He is doing, and sometimes He uses the least and most miserable of all earthly things in order to make known His majesty.

When I requested that you admit me into the community two years ago, writing from this same Ávila, my desire was good and holy; I was searching for God, and God gave Himself to me so freely . . . I suffered, but when it's for His sake, it's not suffering. . . I had hopes and dreams, I wanted to be holy, I thought with delight about the choir, about being a real monk someday . . . There was so much happening within me, Reverend Father . . . I was searching for God, but I was also searching for His creatures, and I was searching for myself; and God wants me all to Himself . . . My vocation was from God, and is of God, but it needed to be purified, its rough edges needed smoothing. I gave myself to the Lord generously, but I still wasn't giving Him *everything*; I gave Him my body, my soul, my career, my family . . . but I still held on to one thing: my dreams and desires, my hopes of being a Trappist and making my vows and singing the Mass. That

kept me going at La Trapa, but God wants more, He always wants more. I needed to be transformed. He wanted His love alone to be enough for me.

With a novice's zeal, I offered Him . . . I offered Him something, but I didn't know what. I thought I didn't have anything left to give Him, that my life was the one thing I had left, and that He already knew it was His.

Reverend Father, I have nothing else to tell you; God sent me a trial, and at first I thought it meant that God didn't love me, that His will was different, but He doesn't ask for our opinion or explain Himself when He sends us something that's good for us. Weak creatures, what do you know of God's designs! He'll handle doing the work without consulting us. All we have to do is let ourselves be shaped in His hands, and hold still, very still; later, the time and light He has sent us will allow us to see His work clearly, and then we will give Him infinite thanks for His loving care.

How many tears must be shed before one is willing to kiss the cross! First we ask for a cross, and then we cry when it is given to us; but once we are on it, how happy we are to find ourselves at Christ's side . . . Though He is a God, He died on the cross for us; so if we truly love Him, the cross ought to be and must be our delight. Isn't that so?

Forgive me, Reverend Father, I've gone astray from where I should be; I'll return to the purpose of my letter.

I was at the monastery about a year ago, and I shared how I was feeling at the time with Fr. Marcelo and with Your Reverence.<sup>1</sup> I asked Fr. Marcelo if it would be possible for me to one day enter as an oblate,<sup>2</sup> because of the diet I have to follow; he said yes, and Your Reverence told me to wait . . . I have waited, for the will of my superiors is the will of God . . . I have waited a year, which seemed like a century to me. The Most Blessed Virgin has upheld me in my vocation; the Lord has given me to understand that the world is not my place, that He wants me beside the tabernacle—and, Reverend Father, to the tabernacle I wish to go.

Once more, then, I ask the community to admit this poor man, who neither wants nor desires anything more than to dwell in the house of God.

1. Rafael spoke with the abbot alongside Fr. Marcelo León, master of novices, on the visit of November 21, 1934 (OC 392).

2. Oblate: A lay member of a monastery who does not take vows and observes a modified schedule (see #7, n. 13).

I don't deserve to be a monk . . . Singing Holy Mass . . . Lord, if I am to see you so soon, what does it matter? . . . The vows . . . do I not love God with all my strength? Then what do vows matter? None of that prevents me from being at His side, dedicating my silence among men to Him, and loving Him quietly and humbly in the simplicity of the oblature.<sup>3</sup> Saint Benedict admitted oblates, and some of them became saints. Why should I not be among them? . . . Of my own strength I cannot, but with Jesus and Mary at my side, I can do all things. When I fall, They will help me.

Your Reverence will speak of the humiliation this entails, the fact of being nothing and no one. But am I someone now? As for humiliation, I don't believe I will feel that way, because in order for a soul to be humbled it must first be up high and then be brought low, and I don't think I have to be brought low at all. Quite the contrary, the real humiliation is when a creature is exalted in the eyes of men, because when that person stands before God, so wretched and wicked in His divine eyes while so extolled by men . . . then he will know true humiliation.

Forgive me, and be merciful to me, Reverend Father—but surely the miter that the Lord has placed in your hands is more of a humiliation than being assigned the lowest place in a Trappist monastery. Did God not humble Himself? That can indeed be called humiliation, but when it comes to us? That word does not apply to us, insignificant dust that we are. Look what I'm saying, my good Father Abbot! Take all this as the ramblings of someone madly in love with God . . . and if I fail to show you the respect I owe you, forgive me; but I want you to know everything I am thinking and how I am feeling about it, and when I sat down to write, I promised to expose my soul completely.

There are so many things I'd say to you, if only I knew how to write. It gives me such joy to think of how God loves me, the path down which He is guiding me, the undeserved light He gives me . . . But of course, I have God, and God has hold of me; what more could I desire? I spoke to you of the cross before, but with Him I no longer have one. My sorrows and the tears I poured out for Him have turned into peace and calm. I have the Lord; let me live beside His tabernacle, eating the crumbs that

3. Oblature: The status of being an oblate (comparable to "the novitiate" for the status of being a novice).

fall from the convent's table, and I'll be happy. . . happy in my nothing, and joyous in my Everything, who is Jesus.

Your Reverence, do you see the work of God now? He has accomplished the greatest and most admirable work in me, a creature of His who—and I don't say this with insincerity or false modesty—has nothing and deserves nothing; I have only sins to offer such a good God. . . I possess neither virtue nor knowledge, but I do know what I am. . . and God knows it too. I might be able to fool human beings, but I can't fool Him.

Tell me, Reverend Father, if my vocation is not from God. Enlighten me if I am deceived; have no mercy. Jesus made use of a harsh blow to make me see clearly before. But if Your Reverence goes before God and considers my situation, you will see a man who, despite everything, is still thinking of his Trapa.

It has been two years (or it will be two in January) since I entered the novitiate. Even so, perhaps not in the eyes of men, but certainly in the eyes of God, I have not ceased for even a moment to be Brother Rafael, Cistercian novice. I assure you that, even if I were to spend the rest of my life in the world, in spirit I would continue to be a Trappist. I carry it deep within me, and the Virgin of La Trapa is always at my side. I am sure that She wants me there, and She wants me to inhabit the humility of which She is an example to us.

I fear only one thing, and that is to fail to be a good example to the community in the observance of the holy Rule, but God wishes to take even that from me, which is a great consolation. Of course, being despised and being no one is a consolation too, and a much greater one, but that is out of my hands and I am not seeking it either.

The other day, a very holy nun<sup>4</sup> whom I went to consult about my decision told me that the Lord would give me so much more this way than if I continued to be a choir novice.<sup>5</sup> I also recall what Your Reverence told me when I entered the monastery, that God would repay me even in this world for the sacrifice I was making. . . Anyway, as God well knows, I don't follow God for any of that now. . . I love God just because, and

4. Sor Pilar García, abbess of the Poor Clares at Ávila (see #3, n. 8).

5. Choir novice: When Rafael first entered the monastery, he was called a choir novice because he was in formation to become a choir monk, as distinct from a lay brother.

that's it. Even though I love God very little, my love isn't mercenary. I know that He loves me, and that is enough for me.

It is a very great mortification to follow the Rule and observe the fasts, but perhaps it is an even greater one to have to take an indulgence.<sup>6</sup>

I still haven't brought up my health, and well, it is the least of my concerns. I'm doing about the same, I carry on with my normal life other than when it comes to food. I could follow the Rule for many years, even. Diabetes is simply a matter of a particular type of diet: switching out some foods for others, maybe taking indulgences . . . Medication by way of injections from time to time, and that's it.

If what I am attempting were absurd on a practical level, I wouldn't have even dared to propose it to Your Reverence. I am merely holding onto Fr. Marcelo's words: that there are many cases like mine, or very similar to mine, in many of the monasteries in France.

If a donation is necessary in order to avoid burdening the community, I don't think my father would refuse me, but they don't know anything yet. I'm waiting for your reply before talking to them; I don't think they'd have or raise any objections.

In any case, I will wait for Your Reverence to decide and give me your answer about what I ought to do, or if I should come speak to you in person. Everything else can wait until afterwards. It's all in Mary's hands.

In Madrid, I went to see a doctor who is well known in this field, and he told me that I have a light form of pancreatic diabetes that would eventually correct itself, but in the meantime I should not consume excessive starch or sugar. I just have to be careful. I wouldn't have any trouble following this diet in the monastery, whether in the refectory or in the infirmary, it's all the same to me, or in the guesthouse, if Your Reverence so instructs. Ultimately, when we go up to receive the Lord at Communion, He doesn't ask us if we have eaten this or that. He is the same for everyone in the community, isn't that so? He won't love me any less than Br. Damián or Br. Bernardo<sup>7</sup> because they eat bread and beans while I eat milk and eggs. God has arranged it thus, so He must know best. When we are all reunited in His presence, and the day is coming soon, such

6. Indulgence: A reprieve from the usual monastic fare at mealtimes (see #31, #33 n. 2).

7. Br. Damián, Br. Bernardo: Rafael's co-novices when he first entered the monastery; see #28, n. 3.

small differences will fade away. They are merely human differences, and we must dispense with all that is human, not just in heaven but also here on earth. For if we view everything supernaturally, everything brings us to God: both the rigorous fast of the one who can observe it, and the care taken by the one who is sick, amid all his miseries. Thus I return to my theme, Reverend Father: we who have God have everything. What does the rest of it matter?

I'm not writing to Fr. Marcelo because I know that he's sick and is not in the novitiate.<sup>8</sup> Please give him my kind regards, and the same to the whole community. My regards also to my confessor, Fr. Teófilo, who is often in my thoughts, for I have found myself so alone on so many occasions, and in such doubt, that I've had much to offer God, although it is all rather little.

Of course, I've also consulted souls who are very much of God, and they have enlightened me quite a bit. For most of the time that I've been away from La Trapa, however, I have been face to face only with God, and even that was only when He did not hide Himself from me. May He be blessed, for I certainly deserved that; my sins have not been few.

If only you knew, Reverend Father, how much the Virgin has helped me! She lifted me up when I fell, upheld me over all the threats I have faced in my vocation, and consoled me when I found myself struggling against the world, which is so clingy. . . . Whether I'd been good, bad, or something in between, at seven in the evening when I united myself to my brothers in choir and prayed the *Salve* to her, I felt a seeming consolation at the thought of the Virgin uniting me to La Trapa; She was protecting us all, gazing upon us all, both the Trappists in their monastery and me wherever I found myself. What would become of us were it not for Her?

Forgive me, Reverend Father, this letter is going on too long. . . . this is an outlet for me. It's so difficult to speak of love for God and the Virgin in the world.

Tell Br. Ramón<sup>9</sup> to pray for me, and that I think of him often. He has very much been on my mind, because he suffered, just as I did, in leaving

8. Fr. Marcelo León died on October 1, 1935 (OC 396). He had been succeeded as master of novices by Fr. José Olmedo Arrieta on July 7, 1935 (OC 397).

9. Ramón Vallauré Fernández-Peña (1914–1996), the younger brother of Rafael's close friend Juan Vallauré (see #9, n. 5). Ramón entered the novitiate at San Isidro on July 22, 1935 (OC 398).

it all behind, and that is very difficult . . . His prayers must be very pleasing to the Lord.

There are so many things I'd like to ask you to tell all my brothers, Fr. Francisco, Buenaventura, Br. Tescelino<sup>10</sup> . . . everyone. They'll think I forgot, but souls who love one another for God's sake never forget, and in loving each other they love God. Loving Him in His creatures is a great consolation, and it takes nothing away from His glory; at least, if I am not mistaken.

Answer me, Reverend Father, I beg you for the sake of charity; it will bring consolation to my soul to learn that I may still, however unworthily, begin my name with the "Brother María" of the Cistercians.

Your Reverence can expect an oblate who wants only to give glory to God, to love Him, and to serve Him; a soul who wants nothing, and surrenders to Him even the desire to be professed, for He asks him to. And believe me, I surrender not with any violence to myself, but with pleasure and joy.

I will try to be a holy oblate with the aid of heaven, the counsel of my good superiors, and the help of my community, whom I ask to remember me in their prayers.

Humbly asking your blessing, your novice in Jesus and Mary,

*Brother María Rafael*

✠O.C.R.<sup>11</sup>

P.S. For the full month of October, I will be with my mother and my sister at the Hotel Inglés in Ávila, from which I will go directly to Oviedo. I ask that you send your reply to my aunt and uncle's house, since I do not want my mother to learn of my plans until the latest possible moment. The address is: Duke of Maqueda, San Juan de la Cruz, 4 – Ávila.

10. For Fr. Francisco, see #33, n. 6; #42, n. 4; for Fr. Buenaventura and Br. Tescelino, see #42, n. 7.

11. O.C.R.: "Orden Cisterciense Reformada," or Order of Reformed Cistercians (see #39, n. 12).

## 65. *To Leopoldo Barón*

Ávila, October 1935<sup>1</sup>

My dearest Uncle Polín,

When Aunt María writes you, your nephew cannot be far behind . . . Just as well, with so little time left. As you know, we leave on Monday. Don't rush over here, let's not force what's not meant to be. If I can give you a hug, fine. If not, that's fine too, what does it matter? . . . That's what the Rafael in my head says, but as for the real one—poor Rafa, he loves his aunt and uncle so much!

Yesterday we went to Madrid. Aunt María didn't want to come . . . but she came. I'm telling you, Uncle Polín, between the Lord's kindness toward me and the charity of those He places in my path, I don't know what to do with myself. What is the Lord's desire?

Today Aunt María, my mother, and I went to the Shrine of Our Lady of Sonsoles<sup>2</sup> . . . We spent a long time there praying the Holy Rosary. Then, at the feet of Our Lady, I thought about many things, one of which was a poor man who was off in Toro trying to collect some pesetas . . . Perhaps it is the Lord who wants to collect from you, rather than you collecting from men.

I am praying to the Virgin that you will be generous and not mess around. You hear me, Uncle Polín? . . . Anyway, I don't mean to give you advice (too many cooks already). You know better than I do, there's so much that I don't need to say to you . . . just remember who all this is coming from, and be merciful to me.

Aunt María asked me to tell you to write to Mr. Luis.

1. This letter is undated.

2. Shrine of Our Lady of Sonsoles: A shrine and hermitage in Ávila dedicated to Mary. The name Sonsoles derives from a local devotion to Saint Zoilus (San Zoilo), an early Christian said to have been martyred by the Romans at Córdoba, Spain.

Pilar<sup>3</sup> has a fever tonight, but don't worry, she's gotten better over the past few days while she's been in bed . . . God is watching over all of us.

I don't have anything else to say. Give my grandmother and Aunt María and "little Ropi" lots of hugs for me.<sup>4</sup> As always, your brother and nephew, more the former than the latter,

*Br. M. Rafael*

3. Pilar: Pilar Barón y Osorio Moscoso, Rafael's cousin and Leopoldo's daughter.

4. Rafael's maternal grandmother, Fernanda Torres Erro; his aunt, María Josefa Barón Torres; and friend, Rosa "Ropi" Calvo, all lived in Toro, where Leopoldo was visiting.

## ***66. To Leopoldo Barón***

Ávila, October 1935<sup>1</sup>

My dearest brother in the Lord, Uncle Polín,

Today I went sightseeing with Juan Vallaure and Arraiza,<sup>2</sup> who came here to spend the day with me. I'm a bit tired, because even though they love me very much, I can promise you that I got used to something so . . . different that even the good ones tire me out somewhat . . . Everything is for God.

We leave on Monday, God willing; as to our return . . . we are all in God's hands, and that's a very good thing, don't you think?

When I get to Oviedo I'll write you and Aunt María a very, very long letter. Right now I can't put anything into words; I'm rather out of it. I haven't been able to go make my visit<sup>3</sup> or anything . . . I think the Lord stirs up our spirits just so that we might truly come to know what it is to be at peace.

I am very pleased. I see God at work in someone whom I love dearly . . . It's an extraordinary thing . . . Uncle Polín, if we could truly see, we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves. What have we done? What does the Lord want? I don't know what I'm talking about, may God forgive me, and may you as well.

May the peace of the Lord be with you. Your nephew,

*Br. M. Rafael*

1. This letter is undated.

2. Juan Vallaure, Rafael's close friend, and Eugenio Arraiza Vilella, their mutual friend and classmate at the Higher Technical School of Architecture of Madrid (OC 401).

3. Make my visit: that is, make an hour of Eucharistic Adoration, which Rafael called his daily "visit with the Lord."

## *67. Dedication of a Holy Card to Dolores Barón Osorio*<sup>1</sup>

Ávila, October 25, 1935

Dolores,

All I can tell you about the Virgin Mary is this: in the world and in La Trapa and wherever I find myself, the Virgin has helped me in some way . . . in a way only She knows how.

You don't have to be a saint to love her very much. Just do it, and you'll find that the thorns you come across on your path soften with Mary's help, and perhaps even become flowers.

No, Dolores, you don't have to be a saint to love Her, the consolation and refuge of sinners.

I assure you that with a little love for God and lots for the Virgin, even here on earth you'll have everything your Trappist cousin hopes for you. Whenever he comes to mind, I beg you, pray to Her for him.

*Brother María Rafael O.C.R.*

1. Dolores Barón Osorio was Rafael's cousin, the daughter of Leopoldo Barón and María Osorio.

*VIII. It Is Love . . .*



The Ultimate Sacrifice of Praise

## 170. *God and My Soul*<sup>1</sup>

La Trapa, December 16, 1937

Ave Maria

After spending a long time (nearly a year) at my parents' house,<sup>2</sup> recovering from an aggravation of my illness, I have returned to La Trapa to continue following my vocation, which is to love God alone, in sacrifice and renunciation, with no Rule but blind obedience to His divine will.

At present, I believe I am following it, obeying the superiors of the Cistercian Abbey of San Isidro de Dueñas without vows and with the status of an oblate.

God asks nothing of me but humble love and a spirit of sacrifice.

Yesterday, when I left my house, my parents, and my brothers and sister, was one of the hardest days of my life.

This is the third time<sup>3</sup> that I have left everything behind in order to follow Jesus, and I believe this time it was truly a miracle from God. By my own strength, I absolutely could not have come back to the infirmary at La Trapa in order to undergo hardships, or bodily hunger because of my illness, or loneliness of the heart because of how far away I find myself from other human beings. God alone . . . God alone . . . God alone. That is my theme . . . that is my only thought.

I am suffering greatly . . . Mary, my Mother, help me.

1. *God and My Soul: Notes on Conscience (Private)* was the title that Rafael gave to a folder where he kept notes written on looseleaf at the instruction of his confessor, Father Teófilo Sandoval, who did not read them until after his death (OC 852). Rafael's mother, Mercedes Barón, added titles to each section upon initial publication (OC 855).

2. Rafael left La Trapa on February 7, 1937, and returned on December 15, 1937 (OC 855).

3. Rafael's mistake; this was his fourth entrance into the monastery, not his third.

I have come for the following reasons:

1. Because I believe that here in the monastery I can better follow my vocation of loving God on the cross and in sacrifice.
2. In order to help my brothers in the fight, because Spain is at war.
3. In order to make use of the rest of the time that God has given me in this life, and make haste in learning to love His cross.

I aspire to the following in this monastery:

1. To conform absolutely and entirely to the will of Jesus.
2. To live only to love and suffer.
3. To be the last in everything, except *obedience*.

May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary take these resolutions into Her divine hands and place them at the feet of Jesus. Today, that is the only thing this poor oblate desires.

*171. God and My Soul*

Everything I Do Is because of God

La Trapa, December 21, 1937

I must convince myself of one thing: everything I do is because of God. He sends my joys; He provides my tears; I eat and sleep because of Him.

My rule is His will, and His desire is my law; I live because it pleases Him, and I will die when He wants me to. I desire nothing but God.

May my life be a constant *fiat*.

May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary help me and guide me in the short journey of life on earth.

## 172. *God and My Soul*

### Take It All, Lord!

La Trapa, December 26, 1937

In community life, as long as I fail to master my whole “nervous system,” I won’t ever really know what it is to mortify myself.

Poor Brother Rafael . . . keep fighting until death; that’s his destiny. On the one hand, a desire for heaven; on the other, a human heart. Add it all up . . . you get suffering and the cross.

Poor Brother Rafael, his heart is too sensitive to creaturely things . . . You suffer when you don’t find love and charity among human beings . . . You suffer when you see nothing but selfishness. What do you expect of things made of misery and clay? Place your hope in God and leave creatures be . . . you won’t find what you’re looking for in them.

But what if God hides Himself? . . . How cold it would be in La Trapa then. La Trapa without God . . . is nothing but a bunch of men.

It is Christmastime, and all I have to show for it is profound loneliness . . . A very deep sorrow . . . No one to rest in, sick and weak as I am . . . Oh, Lord, I have such little faith! My God, my God, You are so good . . . Your mercy will pardon my forgetfulness . . . but what I am suffering is so great, Lord, that my weakness alone cannot abide it.

I see nothing but my misery and my worldly soul, of such little faith, and no love at all.

I will go, Lord, as far as You want me to; but give me the strength to do it, and aid in my hour of need . . . Look, Lord, and see what I am.

On Christmas Eve, I gave the Lord, the Child Jesus, the last of what was left of my will. I gave Him even my littlest desires . . . So what is left? . . . Nothing. Not even my desire to die. Now, I am nothing but God’s possession. But Lord, what a poor little thing You possess!

Poor Brother Rafael . . . you came to La Trapa to suffer . . . what are you complaining about? . . . I’m not complaining, Lord, but I am

suffering without virtue. Those little tears of *loneliness* on Christmas Eve . . . Lord, You know all things and see all things . . . and You also forgive all things.

Fill my heart, Lord . . . Fill it with *that thing* that human beings cannot give me.

My soul dreams of love, of pure and sincere affection. I am a man made for love, but not to love creatures, but rather You, my God, and to love them in You . . . I only want to love You. You alone do not *disappoint*. In You alone are hopes realized.

I left my home . . . I pulled my heart to pieces . . . I emptied my soul of all worldly desires . . . I embraced your cross. What are You waiting for, Lord? If what You want is my loneliness, my suffering, and my desolation . . . take it all, Lord. I ask for nothing.

## 173. *God and My Soul*

### Perseverance in Prayer

La Trapa, December 29, 1937

An hour at prayer without a single thought of God. I hardly noticed time was passing. The clock struck five and I'd already been on my knees for an hour . . . What about prayer? I don't know . . . I didn't do it. I was thinking about myself, about my personal suffering, about my memories of the world. What about Jesus? What about Mary? Nothing . . . All I have is selfishness, a little bit of faith, and a great deal of pride . . . I think I'm so important! I hold myself in such esteem!

Poor little thing! Insignificant dust in God's eyes! Since you don't know how to pray fruitfully, learn to humble yourself before Him, and then you'll be more humble before others.

Lord, have mercy on me . . . Yes, I am suffering . . . but I wish my suffering weren't so self-centered. Lord, I want to suffer for the sake of your pain on the cross, for the forgetfulness of humanity, for my own sins and those of others . . . for everything, Lord, but not for my own sake . . . What is my significance among all creation? What am I in Your eyes? . . . What does my hidden life represent within infinite eternity? . . . If I could forget myself, it would be better, Lord.

I have nothing but a refined sense of self-love and, I'll say it again, a great deal of selfishness.

With Mary's help, I will try to do better. I will endeavor to turn to You, Virgin Mary, whenever a memory from the world disturbs me, and offer You a *Salve* for the sake of all those in the world who offend You.

Instead of meditating upon my suffering . . . I will meditate upon gratitude, and love God in my misery.

Even when I get distracted and waste time, I will persevere in prayer.

## *174. God and My Soul*

### Humility

La Trapa, December 31, 1937

I have realized that the most *practical* virtue in order to have peace in community life is humility.

Humility before God helps us to trust, because humility is self-knowledge, and who can expect anything of themselves once they know themselves well? . . . It would be foolish not to expect *everything* from God instead.

Humility imbues our interactions with others with peace. With humility, there are no arguments or jealousies, and it is impossible to be offended . . . Who could offend nothingness itself?

I earnestly beg Mary to teach me this virtue, of which She is an exemplar . . . so humble before God and others.

“Thy will be done”

## 175. *God and My Soul*

### My Vow

La Trapa, January 1, 1938

Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord<sup>1</sup>

I made a vow at prayer this morning. I made a *vow to love Jesus always*.

I have realized what my vocation is. I am not a religious . . . I am not a layman . . . I am nothing. . . Blessed be God, I am nothing but a soul in love with Christ. He wants nothing but my love, and He wants it detached from everything and everyone else.

Virgin Mary, help me keep my vow.

To love Jesus in everything, because of everything, always . . . Only love. A humble, generous, detached, mortified love, in silence . . . May my life be nothing but an act of love.

I can clearly see that it is not the will of God for me to make religious vows or follow the Rule of Saint Benedict in everything. Am I to want what God does not?

Jesus has sent me an incurable disease; it is His will that my pride humble itself before the misery of my flesh. God has sent me this illness. Am I not to love everything that Jesus sends me?

I kiss with great tenderness the blessed hand of God, who gives health when He wills it, and takes it away when He pleases.

As Job said, *shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?*<sup>2</sup> Besides, does any of this keep me from loving Him? . . . No . . . I ought to love Him madly.

A life of love, that is my Rule . . . my vow . . . That is my only reason for living.

1. In 1960, the octave of Christmas was renamed the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

2. Job 2:10.

The year 1938 has begun. What has God prepared for me this year? I don't know . . . Perhaps it doesn't matter . . . It's all the same to me, so long as I do not offend Him . . . I am God's. May He do with me as He wills. Today, I offer Him a new year, which I want to dedicate entirely to a life of sacrifice, self-denial, and detachment, guided only by love for Jesus . . . by a very great, very pure love.

My Lord, I want to love You like nobody else. I want to spend this life with my feet barely touching the ground. No stopping to look around at all this misery, no stopping to dwell on any creature. A heart on fire with divine love, upheld by hope.

Lord, I want to look only up at heaven, where You are waiting for me, where Mary and all the saints and angels are, blessing You for all eternity, having spent their lives on earth loving only Your law and observing Your precepts.

Oh, Lord, I want to love you so much! Help me, Mother!

I must love solitude, for God has placed me in it.

I must *obey* blindly, for God is the one who commands me.

I must *mortify* my senses constantly.

I must have *patience* in community life.

I must exercise *humility*.

I must do everything for God and Mary.