

George Francis X. Schwager

***Bishop Wittmann—Helper of the Afflicted***

Formator of Priests and Friend of Children

Biographical Sketch—Novena/Prayers—Words

Appendix:

Funeral Oration by Canon Melchior Diepenbrock (1833)

*Dedicated with Gratitude to His Excellency,  
Most Reverend Manfred Müller  
Bishop of Regensburg*

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## Preface

Many accounts aptly describe the brisance and complexity of the church's situation in Bavaria in the middle of the nineteenth century. After the drastic events of the Secularization, the bishops, whom historians justifiably assess as “new shepherds,” were faced with significant challenges—especially when compared with the traditional prince bishops in the old imperial church. It is worthy of note that the working paper for the Tenth Ordinary Assembly of the Bishops' Synod, which was held in October 2001, also defined the ministry of bishop from this point of view: “The authority of the bishop is to be understood in light of his ministry as a good shepherd. . . . For good reason, therefore, the Code of Canon Law calls this ministry *munus pastoris* [service of a shepherd] which implies pastoral care.”

Bishop George Michael Wittmann is appropriately characterized as a “new shepherd.” As Bishop of Regensburg, he shaped the diocese, its priests, and its faithful people by means of his life as priest and bishop, his spirituality, and his social dimension. In his rather *quiet* manner, he had a *profound* effect on the diocese. This gifted formator of priests explained to the seminarians entrusted to him that the life of a priest is characterized by *being on a journey*, whereby the priest must always consider himself a servant of God and a servant to others. Here, too, one finds an actual direct link to the working paper for the bishops' synod where we read: “The church's tradition has always compared this responsibility (that is, the ministry of leadership) to two images which, according to the testimony of the Gospel, Jesus himself used—the shepherd and the servant.”

The book, *Bishop Wittmann—Helper of the Afflicted*, is an outstanding opportunity to engross oneself in a biographical sketch of this great bishop of Regensburg and to pray for his intercession. The remarkable sermon in memory of the deceased bishop, which Canon Melchior Diepenbrock, who was later the prince bishop of Breslau, preached in the Regensburg Cathedral, gives the book an additional historical note. In his funeral oration, Canon Diepenbrock sensitively pointed out how Sailer and Wittmann worked together side by side.

I wish to thank George Francis X. Schwager, Cathedral Vicar, and his colleagues in the department responsible for the publication of this book for keeping alive the memory of this saintly bishop and shepherd in the service of Jesus Christ.

Regensburg, November 17, 2001

250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Birth of Bishop Johann Michael Sailer

*Msgr. Dr. Wilhelm Gegenfurtner*  
*Vicar General*

*The priesthood, in its deepest reality, is the priesthood of Christ. It is Christ who offers himself, his Body and Blood, in sacrifice to God the Father, and by this sacrifice makes righteous in the Father's eyes all mankind and, indirectly, all creation. The priest, in his daily celebration of the Eucharist, goes to the very heart of this mystery. For this reason the celebration of the Eucharist must be the most important moment of the priest's day, the center of his life. (John Paul II)<sup>1</sup>*

*"Prayer makes the priest and through prayer the priest becomes himself". . . Christ needs holy priests! Today's world demands holy priests! Only a holy priest can become, in an increasingly secularized world, a resounding witness to Christ and his Gospel. And only thus can a priest become a guide for men and women and a teacher of holiness. People, especially the young, are looking for such guides. A priest can be a guide and teacher only to the extent that he becomes an authentic witness! (John Paul II)<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>. English translation from Pope John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) 75.

<sup>2</sup>. *Ibid.*, 88-89.

## Foreword

A long desired wish on the part of many who venerate George Michael Wittmann, the bishop of Regensburg who died with a reputation for holiness, is fulfilled with the publication of this novena book. Now the intercession of Bishop Wittmann can also be called upon through a common and beloved devotional form, a novena, in which one's intentions are recommended in prayer to God on nine successive days. The novena is to be prayed with faith and trust because Christ promised that confident prayer will be heard. (See *Mark* 11:24.) *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you”* (*Matthew* 7:7-8).

By praying this novena, we will meditatively immerse ourselves into the life of the saintly bishop, spiritual director, and formator of priests, George Michael Wittmann. From this meditation, we will draw strength, consolation, and nourishment for our own life journeys, whereby we will remain conscious that God's providence and love is especially close to us in the hours of trial, temptation, and suffering. The best unmistakable proof for this can be found in the lives of the saints and of those who one day should be considered saints in accordance with the decision of our beloved church.

Praying a novena to the all-powerful God for help and grace, for the power of the Holy Spirit, is a practice and tradition that can be traced to the early church. On nine successive days after Christ's ascension into heaven, the apostles gathered together with Mary, the Mother of God, and prayed intensely for “power from on high” (*Luke* 24:49), which they really received on the ninth day. Of course, the more reverently, humbly, and purely our prayer rises from our lips to the throne of God, the more blessed it will be. For this reason, everyone who prays this novena is advised to receive frequently and devoutly the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion during the nine days.

The saints also had to face hours of trial, which they accepted and withstood with unshakable trust in God. The lives of the saints and of saintly persons will also encourage us to this kind of trust. They will invite us to take up life's crosses and sufferings in the knowledge of God's love and to see in them a sign that God is close to us. Ever since Christ took up his cross and carried it in accordance with the will of God, his Father, it has been a sign of salvation and redemption. Bishop George Michael Wittmann wanted to die beneath the cross because he knew that the cross is the unmistakable sign of Christ and of all who belong to Christ.

At this time, I wish to thank in particular Msgr. Dr. Wilhelm Gegenfurtner, Vicar General of the diocese, for granting the imprimatur and for his appreciative Preface. I also wish to thank my esteemed predecessor in the direction of the Department for Processes of Canonization and Beatification, Msgr. Emmeram H. Ritter, for his thorough study of Bishop Wittmann's cause. You will find his works cited in the List of References. May they invite you to a deeper study of

the life and works of the great bishop and Servant of God. Gratitude is also due to Msgr. Johann B. Lehner, the director of the diocesan archives and honorary canon who researched Wittmann for many years before he died in 1971. Through his tireless research and gathering of valuable testimony, Msgr. Lehner made an inestimable contribution to Bishop Wittmann's cause. A sincere word of recognition is also due to the employees of *Visuelle Medientechnik GmbH* and *Erhardi Druck GmbH* in Regensburg, and above all to Mr. Horst Wurnitzer for the engaging design and format of this book. Not least of all, a cordial and loving thank you to my sister, Frau Marianne Cäcilie Schwager, who, despite her many and diverse professional responsibilities, made crucial contributions to the emergence of this Wittmann Novena Book.

May all who delve into Bishop Wittmann's life, works, and words, grow in appreciation of the dignity and beauty of the Catholic priesthood. May all the friends and admirers of Bishop Wittmann and all who prayerfully turn to this great friend and helper of those who are in anxiety, need, or distress, continue to experience the redeeming power and blessing of the cross of Christ and the helpful intercession of the Servant of God!

Regensburg  
Feast of the Nativity of Mary, September 8, 2001

*George Francis X. Schwager*  
*Cathedral Vicar*

Director of the Department of Canonization and Beatification Processes  
Diocesan Consistory  
Diocese of Regensburg

***Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of Priests, pray for us!***

*"I will flee to Mary who has never abandoned me."* (Bishop Wittmann)

## I. Biographical Sketch

The Servant of God  
**George Michael Wittmann**  
 (1760-1833)

George Michael Wittman, the son of an ironworks owner, was born at the *Finkenhammer* near Pleystein (Upper Palatinate) on January 22, 1760. After completing his studies in Amberg and in Heidelberg, where he obtained a doctorate, he was ordained to the priesthood in Regensburg on December 21, 1782. As a young priest, Wittmann worked in country parishes until 1788, when he was appointed subregent of the diocesan seminary in Regensburg. He then dedicated himself to the education and formation of prospective priests.

In 1802, Wittmann was appointed regent of the seminary, a responsible position which he held for the rest of his life. During this time, he accompanied approximately 1,500 priests to their ordination. In the face of the widespread spirit of the Enlightenment and liberalism, Wittmann upheld in his future priests convictions that were faithful to the church. Throughout thirty years of his life, all his endeavors, sacrifices, and sufferings were for this cause. In his position of responsibility before God and the church, Wittmann's deepest concern was to serve the Catholic priesthood. To this very day, therefore, Bishop Wittmann is considered a great patron of priestly spirituality and a model of a way of life that is truly a priestly way of life. The Servant of God invites us to pray and to sacrifice for the sanctification of priests.

As pastor at the cathedral parish in Regensburg from 1804 until 1829, George M. Wittmann exercised a ministry that was extremely rich in blessing. Wittmann was a very gifted pastor who loved poor people and children in particular and thus became the spiritual director and cofounder of the order of the Poor School Sisters. Wittmann gave the first superior, *Blessed Mary Theresa Gerhardinger*, her pedagogical and ascetical formation.

A significant pastoral concern was to spread among the faithful Sacred Scripture and love for the Word of God.<sup>3</sup> Regent and Cathedral Pastor Wittmann had a thorough knowledge of oriental languages and hoped that, through Sacred Scripture, faith would be strengthened and internalized in both the people and the priests. Thus George Michael Wittmann anticipated far ahead of his

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<sup>3</sup>. See the detailed treatise by Emmeram H. Ritter, *Weihbischof Georg Michael Wittmann: Der Diener Gottes im Dienste der Heiligen Schrift und des Bibelapostolats* [Auxiliary George Michael Wittmann: The Servant of God in the service of Sacred Scripture and the biblical apostolate] (Regensburg, 2000), which emphasizes that the Servant of God was an outstanding exegete and authority on Sacred Scripture, as well as his contributions toward the distribution of the New Testament—which Wittmann translated into German—among the faithful of his times. After detailed study of the available sources, E. H. Ritter rejects in this work the claim that the Servant of God founded his own bible society. Although incorrect and lacking any proof, this assumption is still uncritically accepted today. In 1816, bible societies that were modeled on Protestant societies were forbidden by Pope Pius VII (1800-1823).

time the call of the Second Vatican Council, which hoped to further in all the faithful the love of Sacred Scripture because one can find in the word of God “*strength of faith, food for the soul, and the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life.*”<sup>4</sup>

When Regensburg was bombarded on April 23, 1809, Wittmann risked his life, rescued friend and foe alike from the flames of the burning city, and administered the sacraments to the dying.

A member of the cathedral chapter since 1821, he became auxiliary bishop in 1829. In the same year, he became the cathedral provost and, in 1830, vicar general. In order to unite the diocese with its bishop and to better understand the situation of pastoral care in the parishes, Bishop Johannes Nepomuk von Wolf (1821-1829) and his successor, Bishop Johannes Michael von Sailer (1829-1832) appointed Auxiliary Bishop Wittmann as General Visitor and asked him to make regular extended autumn visitation journeys in the years 1829 through 1832. The detailed, handwritten reports by the Servant of God are still available to us.<sup>5</sup> They provide an informative insight into the pastoral conditions of that time and testify to Bishop Wittmann’s tireless commitment to the salvation of souls, conscientious observance of church discipline, and faithful attachment to the church—a main concern of his pastoral care.

After Bishop Sailer died in 1832, King Louis I (1786-1868) appointed Wittmann as Bishop of Regensburg but, before papal confirmation of the appointment arrived, Wittmann died in the early morning of March 8, 1833. His last words were: “*I will die beneath the cross.*”

Bishop George Michael Wittmann’s last earthly resting place is in the north aisle of the Regensburg Cathedral. When a public, impressive, and still visible tomb was built there for the Servant of God in 1837, the bishop at the time, Francis Xavier von Schwäbl (1833-1841), spoke the following apt words regarding Bishop Wittmann: “*We have lost the father of those who are poor or sick, the consoler of those who suffer, and a devout friend and helper in every need! If, therefore, the shortest sketch of the life of our Lord and Master, which was drafted by the Prince of the Apostles, can be truly applied to a faithful disciple of Jesus, then these same words apply to our departed Bishop Wittmann: ‘He went about doing good for God was with him!’*” (*Acts* 10:38).<sup>6</sup>

Ever since he died, Bishop Wittmann’s tomb has been decorated with flowers and burning candles. On March 7, 1955, his beatification process was opened, and it is still pending in Rome.

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<sup>4</sup>. Second Vatican Council: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 21.

<sup>5</sup>. See Emmeram H. Ritter, *Weihbischof Georg Michael Wittmann als General Visitor für das Bistum Regensburg* [Auxiliary Bishop George Michael Wittmann as general visitor of the diocese of Regensburg] (Regensburg, 1992). This work in particular is highly recommended because the interested reader and researcher of local history will find that it contains a previously untapped source of diocesan and local history. The pastoral situation in numerous localities and parishes during Wittmann’s time is described in detail.

<sup>6</sup>. See Diocesan Consistory, Regensburg, *Causa Michael Wittmann*, Information Process, Session 36, p. 2. (Hereafter cited as BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess.)

In a letter of December 28, 1847, addressed to Canon Weigl, George Brunner, a pastor and historian who died in Deggendorf on July 7, 1882, and knew Bishop Wittmann personally, summarized how significant this saintly bishop was in strengthening the life of the church and preserving the Catholic faith in difficult times, as well as how much God worked through this servant in the church: *“Next to Sailer, Wittmann, whose name is so gladly spoken by the people, was the one who successfully led the church in Bavaria through the marshy sea of Illuminism<sup>7</sup> and saved morality in the diocese of Regensburg to which he belonged and where he lived for forty years. He stood like a rock with all the raging waves breaking upon it, a man worthy of apostolic times, a man who understood those times and then only began to understand completely his own time. If the diocese of Regensburg already differs from neighboring dioceses, it is only due to Wittmann who, despite the storminess of the time, was not satisfied with having formed upright priests but also, with his spirit, left a mark on the entire diocese which is lacking in other dioceses. This shows what grace God granted to the diocese of Regensburg by giving it, in the most dangerous times, a man in Wittmann who not only saved the diocese of Regensburg in the moral respect but whose works also embraced all of Germany and whose blessing continues to have an effect today through the Poor School Sisters. Since Wittmann belonged to everyone, he is also understood by everyone.”<sup>8</sup>*

This description should suffice. May it be for us an invitation to honor with deeper gratitude the Servant of God, Bishop George Michael Wittmann, and, with trust and perseverance, to call upon this formator of priests, friend of children, and helper of the afflicted to intercede with God, not only for our personal intentions, but also for the intentions of the church!

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<sup>7</sup>. *Illuminism* means Enlightenment. As an attitude of mind, it is rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but its effects continue to be perceptible in our times. The followers of the Enlightenment felt that they were the “illuminated,” not by faith but by reason. God was no longer at the center but the human being and reason instead. For the followers of the Enlightenment, only the human being was considered the goal and standard of action. Revelation, supernatural faith, pilgrimages, and traditional forms of devotion were generally disavowed or considered out of date. The Enlightenment and its consequences led to a widespread slackening of Christian life, to frequent, malicious criticism of church institutions, and finally to open rejection of the papal magisterium and its statements.

<sup>8</sup>. See Emmeram H. Ritter, *Wittmann als General Visitator*, pp. 152 ff.

Christ's power is pure forbearance.  
The reed bends and suffers.  
The wind uproots trees,  
The water currents rush in and sweep away everything.  
The reed bends with the flow of the current  
And then stands upright again.  
The sun's burning heat comes;  
The reed remains standing and does not wither.  
The enemy crushes fields and meadows;  
The reed bends but remains standing.

(Bishop Wittmann)

*In his funeral oration given on April 2, 1833, Canon Melchior Diepenbrock paid tribute to George Michael Wittmann in a timeless address in which he also mentioned the above cited words and said: "With his unshakable perseverance in all that is good and holy, Wittmann himself, the silent sufferer, was this reed. It has been snapped off by death; now it will thrive forever in God's presence."*

## II. Novena for the Intercession of the Servant of God

### Bishop George Michael Wittmann

(Nine Days Devotion)

#### First Day: Prayer

Nothing in the life of Bishop George Michael Wittmann is so striking, indeed, so characteristic for him, as his unceasing prayer. Beginning in earliest childhood, he prayed with admirable fidelity. Without intense prayer, his commitment as a pastor, and his beneficial works as regent and bishop would have been unthinkable. Daily—even when he was vicar general—he prayed the entire rosary (fifteen decades), spent two hours in church, and dedicated an hour to contemplative prayer and the reading of Sacred Scripture. This was in addition to his official prayer (Divine Office). Bishop Wittmann’s contemporaries testify that his entire manner and appearance were “living prayer.”

As believing Christians, we know that all power and all the blessing of life are hidden in prayer. The apostle, St. James, gives us the promise: “*The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful*” (James 5:16). Therefore, let us never grow slack in our prayer, and let us turn to our heavenly Father in all our concerns, cares, and needs. The Servant of God hoped for a great response and many blessings from his nightly prayer when he prayed for the bishop, for priests, for the schools, but especially for the enemies of Christ. Bishop Wittmann was especially appreciative of the prayer of the psalms and wrote his own explanation of them so that they could be more easily understood. He also expected much from the prayers expressed and recommended to the living God during Mass.

Like Bishop Wittmann, may our entire life be characterized by the spirit of prayer!

#### Novena Prayer

O God, throughout his entire life you led your faithful servant, Bishop George Michael Wittmann, on the path of exemplary piety and virtue. Grant peace to families and nations, renew young people in purity and fear of God, and give Christians an ardent love of the Blessed Sacrament and childlike trust in the intercession of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin and Mother of God.

Convert those who do not believe in you, those who hold mistaken beliefs, and those who turn away from you in sin. Be gracious and merciful to the souls of the faithful departed. Hear our prayer and, through the intercession of the Servant of God, Bishop Wittmann, grant us the grace . . . for which we fervently implore through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father*

**Words of Bishop Wittmann:**

*“Pray, work, and suffer. In the spiritual life, these three things cannot and may not be separated.”<sup>9</sup>*

*“If we want to have God’s gift, the Spirit of God, we must pray for it. Chastity cannot survive without prayer. The spirit and power of God come only through prayer.”<sup>10</sup>*

*“In all doubtful matters, I receive definite and reliable counsel only in the Sacrifice of the Mass. I do not remember ever having been disappointed by counsel that I obtained during Holy Mass.”<sup>11</sup>*

*“The more nightly prayer, the more grace.”<sup>12</sup>*

## **Second Day: Service**

For his ministry as bishop, George Michael Wittmann chose as a motto, “to pray and to serve.” He wanted to express what the dignity of the episcopal office meant to him and how he strove to fulfill it. These words, “to pray and to serve,” gave him strength to face the grueling tasks of his office with great willingness of heart.

In the troubles and cares of daily life, the saintly bishop’s motto and program will become for us a source of strength and consolation. One becomes great by serving, not by ruling. This wisdom is from God. Jesus said: *“Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave”* (Matthew 20:26-27). As cathedral pastor, Michael Wittmann called himself the “parish servant.”

Can we claim that we give such selfless service as well? All church offices can be understood and exercised only with the spirit of service. On the night before his suffering and death, Jesus gave us an unforgettable example of service during the Last Supper. By washing the feet of his disciples, he made himself a slave of all and, in his body and blood under the forms of bread and wine, Jesus still wants to be the servant of all of us as often as we celebrate Eucharist

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<sup>9</sup>. Johann B. Lehner, *Michael Wittmann, Bischof von Regensburg* [Michael Wittmann, Bishop of Regensburg] (Kevelaer, 1937) 101.

<sup>10</sup>. See Michael Sintzel, ed., *Des gottseligen Bischofes G. Michael Wittmann Exercitien für Priester und Priesteramtskandidaten* [The saintly Bishop G. Michael Wittmann’s retreats for priests and for candidates for the priesthood] (Straubing, 1845) 24 ff.

<sup>11</sup>. See Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken des frommen Bischofes Michael Wittmann von Regensburg* [Life and works of the devout bishop Michael Wittmann of Regensburg] (Landshut, 1859) 267.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ibid.*, 263.

and receive his body in Holy Communion as food for eternal life. Through this most holy sacrament, the strength to give inconspicuous, selfless service grows within us.

Let us pray, therefore, that the spirit of genuine Christian service will not languish. Let us pray that in our families, in religious communities, and at workplaces, the dignity of service for the sake of Christ will be recognized and fostered anew.

### **Novena Prayer (p. 12)**

#### **Words of Bishop Wittmann:**

*“I will be a servant in all things all day long.”*<sup>13</sup>

*“In my parish duties, I was a servant without pay; in my school duties, I was a servant without pay or praise. In the seminary, I served without hope of success.”*<sup>14</sup>

*“O Lord, you have appointed me as housefather for the entire diocese. Each day, therefore, I want to be the servant of all. Prostrate at their feet, I accept their commands, their abuse, their slaps in the face, their blows, and my expulsion.”*<sup>15</sup>

### **Third Day: Penance**

Only one who has the Spirit of Christ can have the proper spirit of penance. We will turn our eyes toward Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who emptied himself and humbled himself, even to death on a cross. (See *Philippians 2:7 ff.*) This view invites us to lead a life of penance. We may not forget that the virtue of penance makes us like Christ. This alone makes it worth striving for the spirit of penance. Jesus carried the cross to Mount Calvary for all of us and he calls us to follow him.

Today many become completely captivated by blind craving for pleasure. They no longer find any meaning in the message of the cross or in the necessity of atonement and penance. Penance is vicarious love, however, and what the apostle Paul proclaimed to us is applicable here: *“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us it is the power of God. For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified.”* (See *1 Corinthians 1:18, 23.*)

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<sup>13.</sup> Johann B. Lehner, *Michael Wittmann*, 67.

<sup>14.</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15.</sup> *Ibid.*, 67 ff.

Bishop Wittmann did penance for himself and for those entrusted to him. In the spirit of forgiveness, he willingly bore hostility, insult, and abuse, which he often had to experience from ungrateful petitioners or adversaries.<sup>16</sup> He saw all of this as the way to imitate Christ.

Let us pray to the Servant of God for the grace of a repentant heart which detests sin and is willing to be sanctified. Let us pray to him for the strength to accept in a spirit of penance and humility the unpleasant occurrences, trials, and illnesses of our life, for they will help to free us from false attachment to the things of earth and to seek God in all things.

### **Novena Prayer (p. 13)**

#### **Words of Bishop Wittmann**

*“Nor should we fail to practice some works of penance. Voluntary acts of penance include regular sleep, solitude, withdrawal from worldly things, and patience with tribulations. The love of God will inspire what is pleasing to God.”*<sup>17</sup>

*“Finally I want to add something about the sword of which Simeon spoke when he took the Child Jesus into his arms and said to Mary: ‘A sword will pierce your soul’ (Luke 2:34-35). It will be the same for anyone who follows Jesus.”*<sup>18</sup>

*“If we are judged badly, how should we respond? According to the teachings of Jesus, we should put up with bad judgment, hold fast to him alone, and leave the rest to him.”*<sup>19</sup>

### **Fourth Day: Love**

What was the center of Bishop Wittmann’s life? Love must be our response. His tireless engagement for the salvation of souls, his courageous defense of the rights of God and of the church, his unceasing penance and striving for sanctification—all of this came from the center of his heart, from love. Love is patient, love is kind, love is not pompous or inflated. Love does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury. (See 1 *Corinthians* 13:4 ff.)

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<sup>16</sup>. An incident described in Mittermüller’s biography is significant here. Once in 1812, when Wittmann was spending time with children on the street, a royal city official passed by and began to sneer at him. A priest who was accompanying Wittmann became angry, but the Servant of God answered: “Let us rejoice if we are despised. They also despised Christ. The more the world despises us, the more we can follow Christ.” (See Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken*, 122.)

<sup>17</sup>. See Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 259.

<sup>18</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>. *Ibid.*, 31.

We find all these characteristics of true, Christian love in the life of the saintly bishop. Since they characterized his ministry, his works were so beneficial for those who were entrusted to him and became an extraordinary song of praise to the Triune God. We could enumerate many examples of Bishop Wittmann putting love into practice—by ministering in country parishes when he was a young priest, by practicing forbearance in the formation of his seminarians, by patiently bearing false accusations, and by his charity for people who were poor or ill. He was willing to give everything for the children and truly became their spiritual father.

There is no more moving image of Bishop Wittmann than the one in which a young boy gratefully and respectfully kisses his hand. It is one of the best known pictures of Bishop Wittmann because it shows us a person whose kind expression was exclusively for those who were small and in need of help. When we are in need, this is also an invitation to us to turn to Bishop Wittmann, whose his kind expression continues to be for all the suffering and afflicted people today.

### **Novena Prayer (p. 13)**

#### **Words of Bishop Wittmann:**

*“Who is deeply moved to practice works of mercy? Anyone who loves God, for those who love God are different interiorly. Therefore, love of God and love of neighbor must be one.”<sup>20</sup>*

*“As far as my love for Jesus is concerned, I have gained the certainty, or rather the confidence, that I am not without love. I will not demand anything more than to be slaughtered as a sacrificial lamb of love.”<sup>21</sup>*

*“I fear that, if we (priests) do not have the fortune of dying as a sacrifice of love for our neighbor, only a few of us will be blessed.”<sup>22</sup>*

*“We priests should be attentive to poor people. We must begin with this class of people who were so highly recommended by God. All those who have achieved great things have remained close to poor people.”<sup>23</sup>*

*“If we are judged badly, we are in even greater need of holding on to God alone.”*

(Bishop Wittmann)

<sup>20</sup>. See Johann B. Lehner, *Michael Wittmann*, 187.

<sup>21</sup>. See Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken*, 253.

<sup>22</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>23</sup>. *Ibid.*, 147.

## **Fifth Day: Silence**

Each year for more than thirty years, George Michael Wittmann spent a few days in silence and reflection in the hermitage known as Frauenbrünnl near Bad Abbach. He made his annual retreat there and, in silence and prayer, used the few days left to him to refashion his life before God. The reports and notes from his retreats allow us to see into the depth of his interior life and union with God. In silence before God, he recognized the truths of faith and what God wanted from him in his pastoral responsibilities and offices.

Bishop Wittmann may be described as a man of silence. For him, nothing was more unpleasant than having the quiet of his conscience disturbed by empty talk and frivolous conversation. His interior union with God and his way of life before God were the fruit of his silence. He silently bore humiliations and attacks against his strictness with himself, and he found refuge and consolation in God alone. He knew that Jesus also remained silent before Pontius Pilate and he recognized that the strength of love rests in silence.

Mittermüller, his biographer, reported that when Cathedral Pastor and Regent Wittmann went to administer the sacraments to the sick at night or returned from visiting the sick, he was often attacked and abused. Wittmann never spoke about these occurrences and passed over them in silence.<sup>24</sup> He wanted to be like his Divine Master in all things. In his sparing use of words, solitude, and seclusion, he found a very effective means toward growth in holiness and imitation of Christ.

Rediscovering these spiritual helps is also necessary in our times. In order to recognize the blessing that lies hidden in silence as ordained by God, let us be inspired by the life and example of Bishop Wittmann and pray for the spirit of silence and inwardness for ourselves and for those who are entrusted to us.

### **Novena Prayer (p. 13)**

#### **Words of Bishop Wittmann**

*“Remaining indifferent about worldly occurrences is also a way to be silent.”<sup>25</sup>*

*“Speaking much contradicts love.”<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup>. Ibid., 155.

<sup>25</sup>. See Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 232.

<sup>26</sup>. See Ibid., 233.

*“I have firm confidence that Jesus himself gave me faith because he looks down upon me during Mass, because I hate the splendor and talkativeness of the world, and because, in every difficulty, I look up to God alone.”<sup>27</sup>*

*“The more remorse I have, the more love and repentance I bring forth in penitents. If I am very sparse with my words, and if I awaken with sighs during the night and cling to my angel, grace will work through me.”<sup>28</sup>*

### **Sixth Day: Listening**

For Bishop Wittmann, listening and obeying were one. He heard the voice of God when he listened to the voice of his conscience which was schooled in the commandments of God and of the church. In the voice of God, he found direction for what he had to proclaim as God’s will to those entrusted to him. His contemporaries especially remembered his views, which were completely aligned with those of the church, and his absolute obedience to the precepts and teachings of the church. These were Bishop Wittmann’s fundamental distinguishing characteristics.

True freedom is not found in the fulfillment of our wishes, which only too often rise from selfish desires. Nor do we become free by placing ourselves at the center of our thinking and feeling—which was proclaimed by Bishop Wittmann’s contemporaries who were filled with the spirit of the Enlightenment.

True freedom is found only by listening to the will of God. Bishop Wittmann himself did this every fifteen minutes of the day, whereby he obtained interior freedom which finds its security in God. Since the will of God is nowhere so clearly perceptible as in the words of the bible, Bishop Wittmann recommended that both the priests and the faithful frequently read Sacred Scripture so that, through obedience to God’s love which is revealed in the words of Sacred Scripture, faith would be internalized.

In addition to his living expression of the observance of church discipline, Bishop Wittmann’s obedience to the church was also expressed by faithfully praying the breviary, by the conscientious observance of celibacy, and by wearing clerical dress. In this spirit, he also trained the seminarians who were entrusted to him. As a highly regarded spiritual director, he said that, if one submits to the directives of his confessor, quickly carries out the orders of his superiors,

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<sup>27</sup>. BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 30, 2.

<sup>28</sup>. Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken*, 158.

and promptly fulfills the duties of his vocation, obedience can be practiced without any difficulty.<sup>29</sup> “Christ was obedient to death, even death on a cross.” (See *Philippians* 2:8.) This obedience by the Son of God was Bishop Wittmann’s whole life. In obedience, he accepted all the church offices and titles which his authorities entrusted to him. He himself never sought any of them.

In order to obtain true freedom of mind and heart, let us prepare ourselves to accept in faith-filled obedience what God wills and ordains.

### **Novena Prayer (p. 13)**

#### **Words of Bishop Wittmann**

*“We should also suffer with complete submission to the divine will. Anything that we must put up with is only a trifle in comparison to the suffering of Christ. We also receive new vitality in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in prayer.”*<sup>30</sup>

*“Since time immemorial, the entire Christian Church was convinced of the necessity of obedience. Christ himself, whose nature was completely free of sin, distinguished between his divine and human will: ‘Not my will but yours be done.’”*<sup>31</sup>

*“It is a sin against obedience (a) if, at the altar, we do not observe the precepts of the church exactly and in the smallest detail; (b) if we are disobedient with regard to praying the Divine Office; (c) if we are disobedient to the bishop’s directives; (d) if we do not observe the laws of the church; (e) if we neglect the laws of the church regarding clothing. The clothing prescribed for priests keeps us from associating with the world. It is a sin against obedience (f) if we neglect various church customs, for example, folding our hands, and (g) if we do not have a daily order.”*<sup>32</sup>

“Only the pastor who prays will know how to teach others to pray and bring God’s grace on those in his pastoral charge, thereby evincing conversions, more fervent resolution for life, priestly vocations, and special consecration.” Congregation for the Clergy: *The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium: Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacraments, and Leader of the Community*, Chapter 3, Number 21.

<sup>29</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>30</sup>. See Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 226 ff.

<sup>31</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>32</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 66.

## Seventh Day: Guidance

George Michael Wittmann was a gifted spiritual director. He accompanied people of every state and every age on their journey to God. Early in the morning, he could be found in the confessional in order to free souls from the burden of sins, to give spiritual direction, and to accompany them in their interior life. How much light and blessing he provided through his sermons which came from the heart, his countless hours of religious instruction in school, and his consoling words at the sickbed! What an outstanding quality of direction he demonstrated in the formation of 1,500 seminarians on their journey to ordination!

The noblest fruit of his guidance and spiritual direction was the daughter of a shipmaster from Stadtamhof, Caroline Gerhardinger, who later became Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus, the foundress of a religious congregation. Her life work, the founding of the Congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame, would have been unthinkable without the spiritual influence of Bishop Wittmann, her spiritual director. The saintly bishop became the formator and mentor of one who was declared Blessed. What a wonderful synergy of grace! Should we not praise God for this?

Let us pray that, through the intercession of Bishop Wittmann, God's Holy Spirit will form generous and responsible people who, as models of a holy way of life that is pleasing to God, will light the way for others. Let us pray in particular for good parents and teachers who will accompany their children in life and set before them an example of loyalty and faith. Not least of all, let us pray for saintly priests who, in the spirit of Bishop Wittmann, will lead souls to God and, following the example of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, will guide them to the source of living water which is prepared for us in the sacraments of the church.

### Novena Prayer (p. 13)

#### Words of Bishop Wittmann

*“The goal of my prayers and endeavors is to give the young priests a spirit of repentance in prayer, poverty, and the complete sacrifice of their lives.”<sup>33</sup>*

*“It must be our lifelong rule that, with unwavering trust in God, we will persevere in the resolutions we have made in prayer and reflection. Without this rule, we will not be suitable for anything because we will vacillate in everything.”<sup>34</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup>. Johann B. Lehner, *Michael Wittmann*, 94.

<sup>34</sup>. See Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken*, 166.

*“You will find counsel with the one who knows the future—with God. Consult with God in nightly prayer and in Holy Mass.”*<sup>35</sup>

### **Eighth Day: Unity**

To bring people together in unanimity, peace, and love was the lifelong endeavor of the Servant of God. Bishop Wittmann’s highest goal was the union of souls with God. Day and night, he worked for this cause, often to the point of exhaustion. He knew that only a soul which is united with God will experience deep peace, a peace that will safeguard us from hatred and discord. For this reason, he tried to bring about unity and peace, not only in the families of his parish, but also among future priests by planting in their hearts a love for the church.

The visitation journeys which the Servant of God made when he served as auxiliary bishop were seen as a means toward uniting the priests of the diocese with their bishop and an opportunity to hear firsthand about their cares and concerns in pastoral work.

Bishop Wittmann was never vindictive toward his enemies. When there was danger of war, his pastoral commitment was for both friend and foe. When Regensburg was bombarded in 1809, he provided priestly services to both the enemy soldiers and the native population without distinction of persons.

The zealous shepherd of souls was especially concerned about the proper unity in faith. He never considered bringing about unity in faith at the expense of purity of faith. He saw a common ground where separated brothers and sisters were already brought closer together in faith and could even be reunited in their love for the word of God in Sacred Scripture which has been entrusted to the members of Christian denominations.

One of Bishop Wittmann’s greatest contributions to unity was that of bringing together the Bavarian bishops who were unable to agree in the prevailing conflict regarding the question of mixed marriages. By word and example, the Servant of God convinced his brother bishops and, by his personal engagement, brought them to unity in faithfulness to the Roman pope.

### **Novena Prayer (p. 13)**

#### **Words of Bishop Wittmann:**

*“The Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, the victor over all enemies will soon unite all the scattered lambs into one!”*<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>. Ibid., 167.

<sup>36</sup>. Ibid., 180.

*“I will come to the priests as a servant who is ready to wash the feet of each of them so that they will be united with their bishop.”<sup>37</sup>*

*“As one, let us steadfastly adhere to the head (the pope); otherwise the evil spirit will have power over us.”<sup>38</sup>*

### **Ninth Day: Fulfillment**

In death, human life finds its fulfillment in God. As Christians, this is our faith which we proclaim to the world. This faith gives consolation because we know that death does not mean the end but rather the beginning of life in God. Everything that grace has laid as a foundation in our life can come to fulfillment in death. For each of us, the days of this life will one day come to an end. May God grant that they will be completed in the state of blessedness, in the Beatific Vision of the eternal glory of God. *“I am convinced that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us”* (Romans 8:18). With these words, St. Paul expressed his hope for eternal life, and, from these words, Bishop Wittmann obtained the strength of an indestructible hope.

When one of her sons or daughters passes into the light of the living God, the church prays, *“Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones”* (Psalm 116-15). The death of the Servant of God, Bishop George Michael Wittmann, was also a “precious death” in the eyes of God. When his days were coming to an end and he felt that death was near, he asked for the grace of the Last Rites. He had a crucifix set up and he asked to be placed on the floor beneath it. Extremely patient in his suffering, he lay on straw beneath the large crucifix in his room so that he would be ready to return his soul to Almighty God. His last words were: *“I am a Christian and I will die beneath the cross.”*

Let us also pray that we will be granted the grace of living and dying with complete submission to God’s will. In all our joys and sufferings, let us live in such a way that one day our life will be fulfilled in the glory of eternal life with God. Through his death and resurrection, Christ has shown us the way to this unchanging life. This is our consolation in misfortune and suffering, and it strengthens us to master life and death in a Christian manner. Bishop Wittmann will be at our side to help us. He will bring our intentions to God and help us so that we will not lose the most precious possession, the possession of eternal life.

### **Novena Prayer (p. 13)**

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<sup>37</sup>. Ibid., 204.

<sup>38</sup>. Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 72.

### Words of Bishop Wittmann

*“I am a Christian and I will die beneath the cross.”*<sup>39</sup>

*“I am now ending my miserable life. God is taking me. I trust in God’s mercy.”*<sup>40</sup>

*“I can do nothing more, but I trust that God will be merciful to me. Let us pray for one another in life and in death.”*<sup>41</sup>

*“Those who, with repentant hearts, offer their bitter sufferings to God will have great consolation and joy when they appear for judgment. Those who good-naturedly bear suffering and the cross here on earth will taste something of their future heavenly bliss.”*<sup>42</sup>

*“It must be our lifelong rule that, with unwavering trust in God, we will persevere in the resolutions we have made in prayer and reflection. Without this rule, we will not be suitable for anything because we will vacillate in everything.”* (Bishop Wittmann)

### Important Information

In order to support the beatification process for the Servant of God, Bishop George Michael Wittmann, and to hasten the cause, we ask the faithful who turn to Bishop Wittmann for help and attribute the answer to their prayers to the intercession of the Servant of God, to send a detailed written report to the director of the Department of Canonization and Beatification Process at the Diocesan Consistory for the Diocese of Regensburg. His address is as follows:

H. H. Domvikar Georg Schwager  
Schwarze-Bären-Straße 3  
D-93047 Regensburg

(Fax: 0941/57003)

Attention is also drawn to the fact that, on the eighth of each month, a Mass is

<sup>39</sup>. Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken*, 246.

<sup>40</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 23, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup>. See Ibid., 4.

<sup>42</sup>. Michael Wittmann, Bishop of Regensburg: *Predigten über die vier letzten Dinge des Menschen, über die Unvollständigkeit unserer Buße, und über die Standespflichten der Christen. Nebst zwei Charfreitagspredigten, hrs. von einem katholischen Geistlichen* [Sermons on the four last things, the incompleteness of our penance, and the professional duties of Christians, with two additional sermons given on Good Friday, edited by a Catholic priest] (Regensburg, 1849) 50.

offered by the director of the Department for Canonization and Beatification Processes for “all the intentions recommended to Bishop Wittmann.” You can also send your prayer intentions to the address given above so that they will be included in the Holy Sacrifice.

Finally, it is cordially requested that you would spread the veneration of Bishop George Michael Wittmann, Helper of the Afflicted, and, if possible, that you would pray daily for his beatification. May God soon hear the united prayer of so many faithful admirers!

*Donations for the furthering of the beatification process for Bishop Wittmann can be sent to:*

Bischöfliches Konsistorium Regensburg  
Account 110 1765 (BLZ 750 903 00)  
LIGA Bank, Regensburg

Donation Purpose: Bishop Wittmann’s Cause

*We are grateful for every donation, no matter how small,  
and say a heartfelt “May God reward you.”*

*“God may do with me whatever is pleasing to God.”*

(Bishop Wittmann)

**Daily Prayer for the Beatification of the Servant of God,  
Bishop George Michael Wittmann**

Triune God, Crown of All Holiness,  
you continue to raise up new saints in your church.

We ask that you would allow your servant,

Bishop George Michael Wittmann,

to be raised to the honor of the altar soon so that, before your throne,  
he will be a model and intercessor for bishops, priests, and the faithful,  
and especially for those in charge of seminaries and parishes,  
so that, through him, you, Almighty God who lives and reigns forever,  
will be glorified even more.

Amen.

### III. Prayers and Words

#### a. Prayers

##### **For the Bishop**

Lord Jesus Christ, shepherd and head of your church, give our bishop the help and strength of your blessing so that he will inspire us by his zeal, be a model for us by his way of life, support us by his love, strengthen us by his patience, preserve us in the joy of the Holy Spirit, bless us by his prayer, give us good directives by his teaching, and unite us into Your holy people whose worship in spirit and in truth will be purer. (Johann Michael Sailer, *Gotteslob*, 27, 3)

##### **For Priests**

O Jesus, eternal Priest, keep your priests within the shelter of Your Sacred Heart where no one may touch them. Keep unstained their anointed hands which daily touch Your Sacred Body. Keep unsullied their lips, daily purpled with your Precious Blood. Keep pure and unearthly their hearts, sealed with the sublime mark of the priesthood. Let Your holy love surround them and shield them from the world's contagion. Bless their labors with abundant fruit, and may the souls to whom they minister be their joy and consolation here and, in heaven, their beautiful and everlasting crown. Amen. (This prayer is attributed to St. Therese of Lisieux.)

##### **For New and Holy Vocations to the Priesthood**

Holy Father, eternal source of existence and love, who, in living man, show the splendor of your glory, and who put in his heart the seed of your call, let no one, by reason of our negligence, ignore or lose this gift, but may everyone walk, with wholehearted generosity, towards the realization of your Love.

Lord Jesus, who in your pilgrimage along the roads of Palestine, chose and called the apostles and entrusted to them their task of preaching the Gospel, feeding the faithful and celebrating divine worship, ensure that today, too, your Church may not lack numerous holy priests, who can bring to all the fruits of your death and resurrection.

Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the Church with the constant outpouring of your gifts, place into the hearts of those called to the consecrated life a deep-rooted and resolute passion for the Kingdom, so that with a generous and unconditioned "yes," they may place their entire existence at the service of the Gospel.

Most holy Virgin, who without hesitation offered yourself to the Almighty for the carrying out of his plan of salvation, pour trust into the hearts of young people so that there may always be zealous pastors who are able to guide Christian people on the way of life, and consecrated souls who will know how to witness, in chastity, poverty, and obedience, to the freeing presence of your risen Son. Amen. (Quoted from Pope John Paul II, Message of the Holy Father for the XXXVIII World Day of Prayer for Vocations, May 6, 2001, the Fourth Sunday of Easter)

##### **To Mary, the Mother of Priests**

Mary, full of grace and Mother of grace, protect your priestly sons who, like you, are called to be collaborators of the Spirit who causes Jesus to be born in the hearts of the faithful. Teach them to be faithful dispensers of the mysteries of God during this anniversary of the birth of your

Son, so that with your help they may open the way of reconciliation to sinners, make the Eucharist the summit of their lives and of the lives of those entrusted to them.

Mary, Morning Star of the Third Millennium, continue to guide the priests of Jesus Christ in following your example of love of God and love of neighbor. May they know how to be true pastors. May they guide the footsteps of all men to your Son, true light enlightening all men (*John* 1: 9). May priests and through them, all God's people, listen lovingly to his call on the eve of a new millennium in the history of salvation: "Do what he tells you" (*John* 2:5). The Vicar of Christ tells us that "with renewed force, the year 2000 should echo the proclamation of the truth: *Ecce natus est nobis Salvator Mundi.*" (Quoted from Congregation for the Clergy, The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium, Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacraments, and Leader of the Community, Conclusion)

### **b. Words of the Servant of God, Bishop G. M. Wittmann**

#### ***On Unshakable Trust in God***

*"Christians entrust themselves into the hands of God and know that, with God, the hairs of their heads are counted."*<sup>43</sup>

*"If Jesus allows me only to be at his side, he will be there and will be victorious. Jesus is the Lamb who was slain and the victorious Lion of Judah."*<sup>44</sup>

*"As long as the world exists, passions will be at work. Nevertheless, the world is not ruled by passions, but by the Lamb who has overcome the world. You are feeling the world's battle against Christ; it must be so. Jesus has spoken and he will keep his word: "I will always be with you until the end of time."*<sup>45</sup>

*"You write about threats to our Catholic faith. I trust that Jesus will preserve the church. God allows the storm to come: 'See to it that you are not alarmed.'"*<sup>46</sup>

*"Whoever knows Christ and his power should not be afraid, but should suffer and work quietly instead. Whatever stands before God will also be supported from the outside."*<sup>47</sup>

*"I thank you and I trust in your mercy, your blood, and your wounds. I will thank you now and for all eternity because you have mercifully helped me, a poor sinner."*<sup>48</sup>

#### ***On Patiently Bearing Sufferings***

*"We must also be willing to bear some discomfort, for example, the weather. We must continue to follow a definite daily schedule. We must have a definite order in sleep,*

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<sup>43</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 33, 5.

<sup>44</sup>. See Ibid., 6.

<sup>45</sup>. See Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>. See Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 34, 3.

<sup>48</sup>. See Ibid., 4.

*nourishment, clothing, and lodging. What is the purpose of so much prayer, reading, and study? To prove our perseverance in the many temptations and afflictions which befall us.*"<sup>49</sup>

### **On Prayer**

*"Whoever (as a priest) does not pray the breviary is an unbeliever."<sup>50</sup> Of course, it is often difficult when one is away and must pray at night. Just be faithful! God will reward this faithfulness with blessed joy!"<sup>51</sup>*

### **On Prayer in School**

*"Teachers who are too proud to pray will come up against the children's guardian angels."<sup>52</sup>*

*"Until death, abandon yourself to what God ordains!"*

(Bishop Wittmann)

### **On the Virtue of Hope**

*"I do not think that I have ever placed my hope in human beings. In my labors, especially in the seminary, in the school, on the teaching chair, in the confessional, in the church, in supporting poor people, my greatest hope is in you alone, O Jesus. It seems to me that I have no trust in money, honor, or my own cleverness, but I am still much too afraid of other people. I desire to walk through the streets without giving or receiving recognition; I also desire the poorest clothing."<sup>53</sup>*

Jesus Christ said, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for the harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way." (See *Luke*, 10:2 ff.)

<sup>49</sup>. See Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 227.

<sup>50</sup>. Formerly the priests' prayer book was called the breviary. Since the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, this prayer is called the Liturgy of the Hours and sanctifies the various times of the day. The psalms of David form the nucleus and, together with hymns, readings from Sacred Scripture, and texts from the teachings of the saints, they constitute the Liturgy of the Hours, the official prayer of the church.

<sup>51</sup>. See Johann B. Lehner, *Michael Wittmann*, 102.

<sup>52</sup>. *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>53</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 33, 3 ff.

(1) *“We would sin against hope if we would be timid in reproaching ourselves for the many infidelities and offenses against God which we find in our daily examination of conscience, and if we would be timid on our deathbed, when the evil enemy will reproach us for the number of our sins. Perhaps our offenses will be innumerable, and we must firmly hope in Christ. On the other hand, we may not presume to hope in God because, twice, Christ emphatically impressed on us, ‘if you do not repent’ (Luke 13:3, 5).*

(2) *“We would sin against hope if we would be timid in the fulfillment of the duties of our vocation. God can do whatever he wants with our works.*

(3) *“We would sin against hope if we would be timid during the storms which are befalling the church. We have seen an entire neighboring kingdom fall away from the faith, two popes die in prison, and dioceses destroyed with the stroke of a pen. Despite all this, Christ still reigns.”<sup>54</sup>*

*“The courts of God are just; I ask God for steadfastness. I will gladly be an offering for the holy church, and I cherish the living hope that, in the deep currents of water that are streaming toward us, the local church will remain Catholic.”<sup>55</sup>*

### **On Love**

*“It is very important that we love God, our Lord and Creator, in the manner asked of us. Jesus says: ‘Whoever observes my commandments is the one who loves me.’ Therefore, if we live according to God’s will, follow God’s holy teachings, and keep God’s commandments, then we truly love God. We will be loved by God, and we will reap grace and blessing from God.”<sup>56</sup>*

*“Signs of the love of God dwelling in us are prayer and joy in the things of God, striving after true knowledge of God and self, having contempt and disdain for all temporal things, and having a deep longing for eternal things.”<sup>57</sup>*

*“Father of Divine Love! Give me a heart filled with zeal and devotion, filled with longing and love for you, so that, in all things, I will seek only you.”<sup>58</sup>*

### **On Reading and Contemplating Sacred Scripture**

*“If exegesis is to benefit the people, it must be presented in the state of grace.”<sup>59</sup>*

*“Read Sacred Scripture with zeal and humility! If you are in need of a truth, God will mercifully reveal it to you!”<sup>60</sup>*

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<sup>54</sup>. See Ibid., 4.

<sup>55</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 34, 2.

<sup>56</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 35, 3.

<sup>57</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>. See Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>. See Johann B. Lehner, *Michael Wittmann*, 133.

<sup>60</sup>. Ibid., 133 ff.

*“Those who are not well-grounded in blessedness or knowledge will not benefit from reading Sacred Scripture. They, as well as others, will be harmed instead because they neither understand nor know how to apply scripture. Since the Holy Spirit does not dwell within them, they cannot read scripture with the balm of the Holy Spirit and will derive no benefit from it. On the contrary, anyone can find anything he or she wants in scripture and, by reading it, those who still lack an education and a foundation in piety will perhaps be confirmed in their errors and vices instead of turning away from them. Moreover, after reading scripture in this manner, they will feel superior and, believing that they know everything, will tempt or confuse others. If Sacred Scripture is read only by devout and humble people who can profit from it, it will also be of great benefit to the common good. For this reason, pastors or confessors will not advise every person whom they want to lead to God to read Sacred Scripture. On the contrary, they will keep defiant and arrogant people from reading it until, by giving up their vices and accepting blessed humility, they have prepared the spirit for reading.”<sup>61</sup>*

*“Sacred Scripture cannot be understood unless one appreciates the spirit of the writer. Only one who is devout can be a proper appraiser of the devout spirit.”<sup>62</sup>*

*“In Sacred Scripture, many things about the sacred writers are shrouded in obscurity. Without divine instruction, therefore, no one can understand it.”<sup>63</sup>*

*“If you want to understand Sacred Scripture, then keep your heart burning with divine love and drive all darkness (defeat) and lethargy from your spirit.”<sup>64</sup>*

*“Those who want to interpret Sacred Scripture must live in moderation and silence. All haughtiness or longing for awards, places of honor, riches, and great delights must be set aside in order to preserve the intent of serving God alone.”<sup>65</sup>*

*“If it is said that a mystical sense is hidden in the elements of Sacred Scripture, then even trifles are awe-inspiring. Since the mystical sense is very dubitable, however, Sacred Scripture must be read with greater humility, and, due to our ignorance, we must plead to God for enlightenment.”<sup>66</sup>*

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<sup>61</sup>. See Michael Wittmann, *Katholische Prinzipien von der heiligen Schrift. Aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt von dem Herausgeber der Werke des heiligen Kirchenvaters Johannes Klimakus* [Catholic principles of Sacred Scripture. Translated from Latin by the editor of the works of the church father, St. John Climacus] (Landshut, 1834) 146 ff. The statement given above is even more astonishing, since Bishop Wittmann was known as the great patron of the reading of Sacred Scripture and the distribution of bibles in the entire German-speaking area which stretched far beyond the borders of the diocese of Regensburg. From his own experience as an expert on the spiritual life and a zealous pastor, however, he knew the danger of false interpretation of Sacred Scripture which was not in accord with the teachings of the church.

<sup>62</sup>. Ibid., 133.

<sup>63</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>. Ibid., 136.

<sup>65</sup>. See Ibid., 137.

<sup>66</sup>. See Ibid., 269 ff.

*“Incidentally, all who have the leisure or the duty to study Sacred Scripture see how necessary it is to read diligently the ancient fathers.<sup>67</sup> Since the Spirit of Jesus Christ, blessed instruction, steadfastness that cannot be shaken by any adversity, concern for the salvation of the souls of others, and zeal in one’s own mortification come from the reading of Sacred Scripture, this reading is like a prayer.”<sup>68</sup>*

*“The cross, formerly despised, now shines on imperial crowns.” (Bishop Wittmann)*

### ***On Veneration of the Holy Angels***

*“O good angel, to whom I have been entrusted by God, angel of peace, angel of prayer, angel of tears (penance), angel of chastity, and insurmountable strength in battle, I would like to enumerate what you have done for me, but I could only mention a hundredth of it.”<sup>69</sup>*

*“We do not know the future. The angel whom we allow to guide us has better knowledge of the future. I have never regretted the resolutions which I have made in prayer, even if, now and then, the immediate results seem to be adverse. By professing Jesus and the Catholic faith, I hope to withstand all adversity.”<sup>70</sup>*

### ***On Christian Death***

*“There are some Christians who do not take death very seriously and believe that they can prepare for death on their sickbed, but they deceive themselves.*

*“Generally, one dies as one lives. It would be a miracle if someone had sown weeds and, in the end, harvested wheat. It is God’s just law that those who forget God during their lifetime are themselves forgotten in death.”<sup>71</sup>*

### ***On What We May Expect from God***

*“What may we hope from God with absolute confidence and certainty? God’s wisdom sends us neither good health, nor a long life, nor honor in the eyes of others, nor wealth, nor a good*

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<sup>67</sup>. Referred to here are the ancient Christian theologians and bishops as teachers of the faith (among others, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Cyprian, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Polycarp, Jerome, and Athanasius). They are considered as the transmitters and witnesses of church teachings and orthodoxy. Their works can be found in the *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter* [Library of the fathers of the church].

<sup>68</sup>. See Michael Wittmann, *Katholische Prinzipien*, 181.

<sup>69</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 33, 2.

<sup>70</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. Inf., sess. 34, 1.

<sup>71</sup>. See Michael Wittmann, *Predigten*, 11 ff.

life, nor a leisurely life because these goods of the world often lead us to our undoing and downfall. Often they divert us from the path of virtue and pave the way for vice and ruin.

“God’s gracious mercy sends us poor creatures gifts of a far higher nature—grace and mercy, gracious pardon and forgiveness of our sins, strength and energy, blessing and peace, and finally, consolation—for the battle against evil, for victory over the world and its vanities, for steadfastness, and for the fulfillment of our arduous endeavors. God sends us divine help which is granted us through frequent union with his Son, Jesus Christ; God’s Holy Spirit who guides and supports us in all our actions; God’s divine love which is poured out in our hearts and grants us consolation and peace in all circumstances; satisfaction in all things that befall us so that we will not anxiously worry about the next day but firmly trust in God who will not let us come to ruin; and finally, divine help at the hour of death when all human help disappears.”<sup>72</sup>

### **General Sayings by Bishop Wittmann**

“Although we must live in the world, God can preserve us, but we must be on our guard. Therefore, daily spiritual reading is necessary so that we can discover the difference between the world and Christ. Nightly prayer may not be omitted either, but it is clear that we will also have to endure contempt because of this.”<sup>73</sup>

“In the confessional, in the school, and in sermons, I, on my part, encourage those whom I can to pray and do penance, to receive the sacraments frequently, and to venerate daily the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.”<sup>74</sup>

“If we have faith and love, then we will also have peace.”<sup>75</sup>

“We need good priests!”<sup>76</sup>

“Good priests adhere to the many saints of the Catholic Church, the teachings of the faith, and the laws of the Catholic Church.”<sup>77</sup>

“Prayer is the main occupation of good priests who do not omit morning and evening prayer, Holy Mass, praying the breviary, meditation, spiritual reading, prayer in school, and so forth.”<sup>78</sup>

“Whenever I have a little leisure time or there is a delay and I must wait, I hear the reminder to pray, and if I am on the road for even a minute and do not pray, then I am deserting the Holy Spirit.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 34, 5 ff.

<sup>73</sup>. See Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 240.

<sup>74</sup>. See Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken*, 158.

<sup>75</sup>. Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 231.

<sup>76</sup>. Johann B. Lehner, *Michael Wittmann*, 100.

<sup>77</sup>. Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 35.

<sup>78</sup>. *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>79</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 33, 3.

*“Human cleverness occupies itself both with seeking honor, praise, and applause and with avoiding difficult things, abuse, injury, and so forth. It is always wary of contrary circumstances that come its way. According to Christ’s teaching, we may not waste our time on such things.”*<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>. Michael Sintzel, ed., *Wittmann Exercitien*, 7 ff.

Jesus Christ says: “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.” (See *Matthew*, 6:25, ff.)

*“Of course, we must live in the world, but God can protect us. Therefore, daily spiritual reading is necessary so that we can discover the difference between the world and Christ. Since we have been cast out into the world, we may not omit meditation or nightly prayer, even if it is self-evident that, because of this, we will have to endure contempt.”*<sup>81</sup>

*“Let me not be a servant of the world, of the nations, of the devil, of my pride, or of myself! I will serve you in your holy church and in your Holy Spirit.”*<sup>82</sup>

*“United as one, the bishops, the priests, and the pope will withstand the storms of the times.”*<sup>83</sup>

*“If there are a few priests who do not do apostolic works, it was ordained by God so that, now and then, a light will be placed in the center. The people will look at this light, be edified, and grow stronger in their Catholic life. Thus God rules the church in a wonderful manner.”*<sup>84</sup>

*“I have firm confidence that Jesus himself has given me faith because he looks down upon me in the Mass, because I hate the splendor and talkativeness of the world, because, in every difficulty, I look up to God alone, and because God has given me both a love for poverty and peace and consolation when I am humiliated.”*<sup>85</sup>

*“I have the Lord’s command to pray every night, without exception, and I will not excuse myself because of fatigue or sadness or having exceeded the determined amount of food.”*<sup>86</sup>

*“Let us remain Catholic!”*<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>82</sup>. See BKR, CMW, Proc. inf., sess. 30, 2.

<sup>83</sup>. Rupert Mittermüller, *Leben und Wirken*, 65.

<sup>84</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>85</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 252 ff.

<sup>86</sup>. See *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>87</sup>. *Ibid.*, 67, footnote 2.

## IV. Church Statements on the Catholic Priesthood

### ***The Goal of Priestly Ministry***

The purpose, therefore, which priests pursue in their ministry and by their life is to procure the glory of God the Father in Christ. That glory consists in this—that men working freely and with a grateful spirit receive the work of God made perfect in Christ and then manifest it in their whole lives. Hence, priests, while engaging in prayer and adoration, or preaching the word, or offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice and administering the other sacraments, or performing other works of the ministry for men, devote all this energy to the increase of the glory of God and to man's progress in the divine life. All of this, since it comes from the Pasch of Christ, will be crowned by the glorious coming of the same Lord, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father. (Quoted from the Vatican II Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Paragraph 2)

Therefore, every ministerial action - while it leads to loving and serving the Church - provides an incentive to grow in ever greater love and service of Jesus Christ the head, shepherd and spouse of the Church. (Quoted from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, by Pope John Paul II, Paragraph 25)

### ***The Priests' Vocation to Perfection***

Priests are made in the likeness of Christ the Priest by the Sacrament of Orders, so that they may, in collaboration with their bishops, work for the building up and care of the Church which is the whole Body of Christ, acting as ministers of him who is the Head. Like all other Christians they have received in the sacrament of Baptism the symbol and gift of such a calling and such grace that even in human weakness they can and must seek for perfection, according to the exhortation of Christ: "Be you therefore perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (*Matthew* 5:48). Priests are bound, however, to acquire that perfection in special fashion. They have been consecrated by God in a new manner at their ordination and made living instruments of Christ the Eternal Priest that they may be able to carry on in time his marvelous work whereby the entire family of man is again made whole by power from above. Since, therefore, every priest in his own fashion acts in place of Christ himself, he is enriched by a special grace, so that, as he serves the flock committed to him and the entire People of God, he may the better grow in the grace of him whose tasks he performs, because to the weakness of our flesh there is brought the holiness of him who for us was made a High Priest "holy, guiltless, undefiled not reckoned among us sinners" (*Hebrews* 7:26). (Quoted from the Vatican II Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Paragraph 12)

### ***Who Is a Priest!***

The priest finds the full truth of his identity in being a derivation, a specific participation in and continuation of Christ himself, the one high priest of the new and eternal covenant. The priest is a living and transparent image of Christ the priest. (Quoted from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, by Pope John Paul II, Paragraph 12)

### ***Priestly Authority***

As the life of Christ was consecrated to the authentic proclamation of the loving will of the Father (cf. *John* 17, 4; *Heb* 10, 7-10) so too the life of priests should be consecrated, in his name, to

the same proclamation. «In word and deed» (cf. *Acts* 1, 1) the Messiah devoted his public life to preaching with authority (cf. *Mt* 7, 29). Such authority derived, in the first place, from his divine condition but also, in the eyes of the people, from his sincere, holy and perfect example. Likewise, the priest is obliged to complement the objective spiritual authority which is his in virtue of sacred ordination with a subjective authority deriving from sincerity and holiness of life, and that pastoral charity which manifests the love of Christ. (Quoted from Congregation For The Clergy: “The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium: Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacraments, and Leader of the Community,” Chapter 1, Paragraph 2)

### ***The Center of Priestly Life***

There exists, in fact, an intimate rapport between the centrality of the Eucharist, pastoral charity, and the unity of life of the priest, who finds in this rapport the decisive indications for the way to the holiness to which he has been specifically called.

If the priest lends to Christ, Most Eternal High Priest, his intelligence, will, voice and hands so as to offer, through his very ministry, the sacramental sacrifice of redemption to the Father, he should make his own the dispositions of the Master and, like him, live those gifts for his brothers in the faith. He must therefore learn to unite himself intimately to the offering, placing his entire life upon the altar of sacrifice as a revealing sign of the gratuitous and anticipatory love of God.

### ***Celebrating the Eucharist Well***

It is necessary to recall the irreplaceable value that the daily celebration of the Holy Mass has for the priest, be it in the presence of other faithful or not. He must live it as the central moment of his day and of his daily ministry, fruit of a sincere desire and an occasion for a deep and effective encounter with Christ, and he must take the greatest care to celebrate it with intimate participation of the mind and heart. (Quoted from Congregation for the Clergy, Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Paragraphs 48[-49])

## V. Appendix

### **Bishop Wittmann's Works and Characteristics in the Words of a Few of His Contemporaries**

#### *The Essence of His Life . . .*

“What was the essence of the life of the deceased which moved his whole being? It was his consecrated life. He ministered in a truly Catholic manner, but he never lost his own internal composure, which was a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and from which, by means of humble faith, he drew the substance of his speaking. Without Christ, he could have never been as pure of heart as he was.” (Prince Alexander von Hohenlohe)

#### *He never wanted to bring misfortune to anyone . . .*

“He never wanted to bring misfortune to anyone and did as much good as he could. He did not work any miracles as Jesus did, and he could not turn water into wine, but if he knew that someone was sick and could be restored to health by a refreshing glass of wine, he paid for the wine or the healing medicine. He could not make the blind see but, by means of intellectually stimulating admonitions, he brought to their senses many who had gone astray on dark and difficult paths. He could not raise from the grave anyone who had died, but by means of religious words of comfort and encouragement, he kept many from despair and suicide.

“At Bishop Wittmann's tomb, many people could be heard saying: ‘Here I see my benefactor again. He himself bought bread for us and cooked for our children in school.’”  
(Sebastian Hosang, Royal Salt Authority Clerk)

#### *“He went about doing good.”*

*The classic funeral oration for Bishop Wittmann, which was given in the Regensburg Cathedral on April 2, 1833, by Canon Melchior von Diepenbrock—who later became Cardinal and Prince Bishop of Breslau and died in 1853—is the first, most significant, and probably most moving compilation and tribute to Bishop Wittmann's life and work. It expresses impeccably the impression which the character and the saintly life and death of the Servant of God left on his contemporaries.*

## Funeral Oration

For the Most Reverend  
**George Michael Wittmann**

Doctor of Theology  
 Bishop of Miletopolis  
 Appointed Bishop of Regensburg  
 Cathedral Provost  
 Vicar General  
 Director of the Diocesan Seminary  
 Honorable Member of the Royal Bavarian Order of Louis

Given in the Regensburg Cathedral  
 by Canon Melchior Diepenbrock  
 at the Third Funeral Liturgy  
 on April 2, 1833

***“He went about doing good.”*** (*Acts 10:38*)<sup>88</sup>

At certain hours every day for forty-five years, a man in traditional clerical dress, head and eyes cast down, walked with zealous steps through the streets of Regensburg, respectfully greeted by everyone and graciously returning each greeting. He was often accompanied by a crowd of children clinging to his black coat. His path led him through the remotest alleys, into the homes of people who were poor or sick, into homes for poor and elderly people, into schools and churches. His zealous gait, his recollected manner, revealed that he was on a higher mission and giving greater service. Wherever he appeared, seriousness, reverence, and peace prevailed. Until a few weeks ago, this is how we all saw him walking, day after day. We no longer see him; he no longer walks among us. Bishop Wittmann is dead!

Three weeks ago they carried him—his body—one more time in a long, solemn procession through the same streets where he so often walked and brought blessing. Thousands of people

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<sup>88</sup>. This funeral oration was printed in Stadtamhof without an exact date. The original (probably from the year 1833) is in the archives of the Department of Canonization and Beatification Processes at the Diocesan Consistory for the Diocese of Regensburg (CMW, Proc. inf. Adjuncta 101-231, No. 144). In this booklet, this tribute to Bishop Wittmann is accessible for the first time to the admirers of the Servant of God. Spelling and punctuation were left as they appear in the original copy.

gathered to see the solemn procession and, with tear-filled eyes, to pay their respects to the coffin which held his earthly remains. Mothers carried their infants in their arms so that one day they could impress upon them the lifelong memory that they were also present at the funeral procession of this unforgettable man. Many tears were shed over his death, perhaps as many as the man had dried in his lifetime. Finally, they lowered him into the dark tomb and, if you are searching for the place, you will easily find it because people are praying there, kneeling on the cold, hard stones, softening them with their tears and warming them with their sighs.

What is the reason for this universal sorrow? It is the feeling that we have experienced an irreplaceable loss in this man; that, with his death, a living source of blessing has dried up; that a pillar which supported so much that is holy, so much that is good, has been lowered into the tomb. And this feeling is no illusion; it is the truth, the bitter truth.

Nevertheless, it does not seem proper for Christians—and as such we are gathered here—to sink with blind pain into hopeless mourning, because our God is not a God of the dead but of the living. If God counts the hairs of our heads, then it is certain that, just as all the days of the just are in the hand of God, the last heartbeat of the just will also be in the hand God.

If we gratefully consider what God's mercy has given to us in the one who has died, and if we faithfully preserve the blessed memory of him and his virtues, then our mourning over such a death will be enlightened, worthy of a Christian, and bring healing.

Since time immemorial, history has shown us how God maintains and fosters the kingdom on earth by working through people who then have an effect on others. We may not be surprised over this, since God took on a human form in order to bring salvation to us. Ever since the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been working invisibly in the church, but the Holy Spirit also works through individuals who can then have an effect on many others, just as the Holy Spirit worked through the twelve apostles who had an effect on the three thousand gathered on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit inspired a centurion, Cornelius; a treasurer for the queen of Ethiopia; and a Saul, but at the same time, the Holy Spirit also instructed a Peter, a Philip, and an Ananias. At all times and in all places, there will always be individuals in the church who minister by supporting the saints and testifying to everlasting life. These individuals are similar in every way to the high mountains of the earth which serve as guides for travelers who have lost their way, which overcome the force of destructive winds, which produce the finest minerals in their interior, and which gather the waters of the heavens on their peaks so that they will flow down in all directions as streams and rivers and make fruitful the valleys at the foot of the mountains.

It is incontestable that George Michael Wittman, whose *Requiem* gathered us here once again today, is one of these men of God for this city and this area. As the true salt of the earth, he preserved this generation from decay and morass.

Although the story of his life is very simple, it is unmistakably marked with the stamp of a great mind. Wittmann was born on January 23, 1760,<sup>89</sup> at the Finkenhammer near Pleystein in the Upper Palatinate. His family was rather well-to-do, but a Christian ethos was always its greatest family possession. Already in his earliest youth, a striking love for solitude was noticeable in him. When he was nine, he began studying with a devout pastor in Miesbrunn. Instead of playing children's games, he was often found alone in the chapel where he practiced liturgical rites. When he thought no one was listening, he was frequently heard preaching.

From Miesbrunn, he went to the Latin school in Amberg where, for several years, he had the benefit of an excellent education provided by the Jesuits. When he returned home to his parents for vacation, he was given a small, empty room where he could study and pray. He seldom left this room and never went out to socialize. This love for solitude, the distinguishing feature of a great and serious heart and soul, remained with him throughout his entire life. It was only by means of this solitude that he was able to become what he was, a citizen of and witness to a world different from the one which plays its transitory games in the market square of life.

From Amberg, Wittmann went to the university in Heidelberg where he laid the foundation for that broad and sound knowledge which so surprisingly illuminated his lectures and writings which were presented in such a plain and unpretentious form. He also traveled in the area around Heidelberg. A still extant letter, in which the nineteen-year-old young man wrote to his parents about his journey in that part of Germany, testifies to his interior maturity and clarity, deep seriousness, gift of keen observation, and poetic sense for all the splendid natural beauty surrounding him. "I was not looking for pleasure," he wrote, "but rather for knowledge of people and of myself." Instead of writing about a magnificent royal garden, he wrote about a gorge in the mountains near Coblenz where he got lost while walking alone: "I felt far more pleasure there. The works of God are still untouched, no human hand has spoiled them, and there is no trace of today's malice. There is only an elusive footpath; there are no lies or vanity." These are truly awe-inspiring words that give us a deep insight into the wealth of his interior life.

After he was given further preparation in the seminary in Regensburg and received a papal dispensation, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1782. On the feast of the Three Kings [January 6] in 1783, he celebrated his First Solemn High Mass and offered himself to God and to his ministry in the gold of sincere endeavor, in the frankincense of devotion, and in the myrrh of self-denial. The grace of ordination made the well-prepared ground of his pure mind and heart very fruitful through the abundant blessings of priestly ministry, and everything that we admired in him later came forth from this ground of dedication to God.

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<sup>89</sup>. Canon Diepenbrock was mistaken when citing the date of his birth. George Michael Wittmann was born on January 22, 1760, and received the Sacrament of Baptism the next day, January 23.

With zeal inspired by love, Wittmann worked for almost five years in country parishes until he was called to be subregent at the seminary in Regensburg in 1788. He then began the beneficial ministry which he continued without interruption for almost half a century. During this time, he prepared more than a thousand young men for the sublime vocation of the priesthood. In a small, noteworthy work, *Nachrichten vom geistlichen Seminarium in Regensburg, 1803* [News from the seminary in Regensburg, 1803], he presented the guiding views and principles which he faithfully followed until his death.

More than all his lectures, admonitions, and exercises, the young seminarians were impressed by this man's own character which personified the spiritual principle which he unmistakably possessed and which was revealed in all his actions—his living, unshakable faith in Christ and in the power of Christ's reign. He was permeated with the deep, mysterious meaning of all church institutes and practices, with self-sacrificing love, heroic self-control and mortification, and with humility, depth, and love for prayer. Truly, by associating daily with such a man, every spark of spiritual receptivity, no matter how deeply hidden, would have had to have been awakened in the young men.

The confidential conferences which he had with every individual seminarian in his room in the evening, and which he knew how to adapt to the emotional state and needs of each one, are praised by everyone as being especially beneficial.

Wittmann was deeply concerned about awakening in the future priests a love for children and concern about their education. His lectures on moral theology, ethics, liturgy, and scriptural exegesis testified to his exceptionally wide reading, knowledge, and ability to see things clearly, and remarkably proved his surprising originality in an outstanding combination of free, independent thinking with the strictest orthodoxy.

Year after year, he steadfastly endeavored to carry out the responsibilities of this difficult position. Each year brought new seminarians, and, just when he began to experience joy over their progress, the seminarians whom he taught and guided left the seminary. With so many seminarians, it lies in the nature of things that not all of them would respond to his endeavors, hopes, and expectations. Nevertheless, it is certain that every person whom he taught and guided remembers him with respect and cherishes the desire to be at least remotely like him.

If the priests of the diocese of Regensburg constantly maintained such an excellent reputation, even during the earlier years of confusion with regard to the church, this must certainly be attributed above all to the work of the deceased. It will be revealed only in the next world how many souls were led to salvation by the rays of light which emanated from him. Many of his former seminarians, now worthy pastors, openly admit that, next to God, they owe him not only their own salvation from unbelief and sin, but also any influence they may have had

on others. Therefore, the deceased can rightfully be called the spiritual father of this diocese in more than a figurative sense.

After Wittmann became the head of the seminary in 1803,<sup>90</sup> he was entrusted by Prince Primate [Carl von Dalberg] in 1804 with the administration of the cathedral parish which had been served by the Order of the Friars Minor until its dissolution [in Bavaria]. In his zeal for souls, Wittmann joyfully accepted this new burden and later, when the prince primate, seeing the excessive strain, wanted to take it away from him, Wittmann urgently asked him to let him have it because, with God's help, the burden would not be too heavy for him.

I need not describe his great, beneficial works in this very demanding area of activity or how he labored incessantly in the confessional, in the pulpit, at the sickbed, in the homes for the elderly, in the schools, and in caring for poor people, and I can refer to the testimony of both cities.<sup>91</sup> I will mention only a few characteristics which illustrate his extraordinary course of action in these various branches of office.

Like all enlightened philanthropists, he was concerned about the well-being of children above all. He knew that working with the children was the greatest need for the reign of God and the strongest defense against the power of evil. Therefore, he gave unflagging attention to the schools which he visited daily, both here in the city and in Stadtamhof. For several years, he himself taught religion in all the classrooms—thirty-seven hours each week. He was a father to orphaned children and provided them with food and clothing. His adjoining room was a storeroom with clothing for poor children. When they were old enough, he saw to it that they were employed in the service of Christian people or taught a trade by upright masters. He paid their tuition and did not fail to diligently inquire about their behavior. For a diversion on certain days, he himself took the school children and orphans on outings and provided them with refreshments. Wittmann was never happier than when he was with the children. In the midst of the innocents, his entire being was transfigured, and the loving, familiar association with them was probably the single recreation and joy which the ascetical man allowed himself on earth. Therefore, it is not surprising that the children also felt drawn to him and ran after him whenever they caught sight of him.

Wittmann knew all the families of his parish, especially poor families. He knew what they had and what they needed, and he provided considerable service through the Council for the Care of Poor People. If some people with lesser needs wanted support from public funds at the expense of those who were really poor, he steadfastly opposed it and preferred to give them something from his own pocket instead. His conscientious strictness in this regard sometimes

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<sup>90</sup>. Canon Diepenbrock was mistaken in the year. The files prove that Wittmann was appointed regent on September 9, 1802.

<sup>91</sup>. Regensburg and Stadtamhof are meant here.

resulted in public insults made by impertinent beggars, but he silently bore it as if he had not heard it. Even when followed by these viciously scolding tongues, Wittmann was seen walking peacefully the long way across the bridge and through the city to his apartment without saying a word.

To families where strife and discord prevailed, all other means failed, and, as a result, the raising of the children suffered in particular, he often brought calm and reconciliation by suddenly appearing in the midst of the quarrelers and their children, throwing himself on his knees, and praying aloud the Our Father.

In order to subdue jealousy among the older residents in the home for poor people in Stadtamhof, which, as pastor, he also administered, he personally distributed the firewood every Monday. He visited them daily so that he could remind them to live in peace and harmony.

Wittmann's resolve, courage, uncompromising self-sacrifice, love, and pastoral faithfulness were most evident in the days of universal need when, in the midst of the greatest danger, he appeared like a saving angel from a better world. During the great flood, he risked his life and rowed a boat to the houses in Steinweg which were surrounded by water so that he could pass food through the windows to the hard-pressed residents.

On April 23, 1809, the memorable day when Regensburg was bombarded, he alone appeared in the midst of the fiercest battle, in the streets where bullets were flying and undisciplined soldiers traversing, and used a hose to fight the flames spreading on all sides so that he could help save what still could be saved. Where this was impossible, he brought consolation to the unfortunate and his priestly assistance to the dying. He himself described these horrible scenes in a small, noteworthy book<sup>92</sup> in which he enumerated as accurately as possible all the losses except his own, about which he said nothing. He was able to save only his breviary and his parish books—in his own words, “a treasure worth millions.” All his possessions, his large library, and his precious manuscripts were lost. His calm appearance as a priest in the midst of these terrible, atrocious scenes made such an impression on the hordes of galvanized warriors that they allowed him to walk unscathed in their midst as an angel of peace.

It was exactly the same in 1813 when retreating French troops brought typhoid fever into the city. Hundreds of sick and dying people, half-naked and unwashed, were amassed in the so-called hospital at St. Magnus. The most dreadful contamination raged among the suffering. Boats filled with bodies were brought daily to the *Unterer Wörth* where they were buried. Wittmann alone visited the hospital and forbade his assistants to enter. “They should remain in the parish so that no harm will come to them.” He then knelt down among the sick, gave them words of spiritual consolation, administered the sacraments to them, heard their last sighs, and let

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<sup>92</sup>. *Nachricht vom Brande des erzbischöflichen Seminars zu Regensburg, den 23. April 1809* [Report on the burning of the archdiocesan seminary in Regensburg on April 23, 1809].

them die in his arms. Then he hurried home where he carefully registered their names and place of birth in the parish books so that he could later inform their families about their death. His knowledge of French was of particular advantage to him, and he considered himself fortunate. For many weeks, he continued this pastoral work until he himself was stricken by the epidemic and almost died. He believed and hoped that he would die soon, but, in answer to the prayer of the faithful, he was spared. His woven crown still did not have enough jewels.

As a preacher in the pulpit—and who of us upon hearing him was not always deeply moved and edified—his very appearance was already a sermon of blessed holiness. He did not speak with select and beautiful words, but with great simplicity, and what he said was filled with spirit and strength because it came from his own experience. When he began to speak, it was as if he only continued to say aloud in the pulpit what occupied his thoughts—the things of God. Like a faithful head of the household, he brought the bread of life to the poor and humble. Those who hungered for the bread of life found complete satisfaction in him, but those who sought the delicacies of artificial talk were disappointed because, for Wittmann, only bread and wine belonged on God’s table. Nevertheless, his interior enthusiasm frequently and unconsciously broke forth in truly poetic and exalted words and images. I will never forget a passage from his lectures on the Passion in which he described Christ, the thorn-crowned king, before Pilate and revealed his fundamental outlook and his manner of speaking no less than his own innermost being. “Christ’s authority,” he said, “is pure forbearance; his scepter is a reed. The reed bends and suffers. Storms demolish cedars and uproot trees—the reed bends down. Water currents rush in and sweep away houses; the reed bends with the flow of the current and then stands upright again. The burning heat of the sun comes and scorches leaves and grass; the reed stands upright and does not wither. The enemy comes and tramples down the fields and meadows; the reed stands upright in the mud.” With his indestructible steadfastness in all that is good and holy, Wittmann, himself the silent sufferer, was this reed. It was snapped off by death; now it springs up anew and flourishes forever before God.

Thus the zealous man worked as a pastor and, even when he wore himself out working unceasingly the entire day for the living, love urged him to go to the cemetery in the silence of night’s darkness in order to pray for the dead. His faithfulness as a shepherd reached beyond the grave, and even death could not tear away the lambs from his heart.

In 1821, he became a canon and a member of the newly established cathedral chapter. From then on, he shared even more actively in the works of the diocesan council. In 1829, he was granted an even greater dignity—which for him was a difficult burden. Bishop [Johannes Michael] von Sailer prevailed upon him to be his auxiliary bishop and, after humbly offering resistance, he finally accepted this dignity in obedience to a higher will. Soon after, he also accepted the position of cathedral provost.

On their lampstand, the people of the diocese of Regensburg then saw in their bishops two of the most outstanding lights of the Catholic Church in Germany. For a long time, Wittmann and Sailer had known and loved each other as friends. As very different as they were in their inborn characteristics, in their fate and life journey up to that time, and in their profession and position, they were united by one quest, one goal, one faith, and one love which brought them closer together interiorly, even before they actually came together exteriorly. The one was always placed in the world's open arena in order to labor far and wide, and the other was always assigned to a position where he would work with greater intensity in a more limited area. Both worked for the reign of God; both struggled against unbelief, worldliness, and darkness; the one, a John, the disciple of love, with a tame bird in his lap, the other, a James the Just with the calluses of a camel on his knees from unceasing prayer in the temple.<sup>93</sup>

Christianity does not destroy the intellectual characteristics of individuals any more than their facial expressions but transfigures and sanctifies them instead. Sailer's love and admiration for Wittmann were shown in a most moving manner during his last illness when he recommended the diocese to him and then said, "Now I can die in peace."

Wittmann testified to his love and admiration for Sailer when he broke into tears as he brought Sailer's final words of farewell to the seminarians and when he spoke at his tomb.

It was extremely painful for our departed to have to give up the cathedral parish because, in his position as auxiliary bishop, it was no longer possible to fulfill the duties required by both positions. Nevertheless, he also made this sacrifice in obedience and, as auxiliary bishop and vicar general, took up with even greater zeal the general works of the diocese. He visited the remotest areas of the diocese by making extremely difficult visitation and Confirmation journeys. Many times on these trips, he was satisfied with only one meal a day that consisted of potatoes, bread, and water. After returning home, he presented to the diocesan council a very complete and detailed report, made suggestions, and took measures to improve what was found

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<sup>93</sup>. It is told of St. John that when he was old, he now and then gently stroked a tame partridge resting in his lap. A hunter came across him once and was very surprised that he, the holy old man, would deign to pass the time in such a childish manner.

Apostle: "What are you carrying in your hand?"

Hunter: "A bow."

Apostle: "Why isn't it always drawn?"

Hunter: "So that it won't lose its force and stringency."

Apostle: "Then don't be surprised about the little recreation that I allow my mind by playing with this gentle animal. The mind also needs to relax so that it will not succumb to the constant strain."

This story was told by Cassianus, a student of St. Chrysostomus (*Collation 24.c.20*).

We read in St. Jerome (*eccl.c.2*), what Hegesippus wrote about St. James: "One of the apostles, James, the brother of Jesus, was also called James the Just because there were many with the name James. He was the head of the church in Jerusalem, had already been consecrated to God in his mother's womb, drank neither wine nor strong drink, and ate no meat. He never had his hair cut, never used ointment, and never went to the public baths. He was constantly on his knees in the temple, praying for his people, so much so, that his knees became as hard as those of a camel."

unsatisfactory. As head of the diocesan ordinariate, he promptly and conscientiously dealt with all business and, with exceptionally keen insight and tireless patience, went into the individual circumstances and developments of each matter. He was very attentive to the opinion of every member of the council and steadfastly held to resolutions passed by the majority, even on the rare occasions when they were contrary to his own opinion.

When St. Wolfgang's crosier fell from the hands of the dying Bishop Sailer, who was more worthy than this apostolic man to pick it up and continue carrying it? His Majesty, King [Louis I], recognized this and, in this cathedral, here at Sailer's tomb, he appointed Wittmann to be Sailer's successor. The members of the diocese cheered and rejoiced, praised God, and blessed the king for this choice which, better than all others, could make up for the loss they suffered. Only one person did not rejoice and earnestly turned away all congratulations—the appointee himself. An interior, prophetic voice, a ray of hope, perhaps during nightly prayer, told him to consider a different future. Already during his illness last year, he had said that, even if he would recover, he would not live much longer. Several times this year, he definitely prophesied that he would not be installed as bishop. And, unfortunately, his prediction, which everyone wanted to ignore, really did come true. Due to an accidental omission in the prescribed process, the solemn public announcement of his appointment was delayed at the Holy See.

On the morning of Friday, February 22 [1833], he attended the meeting of the diocesan council, and in the afternoon, he ascended the pulpit in the seminary church in order to preach the usual Lenten sermon. Those present anxiously noted his slow and painful walk and the extraordinary effort required to give the sermon. He preached about pride and explained how it really came about because we, who are miserable sinners, do not want to be poor sinners. His penetrating words rang out like a voice from the world of the spirits.

At 5:00 a.m. the next morning, he was at the altar, but the pain that had been suppressed until then became so intense that he had to leave almost as soon as the sacrifice was ended. An agonizing illness had developed. Lying on his poor pallet, he suffered dreadful pain with the patience of a martyr. The careful endeavors of his faithful doctor succeeded in giving him some relief and, for a moment, he himself perhaps thought about his recovery and the fulfillment of the duties of his office. Nevertheless, it was no longer possible to save him, and he joyfully turned his thoughts from life to death. There was universal sadness. Public prayers were said for him in the churches and schools. He himself was constantly engaged in interior prayer. He often asked the hour of the day and responded each time by saying that, at this hour, Jesus suffered this or that. Daily he received Holy Communion with the fervor of a seraph.

All who visited him were deeply moved when he said his final good-bye. Among his visitors, he recognized even those whom he had seen only a few times. He had a grateful, loving, and consoling word for each one. After giving a solemn farewell blessing to his former

seminarians and those with whom he lived, he said: “I am now ending my miserable life; God is taking me to himself. I hope in God’s mercy.” Feeling that death was near, he asked to be placed on the floor, had a crucifix set before him, and said: “I am a Christian; I will die beneath the cross.” During the last day and the last night, he remained there in quiet expectation of his redemption.

Morning so often found him in prayer, but when the morning of the feast of St. John of God [March 8] dawned on earth, it found only the corpse of the one who prayed. The spirit was already in eternity—in adoration before the throne of God.

As the great man had lived and worked, so he suffered and died, worthy of Christianity’s most perfect day. For this reason, he was an even more precious gift of God in this degenerate time. With fitting thanks, therefore, let us acknowledge that he was given to us who were not worthy of him, and that he remained with us for such a long time.

Now it is up to us to make up for the loss of his physical presence among us by embracing, as far as possible, his spiritual legacy, the rich inheritance of his virtues. None of us, no matter how different our position in life may be, will go away empty-handed, because there is plenty for all of us.

His resolute contempt for the world is a reminder to us because we are all in the midst of the world and its temptations. His rigorous self-denial is a reminder to us because we all carry selfish desires in our hearts. His patience and his love for the cross are reminders to us because all of us experience suffering and trials; his penitential life, because all of us are stained with sin; his love for prayer, because all of us need divine help in our manifold needs; his faithfulness to his vocation, because all of us have a multitude of duties with serious responsibility to fulfill; his unshakable faith until death in Christ and Christ’s divine saving power, because we also face unavoidable death with all its terrors. His care for poor people and orphaned children are a special reminder to us because now, having lost him, they depend on our love and care. And the final reminder is the voice which resounds from his grave: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; they will find rest from their labors and their works will follow them!”

And now, you two venerable bishops who have died and are resting, one on each side, in the shadow of the altar which you guarded and defended so faithfully—forget not your church or your flock! Plead for us at the throne of God! Through your intercession, turn away all danger from this city, from this diocese, from the entire land!

Your memory continues to preach in our hearts; I will say no more.

***Priesthood as a Particular Way to Holiness***

*The new evangelization needs new preachers and these are the priests who strive to live their priesthood as a specific way to sanctity. God's works are performed by men of God! Like Christ, the priest must present himself to the world as a model of supernatural life: "For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also" (John 13:15). (Quoted from Congregation for the Clergy: Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Conclusion)*

**Melchior von Diepenbrock**

Melchior von Diepenbrock, who was later Cardinal and Prince Bishop of Breslau, was born in Bocholt in Westphalia on January 9, 17[98]. Having been influenced and guided in the spiritual life by Michael Sailer, Bishop of Regensburg, he freed himself from his superficial way of life and began the zealous study of theology. He was ordained in 1823 and became Sailer's secretary. In 1830, he became a member of the cathedral chapter in Regensburg; in 1835, the dean of the cathedral chapter; and in 1842, one of George Michael Wittmann's successors in the office of vicar general. In 1845, Diepenbrock was sent to the diocese of Breslau as its prince bishop. Under difficult circumstances, he regulated the life of the church in the diocese that had been entrusted to him. His efforts were directed in particular to the formation of good priests, a concern which surely came from his experiences in Regensburg, and especially from his memory of Bishop Wittmann. In 1848, the year of revolutions, Diepenbrock proved to be a supporter of the political order. Two years later, he was raised to the rank of cardinal. He died at Johannesberg Castle on January 20, 1853.

<b>Biographical Information</b> <b>Bishop George Michael Wittmann</b> <b>(1760-1833)</b>		
1760	January 22	Birth at the Finkenhammer near Pleystein
1769	October	Begins studies at the Gymnasium in Amberg
1778	May 7	Begins studies in Heidelberg where he obtained his doctorate
1782	December 21	Ordination in Regensburg; then an assistant in a country parish
1783	January 6	Celebration of his First Holy Mass in Pleystein
1783-1788		Assistant in parishes in Kemnath near Fuhrn, Kaltenbrunn, and Miesbrunn
1788	October 23	Subregent at the seminary in Regensburg
1802	September 9	Regent at the seminary, an office Wittmann held in addition to his other duties until his death
1804	May 20	Pastor of the Cathedral Parish with 8,000 members
1808		First printing of Bishop Wittmann's German translation of the New Testament. For decades, this work enjoyed great popularity among the priests and the people. Beginning in 1851, revised editions with notations were published, with the last edition printed in 1878.
1809	April 23	Napoleon bombarded the city of Regensburg. Risking his life, Wittmann tried to save friend and foe alike from the ruins.
1813		Typhoid fever in Regensburg. While caring for the sick as pastor, Wittmann was also infected and became seriously ill.
1816-1817		Wittmann directed the distribution of food during the year of great famine.
1821	December 10	Member of the Cathedral Chapter
1829	May 1	Auxiliary Bishop
	June 30	General Visitator for the diocese of Regensburg as requested by Bishop Johann Nepomuk von Wolf (1821-1829)
	September 25	Cathedral Provost
1830	February 10	Vicar General
1832	July 1	Appointment as Bishop of Regensburg by King Louis I of Bavaria. (Wittmann died before papal confirmation of the appointment.)
1833	February 18	Official correspondence regarding the foundation of the Congregation of the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame in Neunburg vorm Wald
1833	March 8	Wittmann died with a reputation for holiness.
1833	March 11	Burial in the north aisle of the Regensburg Cathedral
1955	March 7	Opening of the Beatification Process

### **On True Veneration of the Saints**

If our veneration of the devout and holy friends of God is what it should be, then it must make us wiser, better, and holier. Veneration of the saints is not true and proper if it does not make us more perfect—in adoration of God, in love for our neighbor, and in patience, humility, and moderation. Veneration of the saints is true and proper if it results in ever greater love of God and of Christ and if both the holiness of a meaningful way of life and the eternal life of the saints become increasingly precious to us.

In order to free our veneration of the saints from mistaken or useless devotions or devotional pretense, let us carefully hold to the characteristics of true veneration of the saints. (1) Where there is true, thorough, and perfect veneration of the saints, there will be deep, interior joy in goodness, mercy, wisdom, and power—in the holiness of God. (2) Where there is true veneration of the saints, there will be grateful praise of God’s goodness and wisdom. (3) Where there is true veneration of the saints, there will be an increase of faith in Jesus Christ and trust in his goodness. (4) Where there is true veneration of the saints, there will be a vital longing for the true and eternal blessedness that is guaranteed to the pure of heart. (5) Where there is true veneration of the saints, there will be a serious endeavor to imitate the saints’ beautiful play of virtues. (6) Finally, we can and we may call upon the saints as friends of God so that they will pray with and for us both for the grace to imitate them and for all good things from God. (Bishop Johann Michael von Sailer, †1832)

*We must courageously declare our faith in Christ and remain with him just as the branch remains on the vine in order to be filled with its life. Without Christ we can do nothing, just as the branch cannot bring forth fruit if it does not remain on the vine. Therefore, the deepest union with Christ! Although the grapes are a product of the vine, the branch must also play its part and remain on the vine from which it draws the sap.*<sup>94</sup> (Bishop Wittmann)

<sup>94</sup>. In addition to this meditation on our relationship with the true branch, Christ, the following point must also be mentioned here. In his personal seal, Wittmann had a vine and the branch as a symbol, probably based on the above considerations. He kept this symbol until his appointment as auxiliary bishop, when he chose the sign of the cross.

Christ's power is pure forbearance.  
The reed bends and suffers.  
The wind uproots trees.  
The water currents rush in and sweep away everything.  
The reed bends with the flow of the current  
And then stands upright again.  
The sun's burning heat comes;  
The reed remains standing and does not wither.  
The enemy crushes fields and meadows;  
The reed bends but remains standing.

(Bishop George M. Wittmann)