Note: Catholics may be assured and proud to know that the discoverer of the New World was a zealous and devout Catholic whose eagerness for exploration was informed greatly by his desire for the honor of God, and for his king and queen. In these extracts of Columbus' letter to the Treasurer General of the Kingdom of Aragon, he reports on his first trip to America. Later, this letter was published in book form. The New York Public Library holds one of the earliest print editions. Readers will find in his tribute to God's glory an edifying meditation on gratitude.

When I sent two or three of my men to some of the villages to talk with the inhabitants, it often happened that the Indians would advance in a compact mass, only to flee helter-skelter, father pushing son and son treading on father, when they saw our men coming close, And this was not because any one of them had been injured or harmed; for to all of those I approached and with whom I was able to converse, I gave what I had, cloth and many other things, though they made no return. It is their very nature to be fearsome and timid.

On the other hand when they understand they are safe, they lose all fear, are simple-hearted, confiding, and most liberal with all they possess. What they have they do not refuse to those that ask. They even encouraged us to demand of them. With deep love they prefer others to themselves; they give much for little and bear with small or no return. I myself prohibited my men from trading them odds and ends of little or negligible value, such as shards of small dishes and plates, or bits of glass, and nails and shoe latchets. The Indians, however, seemed to think they possessed the most exquisite jewels in the world if they were able to get hold of these trifles.

One of the sailors got as much gold for a shoe latchet as there is in three castellanos, and much else for other things of little price, particularly for new silver blancas. For some gold coins they would give whatever the seller wanted: one and a half or two ounces of gold, or thirty or forty pounds of cotton, which they already knew. Even pieces of bowls, jars, pitchers, bottles, they would buy with cotton and gold, as if they knew no better than animals. I stopped this because it was an unjust proceeding. I made many beautiful and acceptable presents, taking no return for these; for I wanted to conciliate the natives, to make them worshipers of Christ and fill them with love for our King, our Queen, and all the people of Spain. …

They nourish no form of idolatry but believe profoundly that all strength and power, all good things are in heaven and that I, my ships, and my sailors, had descended thence. After they had once lost their fear, I was everywhere received with this attitude. And they are neither

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sluggish nor barbarous but have a fine and perspicacious intelligence. …[Here, he describes his reception from the peoples he met, their boats, and their navigation.] This is extremely favorable to what is, I believe, the urgent wish of our Serene Majesties, the conversion of these people to the holy Christian faith, to which, as far as I could observe, they are accessible and inclined. …

Truly, all this is deeply remarkable; but it surpasses our merit; it is due to the holy Christian faith and the religious piety of our rulers. What the human intellect itself could not achieve, that was granted to the human by the divine. For God hears His servants, even in impossible things, when they cherish his commands. And this is the case with us, for we have attained what no mortal strength has hitherto sufficed for. If anyone has written or spoken of these islands, it was in vagueness and conjecture, none claimed to have seen them; so they seemed almost mythical.

Therefore let the King and the Queen, the rulers, and their fortunate territories, and all the other countries of Christendom give thanks to Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, Who has graced us with such a victory an such possessions. Let processions be celebrated and the sacred solemnities be gone through. Let the holy sanctuaries be hung with garlands for the festival, that Christ may exult on earth as He exults in heaven when He foresees that the souls of so many peoples, lost hitherto, will be saved. and let us, too, be elated, for the exaltation of our Faith and for the augmentation of things temporal, of which not only Spain but all Christendom will be the future partaker.

This brief account I send to you of what has happened.

Farewell. [Signed] Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Ocean Fleet, March 14, 1493.

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